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NOTES FROM THE RIVERSIDE

BY MARK HARRIS

Toward a New Country

In between these massacres and the next

I want my country back. I want the country where “All My Relations” meant an expanded humanity that lives in kinship with other life forms as relatives, not resources. That recognizes that humans in particular are relatives to be nurtured and cared for, not resources to be enslaved or exploited. When enslavement, exploitation or terror happens, that the solution to oppression is to become more humane than your oppressors.

It’s partially the country that existed before 1491: pyramid cities, intercontinental and interracial trade and commerce. Though slavery and war were not unknown here before Columbus, we found ways towards civilized resolution through remembering our common strengths and gifts.

It’s not the country or culture that would build a Walmart outside those pyramid cities, nor where a U.S. corporation could claim ownership of rainfall in Bolivia.

The country that came after that was predicated on a certain type of violence. The targets were indigenous people and their demonstrated allies from other continents, which included historically respectful Europeans. The country that practiced and practices massacres, lynchings, concentration camps and other forms of sociostructural violence must fade into historical memory before my country will emerge.

I asked Robert Kono, at the time a local veteran (442nd) and survivor of the concentration camps, why would you fight for a country that incarcerated you because of your race while allowing major corporations to trade and profit from doing business with the enemy Nazi Germany? He said he didn’t fight for politicians or his family, or the soldiers next to him (all Japanese-Americans). He’s fighting for an America that doesn’t exist yet, that would never do the things that happened to him and others. If he doesn’t fight for it now, it will never exist.

I could pledge allegiance to that America. It’s a kind of a dual consciousness: remembering better, experiencing worse and working for better in the face of worse. Being a mandatory reporter for a system I wouldn’t entrust a single blood relative to, unmonitored. Supporting institutions that regularly betray you, and your kind, and that kind is continually expanding.

It’s not so much where or who will perpetrate the next attack. I come from a people to whom the state was the main perpetrator, or allowed the attacks to happen. Electing a black president (who’s received more death threats than all the white presidents combined) didn’t change that.

Improved technology for killing, without deepened humanity, means that a single person, normally socialized, can kill as many people as a state. The worst massacres were state sponsored or facilitated: Washita (103); Sand Creek (163); Fort Pillow (300); The Red Summer (293); Tulsa Black Wall Street (3,000); and Rosewood, Florida (150).

Dylann Roof was following an American tradition: internally hating yourself, then externally hating others. Omar Mateen was saying, “I don’t have a problem with black people ... You guys suffered enough,” while killing people of color, including black people. Killing people of color while being a person of color is displaying a sort of mental illness commonly undiagnosed in America, racial self-hatred, with gender identity dysphoria. (According to the American Psychological Association, internalized racism doesn’t exist).

If he was taught to hate himself and natural aspects of his being, with no healthy resolution for the inner turmoil, then no amount of FBI background checks could predict or prevent Mateen’s attacks. In fact, the healing could occur from within the community he targeted, just like Dylann Roof.

Communities that suffer in the absence of healing from the mainstream must and have developed their own healing ways, individually, then collectively becoming more humane than their attackers and the society that generates their attackers. How would one become a healthy gay Muslim man, or a recovered white supremacist?

Not through cognitive behavioral therapy and antidepressants. Such healing ways were once widespread in my country, embedded in the culture, as it were. They were largely suppressed by this country. There needs to be, and is, a more vigorous resurgence.

For a new country to emerge, backlash is predictable, but resistance is fertile.

Mark Harris is an instructor and substance abuse prevention coordinator at Lane Community College.