



FALSE EQUIVALENCY AND RACE: SOME PROBLEMS WITH ARTISTIC AND CULTURAL APPROPRIATION

Jeremy Hockett

<https://medium.com/@jeremyhockett/false-equivalency-and-race-some-problems-with-artistic-appropriation-or-happy-black-history-3c73ca395b9d#.52fo8gjjq>

BETSY DEVOS PREVENTED FROM ENTERING A PUBLIC SCHOOL IN WASHINGTON DC

Betsy DeVos visiting a public school in Washington D.C. in February, 2017. She was turned away (temporarily) by a small group of protestors, some of whom were teachers and parents at the school.



Protesters gather outside Jefferson Middle School in Washington, where Education Secretary Betsy DeVos paid her first visit as education secretary.

“TRYING TO TRASH BETSY DEVOS”, GLENN MCCOY, FEBRUARY 13, 2017



The actions by those seen in the video prompted political cartoonist [Glenn McCoy](#) to create the above [image](#).

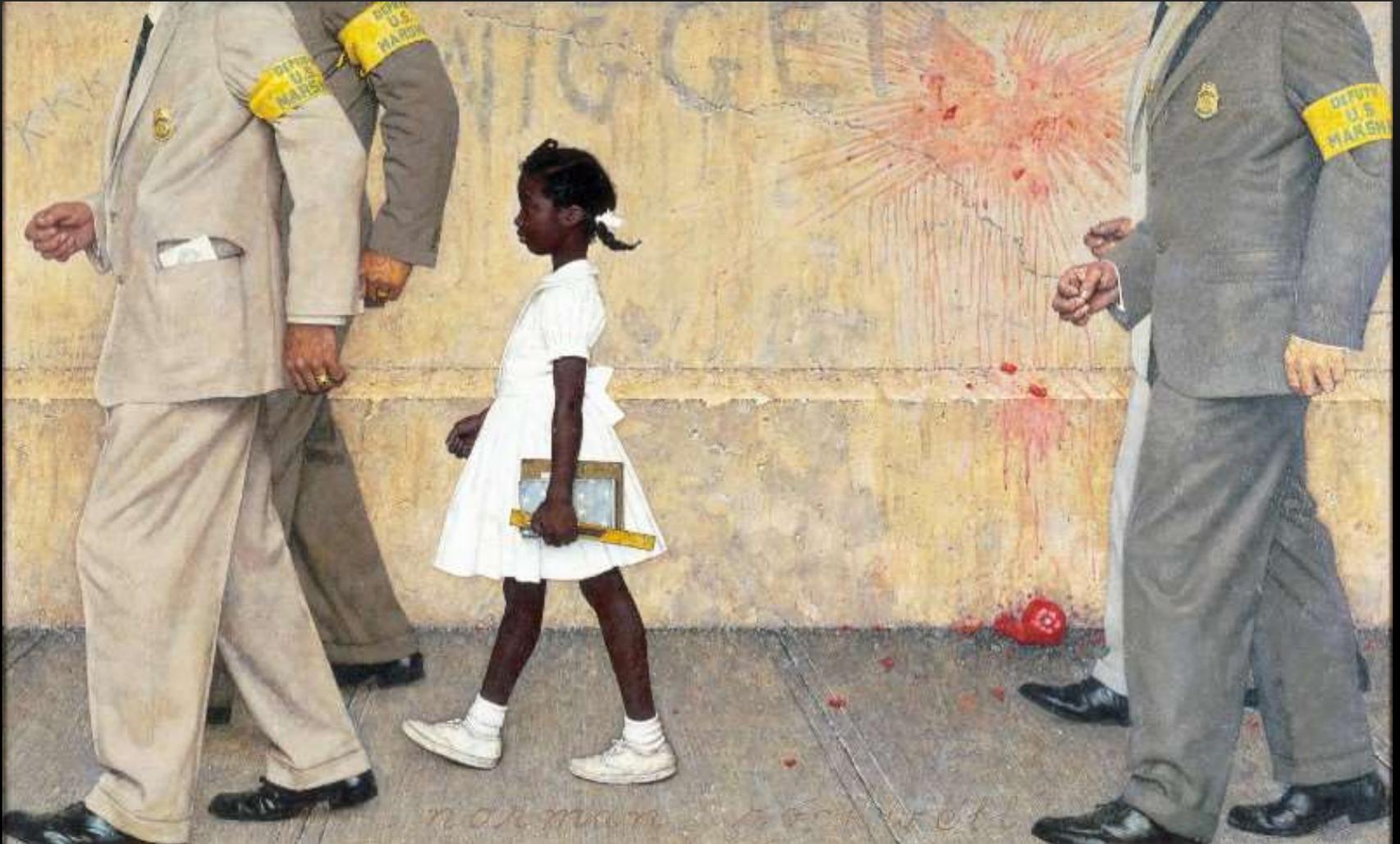
STATEMENT FROM THE ARTIST, GLENN MCCOY

“My cartoon was about how, in this day and age, decades beyond the civil rights protests, it’s sad that people are still being denied the right to speak freely or do their jobs or enter public buildings because others disagree with who they are or how they think,” he wrote. “I’m surprised that you see ‘hate’ in this cartoon when I thought I was speaking out against hate. It’s a woman passively walking while being protected from angry protesters. Isn’t that what went down the other day when DeVos visited a school to do her job? You may disagree with her on issues but I didn’t see any hate coming from her. I did, however see hate going in the other direction which is what made me think of the Rockwell image. That was the only comparison I was drawing. The level of toxicity in today’s political climate has reached ridiculous levels.”

ROCKWELL'S ARTISTIC TRANSFORMATION

