

As I listened to the inauguration of President Trump on Friday, I was reminded by Senator Roy Blunt, whose remarks opened the ceremony, that one of the greatest things about this country is that there is a peaceful (demonstrations notwithstanding) transfer of power from one administration to the next. It was not the inauguration of President Washington in 1789 that had people concerned. Rather, it was the next one on March 4th, 1801, when Thomas Jefferson was sworn in. Would there be a peaceful turnover of power? There was a great political divide over the proper future for our fledgling country. Yet those who believed with every bone in their bodies that Jefferson represented the wrong course, the wrong future, they accepted the results of the election. And so we have continued for 45 presidents.

Transfer of power through democratic process is a good thing. That is not to say that we should not resist, in love, to counter oppression and racism. To fight for the future of our planet and all of her creatures.

Last week I spoke about Dr. Martin Luther King and the racism and inequality that is still prevalent in this country. I used Rev. Dr. Bill Sinkford's words in speaking about staying awake and not assuming that we are the conscious ones who will lead the way, but that we are one community of resistance among many.

This last election cycle was a wakeup call for those of us who had been coasting (not saying there were any of us here in this room who had been coasting) But for those who had been coasting, thinking that most of the necessary work around racism and able-ism and women's rights had been done, there was a wakeup call. While the anonymity of the internet and social media sites had been allowing hate speech and online bullying to flourish, we were able to brush this off as a minority, not representative of our country. But then our new president engaged in these despicable acts and the brush fire became an inferno. Turns out that racism and other forms of hate were never very far from the surface and with a little encouragement from one in power, one now holding the most powerful office in the world, permission was suddenly granted to pander to our lesser selves.

Ta Nehisi Coates is a black author and journalist whom I've quoted before. Coates makes the argument that most of us who call ourselves white have never come to grips with the depths of racism in ourselves and in our country. It certainly

seems that he is onto something. If the way President Obama was treated for 8 years didn't give us a clue, then this last election cycle, and events since, surely must have.

Yes, racism and white privilege are alive and well in this country. One of the speakers yesterday spoke about how she and her black friends are routinely ignored in the job application process here in Chico. They don't get calls back. They don't get interviews. Racism and white privilege. And all of us who call ourselves white carry greater or lesser degrees of it. Yet one ignores pain, wherever it is, at one's peril. Rabbi Lerner, whom I quoted at length in my January newsletter article, spoke about the pain and fear of whites and white males. Their pain and fear lies in a rapidly changing culture and demographic that they feel is leaving them behind. And in many ways it has and is. He spoke about how demagogues have historically stepped into the vacuum left when liberals do not acknowledge when part of their society is hurting.

Reading between the lines, or not so between the lines, it seems that Rabbi Lerner classifies President Trump as a demagogue. A demagogue is a political leader who seeks support by appealing to popular desires and prejudices rather than by using rational argument. Even in his inaugural address, President Trump did this, speaking of the carnage of the last 8 years. Carnage? I might agree if he had been talking about the toll on black lives in our inner cities. The homicide rate in South Chicago, mostly related to gang violence, has broken all records, but that was not what he referred to. He was speaking about everything he has labeled wrong with this country: immigration, health care, trade imbalance, jobs moving overseas. He was pandering to his white electorate.

In his final years, Dr. King moved increasingly toward recognizing that racism, while a huge problem, was only part of the problem. There was, and is, a huge class problem in the United States. And it is this class divide that President Trump bridged while establishment Democrats and Republicans ignored it, while liberals ignored it. Bernie Sanders was the lone exception. And he is certainly not establishment. I'm not saying that Hillary Clinton does not recognize this divide. I think she does. But she certainly wasn't effective in conveying that message, due to reasons only partially within her control.

President Trump bridged the class divide by blaming the "other." Rabbi Lerner says that in the first half of the 20th century, the "other" were Jews on the European continent, and in this country, African Americans and Native Americans. "The other" now includes feminists, gays, lesbians, undocumented workers and Muslims, all groups that President Trump has demeaned in tweets and in speeches. African Americans and Native Americans have never stopped being "other".

Our first principle tells us that there is inherent worth and dignity in every person. This leads us to recoil and protest when people without power are denigrated. It also leads us to hope that President Trump will evolve as President, to hope that he will work for the good of the entire country, as he promised to do in his inaugural address. We can only hope that President Trump's inherent worth and dignity will begin to show in his speech and in his actions. We can only hope that President Trump will begin to see that the United States is not an island in the world community, and that the president of this country must also be the preeminent world leader. We can only hope that President Trump will begin to comprehend that the future of life on our planet is imperiled.

But until he does, if he does, we have our work cut out for us. There is much that is in jeopardy. Minority rights, immigrant rights, education of our youth, health care, the world environment, to name a few.

So what do we do, how do we cope, with this political change? There is much that is outside of our control. But there are things we can do. And some of us have started doing them.

Last Sunday afternoon 15 of us from this fellowship, including 3 of our youth, joined about 250 people in a demonstration and march here in Chico honoring Dr. King. Yesterday 10 of us joined about 1,000 women and men on the city plaza for the Women's March, protesting the actions and policies of our new president. People who have been in Chico a long time said that it was the largest demonstration they had ever seen here. We acted in solidarity with millions of demonstrators all over the country and the world. 200,000 in NYC. Half a million in Washington, DC. 250,000 in Chicago. Another half a million, perhaps as many as 3/4 of a million in Los Angeles. All of these marches exceeded expectations. By a lot.<sup>i</sup>

Here in Chico many stopped to take pictures of our "Standing on the Side of Love" banner. Some wanted their pictures taken with us and our banner. Parents took pictures of their children standing in front of our banner. People thanked us for our positive message, for being present. We marched as one community of resistance in solidarity with other communities of resistance who were present. With women, with gay pride, with Black Lives Matter, with undocumented immigrants. This is what we can do, how we can cope with this political change. By showing up. Our oldest activist from UUFC yesterday is in her 80's, our youngest, mid-20's.

We cope by showing up. To listen in love and compassion to those who are hurting, be they brown or black...or white. Again and again. By showing up to protests. To grass roots organizing. To fight to influence what we can here at the local level and beyond. By showing up in love. Again and again. Will you join us?

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<sup>i</sup> Various online news sources accessed 01/21/2017