

Ten Minute T(ea) with Mr. Thomas Lamont

*Interview conducted by Fran Saldivar
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Q) What is your approach on willful ignorance?

A) That's a term I'm not really familiar with, actually. I'm well aware of ignorance, but not willful ignorance.

Q) Do you think that living in a small and fortunate community like Groton can result in ignorance toward the "real problems" of the world?

A) There are many different kinds of education, ways to be educated, ways to be smart. Most people here will get a very good education, they're book smart, but I do think people lack real experience in the real world. They don't know how to save money or take care of money. They don't know what life is like for most people in this country and the rest of the world. It's definitely a bubble.

That said, most schooling systems in the world are bubbles themselves, even the local [Groton] high school itself, but far less diverse than Groton School. Hardly any African Americans live in the town of Groton. The student body [at Groton] is more diverse than most public high schools in this country, but it's a very different kind of environment. Most [students] at Groton don't understand what life is like growing up in the city, whether you are rich or poor.

But people are young. People [at Groton] have a foundation from which they can build upon and Groton has a very good foundation for that.

Q) The religious service is a requirement at Groton. Do you think that it is ignorant to the atheist students?

A) No, it's not willful ignorance from the administration. But could it be ignorance from the students who come to Groton School knowing there is a religious commitment on the weekends?

Q) Students at Groton are constantly not "cleaning up" after themselves in the dining hall, athletic buildings, and student center, even though they know that the Groton cleaning staff and Faculty work really hard to keep the school clean. Why do you think the student body does this?

A) Qualities of understanding, empathy, and sympathy have to be learned. Young people have less experience with them so it takes time to accumulate the experiences in the service industry (waiter, chef, dishwasher). Those kinds of jobs lead to appreciation. So I'm not surprised students make a mess, but that does not excuse it. Students should be held accountable.

These acts are not willfully ignorant, just ignorant because they don't mean to be mean. They don't intend to be rude, they're just not thinking, that's not intentional.

Q) Over your teaching years at Groton have you experienced intentional ignorance?

A) Let's start with something simple. I'm constantly seeing people who are on their cellphones or with earbuds on who don't say "hi" when they pass you in the halls or around the Circle. Also, people don't respond to emails, you get a lot of that as well from students. Recently I sent an email to a student who was upset about the election and offered to talk to her and didn't get a reply at all.

Q) The student body at Groton used the "N word" in their regular vocabulary even though they know this word has a racist history. Why is it that students used that word even if they know it is highly offensive?

A) You can't say "this is my music, I love my music, listen to my music, but don't sing my music." Music is supposed to be sung. When I was your age, I remember a Congressman who wanted to censor rap musicians and I thought this was ridiculous. Speech is speech, it's out there. Deciding what speech is hateful is a slippery slope.

So I don't see the use of this word as ignorance. In fact, I see it as silly. This is a reflection of how open minded these people are. I know a lot of offensive rap, so should people even be allowed to play it? I say sure, but then don't get upset when people sing about it. People are overwhelmingly good people and I don't think this is a real problem.

Q) Many people overlooked Donald Trump's hateful allegations when voting for him because they wanted to benefit from other aspects of his presidency. In your opinion, is overlooking this part of Trump's campaign okay? Why do you think people did it?

A) People vote for Trump because they want to do what is best for the country. When someone votes for Trump they do not ignore what he says. I think people voted for him for many many reasons.

For the same reasons, a Trump supporter would say the same thing about Hillary Clinton. When someone votes for her they are also ignoring the facts and issues with the emails and money with the Wall Street... so it cuts both both ways in a political spectrum. It's not fair to say that someone who voted for Trump is racist, or misogynist or homophobic, and so forth. I would argue that Trump does not believe in anything except himself. So why should people get all upset about things he said? This is just as people lose their minds when they talk about Hillary Clinton as a criminal who should be locked up or put in jail.

Q) Why do you think many Americans still celebrate Thanksgiving even if they are aware of the terrible acts Europeans committed toward the Native Americans?

A) I celebrate Thanksgiving. Why should it be connected to the genocide of Native Americans? I don't think it's ignorant. Thanksgiving is a celebration of the conjoining of cultures, it's a multicultural celebration. It celebrates the fact that the Indians saved the settlers from starvation by sharing food and knowledge with them. It's a time of different people coming together. Of course there was terrible fighting between the Indians and colonists, but it's not like the Indians weren't fighting; they were fighting each other. Thanksgiving is not willful ignorance at all.