## RUNNING HEAD: RACISM AND GENOCIDE: IGNORANCE AND INTOLERANCE

Racism and Genocide: Ignorance and Intolerance

Ginger Swanson

P.O. Box 665

Summerland, CA 93067

gingerswanson@gmail.com

Hate campaigns are strongly woven into the fiber of many societies and are created and/or sustained primarily by individuals driven by fear, greed, and/or malice. Motivations for hate may be conscious or unconscious, but inevitably, fear is the driver and ignorance is the fuel. The 20<sup>th</sup> century has seen enough genocide to cause one to wonder about the capacities and genuine intelligence or lack of intelligence of man. Are we on a track to render humans incapable of living cohesive lives? History demonstrates that the human race does not, cannot, or simply is not willing to coexist harmoniously as a cross-cultural species. Racism continuously provokes unwarranted violence and hatred and often stems from ancestral attitudes passed down to and through families of origin to children who become adults who carry and pass along the same destructive baton without question or reason. Tragically, racism is the child of ignorance, just as hatred is the child of intolerance. Proponents of Darwin's evolution theory and Christianity's creationist theory need not battle over ideologies and being right or wrong, superior or inferior, valid or not. They need only look at the devastation resulting from split ideological thinking, and settle into the knowing that we must change not for the sake of change itself, but for the sake of the future of the human race. Racism divides and the danger is amplified when it is born and bred of the ignorance of the bourgeois. Darwin never intended Hitler to use his theory of evolution to commit genocide, and Hitler was able to get away with it due to the intellectuals and bourgeois whom he convinced to support his psychosis. Any one of us with friends and/or acquaintances considered "intellectuals" by themselves or others knows how difficult it is to win an argument with them – we are often left feeling inferior when it is not our reasoning that is inferior, it is our ability to educate and communicate, particularly if we have feeling versus thinking personality typologies. We must face this difficulty and argue for our lives, not fight, mind you, but debate, openly and wisely, with tolerance, patience, courage, and grace.

Social practice as discussed by K. Leledakis brings to our awareness the unconscious of society, which can be a holding place for unwanted and unexamined parts of our collective and individual selves – that place where the roots of racism dwell and where power plays out often in

unfathomable ways. Leledakis explains, "participation in social practices also produces effects at the level of the unconscious, not only during childhood but throughout the individual's life" (1995, p. 203). He goes on to say, "Social practice can thus be both the source of a meaningful structuring of the unconscious of the individuals participating, and itself the outcome of (always meaningful) unconscious motivations and intentions" (1995, p. 203). When we engage in racism, we may not do so with conscious intent. Racism is commonly the result of unconscious programming, and until we recognize the existence of the programming, its origins, and its detrimental affects, things will remain the same. The genocides we have witnessed in this century alone are a clear indication that we must rattle our individual and collective unconscious and come to the awareness that new social structures are needed, not brick and mortar structures, but psychological structures.

Leledakis discusses two ways of understanding social action, "The first is the possibility of interpreting individual social action based on motivations underpinning behavior and deducing the social shaping of such motivations" (1995, p. 203). He opines, "The second concerns the possibility to identify the 'meaning' inherent in social structures or institutions which is produced or reproduced through the practices such structures or institutions entail, independently of explicit ideas or ideologies supporting these institutions" (1995, p. 203). Institutions such as churches, schools, and the state are viewed separately from the meaning they inscribe. The nuts and bolts of this aspect of Leledakis' work and the implications of the social as indeterminate can be applied to the theoretical framework of racism. Removed from rhetoric, racism can be viewed as a lesson that answers epistemological questions about the formation of ideals of the individual, and of society. Racism practiced by the individual does not at its core differ from racism practiced at the societal level, which can result in genocide. Both are violent, albeit in differing forms and vastly varying degrees. The conscious and unconscious impact the individual has on society does not appear to hold equal weight to that which society has on the individual; however, it is the unique strength of the individual at the soul level, which contains the seed required for societal change.

