

THE BYSTANDER —★—

Who is the Enemy?

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Since last November, I've been feeling like a naughty child getting a scolding. There's a man on my TV yelling at me. I haven't done anything wrong to this man who would be old enough to be my father if I was a rebellious teenager or a misbehaving second grader, which I'm not. He's only about five years older than me, and I am guilty of nothing except being repulsed by everything he says, does, stands for, and stands with. It's as if he can read my mind.

I turn on the TV and even when I mute the volume, see a grouchy man in a suit, yelling because people disagree with him. What else *can* you experience besides childhood angst, when you got yelled at for petty offenses or (even worse) talking back to your dad or (the worst) daring to question his politics or religion? He is calling some of us "the enemy," and even though I'm not committing any crime, the word *enemy* feels like a declaration of war against certain Americans. Am I one of those people? From his definition, I feel like I am, as well as the editors at the Martinsburg *Journal*, since Associated Press articles are routinely re-printed here that could be classified as "Fake News." Or is the real "enemy" the person who uses the word *enemy* against citizens simply for exercising their First Amendment Rights?

This time, he's yelling at all of us. Even the ones who supported him know he's yelling at ALL of us. We react much the same as children being reprimanded: some act out, some curry favor, some retreat, some tune it out, using the fight-or-flight response that our sympathetic nervous systems gave us to protect ourselves from danger. And this is how censorship starts; it doesn't need to be external. It starts from observing what happens to others when they disagree with the man on TV, then get yelled at, and then get punished. It's contagious. You sense it can happen to you, too.

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This is how repression starts; the suggestions, inferences, accusations, fear, the anxiety, the need to start whispering your opinions: feeling vulnerable even in the privacy of your own home, in front of your own TV. This is how suppression starts; being publically emasculated, even if you're a woman. Being ridiculed for expressing yourself, for standing up for yourself. Adapting your public face to achieve a private comfort level, even if it means sacrificing your individuality.

This is how tyranny succeeds: intimidate adults so they feel like innocent children being yelled at, living in fear of the wrath of the strict authority figure, fatigued by running from the spanking and the scolding. And this is how societies achieve conformity: by implanting thought, contorting thought, dictating thought, penalizing thought, incarcerating thought, killing thought.

It starts with the Man yelling at us on the TV, posturing like a dictatorial father, demeaning us by blaming our rebellious resistance on misguided, naïve minds that can't possibly understand his truth, and therefore are Bad, Sad, and the Enemy of the People. We're being treated like naughty children, by a power-hungry parent who wants to rule our hearts and minds, not just rule the country.