

Wednesday Morning, September 15, 2010

The morning after the last of the primaries before the mid-term elections, the Republican Party and the nation have learned some things about the danger of being silent while some violate the American ethic of equality and fair play, and blame the elected officials whom THEY elected! I have seen little semblance in the "populist" Tea Party Movement of Pogo's, "We have met the enemy and he/she/it is us."

The Tea Party Movement exists because many have deep and authentic concerns about our nation. But, I seek to describe what has happened to the Republican Party and to all of us, as we have allowed the seeds of bias, distrust, fear mongering and animus directed at a black President, to raise up a Movement that devours the Party that helped to create it, as well as the values that are essential to the freedoms the nation professes.

Illustrations from elsewhere help us understand this moment.

THE CREATION OF FRANKENSTEIN: The story of the creation of the monster called Frankenstein that became a popular movie is worth remembering this morning. The Monster turned on his/its creator, and we see the same happening as Tea Party candidates defeat moderate as well as some less-than-moderate Republicans. I do not intend to bash the Tea Party Movement by comparing it to Frankenstein; that is unfair. But, we have now observed that a political party whose leaders thought that the TP Movement would help them destroy a President and the Democratic Party, have discovered that the Movement could destroy the Republican Party that helped create it.

"THE HATE THAT HATE PRODUCED": This 1959 film documentary that Mike Wallace and Louis Lomax produced attempted to link the racial hatred that had been historically directed at blacks as being responsible for the hatred of whites that Wallace and Lomax observed within the Nation of Islam. One of the seldom talked about American mysteries is why and how, blacks have not engaged in a counter-hatred of whites. The Nation of Islam as a group may have—in words—critiqued white racism/racists, but never through violence.

I suggest that the hatred of our 44th President by a few, and the unacknowledged bias of some in the Republican Party as well as the nation, that is expressed in a "just say no" response to the Obama Administration, provided much of the energy that we have seen in the Tea Party Movement. I am not using racial hatred or bias to define the TP Movement. Rather, I am awkwardly attempting to describe what has happened to a political party, and a nation in the last two years.

"WHEN THEY CAME FOR ME, THERE WAS NO ONE LEFT TO SPEAK UP". These words of Martin Niemoller have been spoken and paraphrased and misspoken by many of us. My intent is to ponder whether we have come to the realization that a failure to speak up on behalf of others has a way of feeding the silence of others when we need allies and advocates. The silence of Reinhold Niebuhr's "good people who do not know they are not good," who in November of 2008 rejoiced in the election of our nation's first

President, has been obvious in the presence of the verbal and political abuse of the last 2 years. Many of us have been unwilling or unable to "speak up" with one voice in response to some of the words that have been spoken, signs that have been carried, mischaracterizations that have been thrown around, as some have allowed their legitimate disagreements with our leader and his administration in Washington to go on the "wild side" of double standard comparisons, soft and hardcore bigotry, and obvious anti-American behavior.

Why these "early morning words?" Time and time again in my life and possibly in yours, I have discovered the 20/20 of hindsight. My clarity about the past, once the past has past, is astounding. Historians, whether of the Civil Rights Movement or of other historical moments, reveal the obvious that we did not see, when the obvious was taking place. Those who write the history of a nation's response to our first black president will write words that describe these moments in ways that the readers of the future will find it difficult to believe. These readers of the history will ask; "Why in the name of heaven or hell, did those who lived during the early years of the 21st century, not realize what was taking place during their lifetimes?"

The above is my effort to write today, what I believe the historians of the future will write about us. If we "have eyes to see and ears to hear" today, we will know that the legally-declared invalidity of "separate but equal public schools," all of the laws that made possible equal access to blacks who once did not have that access, the presence of many, many gifted black athletes, artists and entertainers, the election of black mayors and other elected officials, and the election of Barack Obama, while representing magnificent progress, has not healed the cancer of bias, bigotry and racial hatred that seems to be in the DNA still of so many.

But more importantly, that cancer of bias, bigotry and hatred that we thought was only racial, has infected so much of our "life together" (Bonhoeffer) that transcends race. The racial hatred that has been with us from the beginning, (Mr. Gingrich in his "Kenyan anti-colonialist bias" description of President Obama has forgotten that it was anti-colonialism that fostered the birth of the USA), has become a distrust, dislike, demeaning and de-humanization of "the other" that makes all of us victims and sometimes perpetrators.

All of the above then, is about much more than race. It is about our American human predicament! I paraphrase Martin Luther King and conclude by saying: "We must learn to live together as sisters and brothers, or we will die together as fools."

Gil Caldwell
Asbury Park, New Jersey