

## WHERE IS THAT MAGNIFICENT MAMA WHEN WE NEED HER?

by  
Dr. Barry Austin Goodfield

Much of my life I have been making my living dealing with human emotions. I have attended riots on behalf of the government to give feedback about the causes and solutions to the conflict I witnessed. I have worked for governments and have debriefed individuals who have risked their lives in combat. As a psychotherapist I have seen and heard the stories of violence caused by misunderstanding and perceived injustice. In fact you could say I have become an expert.

In 1984 I was invited by the Tunisian President, Habib Bourguiba and his government to be the Keynote Speaker on the subject of violence and how it should be handled, by individuals and government alike.

Regardless of your viewing habits — FOX News or CNN — it's virtually impossible to watch an hour of reporting about today's events without witnessing death, destruction, and "the consequence of man's inhumanity to man" as Robert Burns called it in his pome *Man was made to mourn*.

It seems we simply can't get away from it. After decades of dealing with this issue a solid truth that is clear to me, "**Violence is a communication about a lack of communication.**" I have uttered these words since they first became obvious to me many years ago.

With all the misunderstanding, miscommunication, distress, and dislike is our life destined to see this situation getting worse? Or can it simply be explained by the 24/7 news cycle always looking for grits — the more provocative and violence the greater the chance that somebody will want to broadcast the event to the world.

Inferences and judgments often supersede the need for accuracy and information about cause and deeper causality. On some level it doesn't seem that we really want to know why. We simply want to watch the event that most of the time if not videotaped by a news crew is certainly captured on someone's phone.

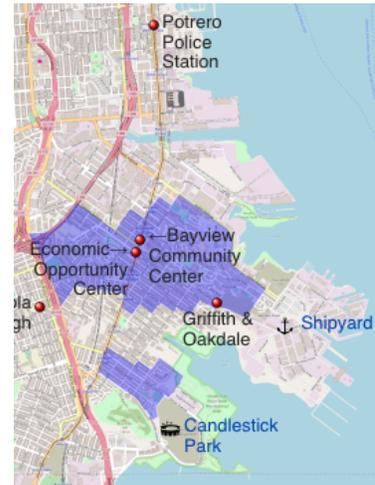
To the extent that this is true, it is both easy and natural to explain why the initial impression is skewered, by the "fog of war," and the need to be first on the scene with a comprehensive explanation of the events unfolding in front of us.

When a television camera is pushed into an observer's face and they asked, "What just took place? What is your name and what did you see?"

In most all cases these individuals are not asked about the skills as observer that they have. Nor are they asked if they have any bias. These important questions are usually left out of the initial interview.

Crisis often times limits the accuracy of our perception of any event for almost everybody. The rise and fall of a young civil rights leader comes to mind as a good example. During the racial riots in Hunters Point in San Francisco Bay Area in 1966, this event unfolded right in front of my eyes.

I was a personal observer for Sargent Shriver who was then Head of the Office of Economic Opportunity. Racial tensions were high in the Bay Area as they were nationwide.



When a riot broke out I went to the location presented my credentials and was reluctantly authorized to make official observations on behalf of the US government.

As I walked around I ran across a news crew searching for a story.

I heard a colorful string of obscenities being shouted at a number of police officers standing at parade rest waiting for direction. Rigid and controlled the police suffered the insults with little response.

As the shouting continued and the foul language escalated the police stood ready waiting for the teenagers words to escalate into violence. By this time the crowd had grown and soon a hungry news crew spotted the action. They quickly push their way through the crowd and then something miraculously happen.

The threatening remarks, sounds of breaking glass and police sirens in the distance made a perfect backdrop for the rants and raving of this young foul mouth kid as he flailed his arms and waves his hands at the police a few feet away.

The moment the television lights lit up the dark skies the metamorphosis took place. Gone were the remarks about the police and everybody else that this young boy hated. The foul language dropped like a rock.

The crowd that by this time had swollen and gathered around to listen to his insults all of a sudden saw him change as he stared straight into the camera. I'll never forget his next words as he seized the moment, "WE DEMAND ....." This was immediately followed by

faulty logic, misperceptions, innuendos and poor grammar as the new civil rights leader emerged as a spokesman for the crowd gathered behind him.

The camera panned the stern line of police and then shifted to the young man who by then had his feet spread apart as he tried to explain the injustice suffered by those living near the shipyards in the houses build for workers during World War II, poverty and unemployment.

He spoke long and loud enough to attract another news crew not wanting to miss out as more and more people gathered. People pushed in so they could hear the truth spoken by this young emerging leader. I could hear people nearby asking, “Who is he? Who does he represent?” The crowd removed tighter in around him as he spoke.

He continued to shut the hardships of living in poverty. Now with the police lined up in front of him he occasionally looked over his shoulder at his supporters as they listen to his truth now being broadcast throughout the San Francisco Bay Area and maybe nationwide.

Once again during this dangerous and surprising evening something else happened. Through the crowd came a middle-aged woman clearly on a mission. She brushed by me like she did everybody else, her eyes clearly fixed on the center of attention — the young new civil rights spokesman.

Her arm and hand shot out as fast, her voice rose above her sons outcry and shouted “Willy, you stop this nonsense and you stop it right now! You have school tomorrow and homework to finish tonight!”

Mother firmly gripping his left ear as she led him quickly and firmly, unabashedly through the surprised crowd. It just took a few moments for the police to march away and the crowd to disperse. The TV lights shut off, for those gathered it was over.

Where is that wise wonderful, clear thinking, courageous woman today when we need her so much? What did she do that was so special? The answer is simple — nothing and everything! She simply saw her son staying up beyond his bedtime when school was the next day. He knew the rules and he simply chose to ignore them. To her that simply was not acceptable .

She did not care about his rants in front of television cameras, or the crowd fixated on his, hard to follow, rhetoric. She cared about her household rules and the importance of his education. She clearly wasn't a mama you want to mess with!

I have often thought about her as I went around the world professionally sticking my nose into other peoples business. To me she displayed two things — **courage and common sense.**

Can the antidote to our divisiveness and bloodlust towards those who sees the world different from we do be as simple as all that?

Is anger and a desire for retribution part of the problem we're facing today with all of violence and polarization we see in our country and around the world?

One of the things I've learned over the years as a clinician is that there are three things at the heart most of all human problems, **powerlessness, injustice, and loss.**

The mama I saw was uninterested in how her actions might disrupt the words and the roar of the crowd. She was not going to be powerless moreover, she was not going to except his unacceptable behavior. She knew what was right and she was going to standup, speak out, grab an ear and get her a little boy back to the books after all. School was tomorrow.

If we're going to find communication in our crisis we first must be open to it. We must be clear about what we will accept and not accept. We must be willing to stand up in a civilized way without name calling.

It's not about the Senate, Congress, or Governor's Office. It is about the genuine shortage of **courage and common sense.**

What we need to do is to find and elect a woman or even a man, with that clarity and courage to pushed her/his way through the crowd of the pedantic petty people and politicians espousing hateful rhetoric that divides our country.

Somebody needs to be pulled through the crowd by the ear and be reminded that there are really important things to do. They certainly are more important than the hot air, hyperbole words we hear everyday masquerade as truth. The question seems to me, shall we pull together or be pulled apart?

Ref.: Fog of war <https://bit.ly/20cDp01>

Hunters Point Social Uprising <https://bit.ly/2SnWS1p>

Robert Burns *Man was made to mourn* <https://www.bartleby.com/6/54.html>



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