



August 29, 2017

### **Hate Speech, Violence & the Unraveling of America**

Over the last three months America has experienced a mix of public incivility, hate speech and politically-motivated violence. During a baseball practice for Republican members of Congress in Alexandria, Virginia in June and at a Nazi / KKK rally in Charlottesville, Virginia earlier this month, extreme political emotion and hate speech gave rise to deadly acts of violence.

We seem to have entered a period in which the uninhibited and unhinged, feel permitted to act on our national overabundance of divisive political rhetoric. This rhetoric can be found on both the left and the right.

How do we stop the trend toward incivility, hate mongering and violence ? How do we stop the unraveling of America ?

First, let's stop bending over backwards to be hyper-tolerant of that which is ugly and threatening. We must not let hate speech define free speech. I am not suggesting banning speech. Rather, we need to recognize the value of standing up to reply, to refute and to be "constructively intolerant" when we become aware of hateful talk and threats.

I believe that the First Amendment involves more than the leeway for people to express provocative opinions. It also involves an obligation that we respond when serious issues are at stake. It carries the duty to call out hate speech and threats. The First Amendment is a two way street.

I believe we have become desensitized to ramped-up political speech which encourages people looking for reasons to violently lash-out.

If we say and do nothing, we permit such behavior. If we down-play or make excuses for those who engage in it, then we enable it.

(CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE)

So, in my opinion, those who chant Nazi slogans and those who burn crosses do not include “some fine people” among their ranks. The same goes for those who call for killing police officers.

We say that we admire elected officials who do not dance around political niceties. We say that we do not want leaders who sugar-coat tough issues. Good. Let’s all practice a bit of that.

Let’s take responsibility for calling-out the hatemongers before America unravels further.

Let’s not wait around for the next horrible incident associated with hate-talk and thinly veiled threats.

Let’s be willing to say: “That’s unacceptable. Knock it the hell off !”