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Not The America I Know

Consider the following statement that moments ago was issued by a high-ranking official of the federal government:

“Please be advised that the United States government will not accept or allow ... Roman Catholics to serve in any capacity in the U.S. military.”

Assuming you are Roman Catholic, and further if the above astounding statement was true, how would you now feel?

Shocked? Hurt? Sick to your stomach? Even afraid?

Maybe you now have a sense of what it means to be a transgender person in America today.

Ordinarily, I write and train about something less pressing: implicit bias—that is, how we humans are hard-wired to group and label other humans, which inevitably can result in marginalizing behaviors, policies, and systems. There's a great challenge around implicit bias, but in my view, it's not an impossible challenge. What's more, rarely will encountering implicit bias ever get you murdered.

On the other hand, explicit bias is legions more evil. It involves self-evident dehumanizing action, often undertaken by governmental authorities. Think Nazi Germany. Or, closer to home, it was the horrors of Jim Crow that resulted in the lynching of nearly 4000 African Americans between 1877 and 1950, something that most under the age of fifty only know from history books.

For several years, our country has been wrestling with “we” versus “them” politics. That wrestling has now spilled over to where various leaders and their followers are comfortable promoting the idea that the “them” in America are unworthy, that they don't belong here, and frankly, that they are lessor compared to the white, Christian majority.

I often equate “them” to being “other.” If you're of color, foreign-born, LGBTQ, a person with a disability, or in many circumstances, female, you are “other” in today's America. And, for you, that could be a darn big problem.

Recall the hipster saying, “Bro, it sure sucks to be you.”

For me, a sixty-year-old transgender woman, all of this came to a head with President Trump's casually-issued July 26 Tweet banning transgender service members from being in the military. (The above quote is the text of the Tweet, with "Roman Catholic" swapped for "transgender individuals.") In 142 characters, he summarily erased an entire class of humans.

Humans who are willing to die for you and me in the service of their country.

Erasure, my friends, is explicit bias at work.

In doing so, President Trump effectively channeled to those who hate transgender persons (and trust me, there are many out there) that it's perfectly fine to allow your hatred to show. He, in effect, put a target on the back of every transgender person in America.

For a while, I had thought that nothing would come to pass of the July 26 Tweet. However, today we hear that there's an actual "plan" to implement the horrendous Tweet.

"Plan" is an ominous word. Remember, Hitler had a "plan" for the Jews. It was a plan that began very incrementally.

For me as a transgender person, I now worry about where things will end. Will the next Tweet announce that transgender people will no longer be employable anywhere in the federal government? Will we become unwelcome by major businesses? With my health insurance already at risk, will this mean that the federal government will endorse a blanket exclusion for all trans folks even if I can afford the astronomical premiums? How many more bathroom—and even workplace—bills will there be?

More to the point: will this mean that I can no longer travel in certain parts of the country because I'm at risk of being murdered by someone who's been granted full license to exercise their hatred of me?

Yes, I feel that the federal government has now placed a target squarely on my back. It doesn't feel very good, let me assure you.

I so wish I was making this up. This isn't the America that I know and so believe in.

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