

# Inquiring Minds topic – 9 November 2018

Bruce McNaughton, Moderator

## Our Role in Confronting Hate

Gentlewomen and Gentlemen:

Today's topic is different. It will require your help to build a plan of action to take a step forward with the idea of forcing the retreat of the hate mongers. The concept is simple. We are the ancient, wise seniors. We have been to this rodeo before. We have histories, we should speak up within our families, our community and the wider world as the voices of tolerance and experience to help create a "more perfect union". Note: not a perfect one, but striving to move closer to perfect.

We should seek to be engaged, not retired, taking up space, safe, comfortable but not in the front lines of leading the fight for change. We should lead the fight to end hate.

Here is the question: How do we step up and provide leadership?

Bring your ideas But leave your "good person" anecdotes and political screeds home We need to discuss moves we can make, not hear old stories or tiresome attack political screeds.

To inspire you to think about actionable steps I have attached three items:

- Pastor Martin Niemoller's words of wisdom about the Nazi era.
- Harry Truman's bigotry and how he overcame it.
- Lincoln's plea to seek our better angels of our natures.

Hopefully they will inspire ideas.

Please come and "Let us reason together" to plan a role for ourselves in these troubled times.

To use our experiences and to help make a better future for our heirs. We owe them and our country our best efforts.

German Lutheran Pastor and former U-Boat commander Martin Niemöller spoke up during the Nazi time in the 1940s:

First they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out—  
Because I was not a socialist.

Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out—  
Because I was not a trade unionist.

Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—  
Because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me.

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## **THE BEST KIND OF BIGOT – HARRY TRUMAN AND HIS HATREDS**

By [Eric Fettmann](#) - July 31, 2003 |

THE most surprising thing about the discovery a few weeks back of a previously unknown private diary in which Harry Truman scribbled fiercely anti-Jewish comments is that anyone was surprised by it.

The fact is, Harry Truman’s anti-Semitism has been well-documented – and much written about – for decades. In fact, his hatred wasn’t limited to Jews: Blacks, Asian-Americans and just about every other ethnic group were targets of Truman’s private venom.

In a column four years ago, I wrote how Truman had repeatedly referred to New York as a “kike” town, complaining that of its 8 million people, “7,500,000 of ’em are of Israelitish extraction,” repeatedly referred to his business partner as “my Jew clerk” and once told the editor of this paper that “all the goddamn New York Jews” should “just shut their goddamn mouths.”

And yet numerous commentators and historians pronounced themselves “shocked” at the latest writings, in which Truman – as president in 1947 – complained that “the Jews, I find, are very, very selfish.”

William Safire, for one, declared that Truman’s anti-Semitism was “more dismaying” than the slurs Richard Nixon privately used to make about Jews in the White House. The

Anti-Defamation League, predictably, issued a press release, while Sid Zion in the Daily News wrote that Truman's recognition of the new state of Israel was obviously a political decision made against his better personal judgment.

Truman, of course, was very much a person of his times. The grandson of Missouri slave owners, he was born less than two decades after the end of the Civil War. Throughout his life, he used the n-word when referring to African-Americans in private.

In the same 1911 letter in which he proposed marriage to his future wife, Bess, Truman wrote: "Uncle Will says that the Lord made a white man from dust, a nigger from mud, then he threw up what was left and it came down a Chinaman. He does hate Chinese and Japs. So do I. It is race prejudice, I guess. But I am strongly of the belief that negroes ought to be in Africa, yellow men in Asia and white men in Europe and America."

Nor did those feelings change with age: Long after leaving the presidency, Truman publicly railed against the civil rights movement, calling Martin Luther King a "troublemaker" and declaring that if anyone tried to sit in at a store he owned, he'd gladly kick them right out.

In one memorable instance, he expressed his fear that racial intermarriage might become widespread, asking a reporter, "Would you want your daughter to marry a Negro?"

And yet it was the same Harry Truman who overruled his own State Department and pushed the cause of Zionism, recognizing Israel just moments after it was proclaimed.

Granted, partisan politics was a factor in that decision – though as Michael Cohen concludes in his 1990 book, "Truman and Israel," there was much more to it than that. Truman truly felt a personal connection to the Zionist movement.

And the same man who admitted to harboring "race prejudice" *also* did more for civil rights than any previous president: Desegregating the armed forces, naming the first blacks to the federal bench, pushing Congress to pass an anti-lynching law, and to outlaw poll taxes, strengthening the Justice Department's civil rights division and issuing an executive order instituting fair employment practices in the federal government.

And none of that could be ascribed to political expediency. On the contrary: Truman was taking an extraordinary political risk when he undertook those moves in 1948; a few months later, the South bolted from the Democratic Party – threatening Truman's re-election campaign.

Indeed, NAACP President Kweisi Mfume, in the foreword to Michael Gardner's new book, "Truman and Civil Rights," writes that Truman's "bravery and dogged determination [on civil rights] opened many doors and forever changed the course of history."

Finally, it's important to note that when it came to Zionism and civil rights, Truman acted where Franklin D. Roosevelt – an icon to both Jews and blacks – failed to do so.

FDR, as is well known, resisted pleas that he help rescue Europe's Jews from the Holocaust and once boasted that he'd learned more about Zionism from one session with Saudi Arabia's king than in all the hours he'd spent with Jewish officials.

On civil rights, FDR pointedly refused to desegregate the military, declined to confront southern senators on anti-lynching legislation and pressured black leaders to call off planned protest marches during World War II.

For all his sympathetic words to Jews and blacks, FDR failed to deliver. For all his hostile words, Truman did.

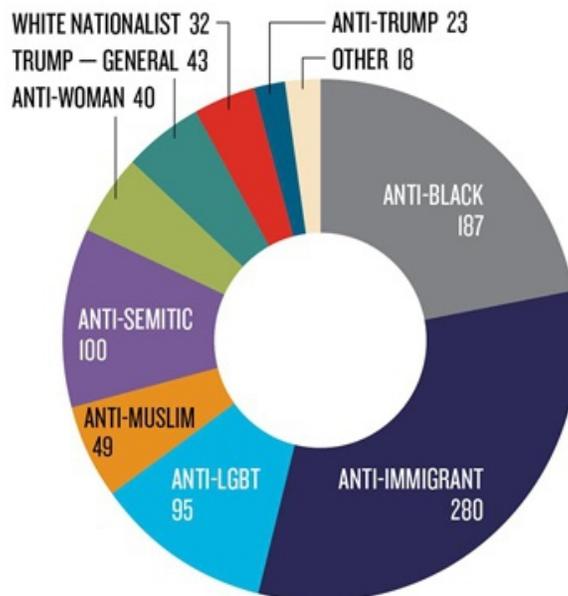
Actions speak louder than words, the old saying goes. And never more so than when it came to Harry Truman.

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Abraham Lincoln: “We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory will swell when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.”

[This is the concluding paragraph of Lincoln's first inaugural address, 4 March 1861 – to read the entire address, go to <https://www.bartleby.com/124/pres31.html>]

### HATE INCIDENT MOTIVATION



[Source of graphic: Reuters – 30 Nov 2016]