When racism leads to genocide, one must ask if it is the outcome of society's unconscious motivations and intentions. What occurs in a culture that would participate in such social shaping? And, if we are racist at the individual level what is to stop us from supporting genocide – consciously or unconsciously – at the societal level? Racism must first be recognized and addressed at the level of the individual, and then one must examine the ancestral ideologies of their culture, and the ideologies of others' cultures with an objective perspective if they are to comprehend the roots of racism. Understanding the history of "self" and "other", aids one in realizing the human condition and connection among all races. This comprehension can serve to disarm unwarranted and ignorant judgments maintained as a result of uninformed ancestral ideologies derived out of ignorance. One of the positive sides of modern technology is the ready access to current information that is coming available. With citizens all over the world beginning to gain access to information, and become better educated, which will hopefully prevent participation in racist crimes collectively, as in cases of genocide, and individually, as in cases of discrimination.

New measures are being taken internationally to hold genocide persecutors accountable for their crimes. The Washington Post reports, "The French government announced yesterday that it will set up a special judicial unit to investigate and bring charges against humanity in France or abroad" (Washington Post, January 7, 2010). The article goes on to say, "Unlike Britain, legislation in France allows prosecution for crimes committed outside France but requires some connection between France and the alleged crime, such as involvement of a French citizen or the presence of the accused on French soil" (Washington Post, January 7, 2010). Hopefully, there will come the day when genocide is no longer a possibility and issues of racism can dissolve into acts of compassion, as oppressors come to realize they no longer need to gain strength from false ideologies compiled as a result of ancestral or other forms of ignorance. Leaders are needed to show the way to the grappling masses; and it is critical that knowledgeable and trustworthy individuals dedicated to the common good of humanity qualify pending leaders. With access to

education and information, citizens from societies around the world are beginning to be better equipped to make informed decisions and choices. If the common good remains at the heart of each individual, naturally the collective as well as the individual benefits; problematic is the lack of a cohesive understanding and agreement as to the common good for all. Within the structure of the state and church institutions, leaders have and continue to seek, find, and establish guidelines for harmonic multi-cultural and multi-racial co-existence. This challenge is not new.

Equal rights leaders Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King, Jr., Mohandas Gandhi, and Nelson Mandela were able with heart, humility, and strength to transform the minds of many, but their missions were not accomplished without severe criticism, opposition, and punishment. Lincoln, King, and Gandhi were all assassinated, and Mandela was imprisoned for 27 years of his life due to his political activities which included ending apartheid in South Africa and working to establish a multi-racial democracy. The cultures of these great leaders may differ but they all struggled with issues of racism and equality; cultures may vary yet their crimes remain common. These leaders inspired and impacted the masses by invoking a cognitive shift in collective consciousness with respect to issues of inequality and racism. A shift in ideologies at the societal level cannot occur without a shift at the individual level – the scales are not balanced. That is why strong, stable, and trustworthy leadership is needed for new social practices to be created, developed, and implemented.

The challenges of shifting injustices in society are daunting, at best. For example, a quandary is presented to an individual who serves as a witness to an injustice they wish to change, they feel they cannot change the situation or correct the injustice due to the shift in society and/or in cultural ideologies that would be needed to affect such change. The individual can easily become overwhelmed by the work required to cause a shift in the collective, and to sustain the change. In the busyness of their life, most people quickly fall into their status quo and give up; others fight until they run out of energy and/or resources, and others go on until they die. To quote Anatole France, "To be willing to die for an idea is to set a rather high price on

conjecture." What drives the leaders of a society who fight for justice? What propels a soul to take on such great work? Are they servicing an unwanted calling? Does psyche drive them to their station in life? There are as many answers as there are leaders. Rare is the leader with the passion, caring, and daring to embark on a journey to change the structure of a society. Also, historically rare, but becoming more and more common, are the individuals and families that realize their own ability to change ill-borne attitudes with respect to destructive behaviors, such as racism. Tragically, leaders and individuals who pursue changes for the greater good are not lone leaders; there are also destructive leaders, such as Hitler and those leading genocide crimes. In the words of Alain Finkielkraut, "Satan became incarnate in the person of Hitler who represented nothing less than an allegory for the devil."

