

It's Not Systemic Racism

by [Samuel Hux](#) (August 2020)



Victor Victorach doublé d'angoisse regarde son cœur tremblant, Victor Brauner, 1949

The following essay is the 11th Chapter (or Coda) of an as-yet unpublished manuscript I call "Race, the Obsession that Will Not Shut Its Mouth: A Philosophical Memoir." Its theme is that despite the abominable racial past of the United States this is not now "a racist society we live in," as an easy cliché has it; it is instead a race-obsessed society.

I present this chapter as a separate essay in order to comment on the national protests of the Summer of 2020 occasioned by the senseless killing of George Floyd by a policeman in Minneapolis. The reader should be aware (1) that I join no "Lives Matter" movement not prefixed by "All," and (2) that I have a polemical tendency to take no prisoners.

As I was concluding an early draft of this manuscript, so were the jury concluding the George Zimmerman-Trayvon Martin case—or so they possibly thought. Since there was not the slightest sliver of evidence that Zimmerman (monumental jerk though he seems to have been) was guilty of a hate crime and nothing to counter his claim of self-defense, the not-guilty finding was a no-brainer for a responsible jury—especially in a trial that should never have taken place and possibly would not have without the encouragement of Barack Obama, who announced to an attentive citizenry that had he a male offspring his son might look like Trayvon Martin.

I say the jury "*possibly thought*," because they probably knew their brave assumption of duty would not be respected by the racial entrepreneurs lusting for the blood of a man part German-American from his father's side, part

Hispanic and lesser part African from his mother's, and thus not a very likely candidate for the role of prototypical White Racist—but, Hey!, y' gotta take what y' can get, the likes of Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton must have thought (if *thought* describes their mental eruptions). There is something pitiful-to-contemptible in the certainty of black worthies, liberals, the media, or street protesters, that Zimmerman, far from acting in self-defense, just must have been a cold-blooded murderer: *they are incapable of imagining themselves in Zimmerman's circumstance because they have been so cossetted, so fortunate in their lives, that they have never thought they were about to die.* They are—in a special sense—a privileged group of people.

But even I, who expected the worst, did not foresee that some idiot ally of the duo of reverends would violate the memory of actual hate-crime victims like Emmett Till—although I should have expected such totally inappropriate comparisons. But *perhaps* (I take back that word) the most disgusting of the post-verdict pronouncements was Barack Obama's confiding to citizens that thirty-five years before he could have been himself Trayvon Martin—the point of which such an intelligent man as Obama is advertised as being had to know was encouragement of the protest against a verdict which with the other side of his mouth he had counseled the citizens to accept as the rule of law. F. Scott Fitzgerald once said that the test of a good mind is the ability to embrace two opposing ideas at the same time without going mad. President Obama, however, was not *embracing* opposing ideas; he was cynically *using* them in the most callow fashion, the natural inclination of the shallow mind.

Two jokes were inspired by the trial and its aftermath, one meant as humor, the other not. "Zimmerman to change his name," an on-line wit announced. He would change his name to Ben Ghazi so that neither the press nor Barack Obama would mention him again. The second joke was that if something good

came out of this tragic and sordid affair it would be evidence of the urgent need for a frank and uninhibited discussion of race in this country. Something the president especially in his largeness of soul and perspective endorsed (for the umpteenth time). In a pig's eye! No such discussion can or will take place. In one sense it should not take place; it would be phony from the get-go. For the entrance fee to the discussion would be the assumption-agreement-confession that white intransigence, holding black hope in bondage, means "this is a racist society we live in."

And I should have known when I began thinking about this Coda that if I have nothing else to do, I could be expanding it as long as my generation at least is likely to live. The Michael Brown event in Ferguson, Missouri, the Eric Garner case on Staten Island; Baltimore; Charleston, SC. No cessation foreseen.

Whether Michael Brown was an innocent holding his hands up in surrender, or a thug with a threatening gesture toward a policeman, this was a case of an *officer* shooting a *civilian*. To "colorize" the antagonists is an act of racial prejudgment the protestors were supposedly protesting against. As many have observed, when Eric Garner was crying "I can't breathe," he had to be breathing, but he might also have been trying to catch his breath because—grossly obese with a heart problem—he might have been dying while resisting arrest. Of course, Obama's man Eric Holder had to look into both cases, with the implication that the White House knew more than the two grand juries who had laboriously studied the incidents. The death of a black man in police custody several days after suffering injuries in still-obscure circumstances was another example of racism in spite of the fact that half of the six Baltimore police officers indicted were black, including the officer specifically charged with murder.

