

## Our Country

While one would think that globalization would bring humanity together, it sometimes seems as though the seven billion souls on this planet have never been farther apart. Polarization, from opposite sides of the political spectrum to various tiers of the social hierarchy, has begun to bring out the worst responses of apathy and hate. As prospects of easing tensions amidst indefinitely turbulent headlines seem hopeless, the timeless words of Ben Franklin become revitalized: “Love your Enemies, for they tell you your Faults.” Love, in the sense of empathy and respect for adversaries, incentivizes reflection and organic conversation, revealing internal faults and consequently promoting self-betterment and confronting social biases.

The assumption that enemies are born naturally from direct conflict neglects perhaps the more frequent cause: toxic competitiveness. Goals that prioritize surpassing others over personal desires embolden Schadenfreude, which means finding happiness in others’ misfortunes. Pleasure from pushing people down is used as an escape from fear of not being good enough to rise independently, ultimately diminishing initiative towards personal improvement. Following Franklin’s advice of “loving” enemies replaces hope to see others fail with self-reflection, giving experiences meaning and fueling learning. The Harvard Business Review writes that “the hardest leaders to coach are those who won’t reflect” (Porter). Unfortunately, the tendency to look outwards instead of inwards is embodied from the president to the public. The media never fails to be critical of the standing administration, with books titled *Divider-in-Chief* and *Devil’s Bargain* written about Barack Obama and President Trump respectively. While the discordance between the media and a candidate may be inherent and inevitable, free speech is a fundamental constitutional right. It is alarming when the leader of the free world declares that Washington Post reporters “shouldn’t even be allowed on the grounds of the White House” and accuses the

New York Times of “Treason.” Learning to “love” the existence of media, which amplifies the people’s voice and champions American values, is necessary--regardless of content--to inspire politicians to take accountability for their faults.

Within the American people themselves, the spread of nativism has led to rampant xenophobia. Political skirmishes over immigrants “taking” jobs have evolved into making enemies out of the “tired,” “poor,” and “huddled masses” that Lady Liberty claims to welcome. A customer once came into my mom’s convenience store screaming, “Get out of *our* country.” This was said to the same woman who brings orange slices to all of my little brother’s soccer games, cheers at the TV screen during Steelers games, and watches the fireworks above our temple every Fourth of July. How did my mom, my hero, become the villain of my country? Loving one’s “enemies,” whether it be the ideas, institutions, or people that are the target of excessively competitive mindsets, can force contemplation and realization of faulty, preconceived notions.

Enemies take the form of not only those on the other side of the field but those society artificially lowers beneath the rest. Often overlooked, underlying biases have contributed to negative public sentiment that considers demonized victims to be humanity’s enemies. Stemming from ignorance, failure to love unconditionally allows for discrimination to persist. For instance, homelessness has increased exponentially in the last decade with limited research done on why or how. The lack of public concern for the matter comes from the perspective that the homeless’ situations are controllable, due to unemployment, drug addiction, or obesity, and thus they alone are to blame. Research horrifyingly shows how homeless individuals are not perceived as fully human. This stigma extends from mental disorders to “bad” neighborhoods, with individuals not receiving the respect nor care they deserve. However, loving the people whom society has made

enemies out of is far from an act of charity. At national debate tournaments, I learn as much about the economy from giving speeches about the Federal Reserve as I do from talking to Uber drivers about the expansion of their small business. These conversations have shown me that there is much to gain from genuinely connecting with those from all walks of life, which corrected my severely wrong misconceptions about the value of their life stories.

Benjamin Franklin's relevant advice to "Love your Enemies, for they tell you your Faults" speaks explicitly to the competition and ignorance that has long prevented reflection and equality. Considering how this pervasive matter has numerous political and social implications, heeding Franklin's words from over two centuries ago still holds the power to bring people together today, especially as it seems to be needed now more than ever.

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