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A Note From A Naive, Soft-Hearted Liberal

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A Note From A Naive, Soft-Hearted Liberal

Abstract

“I’m voting for Trump,” my step-dad announced this summer. Through and through he is Republican, but his backing of Trump still shocked me.

When I asked him why, he said that he thought Trump could bring change while Clinton would only bring the status quo. He wanted, in fewer words, to “Make America Great Again.”

When I provided him with Hitler’s speeches and Goebbels’s propaganda, comparing the threats made to the Jews with those made to undocumented immigrants today, he brushed it off. “It’ll never happen,” he said with a shrug. When I replied with the sentiment of concern, explaining that those were the words of the world before the Holocaust, he said I was being dramatic.

[excerpt]

Keywords

Affirmative Action, Barack Obama, conservative, Donald Trump, Election, Gettysburg College, Hillary Clinton, Immigration, liberal, Male Privilege, republican, slavery, undocumented immigrants, Unemployment, White Privilege, Surge, Surge Gettysburg, Center for Public Service

Disciplines

Civic and Community Engagement | Education | Race, Ethnicity and Post-Colonial Studies

Comments

Surge is a student blog at [Gettysburg College](https://cupola.gettysburg.edu) where systemic issues of justice matter. Posts are originally published at surgegettysburg.wordpress.com Through stories and reflection, these blog entries relate personal experiences to larger issues of equity, demonstrating that –isms are structural problems, not actions defined by individual prejudice. We intend to popularize justice, helping each other to recognize our biases and unlearn the untruths.

SURGE

[VERB] : to move suddenly or powerfully forward or upward

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November 21, 2016



“I’m voting for Trump,” my step-dad announced this summer. Through and through he is Republican, but his backing of Trump still shocked me.

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Many in my conservative family see me as naïve, soft-hearted, and unable to see the real issues adults face today. In other words, they see my age as an inhibitor of my understanding. Nevertheless, I want to try and understand those who support our future president.

My step-dad is a man who lost his job during the Obama administration. He watched many of his fellow white male Americans be seemingly pushed aside to make way for immigrants whom employers could pay less. He blamed Obama, a man who must have achieved his high position not based on merit but through government assistance. A hard working man, according to my step-dad, should never need Affirmative Action. Whenever we discuss politics, these are the beliefs that come flooding out. He believes liberal policies caused his unemployment, and minorities are one of the groups to blame. When he looks at his nation, my step-dad sees all of the progress halting for him, and his own self drowning under the tides of equity. I’ve never lost a job, nor have I had a true “adult” job, so I can’t say how I’d react to the loss and frustration or if and where I’d try to place blame. This I acknowledge.

What I see, however, is the interconnectedness of history; I see the way we can never truly escape the influence of our ancestors. My step-dad says that slavery was horrific, but that we’ve gotten past it. I, on the other hand, see the way our prison system places blacks in chains – a new age and [a new form of slavery](#).

We have a habit of putting others in our own shoes, rather than the other way around. My step-dad believes that people can achieve anything with hard work, because he's seen from his own experience that this is possible. Yet, this assumes that everyone is born on equal footing.

The problem with the philosophy that everyone is on an equal playing field is that it is derived from the belief that society should be colorblind, or, or in other words, ignore that our society has constructed race to maintain inequity. When my step-dad says he doesn't see race or racism, that in itself is a privilege. This must be why he can shrug off Trump's racism. He doesn't see it's implications, because he doesn't have to. I know how hard it is to fight something that you can't even see. I didn't see it either for a while. I don't think I truly saw racism and all of its implications until my summer in the south side of Chicago, where it was so blatant that there was no way I couldn't see it. The news reporters stayed on the north side with the whites, and the police stayed on the south with the blacks. I would step on the Red Line in a car full of black folks and step off in a car full of white people, the separation being a few stops. Constantly experiencing such a juxtaposition, there was no way to deny the existence of implicit segregation rooted in socioeconomic status.

The founding fathers wrote the Constitution in blood shed for our nation, and the slaves built our White House. Both are emblematic of our country, yet only the former have their stories told and their personas deified. It wasn't until this year that the [National Museum of African American History and Culture](#) emerged from the depths of our nation to join with the other museums in the capital. We had a museum for spies before one for those who literally slaved for our nation. I stand upon ground that was bled for by white men who stole it from Native Americans, but we still don't call it genocide. I am as much an illegal immigrant to this country as those crossing the border right now. Do not mistake the flag you want to protect as red, white, and blue, for it is the red, white, and brown of all of those that bled for our country and paved our future.

I, too, am white, and it is my privilege to ignore the stories that go untold and remain unaffected. While Trump threatens my rights as a woman, I cannot escape the knowledge that, at the same time, my race protects me from some of his most heinous propositions. It's protected me for hundreds of years, but many are not so lucky. It is my privilege to vote for any candidate I choose, because I know that even if proposed policies like [stop-and-frisk](#), [mass deportation](#) or [registration of all Muslims](#) are implemented, I will generally remain unaffected.

Not everyone has that privilege. While many voted for Trump without racist, sexist, or hateful intent, that does not excuse them from the impact of their decision. I understand there is so much they don't see, just like there is so much that they see that I can't, but when a vote is casted only for yourself, you should realize that there's privilege in not having to cast it for others. When I voted for Clinton, I voted for myself, surely, but I also voted for all the women in my life who've fought so hard to overcome sexism. I voted for my friends who are undocumented, who have undocumented parents, who are so afraid. I voted for access to birth control, health care and education – all that represents freedom to me.

When my step-dad voted, he voted for himself and his own vision of freedom. He could have voted for his daughter, my mother, or me, but he didn't. If he had, a man glorifying sexual assault against women wouldn't be in office now. You may try to separate the two, claiming that politics are not personal, but I can't stand by and say that you're right. Politics becomes personal when your daughter is raped and no one does anything, when your parents are deported and you are alone in the U.S., when you were so excited to marry the love of your life but now worry you may never get the chance.

It's hard for me to empathize with my step-dad, no matter how hard I try. I'm sorry he may never understand me, and I'm sorry I may never understand him, but that doesn't mean we can stop trying to seek this cognition. I'm sorry because I know I hold prejudice in my heart, even against him, and I'm owning up to it. I have apologies to

make because I struggle, too. Perhaps that's why I can't understand why he isn't fully honest about his own struggle.

Mostly, I'm sorry I can't bring myself to forgive him yet.

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