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Shutting Down Hate

I speak and train a great deal on allyship—the action part of being an ally to someone who's part of a marginalized community. Allyship is critical—it tells those who marginalize that their hateful words or behavior are unacceptable and helps to empower the marginalized survivor, who often lacks a voice of their own.

In the news of the past week, there have been two incidents where others have engaged in true allyship. One incident ended without violence while the second situation, quite horrific, resulted in the loss of two lives and severe injury to a third person.

The first incident occurred in a Walmart in Arkansas where a white woman-shopper yelled at another shopper, a Latina woman named Eva Hicks. Hicks recorded the verbal attack, in which the white woman tells Hicks, "Go back to wherever you're from." The white woman continued, saying, "You're in America....This is not your country."

When a Black woman attempted to intervene (e.g. engage in allyship) by telling the white woman not to be "ignorant," the white woman turned on her yelling, "A n****r is calling me ignorant?"

Eventually, a Walmart store manager (another ally) intervened and told the white woman to leave the store. The manager added that Hicks—who came to the U.S. from Mexico thirty years ago—"Has every right to be here as you."

The second incident happened on Friday, May 26 aboard a Portland, Oregon light rail train after a hateful white man (ironically, who had the surname, "Christian") began yelling racist slurs at two teenage women of color (one of whom was wearing a hijab). Several people attempted to intervene (e.g. engage in allyship) and confronted Christian over his words. In response, Christian pulled a knife and stabbed at least three of the intervenor-allies. Two of the intervenor-allies, John Best (53 years old) and twenty-three-year-old Taliesin Myrddin Namkai Meche, died. A third intervenor-ally, Micah Fletcher, 21, was hospitalized with serious but not life-threatening injuries.

Of note: file news footage from a nationalist rally in Portland several weeks ago included a photo of Christian with his arm raised in a Nazi-style salute and a report that he yelled racial slurs.

This morning I read that one of the teenage women who was the target of the hatred, sixteen-year-old Destinee Magnum, publicly thanked the intervenor-allies who came to her and her friend's aid. As she recounted, the hateful white man (Christian), "Told us to go back to Saudi Arabia and he told us we shouldn't be here, to get out of his country. He was just telling us that we basically weren't anything and that we should just kill ourselves."

As Destinee and her friend moved to the back of the train, one of the intervenor-allies came forward and told Christian that he "can't disrespect these young ladies like that." From there, an argument ensued with the resulting stabbing attack.

On this Memorial Day, my heart goes out the families of the intervenors-allies John, Taliesin and Micah. How horrible! As news of their deaths spread, we learned that each man had lived lives of integrity and service to others. John had been in the military for 23 years and worked for the City of Portland; Taliesin was a recent college graduate whom professors described as a "wonderful human being;" and Micah had won a 2013 poetry competition with a poem again anti-Muslim prejudice.

Apart from the horror here, there are huge gaping questions:

Why is it that hateful people now feel empowered to marginalize people who are "other"?

Is there really so much hate out there that this kind of intolerable behavior is simply the tip of the iceberg?

Most of all, how can we collectively end (or at least contain) the hatred? Why are so many so afraid of people who are "other"?

I don't have the answers to these questions, at least not right at this moment. All that I know is that **we must try harder**. I continue to believe the vast majority of people have good, compassionate hearts (indeed, the number of allies stepping forward in the above incidents reflects this). We must continue to show up, speak out, and be there for others who lack voices of their own.

We must shut down hate.

We must do so even if it means putting ourselves at risk. That, in my book, is the epitome of compassion for others. And right now, if nothing else, we need a whole lot more compassion in the world.

#Shutdownhate

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