

Dianne Post

Sept 1, 2023 in Blog for AZ

Violence is as American as Apple Pie

"The price good men pay for indifference to public affairs is to be ruled by evil men."
Plato, The Republic.

A seeming increase in violence by white supremacists and nationalists is of great concern as they attack school boards, threaten city and county officials, defame election volunteers, dox grand jurors, and shoot homeowners who display a lesbian/gay flag. It may seem new, but we have seen this violence before.

From the beginning, violence was aimed at the Native peoples and enslaved Africans. Later the violence spread to include immigrants of all kinds whether Chinese building our rail system, Mexicans picking our crops, or coal miners seeking a safe workplace. The government attacked veterans seeking to collect on promises made, companies attacked factory workers seeking better conditions and pay, both government and the public attacked anarchists seeking a better structure and women seeking to vote.

The U.S. has a long history of shameful violence toward our own people – the Trail of Tears, Haymarket Square, and the 16th Street Baptist Church to name a few. In 1921, “Black Wall Street” in Greenwood, OK was destroyed with a death toll above 100. In 1923, the Rosewood, FL massacre had a death toll estimated from 27-150 and the town destroyed. In 1949, a violent white mob prevented an outdoor concert headlined by Paul Robeson from taking place near Peekskill, NY. With increased union security, the benefit concert was held a few weeks later. Many Black veterans after fighting in Europe for freedom in WWII were murdered by the “good old boys” when they returned home.

We have not confined our violence to the borders of the U.S. Our “Good Neighbor” policy for Latin American countries supported regime change in Honduras (love them bananas) and Nicaragua. We overthrew elected President Arbenz in Guatemala in 1952 and the asylum seekers at our border are still paying the price of corruption and gang rule. In 1971, we toppled the president of Bolivia, and in 1973 we murdered Salvador Allende and set off 40 years of terror in Chile. We supported Peron’s dictatorship and crimes against humanity for 30 years in Argentina. We invaded Granada in 1983 for no ascertainable reason. In Panama, we turned on our ally Noriega and took him out in 1989. We occupied Cuba (our next try in 1961 was not so successful), and we occupied Haiti and invaded the Dominican Republic. Good neighbors indeed.

We overthrew the Kingdom of Hawaii in 1893 for the fruit companies. Native Hawaiians are still fighting to get their country back. In 1953 we helped to overthrow the first democratically elected prime minister of Iran. See where that got us today. We helped to murder Patrice

Lumumba, the first elected prime minister in the Congo, a country still in crisis after decades of violent dictatorship.

We invaded the Philippines (which is why we have so many Filipino nurses who speak Spanish) and supported a dictator in Indonesia. My generation grew up trying to stop the Viet Nam War and the next generation tried to stop Iraq and the next generation tried to stop Afghanistan where empires go to die. (The UK, Russia, and U.S. have all failed there.) Our violence abroad must inevitably come home to roost. Many of the January 6 insurrectionists were active or retired military or law enforcement. We trained them and their foreign counterparts in the School of The Americas (now called the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation at Fort Benning) to overthrow democratically elected officials (like the recent coup leader in Niger did) but see them now turning those skills on the U.S.

Our early presidential campaigns were also tarred with violence and lies much like today. The third presidential race between Jefferson and Burr was thrown into the House of Representatives. Seven days and much horse trading later (like McCarthy and his 15 ballots to become speaker), Jefferson was declared winner. To stop that nonsense again, Jefferson accused Burr of treason for his actions in Mexico, but the Chief Justice John Marshall acquitted Burr.

Calling each other vicious names and accusing each other of hideous crimes was par for the course in politics. One senator was beaten with a cane on the floor of the Senate and never fully recovered. When I listened to the complete Lincoln/Douglas debates while driving across the country I was stunned at how many lies were told and names called back and forth. We have had presidents who were crooks (Warren Harding, Richard Nixon), bigots (Andrew Jackson, James Buchanan), and incompetents (Andrew Johnson, George W. Bush) or all three (Trump). Bad presidents are not a new phenomenon.

The recent explosion of violence is no surprise to Native Americans whose children were kidnapped into boarding schools or Africans whose family members were sold down river or workers fighting for their lives who were attacked by Pinkerton guards or women who were force fed for wanting to vote. It might come as a surprise to those against whom it has not previously been directed. This is the history De Santos does not want you to learn. But they will come for you as in the well-known poem by Pastor Martin Niemoller.

First they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a socialist.
Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a trade unionist.
Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—because I was not a Jew.
Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me.

It is clearly time for all of us to speak out. We must call out every single incidence of discrimination and violence, we must stand up to it and take action i.e. file a complaint, run for or get appointed to policy making positions at every level of government, write op eds and

letters to the editor, speak back when someone spreads lies or intolerance on social media, talk to our family and friends even if it means they will be angry or may cut ties.

Without a rational argument, the white supremacist and nationalists must resort to violence. But we cannot let violence win. We must do what has worked before and be creative about new strategies. We must use the law, politics, public opinion, community organizing, and social media. We must stand together; build a caring community for all; act for human rights; donate time, money, or talent; speak out; show up; and take a stranger's hand. Ralph Waldo Emerson said in the 19th century that we should leave the planet a better place than when we found it. Not everything I learned as a child turned out to be true – this lesson is.

* * *