Ironically, the only hopeful moment in this recent history of race in America occurred after the most terrible

event: the murder of nine African-Americans in Charleston by Dylann Roof who, by the way, spent an hour or more with his victims in a church before making up his mind, that is to say *choosing*, to kill them. A tragedy which convinces the obsessed, of course, that this is a racist society after all, because the obsessed refuse to be moved by the extraordinary outpouring of grief throughout the nation, and especially in the heart of the ex-Confederacy. I call it a hopeful moment not because of the banishment of the Confederate battle flag; in fact I don't really approve of casting historical artifacts into the dust bin. Nor do I allude to the extraordinary act of Christian mercy practiced by the friends and relatives of the massacred; for although I am touched to my soul by their charity, I admit I do not understand it. I once years ago wrote that "If someone kills my parent, offspring, lover, or whatever," all considerations of social justice and practicalities like deterrence are beside the point because "what I want most is that the murderer *suffer* because my loved one is *dead*. Revenge."

But I take some small solace in the fact (as I assume it to be, although I have no proof) that the bereaved friends and family and responsible elders of Charleston indicated to the race-hustlers like Sharpton and his ilk that they were not welcome, said in effect, "Do not use, vulgarize, and politicize our grief." I call this "small solace" because of the terrible irony that after the double election of the first black president in our history, a phenomenon which included a re-election, which can be convincingly explained only by an overwhelmingly white electorate's refusal to sack this historic figure . . . in spite of this, the evidence is too compelling to ignore, race relations are now at the lowest they have been in decades.

I say "now are" obviously because of what history will probably call "The George Floyd Event." I hate to talk about it because one quite naturally hates to invite

condemnation—and I indeed suspect it is indeed an invitation. But I would hate myself, even more, if I kept my mouth shut in a cowardly fashion . . . which I would know, even if no one else did, was a choice I made to be safe by pretending to believe what I don't believe. So, what the hell, I'm going to explain what I do believe and don't believe and why.

The violent arrest of George Floyd resulting in his death was the most brutal instance of police brutality in recent American history. It *should* have been settled by the almost immediate charge of murder against the cop who used Floyd's neck as a knee stool. It did not, does not, justify the violent protests including arson which followed. I will not bother to say that it did not justify the looting, because I cannot imagine anyone who would be worth hearing claiming that the looting was anything more than a *joyous* taking-advantage of a tragedy (and anyone who says "But given the circumstances . . ." should have his mouth shut forcedly immediately).

But what of the peaceful—or at least non-violent—protests? That depends upon what one thinks they are for. (I use the present tense because they continue as I write.) Only a moronic minority can be serious about defunding the police, which makes as much sense as improving education by cutting teachers' salaries. But obviously it is necessary that police be held to a higher standard of behavior; less obvious, however, is how difficult that will be, for some fairly simple (but hard to see) reasons. Bear with me . . .

Plato in his ideal republic thought that the Guardian class, rather than the Private Citizens (Worker-Producers), required higher education in the humanities, but not only because the Ruler class would graduate from the Guardians, but because the Guardians (roughly the military and the constabulary) were potentially dangerous. The Platonic tripartite *polis* corresponded to the tripartite soul: Producers seeing to the Appetites, Rulers practicing Reason,

Guardians providing Courage and its often-necessary Aggressiveness. Plato's word for the virtue of the Guardian was *Thumos*, often translated "spiritedness" (which isn't very helpful), better understood, as the political philosopher Harvey Mansfield understands it, as "Manliness," which carries a tone of Aggression. The point is that in a proper state the people who do things should do the things which fulfill their characters, their nature. You want Producers who like making or growing the stuff of life, Rulers who like exercising their rational capacities . . . and Guardians who like, who thrive on, the *dangerous arts*. Okay so far, but: the proper Guardian needs a kind of humanizing through philosophy, music, the arts, to smooth out or counter, to control as it were, the aggressiveness that is a necessary component of his courage, in order to insure that it is not turned against those he is supposed to protect. The point is not that police should study the arts and sciences. Nonetheless, Plato had a point. It takes a certain kind of person to.

