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## DO WHITE PEOPLE DARE TO HAVE A BLACK HERO LIKE MLK?

By Steve Bakke  May 7, 2018



It's been my habit in recent times to periodically share my thoughts about Martin Luther King and what he meant to me and many other white people of my generation. Part of my message is that I see some of King's legacy struggling to survive in today's world. Among other things, I usually site the ever-growing segregation on college campuses – separate living, study areas, and courses – apparently encouraged by minority groups themselves. I ask: “Whatever happened to King's dream of condemning enforced separateness and judgements based on one's color.”

Perhaps I should know better than to speak out like that. I never come away from those discussions unscathed. A letter writer in this paper suggested I was confusing the issue (“conflating” was the term used) and suggested my attempts at “racial deemphasis” might be a way of relieving me of “my obligation to address important racial differences and difficulties.” And he reminded me that racial de-emphasis permits me to “engage in highly racialized practices.” Ouch!

It was on social media that I received a response which included the following: “*See color? Like shallow racists, alt-righters, white nationalists and the like? YES, YOU ARE RACIST.....Do not see color? Unless you are literally blind, you do see color. Lying about this fact is to cover for your own latent prejudices, and essentially ignoring racism, helps to perpetuate racism. YES, THAT IS RACIST.*” Gee, thanks for that very clear and helpful advice!

Another person on social media tried to explain to me how I was missing the point in my concern about segregation. I think he was trying to tell me that the segregation I see cropping up in America wasn't the type of thing King was talking about. My critic finally decided it would take more space that social media provided to bring me into line with proper MLK thinking. Just as he dismissed me from the conversation, I was preparing to discuss Frederick Douglas, a great abolitionist, and someone King admired.

For my final example, a letter in another newspaper thought one of my columns “couldn't have been more misguided.” As with some other of my newfound critics, I was accused of promoting “color-blindness” which they say is a form of racism, among other things. Honestly folks, I never claim to promote “color-blindness.”

Seriously, I think I know where my detractors are coming from, and it's NOT my intent to go back there with them. I'm sure I missed some of King's message, but maybe these critics missed some of King's message as well. To my critics I suggest that minimizing ways in which King redirected the intentions of white people, is to diminish him.

King had a very positive influence on the U.S. While aggressively advocating for social justice, he spoke in a way that could both motivate his minority constituency, and help white America understand his peaceful methods and transformative goals. Anyone who has read any of his last book "Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?" knows social justice was his main goal and vision for the future.

King's message to me was about "getting out of the way" in terms of segregation and opportunity. Hence my attempts at de-emphasizing, but not ignoring, racial and cultural differences. With those same words King spoke to the oppressed about social justice, began leading them in dealing with it, and gave them hope by proclaiming he had seen the "promised land."

I stand pat on my assertion that King would condemn the recent surge in enforced separation, as well as the deemphasis on certain aspects of essential immigrant assimilation. I'm confident he wouldn't be happy with the way political correctness has divided us and tied us in knots while dealing with charges of subjective concepts like cultural appropriation and micro-aggression.

Challenges to my opinions are helpful because they make me revisit and examine my original impressions – and clarity strengthens mutual understanding. But really, folks, some of you have been rough on me. Paraphrasing a great conservative thinker, William F. Buckley: "I am determined to stand athwart of these attempts to make me into a racist or white supremacist." I'm trying to remind people what Martin Luther King meant to white Americans, and how people of all races are letting him down. I think King would mostly approve.