

Comments to Criminal Justice Society Meeting
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We are all still struggling with the up until now unimaginable tragedies of the last week. We will be struggling with the consequences for decades to come. Perhaps the first premise in coming to grips with how to deal with all this, is by accepting that we are all affected. No one will be untouched.

We can group the ways we are all touched into three categories: the losses, surges in hate crime and hate speech which are rising now here and elsewhere across the country, and by how our leaders and other leaders on the world stage respond. In the first two of these categories I think there is much that we can do for each other, personally, and perhaps even as a group; there are ways we can reach out. In the third area, we could be divided if we focus on our disagreements about how the US should respond to the events. I would hope we could put aside our differences, and just agree that no matter what your view on what the US should do, it is important to contact your elected leaders in Washington.

Let me talk a bit about the issues and some possibilities in the first two areas.

So many of us are overwhelmed with a powerful need to “do something.” Why is what we do now so important?. Of course there is the obvious answer - there is so much need now. Humans are wired, at a fundamental level, to be altruistic in times of extreme crisis. But there are two other points. If you will allow me to act for a minute like an old geezer who might know something, I would suggest that for decades to come how you think about yourself will be

colored by how you choose to accept the challenges of the events of this past week. If in the future, you are able to remember this as a time when, individually, or with friends, or as part of a group, you reached out to make someone's life a little easier, or to help with some needed task, or to somehow do something to strengthen your community, or perhaps even to reach beyond the immediate community and grow the circle of caring, you will be a stronger, more caring person. Last Friday night driving past the art museum steps around eight pm, and seeing the entire steps covered with people holding candles and singing into the darkness, was powerful for those like me who were just driving by. I am sure that it was a time – and a lesson – the participants will never forget. In addition, every effort you make today to strengthen the human family, to respond to need, to help others, especially those different from ourselves, are efforts that are never wasted. Because when we forge bonds with other humans, especially those different from ourselves, we make it that much harder for terrible events like these to take place again.

I recognize of course that already many of you who are able are helping in important ways. You might have given blood, or signed up to give blood, or comforted or consoled or helped out others who were having a hard time coping with the event or with unexpected loss. And I understand talking with Derek that the society already has some society-sponsored initiatives underway. These are important and valued contributions.

But let me talk about some ways we all may be able to grow further as these terrible tragedies live their ways into our lives.

You may have lost someone close to you. Although it is very easy to say this, I am truly sorry for your loss, which, because it is so personal, overwhelms the larger loss we are all feeling. As the weeks and months wear on, even though you may not have lost someone close to you, you

will know people who have.

One of the first, most important ways you can help is in how you respond to those people not only in the days and weeks ahead, but in the months and years to follow. Basically, we are all now part of a large extended family of murder victims. And we know a fair amount about what happens to those left behind after losing someone in an accident or through a homicide. First and foremost, everyone responds differently. Everyone processes at different levels and at different rates. Some may seem to be fine for a while, and fall apart later. Some may struggle mightily for a short period of time, and then move on. So we need to make allowances for one another. We are all going to be seeing more depression, anxiety, and anger in many of those around us. It is especially important at this time for us to try hard to be understanding with one another.

In addition, patience is vital. Society puts unrealistic expectations on those left behind after unexpected loss, naively expecting things to be “back to normal” in a matter of a few days or weeks or months. But we know from the work with those left behind that there is no closure; for many, emotional impacts, or impacts on their ability to carry on with daily living, persist for many years. So among those you know who have lost deeply, there will be some who will be processing what has happened to them, and struggling with that processing, for many years to come. We owe it to them not to make them feel even worse because we think they should be recovered, or over it, in a short period of time.

Let me turn to hate crime and hate speech. We all know that Timothy McVeigh was not a representative Christian. Similarly, Osama Bin Laden, or whoever perpetrated the terrible acts of last week, is not a representative Muslim. We did not condemn all white Christians after the Oklahoma City Bombing of the federal building in 1995. We cannot condemn Muslims anywhere

– here or abroad – for what happened last week, nor can we tolerate those around us who might do this. And yet that is what many are doing.

In the past week we have seen a remarkably disturbing increase in hate crimes and hate speech. Muslims and Sikhs throughout the country feel they are at risk. According to reports, “mosques in six states have been attacked ... as have “Muslim taxi drivers in several cities.”(1) Outside Cleveland a man drove his car into a mosque. In Mesa, Arizona a man shot and killed a Sikh owner of a gas station, then later fired on a Lebanese clerk at another station. As one Sikh leader said, “our turbans have turned us into targets.” (1) Hate crimes and hate speech are deeply disturbing to the victims. They fear for their personal safety, are forced to make changes in their daily routines, and suddenly feel alienated from many they thought were trusted friends and neighbors. They are becoming the victims of a different type of racial profiling.

I think it is a point of progress that the criminal justice system has undertaken efforts to document hate crime, and develop effective responses to it. Locally, Temple, is a diverse community of students. We work hard to get along. Given this university’s commitment to diversity, and your commitment to diversity by choosing to attend this institution, the hate crime implications are especially troubling.

Given these events, I would suggest this is an especially important time, either as individual students or as a group, to try and grow our community of diversity, and show support for those being targeted or defamed.

I want you to know that if and as your society wants to move forward on initiatives that show support for our diverse community, and/or seek to grow the boundaries of that community, or to respond collectively in other ways, I would like to be part of that process. I look forward to

listening to your ideas, collaborating with you in the effort, and finding, if possible, ways to support it.

(1) Lewin, T., and Niebuhr, G. (September 18, 2001). Attacks and harassment continue on middle eastern people and mosques. New York Times. [online: <http://www.nytimes.com>; retrieved 9/18/01].