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AMERICA IN 2022: AND STILL THE PROBLEM OF THE COLOR LINE!

By Rev. Dr. Wendell Anthony, President, Detroit Branch NAACP

DETROIT – A reporter asked me the other day, what will I say to my congregation about the shootings in Buffalo, NY. I say to them what I have always said. This is not new for us. We must be ever vigilant, highly engaged in our community about the issues of our day, and recognize that America has a problem. It is not a Black or brown problem. America has a problem dealing with self. God has made of one blood all nations and races of people to dwell upon the earth. Unfortunately, not all people appreciate the human race. They are more concerned about their unique race. The real question is what are the white preachers and teachers saying to their congregations? Are you more interested in the building fund for the church? Or is it building a fund to support harmony, justice, and peace which should emanate from the church? Where are the white voices for justice? Where are the white civil rights leaders? What are you preaching in the rural and suburban areas not only in Michigan but throughout our country? What are you saying to your staff and employees in your corporate board rooms? Is diversity and inclusion high on your agenda? Are you monitoring your progress to achieve identifiable results? It is in these places and spaces that the words of justice and equity must be heard. Are you funding and voting for individuals that promote extremism, division, and derision? Are you supporting programs, policies, inclusion, and diversity for all Americans? Are you fighting for fair and appropriate gun control and licensing, funding for the mentally disturbed, and educational equity for all communities? Are you pro-life while the baby is in the womb and pro-death when the infant enters the world? Will you stand up and be counted among those who speak truth to power, or will you remain seated saying nothing because you are afraid that you may lose a little power?

We have been here before. In 1903 Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois wrote in *The Souls of Black Folk*, “*The problem of the 20th century is the problem of the color line.*” He went on to speak of the “*Relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia, Africa, America, and the Islands of the Sea.*” This was a national problem emerging out of the resistance and resentment of what some whites saw as the premature rise of Blacks. This rise occurred in politics, a few businesses, and the call for greater opportunities for a struggling people. For Blacks, it was a time of lynching’s, racial intimidation, educational separation, and economic discrimination.

The Swedish economist and Nobel Prize Winner Gunnar Myrdal described the race problem in the United States as “*A great dilemma that if not resolved threatens the ultimate success of our democratic process.*” The recent terrorist attack by 18-year-old Payton Gendron in which he killed ten Black people and wounding several others, dumps more salt on a wound that has never been allowed to heal. Frankly speaking, is there really a sincere effort to truly find a healing? This historic wound is constantly ripped open, streaming with blood, pained from the trauma of fear, frustration, and loss. Make no mistake about it, this wound is caused by terrorism at the highest level.

President Biden acknowledged its ugly reality in a recent visit to Buffalo, New York. He said, *“What happened here is simple and straightforward. Terrorism. Terrorism. Domestic terrorism.”* Dylann Storm Ruff was arrested after his terrorist attack at Mother Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, SC, June 17, 2015. He killed nine persons, saying he committed the shooting *“In hopes of igniting a race war.”* His website found him posing with symbols of white supremacy and neo-Nazism. He had a manifesto in which he expressed his views towards Black people and other groups. FBI Director Christopher Wray testified before the Senate Judiciary Committee following the January 6, 2021, insurrection at the nation’s capital saying, *“Racially motivated violent extremism, specifically of the sort that advocates for the superiority of the white race, is a persistent evolving threat. And racially motivated violent extremism is the biggest chunk of our domestic terrorism portfolio, if you will overall.”*

Patrick Wood Crusius, a 21-year-old from Allen, TX, demonstrated the threat posed by white supremacy. Crusius killed 23 persons at a Walmart in El Paso, TX, and wounded 23 others. He cited the Great Replacement Theory and the Christ Church Mosque shooting on August 3, 2019, in New Zealand as his inspiration. He also wrote a manifesto with white nationalist and anti-immigrant theories. March 15, 2019, two consecutive mass shootings occurred in a terrorist attack by 28-year-old Brenton Harrison Tarrant. He live-streamed the first shooting on Facebook. Publishing an online manifesto, he pleaded guilty to 51 murders and 40 attempted murders. The attack was linked to an increase in white supremacy and alt-white extremists. October 17, 2018, 46-year-old Robert Gregory Bowers killed eleven people and wounded six others at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, PA. He indicated that he too wanted *“All Jews to die and that Jews were committing genocide against his people.”*

The evidence is clear. The need for a national resolve to stop this madness is urgent. We cannot continue to stick our conscious in the proverbial sand of ignorance, denial, and indifference. The Anti-Defamation League has tracked at least 450 U.S. murders committed by political extremists. Out of 450 killings, right-wing extremists committed about 75%, Islamic extremists responsible for about 20%, and so-called left-wingers, 4%. Nearly half of the murders were connected to white supremacists. What do we do about it? How long will Republican lawmakers, politicians, hate-inspiring cable news anchors, and right-wing extremists be allowed to engage in this unholy, immoral, illicit, and un-democratic alliance without a persistent, public challenge? Congresswoman Liz Cheney called it out, *“The House GOP leadership has enabled white nationalism, white supremacy, and anti-semitism. History has taught us that what begins with words ends in far worse. GOP leaders must renounce and reject these views and those who hold them.”*

When will the leaders of the party of Lincoln demonstrate some Lincolnesque? Lincoln said, *“Nearly all men can stand adversity but if you want to test a man’s character, give him power. Be with the leader when he is right. Stay with him when he is still right. But leave him when he is wrong.”* Those who pedal the right-wing conspiracy theory of replacing white people with Blacks, Latinos, and immigrants to take over the country are wrong. There is no great scheme to replace white people by Blacks or anybody else. Critical Race Theory, which is an academic theory, about the legal systemic infusion of racism in our institutions is discussed among college academics and philosophers. It is not being taught as a curriculum in any school district in America in which I am aware. Most folks don’t even know what it is. There is a great need as demonstrated by such great ignorance for people to know the truth of who African Americans really are.

We do have a critical racial issue in America. We still have not crossed over the color line. This line represents the problem of indifference, apathy, negative acceptance of violent behavior, and a dedicated ignorance to disregard the truth. I’m reminded of the words of Dr. Du Bois who said very clearly, *“Either America will destroy ignorance or ignorance will destroy the United States.”* Let us work together so that our nation will not be destroyed.