1989 Charles Stuart/I have a dream speech by Angela Bowen

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GOOD MORNING. TAKE A LOOK AT THIS BOOK. THIS IS THE PULITZER PRIZE WINNING BOOK ON MARTIN LUTHER KING AND ON THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT. "PARTING THE WATERS" BY TAYLOR BRANCH. IT TOOK HIM 15 YEARS TO DO AND IT IS ABSOLUTELY WONDERFUL. FABULOUS. IT MAKES REAL PEOPLE OUT OF MARTIN, HIS PARENTS, ROSA PARKS AND WORKERS IN THE MOVEMENT IN A WAY I'VE NEVER SEEN DONE BEFORE. IF YOU BUY ONE BOOK THIS YEAR, LET IT BE THIS ONE.

I WANT TO START BY SAYING A FEW WORDS ABOUT THE CHARLES STUART CASE – BOSTON – RACISM – CYNICISM – GULLIBILITY – ASSUMPTIONS

THE POSSIBILITIES OF APPROACH TO THIS STORY ARE MIND-BOGGLING IN NUMBER. IT'S AN ONGOING UNRAVELING OF A MYSTERY. THE DETAILS WILL MOST LIKELY NEVER BE KNOWN IN THEIR ENTIRETY. THE COMPLEXITIES OF THE STORY CAN AND WILL KEEP REPORTERS, TALK SHOW HOSTS, WRITERS, ACTORS PRODUCERS AND DIRECTORS BUSY FOR SOME YEARS TO COME.

ALREADY DOZENS OF BOOK PROPOSALS HAVE BEEN SUBMITTED TO PUBLISHERS; ONE PUBLISHER IN BOSTON HAD 16 TWO DAYS AGO. ONE PUBLISHER. AND AS HE SAID, IF HE HAD ..........

THE MISSION HILL SECTION OF ROXBURY IS CLAIMING VINDICATION; BLACK COMMUNITY LEADERS ARE DEMANDING AN APOLOGY AND A REVIEW BOARD; THE FAMILY WANTS REPARATIONS; THE POLICE DEPT. AND MAYOR ARE DEFENSIVE; CAROL STUART'S FAMILY IS DEVASTATED; CHARLES STUART'S FAMILY IS SILENT; THE BLACK COMMUNITY IS ANGRY; THE WHITE COMMUNITY FEELS GUILTY; AND EVERYBODY FEELS DUPED.

OH, DO WE NEED A LEADER NOW. OH, FOR A MARTIN LUTHER KING TO STEP IN AND MAKE US ALL KNOW THE RIGHT THING TO DO. IT WAS A LOT SIMPLER BACK WHEN WE COULD MARCH FOR VOTING RIGHTS, BOYCOTT FOR THE RIGHT TO UNSEGREGATED SEATING ON BUSES OR AT LUNCH COUNTERS, SUE FOR THE RIGHT TO INTEGRATED SCHOOLING. DANGEROUS, YES, BUT SIMPLER TO UNDERSTAND: BLACK AND WHITE TOGETHER, WE WOULDN'T BE MOVED.

BUT WE'RE IN DIFFERENT TIMES NOW. WE'RE IN FAR MORE CYNICAL TIMES. TIMES OF ENTRENCHMENT. THOSE WHO THOUGHT THAT MOVING A NATION TO JUSTICE BY APPEALING TO ITS BETTER SIDE HAVE FOUND THAT IT TAKES PEELING AND PEELING AND PEELING BACK LAYERS TO GET TO THE CORE OF A NATION, AND THEN YOU MIGHT JUST HAVE TO RECOGNIZE THAT THERE'S NOTHING BUT PURE SELF-INTEREST AT THE HEART. OR INDIFFERENCE. OR APATHY. AND FEAR. ALWAYS FEAR.

