

## Charlottesville...A Context

August 15, 2017

This past weekend, a violent event occurred which has occupied the attention of the national press and has inspired a cultural debate that has been boiling under the surface for generations.

Some think that the debate is about Southern monuments and the Confederate flag.

Some argue that the issue is the preservation of a country founded by Europeans of Anglo-Saxon descent and the fear by some that this country has lost.

Others will debate that people are naturally rebelling against the immersion of our culture by immigrants, multi-ethnic communities and people "different from us" and that these actions are only the actions of a group seeking natural preservation.

To others, the violence of this past weekend in Charlottesville only represent the tortured ideology of the alt-right, the propaganda of neo-nazis and the violent tactics of the KKK (Ku Klux Klan).

Let me share with you the context with which I view these events:

They come nearly 250 years after the founding of a country based on the belief that all people are created equal and that all persons have the inherent right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

There has always been a dichotomy between the American ideal and the practice. The authors of our original constitution and the bill of rights owned slaves, and the slave system in our nation fostered views of majority superiority/minority inferiority for generations. This majority/minority divide persisted after the end of the Civil War, through the work of reconstruction, into the era of Jim Crow laws and the eventual struggle for civil rights and the voting rights acts of the 1960's.

And yet, here we are, in 2017, still fighting the issues of the majority superiority/minority inferiority philosophy and theology.

Let me be clear: those who were marching on the streets of Charlottesville are promoting an ideology that says that there are some races and persons who are naturally, genetically, mentally and spiritually superior to others. Those who espouse this belief are those who advocate for a return to an all-White society and a rejection of multiculturalism.

There can be no equation of those who have been oppressed for centuries with those who want to do the oppression. Those marching under the Swastika and the Confederate flag on Friday and Saturday were doing so, not to win freedom but, to restrict freedom to the "superior race."

What will happen to our culture if we fail to denounce the hatred and the vile rhetoric that proposes that one group of people are superior to another group? What will happen if we continue to allow those who believe that Blacks are inferior to Whites and that White men should do everything in their power to release the superiority of the White race?

It will not be too long before we begin to go down the road that our nation once traveled. It will not be too long until we start to see an environment where Mary Turner lived (and tragically died)!

Mary Turner was a resident of Valdosta, Georgia when her husband, Hayes, was unjustly hung in a revenge attack for the suspected killing of a white landowner, Hampton Smith in May of 1918 (less than a century ago). Hayes, who claimed his innocence until his death, died at the hands of an angry mob who acted on their prejudice and hung and burned a black man "suspected" in his death.

Mary did not take the death of her husband silently. She spoke out against the injustice and the horror that occurred. The rest of her story is told eloquently in a book I have been reading, and I share it with you:

Mary Turner, who was eight months pregnant, was infuriated by her husband's death. She declared him innocent and vowed to seek justice, although, as *The Atlanta Constitution* reported, she protested what had occurred too vehemently and 'made unwise remarks...the people were angered by her remarks, as well as her attitude'. The sheriff placed her under arrest, possibly for her own protection, but then gave her up to a mob that took her away into the woods near the Little river at a place called Folsom's Bridge. There, before a crowd that included women and children, Mary was stripped, hung upside down by the ankles, soaked with gasoline, and roasted to death. In the midst of this torment, a white man opened her swollen belly with a hunting knife and her infant fell to the ground, gave a cry, and was stomped to death. The *Constitution's* coverage of the killing was subheadlined: 'Fury of People is Unrestrained!'"<sup>1</sup>

Check out the Mary Turner Project which describes her life and her tragic death at <http://www.maryturner.org/>.

I know some will say that I am extremist and there is no way that this would occur again in our country.

Perhaps...but instead of taking a woman and dragging her out of town and hanging her, perhaps we will only see a wild madman drive a car into a crowd who are protesting a "majority superiority" mentality, killing one woman and injuring 19 others. Lest we think it cannot happen again...let us remember the Dodge Charger that plowed through the crowd.

It is time to speak up and remember the context. We have lived in a world of racial animus for a generation, and we cannot give in to those who hate – we must stand up for the principles and ideals of our country: ALL PEOPLE ARE CREATED EQUAL.

Nazism has been defeated once. Slavery has come to an end once. Jim Crow laws have ceased to be the laws of the land once. Let's not allow these things to rear their ugly heads again!

Remember Charlottesville...and its context!

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<sup>1</sup> Philip Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown: The Lynching of Black America* (New York, NY: The Modern Library, 2003), 246.