



The Ethical Humanist

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Election Hangover

Brian King, BEC President

I need to preface this by saying that I am writing this one week after the election. I say this because my thoughts on the election have changed on a daily basis since then, and I don't expect them to resolve completely for quite some time.

I could tell you why I think Trump was elected, but there are still millions of ballots yet to be counted, mostly provisional, so comparable numbers for 2008 and 2012 are still not available. Did more people vote for Trump or did fewer people vote for Hillary? We just don't know yet. There are some reports that relatively more voters opted to leave their choice for president blank.

For a significant number of voters, Trump's bigotry was apparently not a deal breaker, but this is still the same country that elected Barack Obama twice. I just don't know yet which of these facts is more reflective of our country.

The electoral college is obviously a huge problem. Not only have two of the last five elections resulted in the popular vote winner not being elected, but most Americans feel their votes don't count at all.

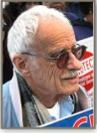
As a nation, we could easily fix the electoral college problem before the next election. The [National Popular Vote Interstate Compact](#) is an agreement between the states to award their electoral votes to the candidate who wins the national popular vote. It already has been passed by ten states and the District of Columbia, which totals to 165 electoral votes — more than 60% of the 270 needed to effectively nullify the electoral college. Although only heavily Democratic states have joined so far, there is plenty of bipartisan interest in ending this archaic system.

But these discussions are probably for another time. We need to focus now on the present — in particular, how we take this gigantic mess and turn it into something positive.

I am reminded of the Tea Party movement. Yes, it was a reaction to the election of our first black President, and yes, it was primarily a creation of Fox News, and yes, it probably gave us President Trump. But it was a sign that popular movements can indeed effect change. We need to channel our fear and anger over Trump's election.



Protests have spontaneously broken out across the country in response to the election. While the voters have spoken, that doesn't mean it is a futile act to voice our opposition. We need not only to organize to resist the new administration, but also to come together and to find candidates and run campaigns to win elections at every level of government. Let's take this as a call to action.



The Way It Is (?)

Marvin Miller

Suspect

We can hardly see or hear a news report without encountering the word suspect, with the accent on the first syllable. My dictionary defines suspect as one who is suspected, especially of a crime. It doesn't say suspected by whom. Usually, when the media use the term suspect, they don't state who is doing the suspecting. They just call the person a suspect.

The media usually get their information about events involving suspects from "the police", i.e., from someone in a police department acting as a spokesperson for the police. The media have a symbiotic relationship with the police: they get news stories from the police, and the police get their viewpoint on any story disseminated by the media. When the media call someone a suspect, they mean someone suspected by the police.

The use of the word suspect dehumanizes the person to whom it is applied, in the minds of those who hear or see the word. It evokes subconscious antagonistic feelings, especially fear. We usually don't have time to evaluate, analyze, or question the use of the term. This is particularly the case with the electronic media, which send

information to us continuously, preventing us from thinking about what we hear or see before we receive the next incoming information.

We tend not to think of suspects as people. In our culture, people have rights, but suspects don't. The Constitution says that a person accused of a crime has the right to a fair trial. Some of the worst people in the world, even Nazi war criminals, had trials. In the highly unlikely event that someone who has been represented in the media as a

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suspect has a trial, can the jurors think of him as innocent until proven guilty? When a suspect is killed rather than being arrested and tried, we hear that he received justice.

How does one become a suspect rather than a person? In detective stories, this happens as a result of an extended investigation. But in the real world there's no time for that. Our age is one of instant formation of subconscious attitudes, as

Malcolm Gladwell described in his book "Blink". Someone is a suspect in the mind of one who sees him because he looks like a suspect; that is, he looks different in some way from how the viewer thinks a "person" ought to look. Prof. Gates was a suspect in his own home, in the mind of an officer.

