

Growling

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lieve" in reason or science, happiness, love or justice. I certainly consider these critically important in life. But it doesn't take belief to make it so.

I once had a bright poster of the sun that said, "I believe in the sun, even when it is not shining." Nice image. But that's not really about belief, is it? We know the sun is there even obscured by clouds, or during the night. We know; we don't believe.

When Olmsted was a correspondent traveling through the South in 1853 he saw a lot of things that interested, amused and disturbed him. He acknowledged his biases and wrote that his book "has one fault — it is too fault-finding. [The author] is sorry for it, but it cannot now be helped ... so let the reader understand that he is invited to travel in company with an honest

growler" ("A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States," 1856).

Like Olmsted, I don't necessarily like being a growler, but at least I think I'm an honest one. Like Frederick Douglass, I need my growlery, my growling space, now and then. There are creative ways to handle our disbelief both privately and publicly.

There's a certain wisdom in a practice of growling when it's accompanied by a willingness to admit we may not like what we see but we probably aren't getting the whole picture. We assume that others will also shake their heads, growl and offer another point of view. We can make good use of our grumbling, head-shaking eyerolls and disbelieving. Who knows what we might learn from another growler?

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Frederick Douglass's "Growlery" at Cedar Hill

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