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## “What bothers you most?” he asked.

By Steve Bakke  July 28, 2020



*Base of Frederick Douglass statue after being torn down. Is it lost and gone forever?*

Often someone asks a question that sticks in my memory – one that has no immediate or easy answer. That happened to me recently. A friend asked me about racial tension and what’s happening now around the country. His words: “What bothers you the most about all of this racial turmoil?” I fumbled around with a quick answer that wasn’t very insightful.

I’ve been thinking more about that question as I watch the coverage of well-deserved respect and recognition given to the late Representative John Lewis who served, and suffered, at the side of one of my heroes, Martin Luther King Jr.

Originally, I came up with a “boiler-plate” answer – something dealing with my frustration over the hatred, violence and destruction. I commented about the reluctance of local officials to meet the pointless violence with at least some intention of enforcing the law. While those points are fine, they didn’t adequately convey what bothers me the most.

The first part of my real answer relates only indirectly to the violence and destruction we’re witnessing every day in several cities. Those events are important, but my strongest emotions are elsewhere. I retain some faith that we can overcome the anger and hatred, given time and a lot of compromise and hard work. Call me naïve, but that’s how I feel. There’s something else that haunts me more.

My strongest emotion isn’t frustration or anger, nor is it anxiety about what comes next. I am, quite simply, sad. I’m sad that someone believes this violence and destruction serves some purpose. Any chance of meaningful purpose was destroyed when the anarchists and terrorists stole the public stage from legitimate demonstrators seeking to achieve certain civil rights advances. In spite of much overall progress, there’s still work to do.

I’m sad about the destruction of government buildings, white and minority owned small businesses, and homes of Americans of all races. I’m sad about the loss of lives in the turmoil that outnumbers the lost lives originally being protested. And there’s been so much destruction or removal of historical statues of many patriotic forebears. Most of these individuals’ public lives included very little other than honorable actions and admirable achievements.

I'm sad because of the permanence of the physical destruction. I'm leaning on my optimism that honorable and determined citizens will find a way to get past our negative emotions and motivations – somehow. But when I think about the permanence of all the destruction my sadness intensifies. Many of the businesses, government buildings, homes and historical symbols will never be adequately replaced. If experience has taught us anything, those replacements that do occur will be in the far too distant future and bad scars will remain.

The other part of my answer is also about sadness. It came to me as I recalled the story behind the late Representative John Lewis who has been remembered and memorialized so appropriately during these few days. This man of peace never strayed from a commitment to the peaceful teachings and tactics of his mentor Martin Luther King Jr.

The criminals who ruined the sincere actions of those lawful protestors, while claiming to be concerned with black lives, are mostly anarchists devoid of good intentions. They are harming those they claim to support. They are also sending an insincere message about Lewis and his civil rights contemporaries. The significant progress made by those peaceful activists is being denied by the violent mobs. They want men and women of peace to step aside in favor of senseless destruction.

So much is lost and gone forever.