**In Defense of White Men**

**By Roland Merullo**   JULY 03, 2017 Boston Globe

EVERYWHERE I TURN these days I encounter the term “white male,” almost always used in a pejorative way. I understand the reasons for this. There are abundant examples — both in history and current events — of boorish and evil white men. Hitler comes to mind. Stalin. Mussolini. On a much lesser scale, certain unmentionables in present-day D.C.

For one example, it’s not difficult to look at the assembled power brokers of the Republican congress, smiling as they eliminate funds for the health care of women, and see them as part of an evil empire of powerful, pale-skinned, masculine creatures. And I’ve met enough obnoxious white men in my own life to understand the contemptuous tone in which “white male” is so often used.

But these blanket condemnations are part of a very narrow and skewed reading of both history and current events. While it’s certainly true that white men have started wars, participated in torture, and committed rape, they/we have not cornered the market on evil behavior. Idi Amin comes to mind. Pol Pot. Baby Doc Duvalier. Hirohito.

Not to mention certain notorious female camp guards and serial killers.

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It’s not hard to argue that white men have done more harm in history — from the keeping of slaves to the genocide of Native Americans, and a thousand other examples — than any other single group. But it can also be argued that they have done more good — in combatting evil regimes, in developing medicines, in inventing everything from the automobile to the cellphone to various methods of birth control. White men discovered penicillin, Novocain, the drug regimen used to treat people afflicted with AIDS. In many places the chances are good that if your home is on fire, it will be a white man who comes to put it out. And, if it were not for the millions of white men who gave their lives in World War II, we might all be ending and starting the work day with the Nazi salute.

Associating us only with evil deeds, selfishness, and violence is as misguided as making general disparaging statements about any other group: women, blacks, Muslims, homosexuals. Yet, in certain circles, it has become acceptable — even laudable — to do just that.

Not long ago I had an exchange with a former student of mine — we were discussing women’s rights and abusive men — and she told me I had no right to speak on the subject. “We were made to be silent for millennia,” she said, “now it’s your turn.” That kind of revenge must be satisfying, and particularly soothing to those who’ve been hurt by men — no small number. Ultimately, though, understandable as it may be, the impulse toward revenge leads nowhere except to a seesaw of oppression and fury.

I thought of arguing with her that my right to speak on those issues derives from the fact that I have two daughters and have been married for 38 years to the same good woman. But those aren’t the true reasons. The true reason is that I am a human being, and the welfare of all human beings concerns me.

At the root of the oppression of women, an oppression which denied and continues to deny them equal status and opportunity, was what Hemingway — a quintessential white male, much in disfavor in certain circles now — called “[those dirty, easy labels](https://books.google.com/books?id=Qyp-CwAAQBAJ&pg=PT121&lpg=PT121&dq=those+dirty+easy+labels+Hemingway&source=bl&ots=xUA7bAKC-G&sig=3iEcq8wTvJRyBzFg7xx9lB3h0aw&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjmobSntObUAhUBYz4KHa8sDQwQ6AEIKDAA#v=onepage&q=those%20dirty%20easy%20labels%20Hemingway&f=false).” For centuries, females were considered less intelligent, less dependable, fickle, flighty, hysterical. That was the rap, and it infiltrated the culture in everything from hiring practices to the naming of hurricanes.

From Jews to African-Americans to homosexuals to Irish, Italian, and now Middle Eastern immigrants, hatred began by tossing all of them into a group, and attributing to that group the most unattractive characteristics imaginable. What is being done to “white males” now, it should go without saying, is not on a par with what was done to those people. But the instinct to label and blame is born of the same kind of group-think.

Maybe one fine day we’ll learn to eschew labels, or at least see beyond them, and focus on the humanity we share.

*Roland Merullo’s latest novel is “The Delight of Being Ordinary: A Road Trip with the Pope and Dalai Lama.”*



