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FOR LNP | LANCASTERONLINE

## *We must speak out now for what we know is right*

**W**e keep likening it to Nazi Germany, this idea of being told not to believe what we can clearly see. We quote George Orwell. We make the idea distant, like a foreign war in which we were the heroes. Or a fictional book in which the enemy wasn't us.

But the deeper I dig into my conscience and our country's history, the more American this concept of manufactured reality becomes. Guys, I think we've been told what to see and what to believe since Plymouth Rock.

Indigenous people had sophisticated trade routes, systems of government, vibrant communities and a beautiful, meaningful culture. We arrived, saw land we wanted and skin tones that didn't match our own, called them savages, and said they needed *our* God. We justified our brutal invasion with a Christian narrative that made it more palatable for the tenderhearted among us.

We brought innocent people here in bondage. We terrorized them as they built our country, and then we bragged about how lucky they were that we, their torturers, led them to Christ.

Then there was the Trail of Tears.

Wounded Knee.  
The Tulsa massacre.  
Rosewood, Florida.  
Emmett Till.  
The Birmingham church bombing.

Jim Crow.  
George Floyd.  
And more and more and more.  
From the beginning, it seems, our country was split in two as something dark — carried from the old world to the new world — grew inside some of our Christian churches. Jesus was forgotten in favor of fear and vengeance, and now our government seems to be embracing those broken beliefs.

Back when America was thought to be great, white men with white hoods and God complexes — pastors and police officers among them — met in churches and planned evil. Outside of those churches, on sunny Southern Sundays, congregants ate barbecue and drank sweet tea while the bodies of Black neighbors hung from the trees.

While the multifaith Freedom Riders were bolstered by the hospitality and support of Black churches, other Christians raised bats and pipes against them in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1961.

We never tell our children that

part. We never teach them that during the darkest moments of our history, during the most chilling human rights assaults, a certain us-versus-them brand of Christianity was leading Americans astray. Today, these Jesus-less Christians are still pulling strings, pouring fear and persecution into communities, all while crying that they are the ones being persecuted.

They bemoan an imaginary war on Christmas while they wage a war on anything that isn't straight Christian whiteness.

And I can't help but think: What if we had gone to the source, right from the start?

What if, instead of sitting in at lunch counters, we sat on the floors of the churches that were powering it all? What if we had chanted Jesus' urgent calls to welcome the stranger and love our neighbor and demanded an end to their heresy from the start? Because the owner of the five and dime who hung signs saying who could sit at his counter was covered by the power of his church. The tithes and bribes that fund the foundations and the schools that mold the next generation of tormentors are coming from churches.

The coffers overflow in Lancaster County, thanks in part to churches with MAGA secrets and Christian nationalist beliefs.

Hate is passed down in plain sight, and we don't say a word because it wouldn't be polite. Somehow, if they're holding Bibles while waging unholy battles, wrong gets confused with right.

It's time to start speaking out for what we know is right.

Because there is another side to the story, a beautiful one: our country's legacy of standing up

to rich and powerful systems in a fight for progress. Those battles, often led by Christians themselves, birthed a beautiful American spirit that formed the heart of a country I love and want to fight for. That spirit burst from the chests of Harriet Tubman, the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, Fannie Lou Hamer, Mamie Till-Mobley, James Baldwin, Harvey Milk and Maya Angelou. And it burst from the chests of heroes whose names we didn't record: the faithful who locked arms and walked across the Edmund Petrus Bridge, the volunteers in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, the NAACP, the Congress of Racial Equality, GLAAD, the American Civil Liberties Union, the clergy members standing up to tyranny in Minneapolis and the neighbors who have stood between angry mobs and innocent families for generations.

And before all of these beacons of hope, there was Jesus. Make no mistake: His teachings live inside the actions of the heroes listed here. He was a force for truth, fairness and freedom. I imagine he weeps at the brutality carried out in his name. He didn't believe in bondage. He believed in love.

I think he would want us to own the moment we're in. The shameful days of our past are echoed in our present.

There's a reason groups such as the Independence Law Center, the Pennsylvania Family Institute and Moms for Liberty want to limit our children's access to world-widening books. There's a reason they demand an alternative telling of our history. They don't want books and history to reveal that they're the villains of the story. So they create a world in which social circles are

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tight, counting on closed minds to shield against problematic worldviews.

But what a world they're missing out on. They're being kept from the beautiful, bighearted, brave community members who labor with love to move us forward. They miss the chance to find pride in a country that has always moved forward because of a relentless love for this place and *all* the people who call it home.

For those of us carrying signs in the streets and shedding tears for lives lost in the Minneapolis snow, I think we have to start following the money and stopping its flow. It's not enough to not go to the churches that are advancing a Christian nationalist worldview; we have to stop going to their businesses, too. Because here's the truth: This is a business for them. Look at their sprawling campuses with chic cafes, stages with state-of-the-art lights and sophisticated sound systems and the absence of Jesus' spirit.

I don't think we end these waves of injustices until we address the source of what's been plaguing us since our start.

It's time to flip tables.

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