BUT WHAT IS RACISM? RACISM IS THE OPPRESSION OF ONE RACE, A MINORITY, PREJUDICED RACIST IS INCORRECT. WHITE PEOPLE HOLD THE POWER IN THIS COUNTRY. SO BLACK PEOPLE CAN’T BE RACIST TOWARD WHITES. THEY CAN BE, AND OFTEN ARE, PREJUDICED. INSTITUTIONALIZED RACISM IS BUILT INTO THE SYSTEM. AND IT’S THAT INSTITUTIONALIZED RACISM THAT THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT IS BUSILY TRYING TO ROOT OUT OF THE SYSTEM. BECAUSE WHEN PREJUDICED PEOPLE BUILD A SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT, THEY LEAVE OUT PEOPLE WHO ARE NOT LIKE THEMSELVES. BUT ON A PERSONAL AND BASIC LEVEL, RACISM IS THE TERROR OF CONFRONTING DIFFERENCE, ACKNOWLEDGING IT, GRAPPLING WITH AND MOVING BEYOND IT. THAT BOTTOM LINE FEAR OF DIFFERENCE IS WHAT FUELS RACISM. AND FEAR OF DIFFERENCE COMES FROM IGNORANCE. AND THERE’S A WAY AROUND THAT. IT’S CALLED EDUCATION.

I DON’T MEAN BUSING THOUSANDS UPON THOUSANDS OF WHITE CHILDREN AND CHILDREN OF COLOR BACK AND FORTH ACROSS A CITY SO THEY CAN SIT ON OPPOSITE SIDES OF THE CAFETERIA AND CLASSROOM, HANG OUT ONLY WITH THEIR OWN GROUP, THEN GO HOME, WITH EVERYONE PRETENDING THAT AN INTEGRATED EDUCATION TOOK PLACE. I MEAN USING INNOVATIVE KINDS OF CROSS-CULTURAL EDUCATION TO TEACH KIDS ABOUT ONE ANOTHER. I MEAN COMMUNITIES LIKE BOSTON USING AN OCCASION LIKE THIS TO DO SOMETHING MORE CONSTRUCTIVE THAN STANDING AROUND YELLING AT ONE ANOTHER. I MEAN USING AGENCIES LIKE THE MULTICULTURAL PROJECT FOR COMMUNICATION AND EDUCATION TO COME INTO OUR SCHOOLS, WORKPLACES, PLACES OF WORSHIP AND TEACHING US HOW TO RECOGNIZE AND DO SOMETHING ABOUT THE RACISM WITHIN. AND THE SEXISM, THE AGEISM, THE HOMOPHOBIA, THE ABLEBODIEDISM. FEAR OF DIFFERENCE IN A COUNTRY LIKE OURS MAKES NO SENSE.

PEOPLE TRAVEL HALF A WORLD AWAY TO EXPERIENCE DIFFERENCE. AND WE HAVE SO MUCH TO TEACH ONE ANOTHER RIGHT HERE IN OUR OWN COUNTRY, WE HAVE SUCH DIVERSITY TO ENJOY IF ONLY WE DIDN’T SPEND SO MUCH TIME BASHING ONE ANOTHER. BLACK COMEDIAN ARSENIO HALL HAS A JOKE WHERE HE SAYS THAT WHITES IN THIS COUNTRY BEAT UP ON BLACKS, WHITE SOUTH AFRICANS BEAT UP ON BLACK SOUTH AFRICANS, ISRAELIES BEAT UP ON PALESTINIANS, AND IN A COUNTRY LIKE IRELAND WHERE THEY ALL LOOK ALIKE? WELL, THEY JUST IMPROVISE. OF COURSE, HE COULD HAVE USED ALMOST ANY COUNTRY BESIDES IRELAND. INDIA. SEVERAL AFRICAN COUNTRIES. ON AND ON. AND ALL IT MEANS IS THAT WE REFUSE TO LOOK BEYOND THE SURFACE TO FIND ONE ANOTHER. IT’S TOO EASY FOR YOU TO CALL ME A NIGGTER, AND ME TO CALL SOMEBODY ELSE WHITEBREAD, AND THEM TO CALL THE NEXT PERSON A FAGGOT, AND HIM TO CALL ANOTHER WOMAN A BITCH, AND HER TO CALL ANOTHER PERSON AN OLD BAG. ETC. BECAUSE ONCE WE’VE DONE THAT, WE CAN DUST OFF OUR HANDS AND MOVE ALONG WITHOUT EVER SEEING BEYOND THOSE AWFUL EPITHEThS AND LABELS.

THE ASSUMPTIONS WE MAKE ABOUT ONE ANOTHER ARE FROM IGNORANCE. I REMEMBER ONE TIME I WENT TO PICK UP SOMETHING FROM A WOMAN’S OFFICE ...

