

February 14<sup>th</sup>, 2017

“FREE’ SPEECH, FEAR AND THE PRIMITIVE HUMAN BRAIN-- the intrinsic dangers of social hierarchy.

It is illegal to shout “fire” in a crowded theater. The idea of fire creates intense fear deep in the primitive human brain known as the Limbic System, or emotional center. The “Fight or Flight” reaction is activated causing a stampede, resulting in injury and death. Similarly “Hate Speech” can activate the emotional centers of the primitive human brain. “Hate speech” can be understood to be as intrinsically dangerous as shouting “Fire” in a crowded theater.

Neuroscience studies have shown that both in brain activity and behavior, people place higher importance on social status than money.<sup>1</sup> When concerned about social status the brain’s emotional center, in the limbic system is most active. Brain activity in the emotional center is also strongly correlated with a person’s commitment to social status, for example, strong belief in racial superiority and economic inequalities.

In the US, social status and race are often intertwined. African Americans are often assumed to be less worthy and White individuals are often assumed to be more worthy. This greater status attached to white skin is learned at a young age and continually reinforced by US culture. Furthermore, research has shown that those who believe in white supremacy and the negative stereotypes of blacks, view a rise in the social status of blacks as threatening, activating their limbic–emotional center.<sup>2</sup> Those who are committed to racist ideas of social superiority can also feel threatened during times of social unrest and instability, again activating emotional arousal in their primitive brain.<sup>3</sup> This is particularly important in today’s neo-fascist politics tied to white supremacy.

Many countries have passed laws against “Hate Speech” because they recognize that such speech incites violence or prejudicial actions: Canada, France, Germany, England, Australia and many others. One needs only to look at the hate speech of the white supremacist Ku Klux Klan or the German Nazi party to see this obvious reality.

Ask yourself why we cannot shout fire in a crowded theater but we can shout out hate speech anywhere? Millions of working people of all colors and nationalities are seeing corporations move their jobs overseas or out of existence through automation. Vast numbers of people are insecure about their lives and the future for their children. Hate, fear and anger are a primitive brain response which clouds the mind’s ability to see how much more we are alike than different.

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<sup>1</sup> For the Brain, Cash is Good, Status is Better, Scientific American, 4/24/08

<sup>2</sup> Neuroimaging Investigations of Social Status and Social Hierarchies, Jasmin Cloutier et al, Copyright 2016, pg. 195

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, pg. 197