
Guest Opinion

August 29, 2019

While everyone is welcome to read this message, it's directed at you, my fellows, who think of yourselves as white.

This message is delivered with a loving smile. I like you. I assume, like me, you are generally nice. You are kind to children. You appreciate nature. You value education and hard work. You see beauty in music, art, even everyday things. You enjoy a good meal with family and friends.

Being white is good, right? Of course it is.

There's just this little thing I'd like to suggest we work on, we white folks. Maybe we can work on it together. Nobody's perfect, right?

You have probably observed that some of us are afraid of people we don't see as white. We think of them as very different from ourselves. Not as clean. More prone to crime. Lazier. Or maybe just different. Outsiders. Foreign. Not like us.

Some of us would like to send them back to wherever they came from, which is somewhere not here.

Of course, I'm not talking about you, but some of us are very afraid of people we don't see as white. We might feel like shooting them. Or running them over with our cars. Or dragging them behind our trucks. Or setting them on fire. Or shooting them while they are praying with their families in church.

Now, that's just a small number of us, thank goodness. It behooves me to say - and this is directed at everyone - those are terrible thoughts, unworthy thoughts. Those thoughts and those actions don't reflect our values - white values, you could say - such as they are. I officially and publicly abjure them.

Here's the thing, though. Even though the vast majority of us are not so full of fear that we would travel 600 miles to shoot families of non-white people while they back-to-school shop, most of us - take a deep breath now - are still at least a little bit afraid.

We need to do something about that fear.

First, we need to see it. I'm not asking you to point to others, now. Not to your relatives. Not to those really racist people down the street. Yourself. I will look at myself, too. We're in this together, right?

Do we, even unconsciously, seek out places where we aren't likely to meet non-white people in large numbers? Living apart from those different from us - it's a lifestyle. We build neighborhoods with gates to

keep them out. We join churches and clubs where they are not in attendance - or at least, where we don't feel outnumbered. We might even migrate to areas where we will not have unpleasant experiences with those not like us.

We also do this other thing- ... construct rules that keep us apart. And because people who look like us are mostly in charge, we pass laws and draft policies to keep those other folks out of our neighborhoods, schools, malls, and halls of government. We build prisons, too, which help with this effort.

Perhaps you have heard these claims about the "racist" systems and policies we've made - and continue to make - to keep US away from THEM? Some of you don't believe they have this effect, even when you see the results in front of you. It's very painful, I know, to SEE it.

If you doubt me, I understand. Would you at least grant we HAD such systems and policies once, even if you now believe they are long behind us?

I think about this often. In the history of white folks, including colonists, slave owners, segregationists, even notable and beloved founding fathers, they called out the abuses of the past ... but they did not confront the racism that was right in front of them. They thought of their values as fair and reasonable. Progressive, even. Noble.

Could we be equally blind? I mean, not too long ago, survivors of a hurricane seeking help and safety were stopped from walking across a bridge by a group of us, so terrified of black people that they lost their minds and pointed guns at their fellow human beings to keep them back. Parents and children needing clean water became dangerous, in their minds.

In the same way, some of us have begun to see the recent influx of refugees - predominantly families fleeing violence and oppression - as part of an "invasion." We use that language as if these people represented an army coming to hurt us, when they are clearly fellow human beings asking for help in a real time of need.

It's ironic, this fear of immigrants. Because all of us who think of ourselves as white also must think of themselves as the descendants of people who immigrated from somewhere. And we don't imagine that our ancestors all came over on first-class ocean liners, do we?

White people in America are by definition the descendants of refugees, of people who knew hunger, and poverty, and persecution, and the terrors of war. We just forget. We forget who we really are. We hold onto that precious whiteness so tightly, as if really meant something.

Which brings me to my next big point: This deep-seated fear of our nation becoming less white - a fear that is driving some of us to kill people - it's entirely in our imaginations. Firstly, because we aren't really white anyway, and secondly, because it's a good thing. It's an opportunity to share our values, ones we might even think of as "white," and embrace new and potentially useful ideas that come from people with different experiences and ideas, which will benefit our offspring.

If we're holding on to "white culture," and "white values," we can let that go. It's all in our heads. All people, not just people who think of themselves as white, are generally nice, are kind to children, appreciate nature, value education and hard work, and see beauty in music, art, even everyday things. They enjoy a good meal with family and friends, too.

This is what it means to be human, actually.

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