Attitudes such as racism that are prevalent in society are naturally also prevalent among its police, and they are reflected and promoted by the media. News isn't what happens; it's what the news media choose to report about what happens. We learn about what happens from the media, and they learn about what happens from their sources. Every image of a Black suspect in the media

reinforces the subconscious view that people who look like that are suspects. Media people decide what to show, based in part on their own views and also in part on what they think will resonate with the views of their audience.

When we encounter the word suspect, we need to think about what it means, to what extent its use is justified, and what the potential consequences of its use are.

Toward Reconciliation

Peter Denison

The New York Times of Saturday, October 29, 2016, printed a story about a woman named Shifa al-Qudsi, a Palestinian so upset by the mistreatment of her people that she volunteered to become a suicide bomber. Fortunately, she was caught before she could detonate the bomb and was sentenced to six years in an Israeli prison. During her imprisonment, she learned about a group called "Combatants for Peace" which had been started by some Israeli veterans whose army careers had convinced them that there must be a better way than shooting and bombing the enemy. Shifa had come to the same conclusion while serving in prison. Thus she joined a group composed both of Israelis and Palestinians working for a peaceful solution.

Several years ago, on the CBS program *Sixty Minutes*, I learned about two thirteen-year-old girls, one Israeli and one Palestinian who had become fast friends. They also had wanted to work for peace and reconciliation. Five years later, *Sixty Minutes* did a follow-up. By that time the Palestinian girl had become disillusioned because of all the Israeli violence against her people. As a result, she had decided she wanted to become a suicide bomber. I

have no further information about her and don't know if she carried out her wish, returned to being a peace activist, or simply dropped out.

How is it possible for the same person to want to be a peace activist at one time and a violent militant at another? There is an underlying aspect of their characters, an intense feeling of patriotism for their people, an idealism which can lead in either direction. In either case, their motivation is idealistic, not self-regarding. Americans tend to call them thugs or worse, but this is not accurate (at least in most cases). When they are held in an Israeli prison, they support each other and behave in an orderly manner -- as the political prisoners they consider themselves to be. As a result they have much better personal relationships with their prison guards. (Of course, this is possible because Israeli prisons are relatively civilized, unlike most prisons in the neighboring Middle East nations.)

Combatants for Peace had scheduled a conference in the United States, and Shifa wanted to go just as other members had. The Israeli government did not feel able to trust her and wouldn't let her travel to Tel Aviv to get a visa. In a sense, the whole Israeli-Palestinian problem is fear and lack of trust. Most Israelis would love to have a definitive peace settlement and not have to worry about terrorist acts every so often.

But can they trust the Palestinians? And equally important, can the Palestinians trust the Israelis? Both sides tend to dehumanize the other as simply thugs who only respond to force. Yet violence never ultimately works either.

The Israeli-Palestinian standoff is only one of many on this earth. In our country, we continue to have racial conflict and senseless killings. I can see why some African Americans seek revenge for police killings by killing some police officers who ironically happen to be innocent. It's a feeling many sympathize with. But it just won't work. If the police fear that they are the objects of assassination attempts, they will be more inclined to simply shoot first. We must regard the other side as also human and try for reconciliation. It's true that the methods of Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King do not always work. Despite their peaceful ways, both suffered a violent death. But when the weaker side chooses violence out of frustration, they simply lose the emotional support of those who could be persuaded to intervene on their side. We must aim for reconciliation.



Dakota Access and Solidarity

Fred Hewett

The day after the election, protesters filled the streets of Boston. But one group of several hundred was not marching in protest of the new President. They were protesting a pipeline in North Dakota.

As it's currently mapped, the Dakota Access Pipeline follows a north-south route west of Bismarck and then passes just north of the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation. The crude oil pipeline would tunnel under Lake Oahe, a body of water that forms a stretch of the Missouri River, and on which the people of the reservation rely for their drinking water and irrigation.

Crude oil pipelines have a history of ruptures, sometimes with disastrous results. The people of the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation look at the pipeline as a serious threat. Several months ago, they set up camp in the path of the construction. Dozens have been arrested, and confrontations with police have been violent.

