The Long Hot Summer Returns

The expression ‘long hot summer’ was born in the nineteen-fifties, when American Blacks first rebelled, eventually leading up to the appearance of Martin Luther King. King was assassinated in 1968, a few months before US Attorney General Jack Kennedy was also killed in the same context. From one decade to another, America’s black population, which today accounts for 13% of the total, gained in organizing capability, birthing Black Lives Matter in 2013 in response to the acquittal of the murderer of a candy-munching teenager, Trayvon Martin.

Each of the last seven years have been marked by the senseless killing of Black Americans going about their business, thus it is no surprise that the deliberate killing of a black man by a white policeman last week set off violent demonstrations across the country. What separates today’s situation from those that occurred starting in the nineteen fifties is that the incident was filmed by a cell-phone carrying public and immediately broadcast around the world.

Plainly unprepared for the stress, the young mayor of Minneapolis, where Floyd was killed, appealed for consolation as if he were the victim. Part of the problem is that while mayors appoint police chiefs, they have no authority over them. (It will be remembered that Mayor Pete Buttigeig’s presidential campaign was handicapped by his failure to deal adequately with his police chief after the death of a black resident.)

From colonial times onward, a convoluted the legal system has tied up what should be straight-forward processes in unending caviling. On full display during the impeachment saga, in Minnesota the law and order hierarchy made frankly embarrassing efforts to avoid charging a police officer with a record for abuse in the assassination of a black man, trying to persuade the public that they would conduct a ‘speedy and thorough’ investigation of a killing filmed from start to finish by a police officer who though fired, remained at large for a week, the governor and the commander of the state’s National Guard, called in to quell the riots, doubling down on irrelevant details of how they were meeting their respective responsibilities. The result has been nationwide riots, and a President chiding governors for being ‘soft’ emerging from his White House bunker to stage a ‘photo op’ in front of Washington’s most hallowed church, while announcing he would implement a law passed in 1807 (you read that right…) to prevent riots.

I have been living in Philadelphia, the nation’s first capital and home of the Liberty Bell for the last twenty years, gradually coming to the conclusion that the city of Benjamin Franklin is more laid back than any Mediterranean city I have known, perhaps because the pre-civil war boundary between the north and the south, known as the Mason-Dixon line, is the one that separates Philadelphia Pennsylvania, with its relatively benign climate, from the southern state of Maryland. No matter what other cities are doing, demonstrations are rare in Philadelphia, as if the population just can’t be bothered. It is entirely believable that the current violence is largely instigated. The media obediently relayed Attorney General Barr’s claim that rioting was led by the anti-fascist groups known as ‘Anti-Fa’, until proof was uncovered of a deliberate White House/White Nationalist plan to provoke violence by unsuspecting protesters who long ago forgot if they even knew it, that Donald Trump’s most powerful backers in 2016 ranged from David Duke, the Grand Wizard (sic) of the Ku Klux Klan, to the white nationalist millionaire hedge fund owner Robert Mercer, who hand-picked several of Trump’s initial cabinet.

The White Supremacy movement is a reaction to the fact that more affluent Caucasians tend to have fewer children than black or brown populations still struggling to achieve ‘the dream’. While probably ignorant of actual numbers, the men who at the height of the that campaign marched with torches in Charlottesville shouting ‘You will not
replace us’ were reacting to the fact that Caucasians represent only 16% of the world population. It’s worth pointing out that while most Americans still see the ‘other’ 84% as irrelevant, following five years of accelerated immigration from Africa and the Middle East, Europeans aware of the need to support its growing non-white population, demonstrated en masse in response to Floyd’s assassination.

Meanwhile, literally overnight, the United States went from a country in which the military is prohibited from intervening, to one in which its presence is unopposed by civilian authorities cowed by the racist ideology behind the Trump Presidency. As the US left continued to argue over how to organize for change, modest Washington homeowners hosted demonstrators pursued by the police overnight, perhaps changing the dynamic.

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