Do you want Rangers, Green Berets, Seals, who'd rather be teaching kindergarten? Of course not; you want soldiers who are challenged by danger, if not attracted to it. Nonetheless, there's always the possibility some will be attracted, and a few attracted enough to want to create it. Don't get me wrong: I'm ashamed never to have gone to Ranger school.

Do you want a police force longing to sell insurance? No. We know, we know, the vastly vast number of police are models of the profession of danger—and, if we don't know it, we are lying to ourselves. Nonetheless, there are a few who are what Plato was afraid any single Guardian was capable of becoming. And there always will be! There is no way to avoid it. And there is no conceivable Reformation of the Police inspired by these protests or any other that is going to change this, short of insuring—I do not know how! —that every single police officer be free of any proclivity toward what Plato called the *Thumos*. Unless, that is, every cop-in-

training spends a number of years practicing the humanities equivalent to the period M.D.s have had to spend in med school. (And even then, there would be no assurance.)

But as I watch the news every day and hear what the protestors protest, it isn't police brutality itself that's at issue, but specifically or exclusively police brutality and murder against Blacks. Which seems so very clear, and is actually so very muddy. If George Floyd was killed because he was black, then why do not protestors say that, a few days after that death, a 75-year-old man in Buffalo was pushed to the pavement by two police officers, which necessitated his hospitalization with a head injury, because he was white? They don't say that because that's not what the protestors are interested in. In fact, Floyd wasn't killed and the older man wasn't injured because the former was black and the latter was white, but because the cop in Minneapolis and the cops in Buffalo were violent sons of bitches! My judgment here may challenge the protestors' credulity, but does not challenge logic. It would make no better sense or logic to say that a year ago I separated a shoulder not only because I tripped going down a stairway but also because I have a full head of grey hair. Of course the protestors would counter that, *look!, other blacks have suffered at the hands of police!* To which I might counter, *look!, I was hospitalized once before, and I was what my woman calls a "Silver Fox" even then!*

I am not trying to be bull-headed or resistant to some obvious similarities. But even when some victims are black, and are victimized because a cop is a racist, the cop is a racist because he's a son of a bitch. But the protestors are not saying the police forces are made up of sons of bitches. No, they are saying the police forces are racist. But if (or even since) some cops are racists, that does not mean (logically or any other way) that "Cops are racist."

But (look again): the charges against the police are a kind of *synecdoche* (a part standing for a whole); for what The

Protest is asserting is that the problem is with The Society, as if to say "Here we see it again: *this is a racist society we live in.*"

Protestors now, however, are using a more sophisticated rhetoric, and people who should know better, public servants and chattering classes as well, kowtowing to Sharptonian worthies and such, and misleading the less sophisticated and more impressionable, are allowing the new rhetoric to rub off on them. Now, "We are all subject to *systemic racism.*" Let's examine what this can mean . . . or cannot mean.

Systemic makes no sense unless we are talking about a system or systems. *Society* is too generalized and amorphous to be a "system," so the idea of society characterized by systemic racism is meaningless. Legal arrangements, however, are a system, as in "the legal system." Given all the reforms developed, modified, improved, codified, and so on, since the civil rights revolution begun in the 1960s at latest, to charge that American law suffers systemic racism is stupid—no matter that the charge might (or does) excite those making the charge—and beyond stupid, a damnable lie. There may be in some retarded corner of some asleep municipality some obscure and forgotten and therefore missed legal absurdity (I have nothing specific in mind) but the broad American legal system is now color-blind. That battle is quite simply over!

The economic system? Well, books can be in the black as well as in the red; but that's an ancient metaphor. Capitalism may be unjust, even when limited by social-democratic compromises of *laissez-faire*. But to think that millions of economic acts abetting or in conflict with millions of other economic acts can have colors or are subject to some kind of easily grasped organizing principle—like systemic racism—is not merely sheer fantasy: it is crazy. I am willing to believe there are more wealthy white Americans than black, while bemoaning my own bank account. I am also willing to observe there are more black pro basketball players than white, but I

will not attribute that to some systemic anti-racism in the NBA. *Stier Scheisse* in my non-idiotic German.

The educational system? Unless protestors want to return to the days of busing and such to protest the fact that all neighborhoods cannot be fifty-fifty racially balanced, they need to accept the fact that segregation *as a system* is dead. And to alleviate any residual imbalances, this nation, with white approval just as strong as black, Affirmative Action is the rule of the land—without all the positive results expected and desired. Ask any black student at Hotchkiss prep or at Yale, where suspicions of academically unearned special treatment will prevail, justly and unjustly: the unfortunate cost of Affirmative Action.

