

# Violence Is the Language of the Unthinking

I made the mistake of scrolling through Twitter last night before I went to bed. It was filled with videos and stories from recent days about statue toppling, violence, and individuals taking their anger out on others.

Perhaps one of the most disturbing is the clip of a [black man beating up a white employee](#) in a Michigan Macy's store. Official reports now say that the assault was unprovoked, which seems credible given the victim's confusion during the video.

This morning, reports of more violent behavior are surfacing, [this time at the Wisconsin State Capitol](#). Among other things the violence included broken windows, statue-toppling (ironically, of someone who fought against slavery), and an assault on a Democratic state senator. Some are noting that this is a resurgence of the violence normalized in the days following George Floyd's death just a few weeks ago.

Those riots were sometimes justified by a [quote from Martin Luther King, Jr.](#) which declares that "a riot is the language of the unheard." Yet given the violence that often accompanied that quote in the days following Floyd's death – and which appears to be reviving again – I have to wonder if King's other statements have been examined by the mob.

Take, for instance, his [statement about law and order](#). "We believe in law and order...", King noted. "We are not advocating violence. We want to love our enemies. I want you to love our enemies. Be good to them."

Elsewhere, King explained [why violent behavior does little](#) to help a cause:

Let no man pull you so low as to hate him. Always avoid violence. If you succumb to the temptation of using violence in your struggle, unborn generations will be the recipients of a long and desolate night of bitterness, and your chief legacy to the future will be an endless reign of meaningless chaos.

As I look around, seeing many who emulate King and his cause of advancing justice for his people, I have to wonder what happened. Why do people praise King to the skies, using his statements to justify their actions on the one hand, but ignoring his other statements which clearly contradict their tendencies toward violence and hatred?

I could pontificate on many answers: Human nature, historical illiteracy, perhaps anger stemming not necessarily from racial injustice, but from broken families, abuse, and other hurts.

But there is one other thing that may be driving this violence and chaos. That thing is the absence of a cause to fight for, and the thrill people feel when they do find one. Allan Bloom explains this in [\*The Closing of the American Mind\*](#):

Of course the spilling of blood is involved in revolution, proof of men's preferring liberty to life. But great amounts of blood were not required, and the violence was not thought to be good in itself. ...

More recently, however, this has changed. The violence has a certain charm of its own, the joy of the knife. It proves decision or *commitment*. The new order is not waiting, but has to be imposed by the will of man; it is supported by nothing but the will. *Will* has become the key word, both Right and Left.

Such a revolution, Bloom writes, is different than others which have gone before. "Older revolutionaries were willing peace, prosperity, harmony and reason, i.e., the last man. The newer breed wills chaos."

Yet while this contemporary movement is rooted in Marxist thought, it seems to butt heads with those who advanced it in the past. And here we see the rise of empathy and feelings at play, for as Bloom says:

[D]etermination, will, commitment, caring... concern or what have you become the new virtues. ... There is also something of this in the current sympathy for terrorists, because 'they care.' I have seen young people, and older people too, who are good democratic liberals, lovers of peace and gentleness, struck dumb with admiration for individuals threatening or using the most terrible violence for the slightest and tawdriest reasons. They have a sneaking suspicion that they are face to face with men of real commitment, which they themselves lack. And commitment, not truth, is believed to be what counts.

And there it is. This world is looking for truth, commitment, a cause to fight for. Truth and objective fact have been wiped away. Something must fill the vacuum, so in rush chaos, feelings, and the thrill of fighting against any injustice that strikes one's fancy.

Rebuilding foundations doesn't happen overnight. But if we hope to ever get beyond this, we're going to have to begin restoring those main building blocks. Truth, not feeling, is a cause worth fighting for and committing to.

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[Image Credit: Pixabay]