

TRUTH IN LOVE

The Making of Cookie-Cutter Citizens

By Parris J. Baker
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Editor's note: Following is the fourth of a five-part series addressing a growing culture of incivility and contempt in the United States. The series will continue on Tuesday, June 6.

About 10 years ago my daughter began to express an interest in baking. Consumed with the subject, Samantha began searching Google and YouTube for new recipes and special utensils on baking cakes and cookies. As her baking skills improved, Samantha made cakes and cookies for every occasion or for no occasion at all. And I, being the doting dad, volunteered to sample all her efforts, providing the necessary and customary encouragement and appetite.



To quickly produce the seemingly endless supply of cookies, Samantha learned to use a utensil called a cookie cutter. I discovered there are many types of cookie cutters, but stainless-steel cookie cutters are rated the best, primarily because they are sturdy, they don't bend or lose their shape, and the stainless steel provides a sharp edge for cutting the cookie dough. Proper dough preparation, including refrigeration, is necessary for the best results. To get the dough to conform to the shape of the cookie cutter uniformed pressure is applied to the dough. The sharp edges of the cookie cutter help make clean cuts in the dough. Clean cuts are necessary for

each cookie to retain their shape while baking. Until the cookies are decorated each cookie looks the same. However, bakers around the world have created ways to personalize a variety of cookies based on the characteristics of their country: British stained-glass cookies, Matcha cookies from Japan, Pepparkakor from Sweden, and Speculaas from Belgium and the Netherlands.

Colonized Cognitions and Necropolitics

The culture of contempt is a democracy-threatening social condition. It erodes democracy with repeated demonstrations of bile disrespect and brazen rudeness. These demonstrations are so persistent and pervasive that it makes working with others who have opposing viewpoints impossible. The ecology of contempt also promotes humiliating and shaming of others and restricting autonomy, self-determination, and choice. Relentless verbal attacks, overt threats, hand gestures and body postures are all purposed to communicate, contempt: “I wish you were not here; I wish you did not exist.” Recently, two African American representatives were expelled by Republican members of the Tennessee legislature for joining a protest on the floor of the chamber. The expulsion was an operational example of the culture of contempt.

A necessary ingredient in making a culture of contempt is colonized cognition. Colonialism^[1] is the process of taking control of people and property as an extension of state power. The process incorporates the practices of subjugation, domination, and exploitation of one people by another people. The American Psychological Association defines cognition^[2] as the mental process or method of acquiring, storing, and retrieving knowledge. An expanded definition of cognition includes all forms of knowing and awareness, such as perceiving, conceiving, remembering, reasoning, judging, imagining, and problem-solving. Through the process of indoctrination, intimidation, and isolation, colonizers, like cookie makers (those in social positions to construct ways individuals and groups self-identification and socialization), shape cognition by applying consistent uniformed pressure. Constituents are coerced to accept cultural norms, ways of thinking and believing, and language, thus becoming cookie cut citizens. Compliance or conformity is achieved through siloed media outlets that regularly reinforce how individuals should think and behave. The introduction of terms and phrases like “woke or wokeness,” “canceled culture,” and “don’t say gay^[3]” is one of many ways used to subvert an individual’s agency of thought.

An assumption contained in the culture of contempt is that individuals will become cognitively dormant, like cookie dough, and suspend their human agency. Suspension of human agency^[4] allows for the removal of diverse thoughts so that everyone looks, thinks, and behaves the same. Current state and national discussions on gun violence and gun control, women’s reproductive rights and maternal health, sexual orientation, gender identification, and what defines suitable and appropriate decorum for collegiate athletes reveal the

siloes, colonized constituents who share and repeat the same talking points, even when those talking points make little sense.

Cognitive cognition also has a dark characteristic and that is necropolitics. Achille Mbembe's socio-political framework of necropolitics^[5] – the process of subjugation of life to the power of death, suggests there are people with sovereign authority to determine what groups of people are expendable or disposable. Mbembe (2019) intimates that there are powerful and subtle forces of killing that are associated with the sovereign controls of government. Moreover, those individuals or self-interest groups, many times, will institute or permit exposure to ecological conditions that have high probabilities of death. In other words, they wantonly allow or let people die. Death is associated with their refusal or unwillingness to change the conditions that create environments that are uninhabitable for humans.

Necropolitics of place and of policy are linked with race, ethnicity, income, and immigration or refugee status. American history is replete with examples of colonization in which physical and cultural genocide nearly annihilated the first Native Americans. Slave plantations and residential segregation place Black, brown, and poor white bodies nearest to companies that pollute air and water environments. Imagine the dilemma; water that will quench your thirst, cook your food, and clean your body will also take your life.^[6] These residents have been deemed expendable and therefore will experience slow death due to violent and silent political and legal inaction.^[7]

Clearly, we cannot wait for politicians, who seldom talk with each other, to change this culture of contempt. It will be those elected individuals who are chosen, by the burden in their heartbeat; those who act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with their God^[8]; those who thirst insatiably for justice, peace, and the principles of democracy. It will be those individuals who will lead our efforts to change. Crusaders of freedom and justice, such as the recently expelled and reinstated Tennessee House of Representatives Justin Jones and Justin Pearson and local justice advocates Rev. Charles Mock, DDiv., and Rt. Rev. Sean Rowe.^[9]

The parents, students, and communities of Columbine High School (1999), Virginia Tech University (2007), Sandy Hook Elementary School (2012), Stoneman Douglas High School (2018), Robb Elementary School (2022), and The Covenant School (2023) unfortunately are still waiting for state and federal common-sense gun laws. Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote in 1963 this excerpt from his Letter From a Birmingham Jail^[10]:

For years now I have heard the word 'Wait!' It rings in the ear of every Negro with piercing familiarity. This 'Wait' has almost always meant 'Never.' We must come to see, with one of our distinguished jurists, that 'justice too long

delayed is justice denied.’

It is irresponsible for us to wait for the next school or mass shooting. The challenge for each of us is a call to direct action, to perform any action directed toward the establishment laws, community approaches, or prayers that will reduce the number of school and mass shootings utilizing military assault weapons.

By the way, countries that make wonderful specialty cookies (British Stained-glass Cookies, Matcha Cookies from Japan, Pepparkakor from Sweden, or Speculaas from Belgium and the Netherlands) have successfully instituted laws, community approaches and innovative strategies to reduce gun violence and mass shootings in their respective countries.

[1] Kohn, Margaret and Kavita Reddy, "Colonialism", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2023 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.), Available [here](#)

[2] Available [here](#)

[3] Florida House of Representatives HB 1557, Don't Say Gay Bill. Signed into law on July 1, 2022 by Governor Ron DeSantis. Available [here](#)

[4] Suspension of human agency occurs through the process of disenfranchisement, patriarchy, paternalism, and the removal or restriction of choice.

[5] Mbembe, A. (2019). Necropolitics. Duke University Press.

[6] Presently, these conditions can be found in the Louisiana-Mississippi Chemical Corridor; Jackson Mississippi; Flint & Detroit, Michigan; Baltimore, Maryland; Newark, New Jersey, Brady, Texas; and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

[7] Davies, T. (2018). Toxic Space and Time: Slow Violence, Necropolitics, and Petrochemical Pollution. *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, 108(6), 1537-1553.

[8] Micah 6:8

[9] Rt. Rev. Sean Rowe is the Episcopal Bishop of the Diocese of Western New York and Northwest Pennsylvania

[10] King, Jr. M. L. (April 16, 1963). Letter From a Birmingham Jail. In *Why We Can't* ed. Martin Luther King, Jr. pp. 77-103. It is available [here](#).

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