This is not to deny the existence of racism in the United States. I am not a fool. And the first 18 years of my life were lived where it was rampant. But I know the difference between *rampant* and *existent*. There are still many socialists in this country, but this is not a socialist society. The many left-handers do not make this a southpaw society. I will add that there are far too many murderers, but only a lunatic excited by his brave rhetoric would call this a murderous society. I have known too many people who had bouts (and worse) with cancer, but one would be merely proffering a metaphor to call this a cancerous society, and would mean something else altogether. But the protestors chanting *systemic racism* are not being metaphorical: they mean it, with as much clarity as they can scrape together in order to “mean” anything. *But!*

But, the protestors themselves, or at least most of them, the multi-racial and multi-class whole, are the best and clearest evidence against what they proclaim. The nation-wide revulsion (so wide, one wants to call it “universal”) generated by the George Floyd Event, which has won the applause of apparently most people who are not actively protesting, means loud and clear one thing: although single

racists may survive, although some of them may constitute a group, this is not now, and has not been for a considerable number of years, a "racist society we live in"; the United States does not suffer from "systemic racism." Any insistence to the contrary is a grave injustice—no matter how, and especially because, the claim may excite some who lodge the charge. "Revolution" can be fun.

There is another connection of observations, or interpretations, I need to make—which, ironically, I don't like to make, because it makes me so very miserable. When the slogan "Black Lives Matter" gained currency just a few years ago, the few old-fashioned liberals who objected to the exclusivity of the slogan and insisted that *all* lives matter quickly learned a lesson, that unbeknownst to them they were practicing racism. For, the sloganizers explained, when they deigned to explain, to say "all" instead of "Black" was to dilute the significance of Black Lives by suggesting an equivalency of significance. A strange logic, better called the absence of logic. To put a better interpretation that the sloganizers did not bother to provide, *maybe* they meant that *other* lives *already* mattered so did not need to be cherished aloud—but I emphasize that *maybe*. In any case no liberal now dare risk the word *all*.

But let us not be idiotic about this issue. If you say "black lives matter" but reject the correction "all lives matter," what in God's name are you saying? You'd be embarrassed to confess you mean "only black lives matter" because then you'd be guilty of the famous "reverse racism" you deny exists. If you mean "some lives matter, but not all," then the only logical meaning for that is "the lives of some blacks and some whites (and whatever other races, colors, etc. you think need to be included) matter and some whites' and some blacks' lives don't," but then you've rendered your general slogan about black lives meaningless. Or perhaps you mean "the lives of the unworthy, like rapists or whatever, are

excluded from mattering, but since blacks are never rapists or whatever . . .” But I think you’d be too embarrassed to finish that sentence. I could go on with this, but why waste time and patience? You have only two forthright alternatives: (1) rejecting “all,” you have to admit you mean “only black,” or (2) you have to admit, or at least recognize if you have any earned self-respect, that your slogan “Black Lives Matter” is merely an effective piece of political balderdash with no connection to truth. But why is it so difficult to say “Black Lives Matter because or just as Life Itself Matters” even if “All” is for some god-forsaken reason offensive? *Why do so many people insist on being so stupid?*

Connect this slogan-become-a-doctrine with another piece of rhetoric: “Our Time is Here.” I think there might be a book of that title, or something like it, by a black politician. In any case it’s a sentiment heard often enough even if the diction is various, as in “Our time is now.” If one doesn’t hear that as “Now it’s our time” one’s not listening very closely. Because, and there’s no escaping diction and syntax and logic, “Now it’s *our* time” means “It’s no longer *yours*.” If it meant “The time for absolute equality is here” then the “Black Lives Matter” people would say “The time for absolute equality is here.”

Thirty years or more ago my spouse shared a room, extraordinarily amicably, at Columbia Presbyterian Hospital with an old-fashioned black lady named Willie Harper, who was too unsophisticated to even imagine that my spouse’s life did not matter as much as hers. And she certainly valued her own, as she had been beaten badly while resisting the theft of her purse by a couple of thugs: a black on black crime. Mrs. Harper shared little beyond skin pigment with the Sharptonian worthies and the Cornell West-like black intellectuals who give the marching (and sloganizing) orders to the 2020 protestors. And now I am ready for the condemnation I have invited.

