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Aug 21, 2017 by **Omari Faulkner**

Part II: A House United Through Domestic Diplomacy ^[1]

In recent months the United States has witnessed a heavy dose of partisan politics driving the nation's dialogue, creating a deeper divide on important issues. In the process we have used political figures as scapegoats for the impairment caused by this very division. If this destructive pattern does not end, we will drain our most powerful resource for healing and understanding – I call it “domestic diplomacy,” dialogue that engages people to find commonalities and join together as one.

In January 2017 I stated the following in Part I of my domestic diplomacy series on the heels of a tumultuous campaign season:

During times of divide, we must look to connect as human beings rather than stereotyping our neighbor and placing each other in categories such as political parties—right vs. left, urban vs. rural, educated vs. less educated, etc. Understanding each other in a diplomatic sense, and working together to resolve challenges that we face together as a nation, is the only way we

will move forward.

Heightened emotions create a reaction

A horrific clash of protesters in Charlottesville, Virginia which started as a gathering of white nationalists, ended with the loss of three American lives. In reaction to this sad and fatal event we find ourselves debating a different issue, centered on the removal of Confederate monuments and the renaming of schools and public spaces associated with Confederate history.

Racism, fear tactics, hatred, and fatal violence, while sadly not uncommon in America, have stirred raw emotions, causing a sudden kneejerk reaction. The actions of those seeking to disrupt peace and progress should not redirect our attention from healing such a growing divide. Reacting to America's minuscule minority by placing the removal of monuments at the epicenter of our focus is a deflationary tactic that only emboldens those seeking relevance.

Domestic diplomacy is proactive

We all understand the power of love and the strength of diversity; we see it today in our progress as Americans. The one topic that we continuously fail to highlight on a national level is the basic American values upon which we all agree - Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.

Today, we have become increasingly apologetic and uneasy about the liberties and freedoms that make our country great. We are proud of our freedom of speech, but angry at someone who expresses it in a way we don't agree. We are proud that we fought a Civil War that ended with the abolishment of slavery, but we are dismayed that the same history exists.

If we do not teach our history, we are doomed to repeat its mistakes...

If we are incessantly focused on whitewashing and removing painful elements of our history, we are not using the opportunities they provide to engage in dialogue, comprehend the past, and understand the other side of the equation. Most importantly, we miss the opportunity to educate our children and eradicate the ills of our past by moving forward.

We must stop operating in reactive mode.

A pivot to a more proactive stance removes the platform of those that spew racism, hate, and violence and shifts our focus to learning more about each other and erecting monuments of peace and collaboration. We must focus more on domestic diplomacy engagement and how to improve our communities through listening, appreciating differences, and meeting each other on common ground.

Seek to visit a museum that tells a component of American history that you never knew, attend a football game in a neighborhood across town, or visit a small farm in the outlands - in each example don't just be present: seek the voice of those you may not have the opportunity to engage with on a daily basis, listen to their story, understand what matters to them and

why. Within this framework, I guarantee you will notice that stereotypes and assumptions will break down, paving the way to truth and mutual understanding.

In my family we take pride in exposing our children to American culture. Within the past months, we have visited the birthplace and museum dedicated to Harriet Tubman, a woman who served as an unmovable freedom fighter. We've also visited one of the homes of Stonewall Jackson in Winchester, Virginia. While touring the home and noticing the tiny doors undoubtedly used by slaves or black servants, it brought a sense of pride to appreciate just how far our country has come.

Those who advocate vandalism of monuments and public property are merely building barriers that only increase the divides we see in America today. Confederate monuments are part of our nation's history, but they do not reflect our present nor our future. Through domestic diplomacy, I'd encourage communities to engage in deliberate discussion and constructive debate to determine the future of these very monuments.

Not being fully mindful often leads to reactive decision making, but taking proactive steps to finding an agreeable pathway forward can effectively create proactive solutions to challenges.

We must continue to have a stronger voice than those who seek media attention for their hateful rhetoric. In reaction to a massacre of nine black Americans, the Confederate battle flag was removed from the Capitol grounds in Charleston, South Carolina. If we begin having proactive conversations and engagements, we won't allow such violence to move us to act: we will already be in motion. We should strategically determine what discussions are relevant to our society, be it education, national security, racism, inner city violence, monuments, poverty, etc., and not be driven by those few who preach hate and discrimination.

Domestic diplomacy simply means recognizing that we Americans share culture, history and a desire for a better America. Why wait for another tragedy to bring us together? Our similarities create unity, yet we focus on our differences. The spirit of domestic diplomacy can inspire us to understand one another's similarities and respect our differences.

"We must all learn to live together as brothers - or we will all perish together as fools."- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

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