

TORAH THOUGHTS – COVINGTON, NATHAN PHILLIPS, AND TRUTH

On Friday, a group of teenage boys from Covington Catholic High School in Kentucky traveled to the nation's capital. While waiting for their bus at the Lincoln Memorial, a small group of Native Americans engaged the group with chanting and drumming. A video close-up of one student (Nick Sandmann) and one Native American (Nathan Phillips) went viral and led to a lot of social media chatter. Many posted angry comments about the teens – based on the video, they thought that the boys were mocking Mr. Phillips, and they derided Mr. Sandmann for looking smug.

In response, Mr. Sandmann released a long statement, explaining the interaction from his perspective. He painted a different picture, and included details not captured in the short video. A longer video also surfaced, confirming some of the teen's perspective.

When I watched both the short and longer videos, I saw what I feel is inappropriate behavior from some of the teens. Granted it was a tense situation, but nevertheless they displayed a lack of respect for Mr. Phillips and others. Still, I find the rush to judgment of Mr. Sandmann troubling. Our tradition urges us not to react hastily, but rather to investigate a situation thoroughly in order to establish facts.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

1. Here is a report with a more complete video than what originally went viral .
<https://www.cnn.com/videos/us/2019/01/23/maga-teens-covington-catholic-native-american-sidner-pkg-nr.cnn>
2. Here is the statement from Nick Sandmann
<https://www.cnn.com/2019/01/20/us/covington-kentucky-student-statement/index.html>
3. Our tradition teaches, “Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel said, ‘On three things the world stands: On Judgment, and on Truth, and on Peace, as it is said (Zechariah 8:16), ‘Execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates.’” (Avot 1:18) How would you apply these texts to what happened in Washington, and to our consumption of social media today?

Shabbat shalom,

Rabbi Pont