Although I have no quantifiable statistical evidence for the following conclusion—I have only my native intelligence and powers of observation and capacity to hear the subtext of what people unwittingly imply—I am convinced that large numbers of black protestors, who share so little with the late Willie Harper, will not be satisfied that racial justice reigns until the roles—now decades passed—have been *revived but reversed*, that *they* are now sitting in the cat-bird seat that Mr. Charlie used to occupy. “Now It’s *Our* Time.”

But I do wish that they, and their unconsciously suicidal white liberal friends, would not be so trivial about so many things. Aunt Jemima lost her bandanna around her head years ago, and looked very pretty and modern, but into history’s dust-bin she goes. Is it some kind of insult, instead of a compliment, that Uncle Ben’s Rice assured quality with a picture of a handsome elderly black man? I really don’t get it; would a white man suggest something more appetizing? Is a normal black person really so nervously sensitive, like a pampered Ivy-League undergrad protected by safe curricular reading lists, his or her soul so endangered, his or her soul so embarrassingly prissy, that it’s so much better that *Gone With the Wind* be no longer easily available? How bloody sissified can people get?

I’ll have to *think* about this for a long time—*philosophy* was my profession after all—but is it possible that triviality can drive a population *crazy*? Given that there is so much from the past to reflect upon—and to suffer and re-suffer—such as the Tulsa, Oklahoma, massacre coming up on 100 years, the Emmett Till murder, which remains one of my worst childhood memories, the blinding of just demobilized G.I. Isaac Woodard in South Carolina in 1946 (while he was still in uniform!), and God knows how many more horrors which meant a society fairly well crippled by racism, how can any sane person feel diminished by a pleasant-looking black woman

smiling from the label of a pancake mix? And given the fact that after the biblical Job's sufferings were reversed, and The Lord replaced his dead offspring, one of his new daughters was named "Jemima," shouldn't the Book of Job be revised to eliminate any possible offense? After all, so many "offenses" are being eliminated.

From now on no black person's sensitivities need be upset, upon his or her entering The American Museum of Natural History in New York, by the sight of Teddy Roosevelt upon a horse while flanked afoot by an American Indian and an American Black. This in spite of the fact that Roosevelt (no stranger to horses either in the west or in Cuba) rides not because he is white but because he is the president, and his companions accompanying him are being honored by being included in the sculptural work of art. You really do have to be flirting with insanity not to see that, or to trivialize the sculptural achievement. Since this gesture was made by the Museum's board itself, not forced by national protests, I offer this as one example of what I meant several paragraphs ago by an unconsciously suicidal white liberalism.

All of which brings up of course the issue of "offensive" statues *reminding people of the Civil War*—a benign way of putting it, since protestors would say *celebrating slavery and the Confederacy*. I am of several minds about this, which does not mean I am essentially conflicted, but rather that I see the "problem" in multiple ways.

I have never felt about a statue of Jefferson Davis, President of the CSA, the same way I do of a statue of Robert E. Lee, CSA general. I spent six years at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill and never felt anything at all, as best I can recall, about a statue of "Johnny Reb" on campus, about which a big stir a couple of years ago, because I confess I have no recollection of ever noticing it. (Nonetheless I resent its removal, the reasons to come.) I understand how blacks and correct-thinkers could associate

Davis and Lee (and others; I am trying to “economize”) with slavery; I’m not an idiot. But I reject the notion that such statues honor traitors.

No matter what general opinions may be, it is still a matter of debate whether or not a citizen of a State which has seceded from a Union can be a traitor to that Union, and whether or not The Secession was legal or was an act of Treason. That debate will go on no matter what constitutional decisions are made and as long as there are law schools and legal scholars and historians. But I am confident of the following conclusion: Most thinking people whose thoughts are not in service of some “partisan” position or purpose do not think of civil wars as conflicts between the just side and the traitorous side, although they may indeed think of one side as the preferable of the two. They think of the two as *rivals*. There were actually two civil wars in the States, the first called “the revolution.” No one that I know of calls the citizens who remained loyal to the king, the “Tories,” *traitors* to the nascent United States.

