

When did activism become a four-letter word?

When you think about *activism* what comes to mind? Black Lives Matter, MeToo or do you conjure up images of the Boston Tea Party, the Suffragettes or the Civil rights Movement? If you grew up in the forties or fifties you might think the Black Panthers, the Weather Underground or the women's movement.

Truth is, activism has always been a part of the American cultural landscape. Its popularity has ebbed and flowed, sometimes in sync with our national conscience and other times subordinated because of larger national priorities like World Wars and crises like the Great Depression. Ironically, activism has sometimes seen its greatest advances because of those national crises and not in spite of them. I'm thinking specifically of the 'peace movement' that manifested itself as pacifists (or isolationists) in WWI and II America or as the hippies of the anti-Vietnam conflict in the sixties/early seventies.

Americans are believers in activism (or at least we were) before some activist groups started to seriously disrupt the orderly rhythm of our economy and our safety and have prevented us from going about our daily lives. For the most part, we've sympathized with environmentalists who've chained themselves to trees in order to call attention to de-forestation or held our tongues when 'Code Pink' protested animal abuse. Why? Because many of us agreed with their causes even if we didn't agree with their methods.

That support was tacit, but it was there. We didn't demand that a few White suburban Leftist grandmothers be thrown in the pokey or that their grandchildren be labeled as domestic terrorists because they held signs on a street corner. When they trespassed or blocked traffic without parade or protest permits, we let them get their fifteen minutes of free TV fame before the police were called in to disperse them from our thoroughfares. We didn't insist on their arrests but merely asked them to respect our rights to carry on with our business.

That has all changed and we have now turned a very dangerous corner. No longer do we treat all activists equally. Our government(s) - both local and federal - are now choosing *which* activists have the right to challenge our established norms and break our laws. We have seen some groups enjoy protection while others are singled out for prosecution. America's new wave of activism may have started in 2011 with 'Occupy Wall Street' which morphed into the 'Occupy' movement which was a backlash at the 2008 massive bank bailouts and our economic inequality. 'Occupy' posed some painful economic questions about America's capitalist path and took steps to wag their fingers at the status quo.

Not to be outdone or allow the focus to be shifted from their complaints, America's various cultural/ethnic/racial groups stepped up their efforts to be noticed by the media spotlight. The 'MeToo' movement which started already in 2006 ratcheted up their complaints against evil White men and misogynists of all stripes in 2017. Unlike their 'sisters' who burned their brassieres in the late sixties as a protest against the stereotyping of women (as in the Miss America contest of 1968) the MeTooers had learned how to manipulate the media and didn't need to burn anything. However, the next activist groups did.

The murder of George Floyd in 2020 gave rise to renewed anger in the Black community (and the creation of Black Lives Matter and the 'Defund the police' movements) which touched off violent demonstrations that led to arson and massive destruction of private property as did the protests by anarchist groups in the Pacific Northwest in the 'Autonomous Zone' of Seattle and Portland. It must be noted that these were a textbook example of what America is now experiencing -- a two tiered justice (prosecution) system of preferential treatment for certain groups whose ideological underpinnings are in line with those of the current Administration in D.C.

THAT is the new (federal) activism, activism which is going unpunished but which feels empowered to arrest or persecute those with differing opinions or philosophies.

Activists on the Right who are standing up for the rights of the unborn are classified as enemies of the state as are those who demand equal protection under the law and the right to speak their minds at school board meetings or public gatherings. These people are treated as pariahs and are becoming part of the American government's new list of subversives, their only real crimes being their demands to be treated as presumed innocents.

American culture does not exist in a vacuum, nor is it immune from the pressures of new generations of Americans who've never read our history or bothered to engage the other side in an open debate of ideas. We have become a nation of victims-in-waiting, waiting for our demographic's turn to man the barricades and take to the streets. It will not be long before the newest activist group is formed and will demand reparations. I predict that that group will be the so-called 'newcomers' (also known as illegal aliens, undocumented migrants or economic-asylum seekers).

If and when that happens, America will cease to exist as a nation of equal opportunity and will be forever known as a melting pot where all common sense is boiled down to its least common denominator.

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