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SCIENCE MATTERS

By: David Suzuki



When times get dark, we must shine brighter

Are we entering a new Dark Age? Lately it seems so. News reports are enough to make anyone want to crawl into bed and hide under the covers. But it's time to rise and shine. To resolve the crises humanity faces, good people must come together.

It's one lesson from Charlottesville, Virginia. It would be easy to dismiss the handful of heavily armed, polo-shirted, tiki-torch terrorists who recently marched there if they weren't so dangerous and representative of a disturbing trend that the current U.S. president and his administration have emboldened.

Racism, hatred and ignorance aren't uniquely American. Fanatics acting out of fear — of anyone who holds different political or religious views, of losing their real or imagined privilege, of change itself — are everywhere.

But whether they're religious or political extremists or both, all have much in common. They're intolerant of other viewpoints and try to dehumanize those who are different; they be-

lieve in curtailing women's and minority rights even though they claim to oppose big government; they espouse violence; and they reject the need for environmental protection.

Charlottesville was a tipping point, not so much because hatred and ignorance were on full display (that happens all too often), but because so many people stood up and spoke out against it, and against President Donald Trump's bizarre and misguided response.

The effects spilled into Canada, most notably with the implosion of the far-right (and misnamed) media outlet The Rebel. The online platform, born from the ashes of the failed Sun News network, is a good illustration of the intersection between racism, intolerance and anti-environmentalism. Rather than learning from Sun News's failure that racism and extremism are unpopular and anti-Canadian, Rebel founder Ezra Levant ramped up the bigoted and anti-environmental messaging, with commentators ranting against feminists, LGBTQ people, Muslims and Jews (Levant is Jewish), along with rejecting climate science and solutions to environmental problems!

The Rebel's Faith Goldy was at Charlottesville, sympathetically "reporting" on the band of mostly male white extremists. When

a racist drove his car into a crowd of anti-Nazi protesters, killing 32-year-old Heather Haley and seriously injuring others, it was too much for some of Levant's long-time supporters.

Rebel staff and commentators — including a co-founder — cut their ties. Norwegian Cruise Line cancelled a scheduled Rebel fundraising cruise, hundreds of advertisers pulled out and principled conservatives dissociated themselves. Trying to salvage the site's ragged reputation, Levant fired Goldy.

Meanwhile, the White House is in disarray and damage control around the president's unhinged tweets, the ongoing Russian-influence investigation, constant firings — including chief strategist Steve Bannon — and legislative paralysis, not to mention a stupid belligerence that brought us to the brink of nuclear war!

At first it appeared that the tide of intolerance, emboldened racism and anti-environmentalism was rising, but now it's looking more like the last desperate efforts of a minority of small-minded people to hold onto ideas and perspectives that history has proven wrong many times.

Canada and the U.S. have checkered racist and colonialist pasts, but for all our faults, we've been evolving. Thanks to many

people with diverse backgrounds from across the political spectrum who have devoted themselves to civil rights, feminism, Indigenous causes, LGBTQ rights, the environment and more, we've made many gains. We have a long way to go, but we must keep on and not let fear, hatred and ignorance block our way.

If we and our children and their children are to survive and be healthy in the face of crises like climate change and terrorism, we must stand together — in unity and solidarity, without fear. Like the many who gathered in Barcelona the day after recent horrendous terrorist attacks, the people who stood up to racists in Charlottesville, those who reject the anti-human agendas of media outlets like The Rebel, and the many people worldwide who march and speak up for climate justice, we must come together to shine a light on the darkness.

Love conquers fear and hate. We must show those who want to bring us down or take us back to darker times that we outnumber them by far, everywhere.

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