

GRANDTOUR

BULLY PULPIT



By B. W. Cook

Recently a Newport Beach, California city councilman made national news by declaring concern over the dominant usage of coastal parkland by “Mexicans”. His name is not important. This dialogue is not about the man who made the statement. In fact, it is not particularly about the statement or the reference to people from Mexico or of Mexican origin and/or descent. While it is surely pertinent to understanding the councilman’s statement, his opinion, bias, or point of view can only be explained, or defended by the speaker. You may call him, or his statement, racist. You may call him, or his utterance, insensitive, lacking thought, or worse, blatantly ignorant. The fact remains, like it or not, many local people in Newport Beach/Corona del Mar neighborhoods silently agreed concerning the habitation of the beach fronting their community. They just would not have expressed said concern in such terms.

In all of the press, both in print and via the electronic media, a firestorm of public anger further divided the citizens on the issue. The media played the “race card” to its fullest exploitation. Such indignation sells papers and keeps viewers tuned in. And most significantly, it drives a high wedge between people of differing views. Rather than finding common ground to solve problems, we find reasons not to trust. Hatred bubbles beneath the surface. Citizens clam up. They don’t want to be labeled.

The shame of it all is twofold. First, the issue is not simply one of race. It is an issue of economics. The reference to “Mexicans” was in fact a reference to low income, or poor people seeking refuge from the heat and/or their work-a-day lives by coming to the free and public beach. And that beach, one of the most beautiful of all Southern California coastal public beaches and parks happens to be in Corona del Mar, south of Newport proper. Whether the people are Mexican or Hispanic or from other parts of Central and South America, or whether they are white, black, blue or synthetic, they are, in large part poor. And yes, they come in droves. Many of them set up camp day and into the night. They play music, they eat, some litter (and some of that litter is excessive and particularly unpleasant), and do just about everything that people of more significant means do at the beach. This begs the question, who is entitled to dominate California public beaches? The answer is, of course, everyone.

The second part of this shameful equation is the issue of real estate, and property tax. Corona del Mar’s park and beach is adjacent to some of the costliest privately owned residential real estate in the world. Owners pay multiple millions to live and own property along and adjacent to Ocean avenue. To extrapolate, they also contribute five and even six figures annual sums to the Orange County Real Estate Tax Collector.

This naturally begs the question, how would you like to live in a home that requires a 20-30 thousand dollar annual tax commitment and be surrounded by massive public beach utilization. The answer of course, is that you wouldn’t want such a situation, no matter what your personal political or humanitarian views may be. It is however, part of the equation of living adjacent to public property.

Therefore, it may seem that this hot-button racial issue is not really about race as much as it is about economic disparity in contemporary society and further, the lack of respect for public and private property, by members of the population. The added factor of “respect” is most intangible and unquantifiable. Respect for the peace and privacy of others, respect for property, be it your own or a strangers is a value that seems in short supply in contemporary times. One does not need be wealthy to have a moral obligation to respect the rights of others. This is obviously conversely true as well. Unfortunately, when society loses a respect quotient, it may be legislated, to a greater or lesser degree in order to keep the peace.

These issues were not explored in the recent emotionally charged Newport case. If we get beyond the race card, we citizens dissect the problem and come up with solutions. Solutions that may include certain hours of restriction on public beaches, tougher penalties for littering, and so forth. Laws and regulations, created in a democratic society for the greater good of all, rich, poor, and in between may be a partial answer to beach overpopulation. As long as the liberal media points the “how dare you” finger to stir controversy, and the moderates retreat to political correctness, and the conservatives simmer with hatred, we are all doomed.

We need enlightened, intelligent leadership. We must examine issues for what they are, and express and define problems in terms that are factual, honest, and direct, without pulling long held stereotypical images taken for truth. The media, the precious Fourth Estate, the cornerstone of democracy, the beacon of the American voice, must do some serious self-examination. Reforms are a must. In the meantime, we citizens must remain ever vigilant, question everything, and always look behind the surface at the stories, the issues of our time if we ever hope to live in a better world. **GT**

B.W. Cook is the creator of Grand Tour Magazine. He is a twice-weekly columnist for the Daily Pilot, and serves as Editor of the prestigious Bay Window Magazine. Cook has been heard on San Diego radio for the past five years, and is an Emmy nominated television writer and producer responsible for such programs as Entertainment Tonight.