

## Curiosity is not a crime

Have you noticed that we Americans are living more isolated lives? I'm not talking about the Coronavirus pandemic and its influence on social gatherings. Rather, I'm speaking of the voluntary isolationism we've adopted to avoid conflict with other people who might be on the other side of a number of social, racial, gender, economic, age or political 'fences' - people whose differences of opinion might make our lives uncomfortable or unsettling.

My theory is that Americans' natural curiosity about our fellow citizens has been severely stymied if not completely road-blocked by a widespread purposeful migration towards a national 'safe space' - a place where no conflict is possible because no so-called *controversial* questions are permitted. In short, we have chosen to become insular, to protect ourselves from confrontation rather than enrich ourselves through an honest and sincere engagement with other people.

We have been told by authority figures that we must be extra careful and very sensitive about inquiring about each other's backgrounds, ethnicity and physical appearance, to say nothing of an individual's politics or their attitudes about the pressing issues of today. All of these things are considered off-limits, out-of-bounds and certainly not politically correct. By acceding to this new pressure and these new social rules of engagement we have willfully accepted self-censorship as the new normal behavior. By suppressing the Socratic method of "cooperative argumentative dialogue between individuals, based on asking and answering questions to stimulate critical thinking and to draw out ideas and underlying presuppositions" we have, in effect, eliminated any opportunity to enrich our collective understanding of each other.

This is most evident in our politics where the ideological division between America's Left and Right has made any meaningful interaction between the two camps nigh on impossible. Any serious questions of substance posed to the other side are almost always met with an immediate defensive posture at best or an aggressive one at worst. Conversations that start out discussing the merits of any issue soon devolve into personalizing the arguments, making any further pursuit of the truth pointless.

Politics is the most obvious 'no-man's land' where only the fearless (or those with nothing to lose) dare go. A quick look at our legislative branch's Capitol Hill hearings is proof of our dysfunctional behavior. Searching for the truth seems to be incidental to our elected representatives' goals who, I believe, only seek to score political points. Ironically, it is here that the PC culture has not made significant inroads. Unfortunately, neither has propriety or civility. Any encounter between a Congressional Representative or Senator and a witness can be inflammatory as we saw this week between Dr. (and Senator) Rand Paul and Dr. Anthony Fauci.

Recent attempts by various groups and individuals to brand all of us Caucasians as 'racist White oppressors' and Conservatives as 'White Supremacists' or 'domestic terrorists' have done nothing to encourage an honest and open dialogue on race in America. It has actually done the opposite. People of goodwill and objectivity are now going underground and are not venturing their opinions for fear of reprisals by 'cancel culturalists' who will stop at nothing to see them destroyed. Important debates with important questions are still-born. Any progress towards understanding is stopped dead in its tracks. We have chosen expediency over courage and the darkness of the unknown over the light of enlightened debate.

Like many, I was an inquisitive child. To me, the world was one big question mark waiting to be turned into a period. There was nothing that didn't interest me to some extent, and my incessant questioning frustrated my parents and my teachers. Though frustrating to them, they indulged me and encouraged me to *sleuth for the truth*. The ensuing years have only intensified my curiosity of the world and the people around me, but my social maturity has changed my previously direct interrogatorial style to a more nuanced one.

The problem is, now that I have learned the rules of how to play the truth-seekers' game, someone has dramatically changed them and made my newly-adopted, subdued style of questioning unusable. I have gained no purchase because the questions I would now formulate are unaskable! For example, as a traditionalist, product of the post-war period - a Mid-western, small-town boy - I view events, actions and people through what some would call an 'old-timey' lens. There are many things that bewilder me and I yearn to know the answers to a whole host of questions about my fellow man and woman that I am forbidden to pose. Here are a few of them...

I don't understand why many married women resist adopting their husbands' names but insist on making their legal names sound like a long sentence. Why do people defile their bodies with tattoos and pierce their ears, noses, eyebrows and their private parts? Why do we as a society accept the widespread use of drugs and gentrify mind-shifting ones like marijuana? Why do old men think pony tails or shaved heads are attractive? Why do young people embrace music that goes nowhere? Why do educated people vote Democratic? Why do we support companies that take radical political positions? Why must everything have a racial component? Why does the Left try to spin lies to their advantage? Why do we continue to condone the indoctrination of our children in our schools? Why are we turning away from God and making nihilism, 'cool?' Why are we embracing socialistic principles when we know they don't work? Why do we keep electing the same people to public office and expect them to change the system that protects their very existence? Why do we elect old men (like cognitively-challenged Presidents) to lead a young country? Why can't certain people honor their obligations to get married and parent the children they've brought into the world? Why can't we all agree that human life should be protected from beginning to end? Why do we keep beating our chest and declaring that we're the 'best country on Earth' without ever living in or visiting the others? Why do we still not acknowledge that there is evil in the world and that that evil also resides in other human beings who are intent on doing us in?

I have plenty of other questions, too, some pretty superficial ones like those I started out with, but unless something dramatic happens to the way we interact with one another soon they will lie fallow in the furrows of my mind. We must not allow ourselves to withdraw from the battlefield of ideas and relegate our curiosity to POW status, nor should we permit those with thinner skin and a propensity for faux injury to dictate what we can or cannot talk about. True wisdom only comes from critical thinking and spirited discourse.

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