

EDITOR'S PAGE



Have Americans Lost Their Minds?



Spencer B. King III, MD, MACC, *Editor-in-Chief, JACC: Cardiovascular Interventions*

I am writing while traveling to the EuroPCR (European Association of Percutaneous Cardiovascular Interventions) meeting in Paris. It is a trip I approach with some trepidation. Since I have made this trip many times before, why the anxiety? No, I am not concerned for my safety any more than I should be elsewhere. I have a choice to be anxious or not about safety and I chose not to be. My apprehension is not about a terrorist attack.

EuroPCR is the most international congress in Interventional Cardiology with faculty and attendees from all of Europe but also from the Middle East, Africa, Asia, and the Americas. Part of the explanation is the liberal policy the European Union has had toward industry sponsorship of international travel but the inclusion of participants on the program from all over the world is another reason for the broad representation. My reason for being apprehensive stems from my difficulty in coming up with an answer to the question I know I will get: "Have Americans lost their minds?" Words have consequences and even though words of politicians are notoriously inaccurate, especially when they are running for office, words are heard not only by Americans but also by people all over the world. The perception that Americans have become xenophobic religious bigots is a tough one to swallow. People have attitudes in all countries that make them more comfortable with others who are like themselves. America is supposed to be different. We are a country of people, almost all of whom came from somewhere else. The idea that a candidate for president of the United States demonizes our Latin neighbors and advocates blocking entry into the country based on religious affiliation is outrageous enough. However the fact that these positions are not abhorrent to a good portion of the American electorate is disturbing to my friends from

other countries who ask: "Have Americans lost their minds?" How do I answer the question? I can reflect on the inscription on the Statue of Liberty and the millions of success stories of those whose parents and grandparents and great grandparents came and made America what it is. I can talk of the Visiting Professorship I was invited for at Creighton University last month where almost all of the 14 cardiology fellows had come to this country from other lands. After spending two days with them, I believe they will all be fine doctors, caring for Americans. I recently reviewed grant applications for fellowship support and among the several dozen applicant institutions, a large majority of the interventional cardiology fellows were from other countries. Many from Muslim countries. The idea that America is going to become isolationist, quit NATO, bail out of the Middle East, and block immigration on religious grounds is absurd. These things won't happen so why do voters respond to the rhetoric? Passion is stirred more by resentment and anger than by positive emotions. Our European colleagues and their ancestors have experienced this destructive passion several times in the past century and they realize the danger.

No, Americans have not lost their minds, yet. And the Europeans with some politicians espousing similar xenophobic opinions have not lost theirs either. We live in an interconnected world and we in Interventional Cardiology have learned the value of that connection. Now I have arrived in Paris and gone to the Congress Hall to prep for tomorrow's session: "The Essentials for Young Practitioners." The format is a series of 90-min sessions designed to enhance the learning experience with semilive cases. This "Live Case in the Box" program is organized by a team of young practitioners using interactive teaching methods to engage the audience in active decision

making. A senior advisor is assigned to each team and although I relish working with these young people I cannot escape my appropriate title of "Senior." The participants are animated and committed to producing the best learning experience and I am impressed with the discussion of different approaches from young doctors from France, Russia, Spain, and Egypt. There is no talk about who is "greatest." It was refreshing after my long trip worrying about the question I would be asked. Then in the faculty lounge it happened. Colleagues from Africa, Europe, and the Middle East all expressed concern about attitudes in America. Some said they were worried and others were just sad. They all looked to the United States for leadership, but not defined only in military terms. They wonder how the country that offered the world hope and freedom can be tolerating some of the

rhetoric they have heard. They wonder how the same intolerance can be gaining traction in their own countries.

I left Paris' Charles de Gaulle airport just before the Egypt Air flight went down and only heard about it when I landed safely in Atlanta. My immediate thoughts were with our colleagues from Egypt. I started to tear up this column as I too felt my passion being stirred by anger. Instead I was reminded of how susceptible we all are to demagoguery appealing to fear and anger. Yes, bad things will happen, however, "losing our minds" will not be a solution.

ADDRESS CORRESPONDENCE TO: Dr. Spencer B. King III, Saint Joseph's Heart and Vascular Institute, 5665 Peachtree Dunwoody Road NE, Atlanta, Georgia 30342. E-mail: spencer.king@emoryhealthcare.org.