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"First they came for the Jews and I did not speak out because I was not a Jew. Then they came for the Communists and I did not speak out because I was not a Communist. …Then they came for me and there was no one left to speak out for me."

I am always haunted by these words of Rev. Fredrich Gustav Emil Martin Niemöller, delivered in his last sermon before he was incarcerated by the Nazis in 1937. They are a reminder of how fragile freedom is, and a warning of what can happen to all of us when we remain silent in the face of atrocities. Our country is engaged in a battle of "rights" versus "security." And in the name of the latter, we find ourselves standing at a precipice in which the "rights" of a few (Muslims) are deemed to be expendable for the sake of the "security" of all. Enter the new age of "ethnic mapping."

We are told that Muslims, often portrayed to us in the media as monolithic and acting in some type of "psychic unity" in their disdain and hatred for Americans and Christianity, are a security threat. And so, we must pre-empt them in order to save ourselves. The question is who is included in the "ourselves?" Are Blacks included, even though we were once subjected to "Racial Profiling?"

Are Gays' and LBGTs' included or, because their lives and loves are viewed by some as amoral and an affront to certain types of Christian values, should they be excluded? It's not clear anymore. And Ethnic Mapping seems to be another way to take bodies that are easily identifiable—because they are Black, Brown, Muslim—and find ways to monitor and contain them.

Does a potential terrorist attack justify the New York Police Department recent surveillance of Muslim students like Jawad Rasul as part of their new "ethnic mapping" strategy? Does the fear of such a threat justify them going so far as to plant an informant in Rasul's circle of

acquaintance? In a recent NPR interview on March 8, 2012, Jawad, an ordinary student at City College of New York who has a family and prays five times a day in accordance with his Islamic faith, described how disconcerting it was to learn that he had been spied upon. He stated, "…It's really disturbing [to learn that there was an informant along on a rafting trip], and it breaks the trust that we have developed—or we had developed at this time with the law enforcement agencies…"

So do the ends justify the means? I mean does it matter if we tap into and disrupt the privacy of everyday citizens because we think that they might be a risk simply because of their religion? It's a slippery slope that we are on in this country.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the British had a program called "Sus." It allowed them to stop anyone, most of whom happened to be primarily young men of Black Caribbean descent, who they deemed to be **Sus**pects, simply because they were young, Black, and of Caribbean ancestry. Most of these youth were thoroughly British, many having been born in the U.K. Yet, their skin color made them a target for no other reason than that it made them stand out from the majority of white British citizens.

James Slacker, a British reporter stated in a 2010 article that "…so-called 'Sus laws' were scrapped in the 1980s after the alleged targeting of Black people by police led to race riots in London, Birmingham and Liverpool." In the same article, he revealed that British police are thinking of returning to this form of ethnic profiling, despite outrage over the possibilities.

Moustafa Bayoumi hit the nail on the head in his recent book, *How Does It Feel To Be a Problem: Being Young and Arab in America.*
In this book, he explores the thoughts and experiences of young Arab-Americans who get mistaken for the enemy. American has already been down this road when we interned hundreds of Japanese citizens because they looked like the enemy.

Our fears are overtaking us. In anthropology, we call it "xenophobia" or fear of foreigners/strangers. In our American history, that xenophobia was refined into ideologies and practices of racism that still prevail today. Now we have both xenophobia as expressed in anti-immigration sentiments and the ongoing manifestations of racism, most frequently directly towards non-white people. And of course, homophobia (fears of gay and LBGT people) is increasing as an outgrowth of the religious fervor that seems to have consumed some segments of this country.

All of these examples point to a growing malady in the United States and globally. Difference is perceived to be a bad thing. And those who cannot be homogenized because of their skin color, religion, sexual preference are increasingly coming under attack, as if we are a virus that needs to be stamped out. This is dangerous terrain for any country. We must remember that it was an ideology based on biological racism, a belief in racial purity, and a superior race that led to one atrocity. And it is the fear of "difference" that has driven other atrocities throughout the 20th and 21st centuries. When will we learn from the past?

Today, in 2012, we are increasingly becoming a world divided into "them" and "us." Of course, the "us" faction are always right. But they tend to have historical myopia. For example, in the United States, those who are calling for anti-immigration legislation forget that they are not the original people who populated this land. Their (white) ancestors were originally immigrants, and had the current anti-immigration legislation they promote been in place, many of them would not be sitting in the positions of power and influence they now hold.

