

Republican Perspective

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Crime and Punishment at the Air Force Academy

You probably heard of the recent hate crime crisis at the Air Force Academy Prep School. Some racist cadet wrote hateful messages on the whiteboards outside the dorm rooms of five African-American cadets.

I say “hate crime” because that’s how it was reported in the media. Of course writing a message, however hateful, on an erasable board is not a crime in the U.S., although it might be a crime in some other Western countries (e.g. England, Germany, Australia, etc.) that do not have robust free speech protections comparable to our First Amendment. But the written messages were racist, hateful and, although not a crime, certainly a violation of the Air Force Academy’s rules.

The Prep School is for students who are on-track to enter the Academy but need a bit more development and polishing before admission. The Prep School is on the same campus as the Academy and under the same superintendent, Lt. Gen. Jay Silveria.

Silveria wasted no time in reacting to the crisis. He assembled all 4,000 Academy and Prep School cadets and he gave them a collective butt chewing. Referring to the offensive messages, he said:

If you’re outraged by those words, then you’re in the right place. That kind of behavior has no place at the Prep School.

If you demean someone in any way, then you need to get out. And if you can’t treat someone from another race or different color skin with dignity and respect, then you need to get out.

The lashing Silveria gave his cadets received universal praise in the press. For example, an editorial in The Washington Post was titled “Too bad Trump can’t emulate the military when it comes to matters of race.” The article included this: “Lt. Gen. Jay Silveria did naturally what Trump is incapable of doing. The Air Force Academy superintendent answered the hate in his ranks immediately, head-on, and with a moral clarity nonexistent in the Oval Office.”

The New York Times and an assortment of other publications and political figures across the political spectrum, including Sen. John McCain and former Vice President Joe Biden, joined in the hosannas heaped upon Silveria.

Denouncing the hate crime, applauding the Academy superintendent, while simultaneously taking a gratuitous shot at President Trump---that seems like pretty safe ground. A trifecta for virtue signalers.

The wisdom of Phaedrus---“things are not always as they seem”--- would have well served the Academy superintendent, the press, the politicians, and others who leapt aboard the cadets-are-racist bandwagon.

As it turns out, the racist messages on the whiteboards of the Black cadets were in fact written by one of the alleged victims---one of the five Black cadets who were targeted by the racist messages. That cadet has confessed to the hoax and is no longer at the Academy---allowed to slink away, name withheld to protect the guilty.

If this turn of events comes as news to you, it’s because it was much less enthusiastically reported in the media and received little attention from those who had boldly commented when racism apparently ran rampant just a few days before.

Whenever a hate crime is discovered to be a hoax, we are assured by experts that hate crime hoaxes are extremely rare. A National Review article disagrees, saying this:

Fake hate crimes...are by this point so familiar that they are practically a cliché. When a Muslim woman...was attacked and had her hijab ripped off, two things happened: One, the Left insisted that this announced the coming wave of pogroms against Muslims in the Age of Trump; two, people who follow this sort of thing began betting how quickly she'd be exposed as a fraud. It did not take long.

The National Review article goes on to list several hoaxes. And if you Google “fake hate crimes” you’ll find enough examples to keep you busy reading for a good while. One web site maintains a database (though it’s always lagging and incomplete) of hundreds of such hoaxes: www.fakehatecrimes.org. There probably are other such lists.

Had the superintendent waited just a few days for the results of the Academy’s own investigation, he would have known who was responsible. He could then have spared his corps of cadets the unfairness and indignity of being berated for a supposed evil of which they were totally innocent. And he could have spared himself the embarrassment of having lobbed an ICBM at the wrong target.

The superintendent offered not so much as an “oops” for fragging his own cadets. He offered instead this ludicrous declaration to justify his action: “Regardless of the circumstances under which those [racist] words were written, they were written, and that deserved to be addressed.”

Really? Addressed with whom? Well, he did address it. He chewed out the entire corps of cadets, who had absolutely nothing to do with it.