

Triggered: An Experiment

"When I hear the word culture, I reach for my revolver."

Tonight, for no reason in particular, that line drifted up from the rubbish pit of my brain, that junk yard containing such bits and pieces of poetry learned in elementary school, admonitions from my mother, swimming pool songs from high school, and old Mustang commercials.

I looked up the origins of the line about culture and revolvers, and found that it is a misquote from Hanns Johst's play "Schlageter," which he wrote to honor Adolf Hitler on his 44th birthday and to celebrate Nazi control of the government. An appropriate sentiment for Nazis then and for fascists like Antifa today.

This construction of language is what we today call "triggering," when a word or phrase produces trauma or intense emotions in another. As a result, our lips these days must walk tiptoe as we speak, lest we trigger meltdown in a listener.

As I thought about the people who are triggered by words, a song, or a gesture, I wondered: Do any words trigger me? If so, what do I reach for when I hear them? I sat at my desk, scratched out a list, and was surprised to discover so many words which trigger me that I am apparently a human machine gun. Here are just a few of them:

When I hear the words *Social Justice Warrior*, I reach for a bottle of New Amsterdam Gin. If you enjoy alcohol and juniper berries, then give New Amsterdam a shot. It's a superior gin with a middle-line price, and – when properly mixed with diet tonic water – will make you forget you ever heard of SJWs.

When I hear the words *millennials support socialism*, I reach for my copy of *The Black Book of Communism*. Here the European

editors and writers present evidence from around the world showing that in the 20th century, communism killed more than 100 million people, destroyed the economies of dozens of nations, and made slaves of entire peoples. All those “freebies” our young people envision go only to those in power. Sorry, kids, but socialism has nothing to do with Santa Claus.

When I hear the word *patriarchy*, I reach for my copy of the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution of the United States, and Shelby Foote’s *The Civil War*. Yes, all those who laid the groundwork for our nation were white males, and most of the ones who died in the Civil War were males, white and black. These are the guys who gave us the foundation of our government. Deal with it.

When I hear the word *community*, I reach again for that glass of gin. I once attended a Catholic church where the priests constantly intoned the word community. Really? We had two separate Masses, one for Spanish speakers, one for English speakers. Visitors to the church were ignored. Most parish events were attended by the same handful of people. This was community? In places where I have found community – military school, book clubs, and homeschool groups – no one ever used the word community.

When I hear or read the words *quantitative easing*, I reach for a dictionary. I think quantitative easing means printing more money or lowering interest rates or something like that. I still have no idea.

When I hear the words *look in the mirror* used in a literal sense, I reach for a blindfold. I glance at my face in the mirror only once or twice a year. I can shave, brush my teeth, and comb my hair, all without really looking at myself, which means I probably appear in public looking like some grizzled codger wanting a handout. The full body mirror? Never, never, never.

When I hear the word *partner* at a social gathering, as in 'This is John, my partner,' I reach for an explanation. If you introduce someone to me as your partner and then leave me clueless, I will run through several options: 1) you are both attorneys in the same legal firm; 2) you are married; 3) you are living together; or 4) you are pretending to be John Wayne in one of his Westerns. "Howdy, partner," I want to say. Another gin-and-tonic, please. Hey, it's a party.

When I hear the word *patriotism*, I reach for that G-and-T, and raise my glass in salute. Apparently, patriotism these days is another trigger word, meaning that if we love our country and say the word, we are neo-fascist swine who deserve a bullet in the back of the head. For most of us the National Anthem is something we sing with pride before sporting events. For others, the song triggers horrible memories of racism, sexism, and any other -ism you like.

Finally, when I hear the word *trigger*, I apparently reach for my laptop and write an article such as this one.

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