Most of those promoting anti-immigration laws are white. And that is their blind spot. They fail to accept the reality that "whiteness" and "maleness" are still forms of privilege in most western countries. And, those ethnics who join them and seek to "pass" either by de-ethnicizing themselves or by adopting their ideology of intolerance against difference are promoting a platform that is unsustainable in a free world. Those of us who are unable to change our racial phenotype (not that we should) or are unable to blend in (not that we want to), regardless of our successes, are always questioned, scrutinized, and increasingly we are resented for our accomplishments.

I had coffee the other day with a young Black woman who works in an organization in the area of donor relations. She explained that whenever she meets new clients, she must go through at least ten minutes of reciting her pedigree and credentials in order to even begin the conversation. The people her job requires her to meet with simply can't imagine that a Black woman is able to give them advice about the best way to distribute their money philanthropically. This is an extra step her white colleagues do not have to go through. And yet, we still want to insist that it's a level playing field.

The opposition to President Obama falls along these lines. What we are observing in terms of the opposition to him is not just partisan politics; this resistance to his leadership is entangled with the fact that there are whites who simply cannot accept the fact that a man of African/African-American descent or who is Black (as the President chooses to position himself) could have anything of value to say to them; they are resentful of his achievements and his ability to have won by a landslide election to the highest position in this country. Behind his back, they are whispering “who does he think he is?” They accuse President Obama of being a snob for his belief in education, and yet no other President has ever had to apologize for going to college and promoting higher education.

Ethnic mapping is simply another iteration of racial profiling. We are drawing upon stereotypes, xenophobia and racism. It is a form of tracking people based purely on how they look, dress, and speak. However, it is a form of surveillance that historically has used specifically against Brown and Black bodies, and now is being used to monitor those whose religious practice and dress make them stand out.

Isn’t it ironic that virtually every high school shooting tragedy in this country was initiated by fellow students who were adolescent white males, often described as disaffected, anti-social, and possibly the subject of bullying? Yet, there is no “racial profiling” or “ethnic mapping” of young, white men. Why? Could it be because “whiteness” is not viewed as a “race” or an “ethnicity?” And if it is not, then why not? If as much attention was paid to such white anti-social young men as is paid to Muslim young men who go fishing and pray five times a day, perhaps we could prevent the tremendous tragedies that have occurred in schools across this nation. That type of “white” profiling or “white” mapping might actually have an impact on preventing real harm.

In the case of ethnic mapping, racial profiling and “Sus laws,” there is virtually no empirical data to suggest they have significant impact on stopping terrorism or reducing crime. What they have done is to ensure that specific members of society are forced to recognize that they do not have the same rights as others (their white counterparts), and are made to feel as outsiders in the countries of their birth and citizenship.

American society is at a precipice. Increasingly politicians campaign on a Conservative platform, and those who vote for them as part of the conservative right, wish to have their religious beliefs dictate the political and social direction of this country. They would rob us of choice, an inherent American right. I should have the right to choose if I want to take birth control, and it should be made available as other drugs are. No one has mentioned the fact that health insurance pays for Viagra for men.

The vision the political conservatives (PCs) have carved out is not a pretty one—Gay and LBGT people would be persecuted because PCs believe them to be an “abomination” in the sight of God. And, women would have little to no control over their bodies, because the political conservatives-- in what they consider their divinely-sanctioned wisdom— would eliminate choice for birth control and abortion as options.

And yet, these same groups do nothing to reform foster care and orphanages that are filled with children whose parents chose to bring them into this world, but place them in institutions in which they do not live emotionally and physically healthy lives. And what about homeless youth, where are their plans for this vulnerable group? Where is the political conservatives’ call for changes in the policies on these matters, and where are their recommendations to spend more government funds to improve the lives of these children? Better yet, why aren’t PCs promoting adoption of these children among their ranks?

Rev. Niemöller cautioned us over seventy years ago about the slippery slope of xenophobia, racism, and religious intolerance. His message was clear: those who are easily targeted will be rounded up first, then they will come for everyone else, and ultimately, there will be no one left to speak out.

Once we go down the road of treading on the rights of those who are most unlike ourselves, what makes us think our own rights will be respected? The precedent has been set, and there is no turning back, because there will be no one left to protest.

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Read more:

http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Martin_Niem%C3%B6ller

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