

Opinion articles do not necessarily represent the views of the Portland Observer. We welcome reader essays, photos and story ideas. Submit to news@portlandobserver.com.

OPINION

On the Power of Love in Times of Hate

King showed we can't ignore problem of racism

BY JOSE-ANTONIO OROSCO

As someone who regularly teaches about the political philosophy of Martin Luther King Jr., I often spend time discussing with students the ways in which King's ideas are taken out of context and turned into sound bites in order to support positions he would not himself have taken.

The most obvious example is how his most memorable line from the "I Have a Dream" speech about not judging people based on the color of their skin but the content of their character is used to justify attacks on affirmative action—a policy he definitely endorsed—or cited in a way to claim that the best path forward for racial justice is to somehow ignore race and become colorblind.

The white supremacist violence in Charlottesville is proof that we cannot simply try to ignore the problems of racism now. All across the country, marches and vigils are



scheduled to honor the victims of racist violence and to stand against the surge of white nationalist groups in the United States. People are seeking guidance about how to think about the public and proud resurgence of this form of bigotry.

Inevitably, the words and ideas of Dr. King are being invoked, especially his thoughts on the power of love in times of hate. One of his quotes, often bandied about, is this: "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that."

But the hard question is what does it mean to love and not hate in the aftermath of Charlottesville? Does it mean it's somehow wrong to feel angry or violated about people proudly brandishing neo-Nazi symbols on their weapons and shields? Does it mean the best response is to forgive the purveyors of violence like the young man who ran down protestors, killing Heather Heyer in Charlottesville?

In the speeches in which King talked about love, he often spent time explaining what he meant; love has several meanings. In saying that supporters of racial justice had to have love in their hearts, he didn't mean that they had to be continually positive and upbeat, or that they had to approach racists in

friendship. That's the kind of love we share with intimates or friends.

King said the love that we ought to have in the struggle for justice is the kind that acknowledges all people, even the white supremacists, as human beings. And human beings are capable of making their own moral choices and being held responsible for their actions. We aren't called upon to like or be friendly to those who are racist. It means we ought not to dehumanize or kill them as part of our fight for justice.

Someone asked me recently if, out of love, King wouldn't have asked to sit down with a white supremacist and try to listen to their concerns and understand where they were coming from, in hopes of some kind of reconciliation and dialogue. I thought about this and realized that the answer was probably no. King never asked, for instance, to meet with Bull Connor, the rabidly racist police chief in Birmingham, Ala. who sent police dogs to attack protestors. He never called for public meetings with ordinary black and white citizens to dialogue.

Instead, he called for marches, boycotts, and urged legislation that would halt business as usual in that city, deplete the pocketbooks of segregationist business owners, and criminalize racist attacks and intimidation. He

wrote in 1963: "It may be true that the law cannot make a man love me but it can keep him from lynching me and I think that is important also."

This is not to say that fellowship and dialogue are not important, especially when friends approach one another to talk about their fears, hopes, and biases. But in thinking about responses to white supremacy in the country today, we ought to be clear that King's emphasis on love did not mean only sticking to individual efforts and trying to change the implicit racism of our friends and relatives. Toward the end of his life, he called for a revolution of values that would utterly transform the United States and its commitment to materialism, racism, and militarism at institutional levels.

The fight against white supremacy must be tied to issues of poverty, jobs, reducing our military and nuclear weapons, curbing police brutality, and providing decent health care and education for everyone. These were all issues of concern for King; this is what he meant by love.

José-Antonio Orosco, Ph.D., writes for PeaceVoice and is Associate Professor of Philosophy: School of History, Philosophy, and Religion Director, Oregon State University Peace Studies Program.

Condemning the Message but Not the Messenger

Hypocrisy taints reaction to bigotry

BY DR. RON DANIELS

The vicious assault on counter-protesters in Charlottesville, Va. by a volatile amalgam of Neo-Nazis, Ku Klux Klan, Alt Right and other white nationalist forces was one of the most horrific acts of domestic terrorism in American history. The day after a Klan-like torch light, racist and anti-Semitic show of force on the campus of University of Virginia, a white nationalist terrorist used his car as a weapon and ploughed through peaceful protesters killing Heather Heyer and seriously injuring several other people.

