

The problem isn't Trump, it's us

If we don't like the tone we're hearing from our country, perhaps we need to check our own.

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(Photo: Brian Quinn, Wellsville Daily Re)

"America will never be [destroyed from the outside](#). If we falter and lose our freedoms, it will be because we destroyed ourselves." – Abraham Lincoln

DO WE HAVE A HEART PROBLEM?

I am [worried about the future](#) of America. Not because of President Trump or his policies, or Russia, or the Islamic State.

I worry because of us.

Racist, homophobic graffiti was spray painted at [Withrow University High School](#) this past weekend.

"We the People" seem to have forgotten how to treat one another like, well, people. Hostility and meanness seem to be the order of the day, and I find myself wondering, when did America's citizens become one of America's enemies? **Our political discourse has become so corrosive, so**

divisive that its primary casualty has been common decency and respect.

We excel at dehumanization these days and have stopped looking at one another as fellow countrymen wanting to create a more perfect union.

Instead, we view one another with suspicion and contempt, reducing our neighbors to a label: Republican, Democrat, conservative, liberal, libtard, tea bagger, alt-right.

It's easy to blame President Trump or Barack Obama for the divisions in our country, but that lets each of us off the hook way too easily. We play a part in this too — a bigger one than any president. (After all, who elects them?)

While Trump controls his personal Twitter account, he doesn't have access to your social media. **Each of us decides what message we want to send out to the world, and if we don't like the tone we're hearing from our country, then perhaps we need to check our own.**

[Luke 6:45](#) says, "A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart, for the mouth speaks what the heart is full of."

Whether you're a believer or not, it's hard to argue the truth this passage of scripture contains. What comes out of our mouths reveals what is truly in our hearts. **And if this is true, then based on the rhetoric that is being spoken on all sides, it is safe to say America has a serious heart problem.**

WORDS HAVE POWER

Each of us must do an honest assessment of ourselves and the words we are speaking to one another. Words contain power. I fear that we are killing one another and our country with thoughtless, careless and destructive

language that is pushing us farther apart rather than bringing us closer together. We seem to care more about the number of LIKES on our snarky Facebook and Twitter posts, than engaging in real conversation or gaining true understanding.

WE NEED TO LISTEN MORE...

However, there are two things I believe each of us can do to help our country correct course. **The first thing is learn to listen more. This is not just simply hearing someone else's words, but actively listening to those words, feelings and thoughts.** Many of us enter conversations to win the debate. Many of us don't actively listen, we just wait for our turn to speak. Many of us only like to hear points of view that support our own.

I've engaged with a number of Enquirer readers whom I disagree with politically, but through our dialogue I've gained perspective. Sometimes, these readers and I even discover there are more things we agree about than we disagree about.

...AND BETTER CONVERSATIONS

The second thing we can do is make sure our words matter. It's not how much you say, but it's making what you say count. Are your words making an impact or is it just chatter? Are you contributing to the conversation or trolling? Right now, there is a lot of noise out there that, unfortunately, is drowning out real, constructive conversations.

Political correctness is dead and has been replaced by a spare-no-feelings, tell-it-like-it-is attitude. I'm not a fan mainly because, as a communicator, I understand that it's not so much what you say as how you say it. **Being politically correct doesn't mean that you can't or shouldn't speak truth, it is just the recognition that I need to take other people's feelings and dignity into account when I speak.** I value frankness as much as anyone, but our words carry more impact if

they are not weighed down by rudeness and baseless stereotypes.

We absolutely should stand up and speak in favor of our beliefs, but we don't have to say something about everything. And **when we do open our mouths, we should endeavor to be thoughtful and solution- oriented. It's easy to finger-point and highlight flaws; its often much more difficult to fix them.**

Swastikas, racial slurs and the word "Trump" were spray painted around Withrow's campus this weekend. The graffiti was painted on sidewalks, signs, benches and high up on the school itself.

So let's not allow ugly words and acts such as the painting of swastikas on buildings in our community define us. **This really isn't about Trump or any other elected official.** This is about us, We the People. Say what you will about President Trump's inaugural address, but he got a few things right in his remarks.

"We must speak our minds openly, debate our disagreements honestly, but always pursue solidarity," he said. "When America is united, America is totally unstoppable."

Most importantly, he said this: "Everyone is listening to you now."

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