

Jumping on the minority bandwagon

I am not Black or an illegal immigrant. Nor am I a woman or contemplating becoming one. I don't wear dresses, makeup or sport earrings and I prefer the opposite sex for my sex. I'm left-handed and don't shave my head or have a tattoo and I don't owe anyone anything for my education. Finally, none of my ancestors were slave-holders or agreed with those who did.

In short, I don't qualify for reparations or even an apology for the prejudice that may or may not have been shown towards my ancestral family when they came to this country 161 years ago and fought with the North in the Civil War. Along with millions of other Norwegian-Americans, I have gone largely unrecognized and my 'tribe' barely rates an honorable mention in our civil rights laws.

Yet, the miniscule number of the population that are known as *transpeople* along with all the homosexuals, the gender-fluids, African-Americans and the illegal immigrants have held the airwaves hostage with their push for *equitable* (meaning extra special) rights. We, who have not bought a ticket to ride in their rainbow parade floats, walked over their sidewalk graffiti extolling "Black Lives Matter" or joined them in their marches supporting a *woman's right to choose* (death by abortion or infanticide) are viewed as enemies of the state. This is especially true if we are declared Conservatives or voted for Donald Trump.

Not all minorities are alike and not all of them have legitimate gripes against 'the system.' Some were - and are - genuinely persecuted just for being themselves or simply believing what they believe. And those that break bread with those that are doing the persecuting are just as guilty as those who put on white hoods, pull on swastika armbands or who attack innocent citizens because of their race, ethnicity or sexuality. My ancestors weren't political when they got off the boat in 1862, but they sure became part of a political movement when they donned the Union uniform. They became targets of bullets and cannon balls for three long years, and then became 'soft targets' for a few generations for their ethnic and cultural differences until they were all boiled away in the great American melting pot.

It was at that point - when their differences were less significant than their similarities with everyone else's - that they turned in their 'victim ID cards' and joined the ranks of all the other immigrants who gave up everything they owned to journey to the new world for a better life. Their experience was not unlike that of the Italians, the Poles and the Irish, the latter whose patron saint we celebrate today, March 17th. We Norwegian-Americans don't begrudge the Irish for St. Paddy's Day or the Italians for Columbus Day or any other immigrant or racial group for their special days. We know better than to insult other people's identities and pride. Neither do we go in for making laws that would give them a leg up or a bigger seat at the table OR force them to like us or imitate our behavior. We fought a revolution and a civil war to protect everybody's right to be themselves and to share equally in the bounty of this country, and just because we've been passed over as a minority we're not demanding that the tail wag the dog or allow it to shake off its fleas into somebody else's housecoat.

We descendants of the Norwegians are proud of our collective heritage (except for all the raping and pillaging of course), but what we are most proud of is our American-ness and our membership in the greatest experiment of personal freedom the world has ever known. We can eat Lefse and walk at the same time, and we don't need to wear the Norwegian flag on our sleeve nor demand that everybody speak a few words of our mother tongue to acknowledge our presence. We wish that everybody would just step back from the battle lines and remember that you can't force a goat to eat the grass from your roof (okay that's a little too cultural). We all have the right to live together (or live apart), to love Lene (or Lars), to get a little tipsy occasionally... or never touch a drop of akvavit. We also have a right to demand that our leaders respect the laws they've made and protect life (and all the unborn Leifs).

We also want them to keep their thumbs off the scale and not give the groups that scream the loudest more rights than the rest of us. Some might call that typically Norwegian. I would just call it fair... in any language.

Stephan Helgesen is a retired career U.S. diplomat who lived and worked in 30 countries for 25 years during the Reagan, G.H.W. Bush, Clinton, and G.W. Bush Administrations. He is the author of twelve books, six of which are on American politics and has written over 1,300 articles on politics, economics and social trends. He operates a political news story aggregator website: www.projectpushback.com. He can be reached at: stephan@stephanhelgesen.com