

COMMENTARY / CULTURE

“The One You Feed!” (A PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT)

Okay, I'll admit that last week's news of Elon Musk's purchase of Twitter was a big yawner for me. I was like, hey whatever!

But beyond that and another ho-hum week of other

non-starters - daily doses of news about an ex-president, somebody named Kevin McCarthy, and a Florida governor's relentless attack on Mickey Mouse, to name a few - what's fed my angst are the far more important matters of spikes in hate and gun violence that's sweeping the nation.

More disturbingly is how so many hate and violence incidents no longer seem to show up on the front page of many news outlets these days. With a little page turning, you may be lucky to find such news in "section B," which fosters the subliminal message that hate and violence are just part of a new normal.

But the reality is that hate can spring up anytime and from anywhere. And it's on the rise.

"Hey n_gger, go back to Africa, or variations, can puncture your comfort zone while you're crossing a parking lot, walking on campus, in an athletic stand, in cyberspace - anywhere. Replace the "N-Word" with the "M-Word" (Muslim or Mexican), the "B-Word" ("aggressive" woman) or the "F-Word" (Gay) and the aim of the dagger is the same - to hurt, to strike fear.

Inarguably, what sets off these

cowardly acts are the usual suspects - alcohol, fear of change, societal "isms" and even messages from politicians. The mere sight of ethnic clothing, hearing a different accent or language, or just being different can instigate hateful acts.

Now to put all this into perspective, the Southern Poverty Law Center, a tracker of hate crimes in the U.S., reports that acts of hate are on a dangerous rise, including physical attacks on Asian Americans. Unfortunately, by every metric, African-Americans are the most targeted victims of reported acts of hate in the United States.

Similarly, antisemitic incidents from swastikas to hate-filled flyers to vandalism have increased nationwide according to a report released by the Anti-Defamation League last week.

So what do we do? I decided to sit down and interview myself in for answers:

Q: What are some warning signs that you could be the target of a hate crime?

SELF: Unfortunately, warning signs are hard to pinpoint since acts of hate are situational and can be activated in the heat of the moment, or by opportunity. The presence of alcohol, peer pressure, pent-up frustrations, outright fear, and a downturn in the economy can all lead to outbursts of hate.

Is it smart to avoid places that may be fertile grounds for hate-based abuse?

Self: I say exercise caution if you go to places where there are roving bands of profanity-using people, especially when you suspect that alcohol is involved. And if you are a person of color,

make sure that your phone is fully charged and your gas tank is full before venturing into an unfamiliar neighborhood.

Other than skin color, are there other factors that may incite acts of hate?

SELF: One's appearance can make one vulnerable. For example, donning "foreign looking" clothing and headwear could make one susceptible to hateful comments. Other than that, asserting a desire for respectful treatment, and even open displays of affection between same-sex couples, could set off a human ticking time bomb.

How best do you respond in the "heat of the moment," when you're the target of a hate?

Self: Unless you're under a physical threat, exercising expediency is by far the best approach, meaning just ignoring what happened and walking or driving away. That's tough to do, I admit that. But again, I urge one to resist responding in kind.

And if you're in your automobile when someone yells out hate, roll up your window and look straight ahead. I also advise that you keep a full tank of gasoline when you're out since some drive by haters may not stop at hurling epithets at you and may even follow you for a physical confrontation. Under these circumstances it is best to head to the nearest police station or busy, well-lighted parking lot which would likely result in the haters swerving off in some other direction.

That strategy may work for folks in your generation Terry, but what about this new generation not willing to suffer in silence?

SELF: Well this may sound harsh, but I would say to them ask yourself, "If I strike back, do I have medical and burial insurance?" If not, there's a fat chance that your parents will foot the bill, bail you out of jail...or be there when they close your coffin. The ultimate aim in any problematic situation is to get home, or whatever your destination, safely.

In the end, the ultimate goal is to protect yourself. You do that by staying tuned into your environment, being aware of the danger signs and acting accordingly. And as a parent, coach your young ones on what to do - and not to do - if they find themselves a target of hate or violence.

An old Cherokee told his grandson a legend about a battle that goes on inside people. He said, "My son, the battle is between two wolves inside us all. One is evil and filled with anger, envy and hate. The other is good. It is joy, peace, love, hope, humility, kindness, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith.

The grandson thought about this for a minute and asked his grandfather, "which wolf wins?"

The old Cherokee responded, "The one you feed."

© Terry Howard is an award-winning writer and storyteller. He is also a contributing writer with the Chattanooga News Chronicle, The American Diversity Report, The Douglas County Sentinel, Blackmarket.com, Hometown Advantage, co-founder of the "26 Tiny Paint Brushes" writers' guild, and recipient of the 2019 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Leadership Award.

This Week in African American History**The Story of Joseph Laroche, The Only Black Man on RMS Titanic**

By Carissa Villagomez,

In many depictions of the events surrounding RMS Titanic, the people shown are white and many assume there was nobody of color on the ship. The story of the sole black passenger and his family has been brought to light as an overlooked Titanic reality in the past few years.

Joseph Philippe Lemerrier Laroche was born in 1886 in Haiti. At the age of 15, he went to France to study engineering. He spoke French, Creole, and English fluently. After obtaining a degree in engineering, he married Juliette Lafargue, a white French woman with whom he was fast friends when they first met through a mentor. Due to rampant racial discrimination, he had difficulty finding a job despite his qualifications. When he did get jobs, he received poor pay from racist employers. He decided to look outside of France for new opportunities to support his two young daughters and his pregnant wife. The couple decided they would move to Haiti, where Laroche's uncle, Cincinnatus Leconte, was the President of Haiti and who promised he would appoint his nephew to a professorship in mathematics.

Tickets were bought to board a ship called La France to journey to Haiti. However, due to the ship's policy on separating parents and children, the couple decided to instead trade their first-class tickets for second-class tickets on RMS Titanic so that they could stay with their daughters, one of whom often fell sick. From New York, Titanic's destination, they planned to take another ship to Haiti. However, the fateful night/early morning of April 15, 1912 struck. Juliette and one of her daughters, Simonne, managed to get on a lifeboat. Laroche's last known actions are rushing to make sure his second daughter, Louise, was placed on the same lifeboat as

her mother and sister. After ensuring his family was in a lifeboat, he promised his wife they would see each other soon. His body was never recovered; he was 25 years old when he died.

Juliette Lafargue, a new widow, pregnant, with her two young daughters at her side, was left alone in New York after the RMS Carpathia picked up Titanic survivors and transported them there. She did not speak English and had no money as it drowned with her husband. After spending a difficult 3 weeks in the city, she finally began her journey back to France on a ship.

Months later, Juliette gave birth to a son, who she named Joseph after his father. She never healed from the trauma of her husband's death and her experience as the ship sank. She disliked telling the story of her survival and instructed her children to never speak of the event or of their father. She managed the lives of her daughters, never letting them out of her sight until the moment of her death.

The tragic story of Joseph Laroche broadens the narrative of Titanic and speaks to inequities in the Black experience. Laroche boarded the ship in search of new opportunities as he could find none due to racial discrimination in France. These social factors at work against him forced him to look abroad and displaced him from the country he had found and built a family in. Many survivors never mentioned the presence of a black man and his family aboard. His story has been overlooked for decades, and only with determined historical research has it become more known. It is vital to recognize the story and presence of Joseph Laroche on the legendary ship as it challenges assumptions around the passengers and deepens previously nonexistent conversations about race with regard to RMS Titanic. His story must not be overlooked any longer.



Joseph Phillippe Lemerrier Laroche.



Joseph Phillippe Lemerrier Laroche and family