The words of former Ku Klux Klan Imperial Wizard David Duke captured the motive and aspirations of the largest gathering of White Nationalists in recent history: "We are determined to take our country back..... We are going to fulfill the promises of Donald Trump." Much of America and the world was shocked by this vile and ugly show of force in the "land of the free and home of the brave."

Predictably, there was almost universal expression of outrage and condemnations of the hateful white nationalist army that perpetrated the deadly acts of violence in Charlottesville. Divisions between Democrats and Republicans were swept aside as political leaders of both parties came forward to vociferously denounce these acts of terrorism by white supremacists, that is



except the President of the United States.

Donald Trump initially condemned the hatred and violence on "all sides," thereby equating the righteous protests of the counter-demonstrators with the white supremacist terrorists; equating those who were standing for the vision of an inclusive multi-racial, multi-ethnic society with freedom and justice for all irrespective of race, ethnicity, nationality, culture, religion, gender or sexual orientation with those who wish to "Make America Great Again" by turning the clock back to the good old days of white male hegemony.

The condemnations of Trump were swift and furious. There was a strong push for Trump to use the moral authority of the presidency to condemn the white supremacists by name. Political leaders, pundits and commentators suggested that he was missing his moment to pull the nation together and heal its racial divisions. When he eventually did speak-out, Republicans in particular breathed a sigh of relief that Trump had finally done that which was "politically correct."

But, oops, the sigh of relief was short-lived. In an impromptu press conference at Trump Tower in New York, Trump went off script and unleashed a tirade, angrily doubling down on his original contention that there was blame on both sides.

From my vantage point the condemnation of Trump by the Republicans rings hollow and hypocritical. Republicans enabled Trump by refusing to repudiate him decisively during the campaign and after his election to the White House.

Despite a vile and vicious campaign, clearly Republicans made a calculated de-

cision that power is more important than principle. They have stood with Trump despite his erratic and often hurtful behavior as president in hopes of implementing their rightwing, reactionary agenda.

They know who Trump is. He is the originator of the racist birther movement that relentlessly questioned whether President Barack Obama was born in the U.S. This is the Donald Trump who cemented his credibility with xenophobic, anti-immigrant adherents by blatantly labeling Mexican immigrants rapists and murderers; the same Donald Trump who castigated and insulted an American Judge of Mexican descent; the same Donald Trump who claimed he did not know who David Duke was and equivocated on condemning him; the same Donald Trump who brought an Alt-Right, White nationalist Steve Bannon into the White House as his "Chief Strategist!"

Now their lack of principle and moral courage has exploded in their faces like a pus-infected wound. By and large they have refused to condemn and abandon Trump. They know him; they enabled him, and they own him and should suffer the consequences of their blatant hypocrisy!

Actually, hypocrisy runs deep in the "conservative" ranks of the Republican Party. While Richard Nixon was the first to unveil the "Southern Strategy," Lee Atwater employed it with devastating effectiveness as a strategist for Ronald Reagan's campaign for president. The strategy was designed to use code words to fuel and enflame anti-black sentiment in the South and was used to appeal to the disgruntled supporters of Alabama Gov. George Wallace.

The real deal is that the rightwing reactionaries have courted, appealed to and appeased white supremacist sentiments and forces for decades. The only difference is that Trump made the mistake of doing it openly. Trump brought the bigots and haters that conservative Republicans have been courting under the table, from the fringes, from the margins into the mainstream of American politics; from "the outhouse to the White House."

Charlottesville may well represent the dying gasp of the hard core, reactionary, white supremacist adherents who are now a formidable force within the Republican Party. They must be confronted and defeated. But, they will not succumb willingly or easily. They are emboldened and energized by the blessing of Donald Trump and the complicity of the shriveling, equivocating hypocrites who have placed power over principle in their quest to impose their reactionary agenda.

In this crucial moment, those who stand for a progressive vision of America must build a powerful social movement utilizing protests, economic sanctions, civil disobedience and the ballot to righteously overwhelm the racist and reactionary forces. And, then we must compel this nation to confront its original sins and hypocrisy and repair the centuries of damages inflicted on Native peoples and people of African descent as the basis for creating a "more perfect union."

Dr. Ron Daniels is President of the Institute of the Black World 21st Century and Distinguished Lecturer at York College City University of New York