This is a clear case of environmental injustice. Engineers originally wanted to have the pipeline cross the Missouri River above Bismarck. They later rejected that route, in part because of the danger that a rupture of the pipeline would pose to mainly white Bismarck's water

supply. The updated route moved the Missouri crossing south of the city just a half mile upstream of Standing Rock. The pipeline's route would cross sacred lands that the Sioux believe was given to them by a treaty in 1851.

From a political perspective, the Native people of Standing Rock are situated at the intersection of several different identities. They are at once indigenous, rural, colonized, religious, and poor. Consequently, they have drawn support from many varied groups around the globe.

For example, representatives of more than 200 Native American tribes have gone to the protest site. The Black Lives Matter movement has acknowledged the commonalities they share with the protesters. Many clergy groups have traveled to North Dakota to join the protest. Even a group of Palestinians offered solidarity as fellow victims of colonialism. The list goes on — veterans, anthropologists, unions, and many others have lent support to the Native cause.

As expected, environmental groups have also been conspicuously involved in the protests. Climate change activists oppose fossil-fuel pipelines in general, as part of a strategy to reduce carbon emissions and limit the scope of climate change.

The climate activists fully acknowledge that this protest is not about fossil fuels. The

Native people are mainly focused on their water supply and their rights as an indigenous people. They want the pipeline to be moved far from their reservation. Environmentalists don't want it to be built at all. But those minor points of disagreement don't prevent groups like Rainforest Action Network and Greenpeace from pitching in. They willingly downplay their issues, knowing that doing so best serves all the groups who are protesting together. The wide array of causes who are demonstrating at Standing Rock together form a strong network of resistance.

They're going to need that strength, given the election of Donald Trump, who has promised to invest in energy infrastructure, and who includes oil and gas executives among his closest advisors. Trump owns stock in the company building the pipeline. He will be quick to complete the Dakota Access Pipeline if he gets the opportunity.

These days, social justice groups need to find links between their respective causes, even if those links seem tenuous, and even if it means other issues may overshadow their own. Everything is connected — race, fair pay, climate, feminism, LGBT rights, voting rights, free speech — everybody needs to stand as one. The movement to support the Sioux of Standing Rock, even if it may fail, previews how this can work.

Sunday Programs in December 2016

December 4

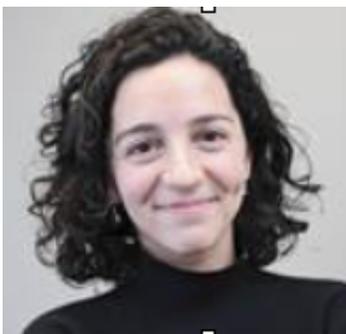


Emily Wilson, MPH, MS, CHES

Trauma-Informed Teaching and Learning: Ethical Educational Leadership for Today's Highly Stressed World

Exposure to traumatic events and adversity including violence, discrimination, and poverty can present major barriers to learning and achievement. This talk will explore some of these exposures in greater detail and context, and discuss some of the emerging practices in education to prevent, address, and respond using trauma-informed principles and ethical leadership strategies in education.

December 11



Joanna Slater, Journalist, Globe & Mail

On The Refugee Trail

Joanna Slater, an award-winning journalist with Canada's national newspaper, will deliver a firsthand account of Europe's refugee crisis. Slater will discuss her travels through Hungary, Austria and Germany documenting the journeys of refugees, as well as the ongoing challenge that displaced people represent for Europe and the world.

December 18

Solstice Brunch

Our community celebrates the solstice together on this morning.

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~ Program Schedule for December 2016 ~	
December 4	Emily Wilson, MPH, MS, CHES <i>Trauma-Informed Teaching and Learning</i>
December 11	Joanna Slater, Journalist, Globe & Mail <i>On The Refugee Trail</i>
December 18	Solstice Brunch
December 25	No meeting
Sunday Meetings are held at 10:30 AM at 33 Garden St in Cambridge	

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