So I was chatting with a family member earlier today, and we were talking about American history. I'd just read up on Dredd Scott (someone I hadn't studied since high school), and found myself wondering how he got his name. Or rather how he got his last name.

My family member looked it up and found the whole history of Scott, but no idea where he got the *name* Scott. He thought it must have been the name of his slave owner, but none of his owners was called that. There was plenty of info on his first name. Apparently he was called Sam, but renamed himself Dredd in honor of his older brother who'd died, who also carried that name.

The conversation kind of wandered a bit from there. I told him that I'd been astounded in 2017, when Trump met with a Russian ambassador and minister of foreign affairs, and revealed code-word intelligence (one of the highest rankings of classification) to them. According to the Washington Post, anyone else in the country would have been committing a crime, but the president has broad authority to declassify information.

I told my family member that it disturbed me that a huge swath of the American people didn't see this as a problem. The idea of literally committing treason against the United States had become a political issue, with one side saying it was ok, and the other saying it should be punished. Then I told him I'd put the situation in perspective, because at one time in history, a huge swath of Americans thought that owning people as property was ok. This treason thing is kind of small-fries in comparison.

The trouble is, it does still bug me. Not the whole betraying America thing- I have strong views on national identity on the whole. No, the troubling thing to me is that the president can do something that would be a crime if done by anyone else.

Isn't a leader supposed to be held to the same standard as the people they lead? Even more so- aren't leaders supposed to hold themselves to a *higher* standard? And I don't mean just here in the States- I mean all over the world. If laws don't apply equally to everyone, then why bother having laws at all?

Some of you readers might say, "Well, they are applied equally to everyone. Look through the laws and the constitution. There are no laws that pertain to race, or to gender anymore. Any prejudice is the result of individuals themselves, not the system as a whole."

The trouble is, laws also need to be enforced, and that's where the prejudice comes into clearer focus. There are mountains of evidence of black people being punished far worse than white people convicted of the exact same crime. There are small planets filled with evidence that women are paid less than men, as a whole. There are quite obvious examples of LGBTQIA+ people being discriminated against just because of who they are. Something doesn't have to be codified into law in order to be bigoted. If we don't enforce the laws that guarantee equality, then we clearly don't care about equality!

So how did we get here? How did we end up in a world where a white cop can suffocate a black man on camera and not be immediately arrested and charged with murder? How did we get a president who can and will do something that would be a crime if done by anyone else in the country, and show no remorse, shame, or hesitation at all? How did we build a system that can look at a clear sunny day and have half of that system deny the the very notion of frickin' sunlight?

*you know what usually goes here*

If a person gets all their news from one source, or from a small number of sources all of which agree with each other, then objective truth is no longer objective. If two people can meet, and argue the idea that climate change is even happening, then clearly no progress will be made in that argument at all. I used to think that mental gymnastics were a rarity, but now it seems to be the norm. It's not just the Emperor who has new clothes, but a lot of his people, too!

How do we combat this? Truthfully, I'm just guessing. I know we have to interact with these people, regardless of what they believe. I know we have to be respectful of them no matter how much we disagree with them. I've *had* conversations with people who are diametrically opposed to me on some of these issues, and those conversations didn't turn into shouting matches. It can happen.

To me, the secret is to stay unemotional during the conversation. Before and after we can go off like a supervolcano, but during, we have to keep a level head. We have to remember that nothing these people say can hurt us personally. Even if they mean it as an insult, it's we who decide how much that insult means.

We also have to remember that anything we say to them could be taken as an insult. As such our only option is to stay consistently and reliably unemotional during the conversation. The more history they have of us not insulting them, the more they're likely to believe that we won't start insulting them.

Remember, these people are fellow Americans. Our neighbors, our friends, even our family sometimes. Just because they're wrong doesn't mean they deserve to be vilified or belittled. Even those who start with insults should be pitied, not retaliated against. Whatever reason they have for being insulting is irrelevant to you. All that matters is that you get your point across politely, respectfully, and firmly. You'd be surprised how often a kernel of your argument gets lodged in their mind, if it's planted with respect and courtesy.