

Soul-Searching After Charlottesville, But Not For Me

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In unity and peace, I'll be one of those to gather near Charlottesville, Virginia's Freedom of Speech Wall tomorrow. With a diverse palette of believers, rallied in love, we will remember the life of Heather Heyer. The 32 year-old Heyer was killed August 12 during a "Unite the Right" rally when an Ohio man drove a car through a crowd of counter-protesters, of which Heyer was one. The 20 year-old Ohio driver was known in his local community to have White supremacist ideologies and Nazi sympathies.

Because racism's effects are so engrained in our culture, even people of color can ignore the kinds of rallies we saw last week, sadly. And though many of us have neglected to hit the streets as Heyer did that day, our hearts were aroused by the other-worldly statements coming from presidential leadership. Though the president suffered widespread and sharp criticism for them, his sentiments create a moment for soul-searching, just not for me.

Reverse Racism

Earlier this year, I reluctantly made an appointment with my son's elementary school. During social studies, the teacher had discussed the usual Black history figures, namely Martin Luther King, Jr., and acknowledged slavery and racism's existence in a cursory spiel.

As one of two Black boys in the class, my son was listening when as an aside, the teacher added, and, "of course, there's reverse racism."

"No, there's not," came the bracing interruption from the son of yours truly. "There's no such thing as reverse racism."

I can't tell you that the exchange ended with them agreeing to disagree. It got heated, and neither side wanted to yield. That's why I had to go to the school.

For almost two hours, the principal and I had a heart-to-heart. I drew a graffiti-like infographic on his whiteboard, something like this:

Power (Muscle or Majority) + \$\$ + prejudice + deprivation = racism

I sat down next to the principal, as we looked at my hieroglyphics.

Historically, the African American, the Latino, the Asian, and the new immigrant to these fine shores, lacks one of these to create an operative system of racism. Sure, some may have the money, but there's no demonstrated will to assert a prejudiced exclusion of another. Occasional movements may have some defensive muscle, but no systematic advantage to effectuate the broad exclusion of rights for another group. An individual with personal bias may say something that hurts, but that individual has no the ability to leverage a system that deprives the rights for the individual with the hurt feelings.

I wasn't trying to school anyone, but I wanted him to know, it's just not happening.

Many Sides.

Here, my friends within the Charlottesville context, I could not ask for a more macabre metaphor for what I was trying to say that day. You had the moving masses of humanity striving for and against each other. Then, there was the barbaric image of a muscle car fracturing the crowd. That he mowed

people down in the name of supremacy, leaves more than the physical scars, broken limbs and even the loss of life. This is racism, at its knifepoint. Then, with a dismissive sweep of the hand, leadership forced the injured to share responsibility for the deadly, racist violence that counter-protesters did not produce, the “violence on many sides.”

The depth of this insult cannot be measured in the widespread cry for unequivocal condemnation of White supremacy. No, the full measure of this injury is in the recasting of the event to spread the responsibility and the blame around. We would blanch to hear rapists, wife beaters and child abusers say “Look! look what you made me do!” yet in this case of terminal, fatal racism, shame and blame was cast “on many sides.”

Ripe for Rift

Personal responsibility, personal effort, and effective individual change—apparently, part of the boot-strapper’s guide to social order—are noble character traits. Believers such as myself uphold the industry and honor in the concepts. Yet, believers such as myself hate to see said traits exacted from the low-income, unskilled, multi-generationally impoverished, while the same moralists decline to apply it to themselves with respect to racism.

Listen for the high-profile defections from the Christian right. Oh, my bad, there are none. Look for the round condemnation from evangelicals who stand for right, though the heavens fall. Oh, again, I haven’t seen it. Is there soul-searching after equating protests for dignity with terroristic aims? Um, nothing.

The Nerve

Elijah the prophet condemned the wicked Ahab, King of Israel, and relayed to the heady monarch that for three years, drought would scorch his land. God hid the faithful prophet, who was courageous enough to call Ahab out to his face. Then, after three years, when God told Elijah to step out of the shadows, Ahab found the prophet Elijah, and had the nerve to ask: “Art thou he that troubleth Israel?” 1 Kings 18:17.

“I have not troubled Israel,” Elijah answered. Like Elijah, and for those counter-protestors, the peacemakers, and in the memory of Heather Heyer, I say it’s not us, and we are not all to blame.