

Black Lives Matter in Australia Too

It's that sudden spikey silence that immediately follows a certain story, joke or remark.

Conversation has stalled over the pandemic lockdown, recommended movies on Netflix and the noises persisting through adjoining apartment walls. Then comes that story and everyone goes quiet. *Look, I'm not a racist.* Another silence as we wait for the inevitable.

But really, how biased is that! I couldn't go back to my gym but they all got out on the streets to protest about something that happened in America. I know it's awful, a black man dying on the street and a white policeman holding him down. But we're not like that here. Our police would never do such a thing.

I recall the news coverage, the images and the commentary that have flooded the airwaves. And the anguished faces of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, their impassioned pleas for white Australians to truly listen to the stories of deaths in custody of their people over decades. Of police brutality to indigenous kids in detention centres, of the overwhelming disproportion of First Nations people incarcerated for crimes such as non-payment of fines.

In my state of silent helplessness I later turn to Parker Palmer. (<https://onbeing.org/blog/parker-palmer-owning-up-to-my-toxic-biases/>)

Palmer speaks about his friend Jerry Colonna – chair of the board at Naropa University – who recently sent out a lovingkindness, or mettā, meditation about his struggle with the state of American politics. He began, “With apologies to Saint Francis... Lord grant me the serenity not to bite the hook of my anger and fear.”

My confession is simple, says Palmer. I also get hooked on my fear, but it's not about “those people” our president wants us to fear. I fear this president and the harm he's done to my brothers and sisters in the U.S. and abroad, to American democracy, to world peace, and to the earth itself.

Jerry doesn't say that there's anything wrong with anger, and I'm glad for that. If I weren't angry about what's going down in Washington, D.C., I'd feel like I'd become dumb and numb — and I refuse to go there. Being dumb (and I include myself here) is what got us into this disgusting and dangerous mess, and going numb will keep us in the mess while it gets worse and worse.

Being hooked saps me of energy and harms my health. Worse still, it diverts me from taking personal responsibility for what's going on right now.

Grant me the wisdom to see my own unconscious biases that continue to unintentionally and inadvertently make me complicit in this staggering rise of hate and callousness.

So, for the umpteenth time, says Parker, I'm trying to come to terms with my own complicity in white privilege and the injustice and inhumanity that flow from it. When white people like me ignore or deny all that, it's just another way of aiding and abetting it.

And like Parker, I'm trying to find ways to challenge racism, in myself and in others. I'm starting with Jac Brown's suggestion, not to argue my point but to simply state that there are other ways of looking at the issue. That I am open and available to talk about this if the other person is willing. Palmer describes this as 'hearing the other into speech'.

And in the process, I'm finding my own voice.

Gillian Hunt – June 2020
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