[Rockwell's] very first illustration for *Look*, published in January 1964, was *The Problem We All Live With*, based on the real-life story of Ruby Bridges, a six-year-old girl who, in 1960, had become the **first** African-American child to integrate an all-white school in New Orleans. It was a radical departure from the Rockwell that America knew and loved: an uncompromisingly disturbing scene of a pigtailed little innocent in a white dress walking straight ahead, preceded and trailed by pairs of faceless federal marshals (their bodies cropped off at shoulder height to emphasize the girl's ultimate aloneness), all set against a backdrop of an institutional concrete wall defaced with a graffito of the word nigger and the gory splatter of a tomato that someone has hurled the girl's way.

“THE PROBLEM WE ALL LIVE WITH”, NORMAN ROCKWELL, 1964





SIGNIFICANCE TO THE HISTORY OF CIVIL RIGHTS

Ruby Bridges was 6 when she became the first African-American child to integrate a white Southern elementary school, having to be escorted to class by her mother and U.S. marshals due to violent mobs. Bridges' bravery paved the way for continued Civil Rights action and she's shared her story with future generations in educational forums. (Biography.com)

RUBY ESCORTED TO SCHOOL IN THE MORNING.



U.S MARSHALS ESCORTING RUBY FROM SCHOOL IN THE AFTERNOON.



ROBERT COLE AND YOUNG RUBY

Compare for yourself the two events, and consider also that Ruby endured this for several days. Watch Robert Cole describe his experience of seeing an angry mob assembling to intimidate Ruby and her stunningly mature response.

Women at William Franz Elementary School yell at police officers during a protest against desegregation of the school. Some carry signs stating “All I Want For Christmas is a Clean White School” and “Save Segregation Vote, States Rights Pledged Electors”.



Original caption: Police keep an eye on demonstrators across the street from William Frantz Elementary School as a Negro girl entered the first grade there November 14.



THREE POINTS
TO CONSIDER



ONE



- To equate the treatment of a grown white woman holding public office to that of a black child going to an all-white Southern school in 1960 America is patently absurd and frankly indefensible.

