



Three Steps Forward, Two Steps Back

January 20, 2019

This weekend—preceding the federal holiday to honor Dr. King—is always a time for me to reflect on where things stand for our country.

As an idealist, I so very much want America to be a place where all humans are accorded dignity and respect regardless of skin color, religion, gender, LGBTQ status or the hundred myriad other things we use to make people “Other.”

As a country, we have made great progress on many fronts, yet the divisions along race, socioeconomic standing, gender and religion seem so stubborn to erase. It is at times very disheartening. It is very much that process of moving forward by three steps, only to fall backwards by two, all fueled by fear of those who are different from “us.”

I woke up this morning to a couple of things: first, there is this CNN piece about upcoming legal challenges to the three most important racial civil rights laws of the modern era—the 1964 Civil Rights Act; the Voting Rights Act of 1965; and the Fair Housing Act of 1968, with the government being on the opposite side of right.

Here are photos by Thomas Foner reminding of what it took to get those laws into place. Let these images dwell in your heart for just a while.

Second, there was this *Washington Post* story about one of our American Indian Vietnam veterans being confronted by a group of teen boys wearing “Make America Great Again” hats in Washington D.C. The vet, Nathan Phillips, said that the youth frightened him. Despite this, he didn’t give his ground.

Later, Nathan summed up the problem best with this: “That energy (of the teen boys confronting him) could be turned into feeding the people, cleaning up our communities and figuring out what else we can do,” Nathan said. “We need the young people to be doing that instead of saying: ‘These guys are our enemies.’”

Can you imagine a world where negative energy (fueled by fear) is turned into compassionate action?

I certainly can. I will continue to push for positive change, reminding all that we do have good, empathetic hearts. It’s just that fear gets in the way of unleashing those hearts.

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