(http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/rwanda/reports/dsetexhe.html). Adolf Hitler and other such leaders are "evil", and there have been far too many of the psychopathic types leading countries around the world in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The Rwandan genocide of 1994 is known as the biggest mistake in President Clinton's administration due to the lack of aid provided and attention paid. This racist tragedy did not capture or receive significant media attention in the United States because at that time, in June of 1994, everyone's eyes were glued on a white Ford Bronco being filmed from a helicopter, on their television sets. While O.J. Simpson was maneuvering his way around the Los Angeles freeway figuring out how to get away with murder, the Hutu Army was embarking on a massacre, wherein they proceeded to murder over 800,000 Tutsis and Hutu moderates. This was not only the biggest faux pas of the Clinton Administration; it was among the biggest media blunders in history. Information regarding the Rwanda genocide continues to emerge, the latest information contained in a report revealing the manner in which the Hutu's proceeded with their campaign of extermination under the guise of political revenge. Author Philip Gourevitch writes,

"... Hutu Power extremists used Habyarimana's assassination as the pretext for going ahead with their plans for a genocide of the Tutsi minority – a program of massacres in

which close to a million Tutsis were murdered in the next hundred days." (The New Yorker online blog, Jan. 8, 2010.)

Genocide is the most devastating racist crime imaginable and acts of genocide in the 20<sup>th</sup> century lead one to wonder and fear for the future existence of humanity.

Genocide is a crime on a different scale to all other crimes against humanity and implies an intention to completely exterminate the chosen group. Genocide is therefore both the gravest and the greatest of the crimes against humanity: In the same way as in a case of homicide the natural right of the individual to exist is implied, so in the case of genocide as a crime, the principle that any national, racial or religious group has a natural right to exist is clearly evident. January 8, 2010 (http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/rwanda/reports/dsetexh e.html)

Unlike the Armenian silencing of the genocide by the Turks, Rwanda will not suppress truth or forget the heinous crime.

"The thousands of skulls from the mass killings of 1994 stored in churches, museums, hospitals and other places, remain the eternal reminder of what really happened in the fateful 100 days when hell broke loose in Rwanda... Keeping the skulls enables Rwanda to deflect criticism of its own failures... to ensure that the genocide issue remains a cornerstone of the government policy to hold the world hostage with these images and memory of the mass killings. *Kenya's Times* (http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/3610555.stm). January 8, 2010.

It may appear gruesome to keep the victim's skulls in these institutions, it even changes the nature of the role of the institution, however, bearing witness to the tragedy is undoubtedly a significant step in the healing process, much as silencing the tragedy continues the process of injuring.

According to the New York Daily News, an estimated 600,000 to 1,500,000 Armenians were massacred or died illness in what is known as "History's Forgotten Genocide" between 1915 and 1923 (http://www.nydailynews.com/). The Armenians were murdered by the Ottoman Empire's Committee of Union and Progress, popularly known as the Young Turks. A declaration was made to exterminate Turkey's Armenian population of nearly 2 million (http://www.armenian-genocide.org/genocide.html). Upon discussing the Armenian genocide

