

Expert Forum Article

My Dream About the KKK Takes Me Back to The Future

by *William (Bill) Shackelford*



THE DREAM

I had a dream earlier this morning about the KKK. I was walking with some of my grandkids and with a teenage version of my brother TJ (who passed last year at age 54). We were walking in an area that looked like the street leading to my old office building. A flatbed truck drove passed us.

On the back of the truck sat about a dozen KKK members. A few in the front of the group were wearing their signature garb. No mistaking they were KKK. The truck stopped a little ways down the road and several of the guys got off and started back towards us. I knew from past experience what was about to happen next.

You see, I grew into adulthood in the 60's. I was in college in Atlanta (the heart of the civil rights movement) for the last of the great rallies led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. I was in the crowd of college students on the Atlanta University Center campus who gathered to march downtown the night Dr. King was killed. I remember hearing State Representative Leroy Johnson telling us not to march downtown that night. He said, the National Guard had been activated and had snipers on the roofs of the buildings. He told us to "go back to your dorms, get a good night's sleep and we will meet in the morning at Sister's Chapel (on Spelman's campus) at 9:00 am and decide how we are going to respond".

Over the years I have seen reams of tapes and viewed numerous broadcast programs that profiled how the clan operates so, I knew when those guys got off the truck, they were coming back to harass us.

This dream had taken me back to the protest days of the 60's and I immediately remembered what we were taught to do when confronted by a white mob. I told the grandkids to stay close to me, outside in the open. TJ, who was very defiant as a teenager, acted in typical TJ fashion and ignored my order. He proceeded to run into the office building to hide. I remember yelling at him repeatedly not to go in the building, then to come back out of the building. The tension and emotions of the moment shook me awake.

I laid there in my bed recalling and reflecting on the dream when I remembered something else I had said to TJ. I was yelling to him “don’t go in the building. Stay out here in the open because out here passerbyers can use their cellphones to record videos and we can identify the attackers. That’s when it dawned on me that this was not a dream about the past but, about the present and the future.

For you see, I had this dream the morning after President Obama signed his executive order providing relief from deportation for millions of undocumented immigrates. I had gone to sleep listening to the loud, visceral reactions from the conservative right. The dream was telling me that the best way to understand the reactions of the conservative right to President Obama’s actions is to reflect on the past.

BACK TO THE PAST

I was asked recently by one of my close, white, republican friends if I thought President Obama’s race was an issue in how republicans react to him. Without hesitation, I said yes. He accepted my response without question but, I went on to say, “YOU won’t be able to see it until the next president is in office. It won’t matter whether the next president is male or female, democrat or republican, you won’t see any president disrespected like this one.”

I went on to say, “Listen to how they voice their objections. They don’t talk about stopping the Obama agenda. They talk about stopping Obama. It’s always personalized... it’s about stopping him.”

It’s the same type of response minority groundbreakers got “back in the day”. For example, when Procter & Gamble opened its Albany Georgia manufacturing plant in the late 70’s, they set a goal to have the plant’s staff reflect the community... at all levels including management. There was great resistance by whites at having to work for black managers. It didn’t matter about the qualifications, education, experience or communication skills, all of the black managers were confronted with resistance... because of their race.

It didn’t matter whether they made good decisions or bad decisions, what mattered was that it was a decision by the black manager and, therefore, it had to be resisted to prove that black managers could not lead the plant. However, despite all of the resistance, the Albany plant became one of P&G’s most successful; and a source of black managers for the entire company.

When colleges and universities were forced to enroll blacks, it didn’t matter how

qualified the students were. What mattered was the fact that they were Black. The same was true for the little black girls and boys who integrated elementary and high schools across the nation. Interestingly enough, in all of these cases, as today with President Obama, the resisters argued that the actions taken by the government “violated the law”. However, to understand the correlation between actions taken over 40 years ago in resistance to integration and objections today to Obama, you have to remember how the objection to integration was framed.

I remember elected officials boldly standing before the cameras and saying something like, “Having negroes and whites go to the same school is a violation of The Laws of Nature”. Remembering this gave me new insight into the current argument that somehow the actions taken by President Obama (actions very similar to what numerous other presidents have taken... on the same issues) are THIS TIME illegal. It is only through the lens of “violating the laws of nature” that the visceral reaction to President Obama (and his actions) can be understood.

FORWARD TO THE FUTURE

By profession, I am a diversity consultant. I do a lot of training on issues of diversity, inclusion and bias. There is one bias model that my workshop participants tell me they find very eye opening. It’s the model on the Stages of Cultural Competence. The most popular version of this model has six stages The first (and lowest) stage is Exclusive/Voluntary Separation. Individuals in this stage display a strong affinity for members of their group and a strong dislike for individuals outside of their group. In addition, they believe their group is always right and those outside of their group are always wrong.

This Stage 1 mentality was very evident in the 60’s and 70’s with respect to integration and the civil rights movement. However, if you listen today to conservative talk radio (and many elected officials) you will see evidence they are acting out of a Stage 1 mentality as well.

- When President Obama was successful in killing Osama Bin Laden, it was hardly recognized by conservatives. Think about the accolades President Bush would have gotten if Bin Laden had been killed on his watch.
- When President Obama announced he had captured the planner of the 2012 attack on the Libyan embassy, instead of accolades he was criticized that same day. Even though the Benghazi attack was important enough for congress to hold numerous hearings, the capture of the mastermind of the attack did not warrant President Obama any praise.

- When President Obama saved the nation from a second great depression with bold and controversial moves (an economic collapse brought on by policies of the previous conservative, republican administration), every step he took was resisted by conservatives – even steps that everyone knew had to be taken to save the country.

By the way, I know some of you will criticize me for my comment that it was a republican administration that led us to a near-depression but, that's to be expected. It is consistent with the Stage 1 (Exclusive/Voluntary Separation) mentality that "their group is always right and others always wrong". On this matter their logic is something like, "It's nobody's fault we slipped into a near-depression but, its Obama's fault it took us so long to get out".

BACK TO THE FUTURE

So, where do we go from here now that President Obama has signed into law his executive order? If resistance is about "the law of the land", those elected officials who object to his unilateral action will quickly pass a bipartisan law that will supersede the actions taken by the president.

However, if this is about "the laws of nature" then the only way to set things right will be to "put him back in his place", to punish him for being so bold, so arrogant, so uppity to think he can get away with something like that. Or as the cartoon character Yosemite Sam would say..."Thems Fighting Words" and, with that, all guns are drawn.

About the Author

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