

Positives alone defeat negatives.

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“The Art of Protest”

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At the risk of sounding like the old fool that I am, rehashing my glory days, these kids today don't know how to protest. Yes, I am old campaigner. In High school, I led several walk outs. Our sits-in at the Pentagon and Capitol rotunda were memorable. The wine skin passed around helped morale.

There we were, over 300,000 attending a counter-inauguration protest on the mall. Nixon was feted on Pennsylvania Avenue. Months later I reminded Dad that we were right about him. Bella Abzug was speaking, folk singers sang. The SDS extremists had commandeered the Washington Monument and started a bonfire at its base, stacking up park benches. Suddenly, a horde of fully armored police arrived -- on foot, on motorcycle, on horseback. I touched my hat to make sure my press credentials were visible. The police decided to reclaim the monument. A pocket of extremists, waving Viet Cong flags, pretended they were at the Alamo, the rest scampered downhill. I remembered deciding the valor of retreat, especially as a huge cop, helmeted, baton held high, trailed me. In front of me was this gangly kid, all 130 pounds, waving a stick at the cop. I grabbed him, I spun him around and nearly threw him to the ground, yelling at him to get the hell out of here. Idiot.

I have little stomach for the obnoxious intolerance of the extreme right. Worse, however, is the hypocritical intolerance of the left. They are faux liberals, posers. What is the liberal tradition we honor? Human rights, open-mindedness, generosity of spirit and mind, promoting individual and social freedoms. I will challenge any individual, any group, or any system that trashes liberalism. It's why I became a professional minister. You might wish to note that the word, Protestant, begins with the word, protest. My original goal in life was to become a lawyer and politician. In my denomination, serving the people in government is the highest calling from God you can receive. But I realized that the law can prevent you from lynching neighbor but cannot help you love your neighbor. That's real Christianity, not the idolatrous, nationalistic, demonic kind rampant today. You can read a bible for free. Go to church. Be careful though, Jesus' radical gospel is catching.

At one rally I got booed for praying for Nixon. My background in the art of protest was schooled by my church, the sermons of Martin Luther King, Jr., and by my college work with the American Friends Service Committee. Educate, don't hate. Agitate, don't alienate. Whenever you resort to violence, you've already failed. King preached: you protest, creatively and nonviolently, for the health of the land. Positives alone defeat negatives.

In college we provided information to counter the war criminal tiger cages the United States built to torture North Vietnamese prisoners. We promoted boycotts in support of Cesar Chavez and the farmworkers. We lobbied Congress; my highlight was debating Congressman Ed Koch, who took me to school. My denomination for decades has defended the rights of the Palestinians against the forced expulsion from their land and homes. Back then, many Palestinians were Presbyterian. We offered solutions. Where were you Johnny-come-lately's then? When the police arrived to patrol our High school hallways due to surrounding race riots, I gained a seat on the school board. Teachers gathered together black and white students to talk. A friend, the spokesperson for the Black students, led the first meeting. He said something that prompted me to support him by quoting Malcolm X. Another

member of the Black students began to berate me for daring to quote Malcolm X. My friend interrupted: "He's the only one in this room who's read Malcolm's autobiography!"

You want to be a real radical about the Gaza war – go help Chef Andres. Frankly, the protests in Israel about freeing the hostages have it all wrong. The shouts should be: "let my people go." Frankly, the shouts from naïve university students favoring Hamas should remember that if Hamas ever gets in charge, you're first to be raped. You also might want to sing along to the gospel of John: "You say you want a revolution? Well, you know, We all want to change the world. You tell me that it's evolution, Well, you know, We all want to change the world. But when you talk about destruction, Don't you know that you can count me out? You tell me it's the institution? Well, you know, You'd better free your mind instead."