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Subject: FW: One Person's Response to Communal Fear 7.6.20
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From: Morris Allen <mojo210al@icloud.com>
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Subject: One Person's Response to Communal Fear 7.6.20

WAGON WHEEL CENSUS 8 Walkers 3 Cars 2 Runners 1 Truck 1 Bicyclist

At some point when I was in high school in the early 1970's, my father(zl) at dinner discussed an interesting situation at the University of Nebraska. It seemed that the University was not in compliance at their Ag School as it related to diversity in the faculty. They had no person of color in the Ag school and thus did not meet the Department of Education's goal. My father went on to say that the number of African American's with PhD's in agronomy or a related field at the time was so small that the Department of Education waived the penalty that it would otherwise impose. It was an example, at the time, of some sort of conviction without consequences. Impossible to fix, but a startling realization of the problem that existed.

Yesterday, after finishing a wonderful but very grueling walk on Pike Island (the heat and humidity were horrible), Phyllis and I returned to our car and heard the following program. In discussing the absence of Black therapists inside this country, the following statistics were shared. Approximately 4% of all PhD psychologists in America are Black and a little over 2% of all Psychiatrists are Black. In the country in which we live, progress in so many fields has been slow and almost non-existent. But unlike the 1970's, we can't live anymore with being convicted and suffering no consequences. I wondered after hearing those numbers how it was possible that in the nearly 50 years since the University of Nebraska was cited but not penalized for not having an African American on its Ag faculty, that this country still operates with the ease of a de facto hierarchy of access to power and opportunity. And then I came home and read the New York Times Magazine.

As many of you know, I am not a big fan of the NYT's reporting biases. But for two weeks in a row, "opinion" pieces in the Sunday paper have been stunning in their brutal honesty and imagery. Yesterday, Isabel Wilkerson's magazine article "America's Enduring Racial Caste System" is must reading for any person trying to understand America historically and certainly America since the passage of the Civil Rights laws of the 1960's. She offers the following proposition—that throughout history three caste systems have stood out—the "millenniums-long caste system of India"; the "officially vanquished caste system of Nazi Germany"; and the "shape-shifting, unspoken, race-based caste pyramid in the United States." In the article that follows, that should be the basis of a national conversation undertaken by anyone seriously laying claim to be a leader of this country, she lays out the particulars of this caste system in a manner that is both filled with pathos and dispassionate scholarship. It will be one of the articles and teachings that will shape my

understanding of America and the work that must occur to address the systemic structures in place that allow for this caste system to survive. A Pulitzer Prize winner for her book [The Warmth of Other Suns](#), (which I admit I could not get through in its entirety—more a comment about my ability to sustain attention than her ability to weave a powerful telling), I cannot wait to read the book around which this article is developed. That book, entitled [Caste: The Origins of our Discontent](#), will only further deepen all of our need to address the story of our founding and our continued use of a caste system to define power and access to it.

While walking [this morning](#) and reflecting on this article—it is one that having read, it is difficult to let go of this newfound frame around which to understand the America struggle with race—I found myself particularly focused on one section of the article itself. In it, she brings forth the desire to be included inside the “White Tent.” The two episodes she describes are painful but illuminating. The desire to be included inside the White Tent, is the grabbing of the golden ring on a carousel. If snag it, I am in, if I fail to grab onto it, I am destined to remain going round and round with little opportunity to change my standing in the world. For me, as a Jew, I have always wondered what category to mark on the census form. For me, the term white implies all sorts of things that do apply to my understanding of self. And yet in a world that demands response, it comes the closest but not the most complete answer for me. I live with the understanding that throughout most of my people’s history, a “religious caste” system was in place that limited opportunity for my ancestors in place after place. It wasn’t just in Nazi Germany, rather that was the unfortunate culmination of the use of that caste system that had been in place for generations. And while we defeated the aryanic mentality of the Nazi regime, crimes against Jews for simply being Jewish remain a constant for my people to this day. But in the America binary caste system, for many—but not all Jews—our whiteness allows us access. For those Jews of Color, they understand that it is not my Jewishness that gives me access—it is my “color” that gives me cover. Were I in a position of implementing any policy discussions today—whether in a congregation or a community—this article would form the basis of my discussion. For it challenges not only us as Jews living here in America and the role we are to play in healing the divides inside our country, but it should serve as the basis for an opening discussion of what it means to be “in charge” of a country’s narrative inside the nation-state of the Jewish people. While not a one-to-one correlation, Israel still cannot wait 244 years for the Isabel Wilkerson of the future to emerge and address its founding flaws in hopes of fixing them. The elimination of caste systems is the structural issue of our day. Morris

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