

At any time, what you have committed to here would matter.

This isn't just any time.

In this time hate crimes are on the rise. Significantly. 900 such acts were counted by the Southern Poverty Law Center in the first ten days following our election. The Anti Defamation League is reporting an 86% increase in anti-Semitic incidents in the first quarter of 2017. The FBI reported a 67% spike in hate crimes against Muslims in 2016, the year following Mr. Trump's announced candidacy for the Presidency.

In this time, a new national narrative is being articulated.

As a child, I was made to read Emma Lazarus' poem inscribed at the base of the Statue of Liberty. At an early age, I learned that the prevailing mythology of this country was rooted in our ability and our desire to absorb and integrate peoples from around the globe yearning to breathe free.

With great pride, I absorbed the American ethos of welcoming the stranger. While that myth belied other hidden truths later made clear as stories about slavery, internment camps, church burnings, Guantanamo Bay, white power, white supremacy and white privilege were discovered, it is nonetheless true that the act of teaching children about the higher ideals of welcoming the immigrant was an investment in a future that could dare to hope for the eradication of past atrocities.

In this time, a new narrative is being cultivated which contradicts the previous one that offered to the world's tired, poor, huddled masses a lit lamp lifted to them beside the golden door.

The gold has tarnished and the lamp is dimmed.

Immigrants are threats.

Mexicans are rapists, murderers, and drug dealers.

Muslims are terrorists.

And an elected President of this American enterprise wants to use religion as a means of determining whether or not you can be trusted here.

In this time, all three of the world religions represented in this Tri-Faith Initiative have zealots whose worldview bends them towards radical intolerance of the other – even when the other is a more moderate practitioner of their own faith.

This has always been true, as Karen Armstrong's book *The Battle for God* documents, tracing Christian, Muslim and Jewish fundamentalism through the millennia of our respective faith's histories.

In this time, however, the margins have shifted to the middle and the meta-narrative is changing.

In America, there is an ascendancy of a fundamentalism that equates Christianity with patriotism. Within this expression of Christian Fundamentalism, alliances with Zionist Jews in Israel is critical – not because there is a deep appreciation for the Jewish people and their beautiful faith, but because their apocalyptic myth requires Jerusalem to be in control of Jews before Jesus can come again and then burn them in hell. Politics indeed makes strange bedfellows – and this unholy alliance is tolerated on both sides because of current political needs and future aspirations.

Also within this expression of Christian Fundamentalism is the perpetuation of the myth of Muslim as terrorist. It has often been said “To the victor go the spoils.” It is more relevant to say “To the victor goes the pen.” Those in power can shift the lens of public attention where they choose, creating narratives writ large across the landscape of our shared attention. As important as the stories they choose to tell are the ones they choose to ignore.

In Portland two weeks ago, a white man named Christian stabbed two people who stood to protect a fellow traveler from Christian’s Muslim rage. What I note here is the amount of tweeting our President did in the aftermath of the London attacks over the weekend, all of which enhanced his emerging narrative that Muslims are terrorists and most of which were reinforced his unconstitutional order to close our borders to Muslims. No such vitriol or venom accompanied the Portland act of terror. On that matter, he was silent. It didn’t fit the narrative.

It is for just such a time as this that you brave, beautiful people are casting a new narrative. In any time, the story you are writing would be compelling. In this time, it is necessary.

I represent a segment of the Christian faith that sees Jesus as a way: not the way, but a way. Our Jesus celebrates the gift that Moses gave in the Torah and every scholar that followed whose musings in the Talmud extend the wisdom from one generation to the next. That same Jesus sees Muhammad and his sacred writings in the Qu’ran as an extension of his own teachings – a blessed pathway to love of neighbor and a call to justice for all.

I deplore any Christianity that militarizes the faith, oppresses the pagan, condemns the Muslim, and imagines that armies and nations will be deployed in service to their God. The stories they must tell to normalize their extremism have become the pabulum being fed to us all. Although it cannot nourish, many of my fellow Christians are swallowing this and calling it good.

What you offer today is the good food that nourishes. It is a narrative of hope and conciliation, of respect and mutual dignity. Every child who arrives here to encounter the sacred will come to know that peace is possible: not the peace that

ensues from forced conformity, but the peace that can only be found when the full array of human effort, ingenuity, creativity and endeavor is celebrated.

My prayer is that the story you are writing here becomes the narrative that defines the next generation of American leaders. Let us not naively underestimate the power of the counter-narrative being propagated in this time. Let us not understate the power of that narrative to reshape the landscape of an American horizon that always oriented towards hope for the oppressed peoples of the Earth. But let us also not underestimate either the need for or the power of the story you are writing to serve as the antidote to the fear and hatred that abound today.

I am here today not just to celebrate a moment in time worthy of our collective notice. I am here today to bear witness to ground that, once broken, might soon erupt in a groundswell of unconstrained peace. Let this be the story we tell our children.

Once upon a time in a land called Omaha the Jew, the Muslim, and the Christian stood as one and started a movement that changed the world.

If all you did in this time and in this place was stand alone against the tide of race hate and religious intolerance sweeping across the globe, it will have been worth every thing you sacrificed to get here.

My hope is bigger than that. I will do my part to make sure that this story, your story, will be heard in every berg and village and town and city to which I travel. Let the hope and the peace and the love and the respect for all that is promised here become leaven in a bread that feeds the hearts and hopes of a world grown weary of its hate.

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