The Russian civil war after 1917-1918 is never (or seldom?) called “The Russian Civil War,” although the Spanish conflict of 1936-1939 is indeed known as “The Spanish Civil War,” and what I say about one applies to the other as well. In both cases, the “Right” *rebelled* against or *rejected* (choose the verb you prefer) the “Left,” which had gained or inherited legal or semi-legal power in the state. Just focus on Spain to simply-clarify matters. Since the “Nationalists” under Franco rejected and assaulted the government in Madrid, you *could* call that *treason*—even though the Nationalists thought they were truly The Nation. But . . . big *but* . . . neither Franco nor the anti-Bolshevists in Russia formally, or even informally, *seceded* from the Spanish republic or the Russian union. And that makes the American Civil War a different kettle of alligators altogether.

The post-Lincoln Union honored what Lincoln clearly

would have wished and declined to push charges of treason, instead inviting the rival from the south to rejoin the union with necessary transitional adjustments, but also with some regional peculiarities merely modified (a bad idea that was, slavery evolving into official segregation, unlike the northern unofficial variety) . . . and with an acceptance of certain cultural and aesthetic characteristics which helped the south adjust to its non-American experience of defeat, such as keeping its myths like the "Lost Cause," that *cause* not being slavery, by the way, but the glory of military honor in that very defeat—which is what all those statues of Confederate generals was all about. This is not to take a stand on the question of whether slavery, or some vague but volatile and even foolish regional pride, was or was not what Johnny Reb was fighting about; it is rather to insist that those statues thought by so many to be so offensive celebrated bravery and a romantic vision of history. But there is more to be said about the statues.

Statuary is an art form, and since seldom possessed by an individual or displayed like most sculpture in a museum, it is *the most public of art forms* and most available to the public. Hence its greatness and its greatest vulnerability. People who would never think to assault a painting or a piece of sculpture in a museum, knowing the offending art work does not belong to them, do however—some of them—think they, as members of the public, own them and have the right to destroy them, or—at best—have the right to hide them away from public view. In other words—and let us not quibble about diction!—this means either the willful destruction of art or, at best, censorship! And this is my considered judgment whether I am talking about the mob threatening a statue—and yes I carefully chose that word *mob*—or whether I am talking about politicians national or local, journalists, TV talking-heads, professors, black leaders "responsible" or Sharptonian, or your normally judicious Aunt Frida and Uncle Felix. Not to see this strikes me as a self-disguised instance of insanity. If that word

sounds too extreme, I'll settle on *crazy*. But there's plenty more yet to be said.

I will be charged with taking a privileged *white* view of things: why can't Hux see that blacks could have a different view of the statues? Well, I do see it, but not believing in a kind of racial mental determinism, knowing there's such a thing as reason (or its absence), I wonder if a kind of group-thought isn't *compelled* here. If one doesn't *like* to look at Lee on horseback, one doesn't *have* to look at Lee on horseback. But one does not have to insist or ensure that no one else can look at Lee on horseback. Art criticism, like lit-crit, is the craft of conveying one's aesthetic opinion. And neither the destruction nor the censorship of art is acceptable criticism: it is instead *dictatorship*. (I started to write *aesthetic* dictatorship, but there's nothing aesthetic about it.) I do not like to listen to music called "Motown," not because it's black, for God's sake, but because I find it boring. I have a very close white friend and colleague who enthuses about James Brown, not because Brown's black but because he's, I'm told, exciting. I tried, but decided simply not to listen; I don't try to keep anyone else from listening. But, hey! someone is trying to tell me, Motown does not celebrate slavery. Neither does Lee on horseback, as I argued several paragraphs ago.

Let me put things this way: I get no pleasure from listening to James Brown. Maybe Al Sharpton does, although I don't know that to be the case (which is irrelevant anyway). But, ex-soldier boy that I am, I do get a certain pleasure from looking at the aesthetic idealization of a brave cavalry officer—and I make no apology at all for that, for I know what it is. I assume my hero John McCain would have agreed with me, although I can't be absolutely certain. But I'm sure he would have abhorred the illogical probable next step, the desecration or removal of Washington and Jefferson. And that's not necessarily the biggest next step. James Baldwin was often

very perceptive, but in an ungenerous moment he called the Statue of Liberty a big joke. After all, her arms were first and most famously opened to desperate people of European ethnicities.

And I know that people of all races and ethnicities and cultural identities respond to *art* in different ways—*non est disputandum* and all that—but, if the manner of responding has nothing to do with aesthetic pleasure or displeasure, but has to do with some social-political position, I cease to be so broad-minded. I love the poetry of Dionisio Ridruejo for its lyricism, but if someone tells me I should not because Ridruejo in his youth was Franco's propaganda chief, then I tell the objector to shove his objections *a donde el sol no brilla*. And I would expect anyone else to treat me the same way. *Quid pro quo*.