NOT ONLY WAS SHE IGNORANT ENOUGH TO THINK A BLACK PERSON WOulDN’T KNOW OR APPRECIATE OPERA, SHE WAS IGNORANT ENOUGH TO THINK IT WAS O.K. TO SAY THAT TO ME.
I LEARNED TO APPRECIATE OPERA FROM MY OLDER SISTER, THE SAME SISTER WHO WOULD NEVER EAT WATERMELON BECAUSE THAT’S WHAT WHITE PEOPLE THOUGHT ALL COLORED PEOPLE ATE. SHE NEVER COULD DISCOVER WHETHER SHE LIKED IT BECAUSE SHE WAS SO OFFENDED AT THE SIGHT OF BLACK PEOPLE EATING IT. WE COULD NEVER CONVINCE HER THAT THE WATERMELON INDUSTRY WOULD GO UNDER IF THEY ONLY SOLD IT TO BLACK FOLKS. SHE NEVER ATE FRIED CHICKEN EITHER. I ALWAYS FELT SAD ABOUT THAT, BUT NEVER KNEW WHY OR WHAT TO NAME IT. OF COURSE THEY DIDN’T HAVE A NAME FOR IT AT THE TIME, BUT NOW THEY DO. IT’S CALLED INTERNALIZED RACISM.

I’VE NEVER FORGOTTEN AN INCIDENT THAT HAPPENED WHEN I WAS ABOUT 6. MY AUNT HAD COME TO VISIT AND AS SHE ENTERED OUR APARTMENT, A FRIEND OF MY MOTHER’S WAS LEAVING, A WHITE WOMAN, IRISH CATHOLIC, WORKING CLASS. AND MY AUNT SAID, "WHY DO YOU LET PEOPLE LIKE THAT IN YOUR HOUSE AROUND THE CHILDREN?" MY MOTHER SAID, "WHAT’S THE MATTER WITH HER?" AND MY AUNT SAID, "THAT’S WHY YOU’LL NEVER GET ANYWHERE, YOU JUST PICK UP WITH ANY OLD PIECE OF WHITE TRASH." AND MY MOM SAID, "BLANCHE ISN’T TRASH. SHE’S A FINE FRIEND. SHE’S WHITE, BUT SHE’S NO TRASH." I NEVER FORGOT THAT. AND A YOUNG MAN I WAS IN A MEETING WITH JUST THIS PAST SUNDAY SAID SOMETHING I LIKED A LOT. I HAD DESCRIBED AN INCIDENT TO THE GROUP, IN WHICH 3 POLICEMEN HAD JUMPED ON THE GREEN LINE OF THE T ON FRIDAY AND PRACTICALLY ATTACKED A BLACK MAN STANDING NEXT TO ME BECAUSE HE HAD ON A BASEBALL CAP AND A LEATHER JACKET. OF COURSE HE ALSO HAD A BRIEFCASE, WAS ABOUT 35 AND WAS JUST COMING FROM WORK, BUT THAT WAS NEITHER HERE NOR THERE AS FAR AS THEY WERE CONCERNED. AND AFTER I FINISHED TALKING, THIS YOUNG WHITE MAN SAID, "WE JUDGE EACH OTHER ON SUCH EXTERNALS THAT BEFORE WE’VE EVER EXCHANGED A WORD, A WHOLE CONVERSATION HAS TAKEN PLACE."

NOW WE WILL NO DOUBT FOLLOW THIS STUART STORY, GOSSIP ABOUT IT, ANALYZE IT, READ THE ARTICLES AND BOOKS, SEE THE T.V. VERSION AND THE MOVIE. BUT IF WE COULD USE IT FOR SELF-EXAMINATION, AS A LIFELONG LESSON THAT WE SHOULD NEVER ACCEPT SURFACE FOR TRUTH, THE EPISODE MIGHT GLEAM SOMETHING THAT WILL ADVANCE US A TINY BIT ON THE EVOLUTIONARY SCALE.

I HAVE A DREAM THAT THIS CITY WILL APPEAL TO THE GOVERNOR TO DECLARE THE GREATER BOSTON AREA A RACIAL DISASTER AREA AND APPLY FOR FEDERAL FUNDS TO CLEAN UP THE MINDS AND HEARTS OF OUR CITIZENS. I HAVE A DREAM THAT THE FAMOUS CHEF JULIA CHILDS AND THE FAMOUS LAWYER LAWRENCE TRIBE AND THE REST OF THE PEOPLE IN THE EXCLUSIVE BRATTLE STREET AREA OF CAMBRIDGE WILL LOOK INTO THEIR HEARTS AND EXAMINE THE TRUE REASON THEY WORKED TO DRIVE A BLACK PRIVATE DAY SCHOOL OUT OF THEIR AREA. I HAVE A DREAM THAT THEY WILL VOW NEVER TO TREAT BLACK CHILDREN IN SUCH AN UGLY FASHION AGAIN.

