

Leaving Richmond Because of Racism

For most of his life, my friend John, 60, has lived near Richmond, Virginia. Much of that time his home was about 75 yards from the city limits, but for the last few years he has rented an apartment in Henrico County, still less than two miles from the city. He attended a private school in Richmond, used its doctors and hospitals, frequented its restaurants and bars, and attended various public events there.

And now he's done.

"I've given money to Richmond all my life," he said to me over the phone. "And I'm finished."

Usually when John and I speak, we come around to politics and culture, and spend a good amount of time grouching – and in some instances, ranting – about current events. During these conversations John is always animated or impassioned as we find ourselves laughing over some ridiculous bit of news, or astounded by yet another lunatic deed or pronouncement.

During this phone call, however, his voice was flat and matter-of-fact with a trace of sadness as he described his plan of action.

John intends to spend no more money in Richmond. He went through a litany of places he would now avoid. "No more gas or groceries," he said. "No restaurants, no 7-11, no movies, no more sports or cultural events, no more Richmond doctors or dentists, nothing."

What brought on this radical self-exile?

For years, John has watched his beloved city fall apart under its local and state government. "Richmond is broke," he says.

“The streets and public schools are a disgrace. There are entire neighborhoods where I can’t walk safely in broad daylight.”

What capped off John’s disgust with the place of his birth were the recent riots and the ongoing destruction of statues on Monument Avenue.

“I’m not paying money to anyone who abuses what I think America should be.”

John is also carrying his one-man rebellion beyond Virginia’s capitol city. He vows to see no more movies starring actors who have bad-mouthed the country, he’s canceling his T-Mobile account because of its campaign against Fox’s Tucker Carlson, and he gave up watching the basketball games played by the University of Virginia, his alma mater, when its 2019 championship team refused an invitation to the White House.

“I don’t encourage people to visit Richmond anymore,” John says. “Some people come for the beer and breweries, but you can get beer anywhere. Some come to tour the Civil War museums and Monument Avenue, but setting foot in those places now qualifies you as a racist.”

And after years of listening to the mainstream media’s take on racism, John has had enough. “I’m tired of hearing about white privilege,” he says. “It’s just racism in reverse. Insult me, embarrass me, I don’t care. I’m not listening. I don’t respect you. We have nothing in common.”

Before talking to John, I had earlier spoken with the owner of an auto repair shop here in Front Royal. A Black Lives Matter march was scheduled to come down Royal Avenue and end Downtown at the courthouse, and I explained I had come to write about the march. (Organizers and the police department agreed at the last minute to change the route of the march, and so the protesters never materialized.) Flanked by two employees with pistols at their waists, the man was there to protect the cars

of his customers. At one point, he asked me, "What do you think about this racism stuff?"

"Well," I said, "I guess I try to look at people instead of skin color," a perspective some now consider racist.

"Me too." He paused, and then added, "We treat all of our customers the same. With respect."

Respect. There's a word in short supply these days.

In the past weeks, we have seen white people kneeling, their arms uplifted as if in prayer, asking forgiveness from blacks for their "sins." We have heard from various quarters that white people are unconsciously racist. Some even [believe](#) that being white automatically makes a person racist.

I suspect that most Americans, like the auto repair shop owner, are genuinely baffled by what passes for racism these days. Like me, that man grew up in the segregated South and saw real racism first-hand. Like me, having witnessed the struggles and changes of the past 60 years, he is confused by the ongoing obsession of some of his fellow Americans with racism.

I also suspect there are also a good number of Americans like John, ordinary citizens sick and tired of being labeled racists because of the color of their skin, a charge that is itself racist. Like John, they're done. They're no longer listening. "They want to make me a member of a tribe," John says. "Fine. I'll join my tribe."

To the race-obsessed among us, to those who preach ad nauseam that Americans are irredeemable bigots, I have two questions: are you solving the problem or making matters worse? If the latter, then what's your real agenda?

I think most of us already know the answer.

Here's an idea: How about we all just profess ourselves as

belonging to the human race and start from there?

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