

An Orgy of Self-Righteous Sentimentality

by Theodore Dalrymple



The orgy of riot and looting that followed the killing of George Floyd was accompanied by an orgy of self-righteous sentimentality among the opining classes. They detected a straightforward causative link between the killing of the victim and the looting of stores in Fifth Avenue; they mistook their own outrage for virtue, and then supposed that their virtue absolved them from the necessity to think clearly.

I found a perfect example of this phenomenon in what a psychiatrist wrote in a posting on a popular website. Since it is not my intention to expose anyone to ridicule, I will not mention his name but deal only with his arguments. There is enough personal contempt being expressed at the moment without adding to it.

The author starts by saying that he is disgusted by comments on the internet that, because George Floyd had illicit drugs in his blood at the time he died, the killing was not as

serious as it would otherwise have been, insofar as it suggested that he was a less valuable human being than if he had been drug-free.

The only real questions of the culpability of the policeman are whether George Floyd would have died but for his extremely brutal and prolonged conduct, to which the answer is clearly “No,” and whether the victim’s death was reasonably foreseeable, to which the answer is clearly, “Yes.” The writer of the piece is quite right to say that the personal qualities of a victim are irrelevant to the judgment of whether or not he was wrongfully killed. Unlawful killing is unlawful killing whoever the victim might be, and any other attitude to it would be savage and uncivilised.

But then the author becomes deeply sentimental. He writes:

I am beyond tired of the stigma of drug use that is so easy for people to cast onto others. People who use [self-worth](#).

What about the poor warmongers, genocidal-murderers, racists, religious fanatics, cannibals, child-abusers, salve-drivers, pimps and other stigmatised groups? Why are they left out? Surely it must be because of the stigma and prejudice against them that turned them into what they are in the first place.

The moral grandiosity of the article is obvious, and not very deeply buried in it is implicit contempt for huge numbers of people not unlike Mrs. Clinton’s contempt for the basket of deplorables. When I read that the author hears “the drumbeat of stigma and prejudice—stigma cast upon all drug users and prejudice against all black men,” I think: speak for yourself.

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