with Caroline Shahbaz, a member of a surviving Armenian family, she indicated how this crime of genocide is not spoken of or taught about in Turkish schools and if one attempts discussion and/or exposing the truth, the threat is clear – they will be incarcerated. Shahbaz said it is painful for her to live with the silencing of this tragedy on the grounds where it took place. Her story is yet another tragedy, where history is written by the victor. Although denied in her homeland, with Internet and media outlets, the truth of the Armenian genocide has been reported upon in the world news. Perhaps surviving family members such as Caroline Shahbaz will be compelled to use literature as a way to expose and speak of their unbearable ancestral wounds, for it is often in the revealing that healing is able to occur. In Left to Tell (Hay House, 2006) Immaculee Ilibagiza tells her story of hiding with seven women in a bathroom for 91 days during the Rwandan genocide. Most of her family was murdered including her brother who died when Hutu's hacked his brain open with a machete in front of an auditorium full of Hutu's (they did this so they could see what the brain of a person with a Master's Degree looked like). Ilibagiza came face to face with death but was spared due to her deep belief in God and her ability to forgive – and love – her enemy. Reconciliation is not easily if ever achieved after such atrocities; but denial and silencing only adds to the injustice and makes worse the individual and collective wounds of a culture. Literature can help as it provides a vehicle for others to bear witness to our pain, which in turn aids in the process of healing. Minsky (1998) offers, "But we need at least to try to 'think' the unbearable in order to help us find ways of reducing the quantity of unbearable things anyone has to face in a life. Literature is often one of the best ways of allowing us to find the words or 'think' the unbearable." (Minsky, 1998; p.178).

Wars between countries can and do conceal genocide crimes. This is believed to be the case with the Bosnian War, where estimates of 146,000 and 220,000 civilians were killed between 1992 and 1995: over 30,000 Bosnians were murdered in the Bosnian genocide crime in 1995. (http://www.ppu.org.uk/genocide/g\_bosnia1.html). The 1982 Guatemalan genocide was

intended to exterminate the Mayan Indians. The involvement and activity of the United States is highly questionable with respect to the genocide, grave mistakes were made, and reconciliation next to impossible.

"The Guatemalan government, using the Guatemalan Army and its counter-insurgency force (whose members defined themselves as 'killing machines'), began a systematic campaign of repressions and suppression against the Mayan Indians, whom they claimed were working towards an communist coup. Their 2-year series of atrocities is sometimes called 'The Silent Holocaust'". Peace Pledge Union Information, (http://www.ppu.org.uk/genocide/g\_guatemala1.html)

The 626 Mayan villages attacked resulted in an estimated 200,000 murdered. "The villagers, if they didn't escape to become hunted refugees, were then brutally murdered; others were forced to watch, and sometimes to take part." The genocide crime conducted by the Guatemalan government (supported by the US) is beyond heinous:

"Children were often beaten against walls, or thrown alive into pits where the bodies of adults were later thrown; they were also tortured and raped. Victims of all ages often had their limbs amputated, or were impaled and left to die slowly. Others were doused in petrol and set alight, or disemboweled while still alive. Yet others were shot repeatedly, or tortured and shut up alone to die in pain. The wombs of pregnant women were cut open. Women were routinely raped while being tortured. Women - now widows - who lived could scarcely survive the trauma: 'the presence of sexual violence in the social memory of the communities has become a source of collective shame'."

Peace Pledge Union Information

(http://www.ppu.org.uk/genocide/g guatemala2.html)

Then there is the Holocaust, which took place between 1933 and 1945 wherein 11 million were murdered, including nearly 6 million Jews and 5 million non-Jews. The Jew's story is not suppressed as with the stories of non-Jews murdered during the Holocaust, and in the case of the Armenian genocide. Hollywood has told the story several times from varying perspectives and in the most moving of portrayals, as in movies such *Schindler's List*, and *The Pianist*, and in numerous documentaries. The 1932 genocide in Ukraine is yet another unthinkable tragedy, "A man-made famine was thus created deliberately to starve political resisters to death. Up to 7 million people in ethnic Ukrainian regions died of hunger. Some of the too-slow-to-die were shot

in large numbers to hasten the genocide." In the Cambodian genocide in 1975, "an estimated 2 million were murdered via executions, disease, exhaustion and starvation." (http://www.ppu.org.uk/genocide/g\_genocide intro.html).

During the Namibia genocide, from 1904 to 1907, and estimated 65,000 members of the Herero tribe were murdered following the resistance of colonization. Raped women bore mixed race children used for scientific study, which added to tragedy.

