

Where Seldom Never Is Heard, A Discouraging Word

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Following in the steps of Weaverville Town Council and the Buncombe County Commissioners, Asheville City Council passed a “Resolution against Discrimination and Intimidation.” Whereas Commissioner Mike Fryar persuaded his peers to add “political party” as a protected class, Asheville’s resolution added protection against the pregnancy gender. Like the other resolutions, it declares, “Hate crimes, threats, or intimidation of a criminal nature will not be tolerated” and calls on victims and witnesses to “contact the appropriate law enforcement agency.” Councilwoman Julie Mayfield asked that the city establish a hotline for hate crimes and make it highly accessible because not everybody knows how to report hate crimes.

A hate crime is any crime already on the books committed against a special class with attributed malice against that class in general. The point being that while citizens may tolerate mugging or vandalism, they are now given a special charge to report those crimes when they are perpetrated by a racist or homophobe. “Every citizen of this great City is called upon to demonstrate that intolerance and hatred will not be accepted within our community,” reads the resolution. Whatever happened to notions like refusing to play the victim, not letting others live rent-free in our minds, and the old “sticks and stones” nursery rhyme?

Following Donald J. Trump’s winning of the general election, Mayor Esther Manheimer issued a statement condemning a rash of hate speech. To hear the commissioners and city council talk, one would be afraid to go downtown. The three redneck incidents that came to light were allegedly perpetrated by people who dropped Trump’s name like Sir Charles Lytton dropping his calling-card glove in a Pink Panther film. The quintessential “fake news” story to date similarly involved an unnamed Muslim girl who said she was, per the New York Daily News, “harassed on the subway by drunken, hate-spewing white men shouting ‘Donald Trump!’”

A problem with government telling people they can only talk about unicorns and rainbows mirrors the irony of gun-control laws. If law-abiding citizens can’t take sharp objects on an airplane, they will be forced to take down hijackers with tissue and cotton balls. Government, like Momma, never sees who throws the first punch. This will get worse if somebody with a stalker can only say what a fine young man he is; especially if he is of a protected class. But what if government is the problem, if its goons are snooping and soiling the reputations of political adversaries, and all the persecuted class can say is, “Oh, pretty flowers. I love my government”? Dystopias have existed in modern history. The whole point in having free speech is to allow people to say things that others find offensive, as in, “King George is a tyrant.”

Anybody who has ever been in a relationship knows how things can be taken differently. Anybody who teaches in public schools sees how words used in polite conversation suddenly become dirty. The Cato Institute, P.J. O’Roarke, and “A Basket of Deplorable People and Organizations” seriously just filed an amicus brief in defense of an Asian-American rock band that wanted to call itself The Slants. The 50-page document, shock-full of epithets, lists many instances where no harm has befallen anybody for colorful expression.

Anybody presuming himself so wise as to be the arbiter of what speech is good, is surely not wise. The deplorables argue, “... for several reasons, we are less sanguine that such a neutral and objective arbiter of true disparagement can be found anywhere, let alone in the federal government;” and, “The government’s standard of looking to the sentiments of the community at issue will not necessarily save well-meaning or ‘valuable’ uses of difficult words. Instead, it threatens to give veto power to those voices who complain the loudest—a phenomenon that is not necessarily correlated with the actual number of people who truly object to a term.”

A greater problem with the resolution goes back to the Sunday School story about the three chariot drivers. While two showed off their ability to take risks, the guy who got the job was the one who stayed as far away from the cliff as possible. In Nazi Germany, Hitler’s Youth were to report subversive commentary from their parents, community organizers patrolled neighborhoods to report questionable conversations to their higher-ups, and neighbors were encouraged to inform on neighbors – whether out of patriotic duty or spite for a relationship gone bad.

The point is, Nazi Germany is one of the darkest moments in human history, and it is now being emulated by Democrats who say they are defending persons persecuted by Nazis by whatever new name. Another tack the left claims protects against Nazis is identity politics – calling attention to differences by pigeonholing everybody instead of searching for common ground. Holocaust deniers won’t remember the patches.