



## **I Am—A Lament for America**

July 17 2018

*Martin Niemöller wrote in 1946: "Whenever I chance to meet a Jew...I cannot but tell him: "I have sinned and my people has sinned against thy people and against thyself."*

First they came for the communists,  
and I didn't speak out because I wasn't a communist.

Then they came for the socialists,  
and I didn't speak out because I wasn't a socialist.

Then they came for the trade unionists,  
and I didn't speak out because I wasn't a trade unionist.

Then they came for the Jews,  
and I didn't speak out because I wasn't a Jew.

Then they came for the Catholics,  
and I didn't speak out because I wasn't a Catholic.

Then they came for me,  
and there was no one left to speak for me.

*Niemöller's famous quote, which feels like a prayer, returned to me this morning shredding my heart to see that nothing has changed.*

First, they came for brown boys with a dollop of crack  
ignoring hedge fund parties with platters of cocaine  
but I said nothing because crack is a crime, isn't it.

They began to shoot black boys playing in parks,  
and I didn't speak out because I wasn't the mother of a black boy.

They came for the kneeling football players,  
but I didn't speak out because I don't care about football.

They torched mosques,  
but I stayed silent because I wasn't Muslim.

They slapped swastikas on synagogues  
and I said nothing because I'm not Jewish.



They bombed black churches,  
and I stayed silent because I'm not a black Christian.

They rounded up refugees fleeing unspeakable horrors  
but I said nothing because I'm not a refugee.

They caged brown children and told them not to cry  
and I stayed silent because those are not my children.

They came for gay men seeking wedding cakes  
and I said nothing because my son isn't gay.

They refused to pay a decent wage  
but I said nothing even as I used those services every day.

They closed state hospitals and tossed the mentally ill in jail  
and I said nothing because I'm not one of those.

More black men are in prison today than were enslaved in 1850  
but I said nothing because I never enslaved anyone.

They drained money from public schools to create profitable businesses for their friends  
and I said nothing because my children are no longer in school.

They turned prisons into private businesses  
and I said nothing because I knew no one in prison.

They made healthcare so expensive only the wealthiest could afford to see a doctor  
and I said nothing because, well, I don't know what to say.

I watched school children get slaughtered by angry white men with guns  
as the country continued to elect politicians in thrall to the NRA.

I watched food turn into chemicals and family farms into agribusinesses  
but I kept shopping at mega markets because they had cheap food.

*Now, I look at the prisons, the schools, the churches, and the parks  
I look at what we have become  
and I must speak*

*I must speak now  
because they are coming for me.  
They are coming for all of us.*

*And before they do,*



*before they cut out all our tongues,  
there is something I have to say:*

I am the football player on one knee  
I am the black boy bleeding in the street  
I am the brown man behind bars

I am the Muslim at prayer  
I am the Jew afraid to enter the synagogue  
I am the black child blown to pieces in her pew

I am the Guatemalan mother desperate to bring her child to safety  
I am the caged child too afraid to cry  
I am the Syrian refugee drowning at sea

I am the gay couple looking forward to a ceremony forbidden for so very very long  
I am the child in a crumbling school turning pages in an out of date text book

I am the elderly woman who will die before she sees a doctor  
I am the young mother working three jobs and still unable to pay the rent  
I am the delusional man waking up in a jail cell

I am the prisoner with no money to call home  
I am the high school kid running from bullets  
I am the farmer who couldn't keep his land, his home, his life

I am all of these  
And they are me

They are me  
because we share One Mother

And I must speak  
I must speak until they come for me