"In the Herero work camps there were numerous children born to these abused women, and a man called Eugen Fischer, who was interested in genetics, came to the camps to study them; he carried out medical experiments on them as well. He decided that each mixed-race child was physically and mentally inferior to its German father (a conclusion for which there was and is no respectable scientific foundation whatever) and wrote a book promoting his ideas: 'The Principles of Human Heredity and Race Hygiene'. Adolf Hitler read it while he was in prison in 1923, and cited it in his own infamous pursuit of 'racial purity.'" (http://www.ppu.org.uk/genocide/g\_namibia1.html)

Eugen Fischer can be credited with planting the seed of racial intolerance into the mind of Adolf Hitler, which led to the Holocaust. On the subject of intermixing of Aryan blood with that of "inferior races": "The North American continent would remain strong," Hitler states, "as long as he [the German inhabitant] does not fall a victim to defilement of the blood," that is to say, as long as he does not interbreed with non-Germanic peoples" (Reich, 2000, p. 76).

To heal the wounds of racism, we must be excruciatingly honest and trace the threads of truth that are woven into societies' fibers. The collective energy around racism has been slow to change, however, it is diminishing as a result of growing intelligence, and as a result of actions taken by courageous individuals who dare bear witness, and face the tragic truth with the injustice of it. I originally intended to write on racism and the pending re-emergence of the use of the "N" word, wherein I would defend my position that the 'N' word carries wounds too deep, and that such a reemergence at this time would contribute to the existing pool of sorrow. However, I was struck by the profound realization that racism is a precursor to genocide. This truth called for my attention.

Emotions were stirred for myself, and several Pacifica graduate student classmates after reading excerpts from White Privilege by P. S. Rothenberg. Lengthy discussions ensued as some of us embarked on gut-wrenching and honest explorations on the roots of racism in our own lives. Melvin Allen, a friend and Black man in the Depth Psychology graduate program, shared how he felt that it was man's ego that prompted him to behave in a way that would oppress another. This falls into the category of fear: fear of being this, or not being that. Melvin is exploring the roots of slavery and how the Black man does not have to look far into the past to find slavery in his ancestral lineage. Allen also explained how he too was raised in a racist household; it was Blacks against Whites. To them, we were "white trash", "honkys", and "peckers". They were racist perpetrators as well as victims of racism: we marveled at how these are not uncommon role reversals.

I began reflecting further on my own history and how my father rose from being a tough boy born on the "wrong side of the tracks" to living a white middle class life style, but to his death, in his psyche, he struggled with his poverty ridden roots and the need to be superior. With racism, he didn't even have to think about it, it came automatically. We sang terrible songs about Blacks, we cut down the Mexicans, and joked about the Italians. We were white. They weren't. We were superior to them. We used the most derogatory of slang terms; guk, spic, nigger, wop: they were all the same. In our household, people from other races were simply a cluster of everybody who wasn't white. We were awful. I was awful. Such was my behavior in this lifetime. And, it sickens me. But things change, thank goodness, things change. Now, my sister is married to an Italian, my brother is married to a Mexican, my niece just married an Afro-American, and my son is dating a Chinese woman. One would think that with all that diversity, we would have washed the racist "Archie Bunker" mentality down the drain. Not so. But we have definitely started.

Now, as I strive to sever the roots of ignorance that bore racism in my family, I am also able to see the destruction of intolerance, the very kind of intolerance that leads to genocide, and I

realize that none of us is far from being subject to or participant in prejudicial actions. I am reminded of how deeply ingrained prejudices can run and am grateful for coming to the awareness that I can contribute in my own individual way, not as a great leader, but as a humble soul, to the transformation of a destructive ideology. I am imprinting my heart with a new pattern and building a new psychological structure. I am cutting the cord and severing the destructive parasitical growth that has come down through my ancestral lineage. There is no sense in supporting false fear driven racist ideologies any longer – not for me, or anyone. The time has come to end it.

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