Motown is not my brew. But among my favorite American poets are Paul Lawrence Dunbar, Claude McKay, Countee Cullen, and Robert Hayden—not because I feel it right that I like some black poets, but because of their race-less lyricism. I met Langston Hughes when a student as he was wined and dined at The Carolina Inn in Chapel Hill; a real gentleman he was, a pleasure to talk and listen to, but I've always thought his verse only rarely escaped from prose. I mention Dunbar and crew for reasons which will probably be found offensive. If the "Reverend" Sharpton and his ilk, or Professor Cornel West and his, have ever heard of, much less (or is it more?) read any of them I will eat all my surgical face masks. I would be surprised to hear, but would be delighted to be wrong, that George Floyd was a big fan; but so what? —neither were my parents, nor any of my relatives that I know of. On the other hand, none of my kinfolks ever passed judgment on the great cultural institutions that house art. But the Black Lives Matter crowd is beginning to voice radical noises about such institutions, abetted, encouraged, and sometimes led by politically correct functionaries of the culture world. Will

publishing houses get the word, or jump the gun, soon? What does the American police “culture” have to do with George Floyd’s death? A great great deal. What has the culture world to do with it? Not a damned thing. Not a blessed thing! Yet . . .

Well, yet what? I hesitate to give offense, but that horse is probably already beyond the barn door. I am going to use the case of Jean-Michel Basquiat as a kind of metaphor. Basquiat is not celebrated at the Guggenheim, and displayed prominently at the Yale University art gallery, because he was a great painter, but because of historical reasons having to do with the economics of the New York art scene, and because he was black. Alternatively, Basquiat is not dismissed by people who have sensitive eyes because he was black, but because he was a perfectly dreadful and incompetent painter. I use the word *painter* because he did after all paint; I avoid the word *artist* because art is not what he made.

Yet the protestors, or a significant cadre of them, are claiming that black artists—not only the visual but the literary and theatrical as well—are shunned by the culture world because of systemic racism—while it’s an indisputable fact that they are sought out as if they were the grail. Think I’ve been offensive? Wait, there’s more.

George Floyd’s death was appalling—just as much as the nine slaughtered in Charleston in 2015—and his funeral did what theirs did—not simply give mourners a chance to grieve, a traditional justification of funerals, but also honoring by remembering formally and somberly the dead, the only sure and certain manner of afterlife we have. And a funeral is all the more heart-gripping when the deceased gets but half or less of the life he could have expected. So George Floyd is remembered . . . but that’s not the only way he’s remembered.

If there are demonstrations, protests, because of a death, I want those protests to be—and think they should

be–funereal. *Funereal*, I say, not exciting, energetic, pragmatic, useful, the loud and forceful making-of-a-point. If you did not see that happening you were not paying close attention. It’s as if a sizeable number of the protestors—and not just the followers—were saying, but not of course out loud:

“Too bad, Mr. Floyd, we’re of course sorry you’re dead, but you are now serving a purpose much larger than you could have alive; you have become now a rallying point, and larger than anything you could have imagined. In some very real way, your death was a useful event, and we will not allow it to be wasted—and wasted it would be if we were to allow it to be remembered as its own tragic self instead of as a compelling symbol of systemic racism. God bless.”

No one who has watched the protests of Summer 2020—I mean no one who has watched attentively—could honestly fail to notice that a significant many of the protestors were having the time of their lives, were having one hell of a good time.

But in the meantime, I do not expect any positive resolution even of a temporary nature. There will surely be another and another incident convincing the delusional of systemic racism. A few days after the Floyd Event, and as I was concluding this coda, a cop, chasing an inebriated black man innocent of any crime but resisting arrest, shot the man dead. The cop should be charged with murder plain and simple, and a court should examine a possible stupid muddle in the cop’s mind. But the protestors, in the meantime, will clarify the muddle by imagining the cop having thought, “The drunk is running away, so I think I’ll shoot him: he’s black after all.” The most unconvincing interpretation possible, but—what the hell—it serves a purpose.

There is nothing in the thoughts I’ve been sharing, not one single thing, that encourages optimism. I see no reason to hope that this will cease to be a *race-obsessed society*. And

as long as it is a race-obsessed society it will be a sick society. God damn.

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