TWO

Betsy DeVos, is billionaire who never attended public schools herself (and staunch advocate for private, charter schools), the very public schools that were desegregated so Ruby Bridges could attend an all-white school that was five blocks from her home, rather than the all-black school several miles away. The educational policies DeVos supports, whether intentional or not, conjure up memories of the post-Brown v. Board of Education strategies in the South.

POST-BROWN V BOARD OF EDUCATION ERA

Almost immediately after *Brown*, white Southerners met the decision with “massive resistance.” In Virginia, segregationist Democrats pushed sweeping educational changes to combat integration. In 1956, the Commission on Public Education — convened by Gov. Thomas Stanley — asked the General Assembly to repeal compulsory education, empower the governor to close public schools, and provide **vouchers** to parents to enroll their children in segregated private schools. In the next few years, whites would open “segregation academies” across the state, while closing public schools to block integration. (Still Separate and Unequal)

THREE

That the artist released the cartoon during Black History Month adds a further layer of irony and offense. Obviously, since the protest against DeVos occurred in February, McCoy's visual commentary would need to be published soon thereafter. However, the entire situation smacks of a deep cultural insensitivity. The image further (falsely) equates the worst racial epithet in the English language, scrawled across the wall in Rockwell's illustration, with that of "Conservative". To suggest that the "negative connotations" associated with the label "conservative" is in any way comparable to that of the psychologically destructive term "nigger" simply defies credulity.

Ruby Nell Bridges at age 6, was the first African American child to attend William Franz Elementary School in New Orleans after Federal courts ordered the desegregation of public schools.



I want to end by stating clearly that I fully support the First Amendment right of McCoy to engage in such political speech. My only hope is that if he is sincere in his belief that the “level of toxicity in today’s political climate has reached ridiculous levels”, he might take more time to consider the full ramifications of his graphic commentaries. I hope he is able to understand why critics would be angry, upset, offended or outraged by his appropriation of an important work of Civil Rights art and especially the event that inspired it. To depict a woman born to wealth and power as being victimized in any way equivalent to a six-year-old African-American child born to poverty in the segregated South, to illiterate parents, is no way to bridge the divide that seems to vex him.





TRIGGERS (P. 57) A.K.A. “INTERRUPTIONS” OR “MICRO-AGGRESSIONS”

White fragility is a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering:

- Suggesting that a white person’s viewpoint comes from a racialized (i.e. “white) frame of reference (**challenge to objectivity**);
- People of color talking directly about their racial perspectives (**challenge to white racial codes**);
- People of color choosing not to protect the racial feelings of white people in regards to race (**challenge to white racial expectations and need/entitlement to racial comfort**);
- People of color not being willing to tell their stories or answer questions about their racial experiences (**challenge to colonialist relations**);
- A fellow white not providing agreement with one’s interpretations (**challenge to white solidarity**);
- Receiving feedback that one’s behavior had a racist impact (**challenge to white liberalism**);
- Suggesting that group membership is significant (**challenge to individualism**);
- An acknowledgment that access is unequal between racial groups (**challenge to meritocracy**);
- Being presented with a person of color in a position of leadership (**challenge to white authority**);
- Being presented with information about other racial groups through, for example, movies in which people of color drive the action but are not in stereotypical roles, or multicultural education (**challenge to white centrality**).

UNIVERSALISM & INDIVIDUALISM (P. 59)

- White as “**universal** human” / **Objective** / “We are all the same” = denial of the significance of race and privilege.
- White as “**individual** and *unique*” / **Subjective** / “We are all different” = denial of white privilege and group identification or culpability with Whiteness.
- Unracialized identity / resistance to a group identification / color blindness / “All Lives Matter” / stand for the anthem
- This is a privilege itself, a luxury afforded to Whiteness.
- People of Color are *almost always* racialized.
- Whites are “freed” of racialized discourse all together.
- Erases structural inequality and replaces it with meritocracy.
- The “universal we” is the basis of the “individual me”.