LET ME SAY JUST A FEW WORDS ABOUT SOME OF THESE MOVEMENTS. PEOPLE LIKE RONALD REAGAN LIKE TO TALK ABOUT SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS PLEADING THEIR CAUSE, OR AS HE LIKED TO SAY TRYING TO BULLY HIM, AND DECLARING HE WASN’T GOING TO BE BULLIED. OF COURSE, WE KNOW WHEN WE SEE HOW WE’LL BE BAILING OUT THE SAVINGS AND LOAN INDUSTRY FOR YEARS TO COME TO THE TUNE OF BILLIONS, WHO THE SPECIAL INTEREST FOLKS REALLY ARE. WE KNOW WHEN WE SEE WHO LOOTED THE DEPT. OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT WHO THE SPECIAL INTERESTS ARE. YOU CAN ONLY FOOL THE PEOPLE FOR SO LONG.

WHEN THE ANTI-WAR MOVEMENT BEGAN AGAINST VIETNAM I REMEMBER HEARING THOSE SAME WORDS FROM JOHNSON. HE WASN’T GOING TO BE BULLIED. NIXON WASN’T GOING TO BE BULLIED. BUT THE PEOPLE SPOKE. I WAS LIVING IN NEW HAVEN AT THE TIME …..

AND WHEN THE WOMEN’S MOVEMENT BEGAN, I REMEMBER THE LAUGHTER AND DERISION …. BUT WORDS LIKE SEXISM ARE NOW A PART OF OUR VOCABULARY

AND I REMEMBER THE TINY LITTLE MEETINGS OF 4, 5 AND 6 PEOPLE THAT USED TO TAKE PLACE ABOUT APARtheid, SOME OF THEM IN MY DANCE CENTER BECAUSE

AND AFTER YEARS OF ORGANIZING, THOUSANDS OF HIDDEN LITTLE GROUPS OF GAYS AND LESBIANS EXPLODED INTO A MOVEMENT THAT WAS ABLE TO PUT 600,000 PEOPLE IN WASHINGTON IN 1987

THE EMPOWERMENT OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IS THE LATEST GOOD NEWS FOR THE WORLD.

THE MESSAGE FROM ALL THESE GROUPS IS QUITE SIMPLE, REALLY. GIVING ME MY RIGHTS DOESN’T THREATEN YOURS. THE MESSAGE IS: GET REAL. GET SECURE WITHIN YOURSELF AND STOP FEELING THAT YOU DESERVE MORE THAN ANYONE ELSE ON THE FACE OF THE EARTH. IF PEOPLE ARE TEACHING YOU THAT YOU DO, DON’T LISTEN. THINK FOR YOURSELF. OWN YOUR OWN BRAIN. AND USE IT. PERIOD. EVERYONE WHO LIVES IN THIS WORLD HAS RIGHTS. AND THAT’S WHAT MOVEMENTS ARE ALL ABOUT. EVERYONE’S A SPECIAL INTEREST. BECAUSE EVERYONE’S JUST AS SPECIAL AS EVERYONE ELSE.

SO I HAVE A DREAM THAT ALL OF US WILL LEARN TO LOOK WITHIN AND WORK ON OURSELVES SO THAT WE TREAT ONE ANOTHER EXACTLY AS WE WOULD LIKE TO BE TREATED. AND I WORK, AND LAUGH, AND PLAY WITH PEOPLE WHO SHARE THE SAME DREAMS. AND WE JUST SPEND OUR LIVES THAT WAY, BECAUSE WE KNOW OUR DREAMS WILL COME TRUE EVENTUALLY. IF NOT IN OUR LIFETIMES, IN OUR CHILDREN’S. IF NOT IN THEIRS, THEN IN THEIR CHILDREN’S. IF THERE’S ENOUGH OF US. AND I THINK THERE ARE. BECAUSE WE’RE GROWING INTO MORE
AWARENESS ALL THE TIME.