

Civic Virtue : an interview with Braxton Winston
by: Kacie Smagacz

"Don't listen to the media." "You can't trust everything you read on the internet." "The news is always biased, that's why I don't watch it." "I only watch Fox, MSNBC is run by liberals." "I only watch MSNBC, Fox is run by conservatives." Sound familiar? The problem is often that our major news sources are, in fact, laced with bias and also get their funding from corporations *even* bigger than themselves. Therefore they are limited in regards to what they can say, issues they are allowed to address, and there are also limitations on whom they are permitted to give a voice. Think about that for a minute. The ones we rely on for the truth of *our nation* are often motivated to convince you of something based upon who is paying their bills. If that sounds scary, it is because it is. Braxton Winston is beginning a production company that will be the opposite of these standards. Truth-telling, when it comes to media, is a major challenge. From false advertising to emotional manipulation, a story is not simply facts as it is backed by feelings and history and it is motivated by convincing the listener/reader to change their minds on something. Virtuous Productions, Winston's latest venture, is based upon what he calls "civic virtue".

SMAGACZ: What is civic virtue?

WINSTON: Civic virtue is an important concept when considering Republican forms of government, meaning a state in which supreme power is held by the people and their elected representatives and which has an elected or nominated president rather than a monarch. Citizens that live in a republic must be dedicated to the common welfare of their community even at the cost of their individual interests.

SMAGACZ: How did this all come about for you?

WINSTON: I found out about the death of Keith Lamont Scott on my way home from work. I was coaching a football game not far from the scene of the crime on Old Concord Road. I decided to stop and bear witness. Soon after, I began live-streaming the event (a task that would ultimately become a responsibility during the ensuing days and weeks of protests and other actions).



SMAGACZ: So, you fell into the role of relaying facts as they happened? Sounds a lot like what photojournalism used to be, and should be, in its purest form. You were in the moment and largely used your phone and the internet to show those not present the truth of what was happening. What do you plan to do from *here*?

WINSTON: I am still actively defining what my exact role needs to be moving forward. I know that I am now a citizen journalist who has a duty to disseminate the facts as they occur, here in Charlotte, in regards to our citizen's demands for justice and equality under the law. At the same time, I find myself as an active member in

the movement to realize those same ideals. I am working on forming an organization that will enable that type of work in the long term. I have also pledged myself to help locate and assist the next generation of leaders who will be necessary for the new ideas we need to defeat the status quo.

SMAGACZ: From personal experience, it becomes tricky to speak on virtue or reform within our own political systems without people tuning out or accusing you or some sort of anti-patriotic motives (when, in reality, it truly is the opposite). Transparency and accountability only make us greater and stronger, more respectable, and united. It seems to me that with Virtuous Productions, you are seeking to tackle some taboo subjects that the mainstream media dances around for fear of losing their funding and to not ruffle too many feathers. How do you plan on doing this?

WINSTON: America is the greatest nation on this planet. It is also one of the world's most troubled nations and is imperfect, having been built upon the potential of what it *could* become. The Nation was built by the subjugation of the rights of many for the economic benefit of a few. It did promise avenues for groups to prove they are worthy of rights or equal protections under the law, but these rights would only be afforded in incremental steps. White, Christian, heterosexual, native born, males were the only true recipients of full rights under our founding documents. Every other group, including but not exclusive to, women, people of color, indigenous, and gays have all been catching up bit by bit and throughout the generations. The Greek virtue of "arete" is a moral virtue that boils down to working to achieve one's full potential in excellence. The fulfillment of our purpose, as a nation and as individual Americans, is to live up to that full potential. We must continue working to achieve our full potential of excellence of all areas. We believe the US Constitution is a living document. When American people are empowered under their rights, under the Constitution, we are able to form a more perfect union. When we become more perfect, America gets closer to achieving arete.

SMAGACZ: What are your initial goals with Virtuous Productions?

WINSTON: This traditional production company will focus on three (3) initial projects: 1) This will be a long-form documentary that will express the chronological account of the streets of Charlotte following the death of Keith Lamont Scott culminating with my arrest outside of BOA Stadium (on Sunday, September 25th) and my address to the mayor and City Council the following day. The documentary will make heavy use of existing live-streamed footage, interviews of front-line participants, and other footage that was captured by independent photographers and media outlets. 2) It will feature a series of viral videos that depict some of the more provocative and inspirational moments from the "Charlotte Uprising", using first person footage from the nights on the streets of Charlotte and the ensuing days and weeks. These will be used in attempt to keep control of the narrative that was the "Charlotte Uprising" by showing the facts as they occurred on the streets. 3) You can expect a weekly 30-60 minute live-stream program focusing on issues in social justice. All individual Americans have remarkable potential. We CAN greatly impact society if our lives are fortified by civic and moral virtues. Too often we suffer from institutional and systemic ills that strip us of our rights as a matter of convenience and comfort for some. These conveniences and comforts have caused a severe erosion of civic virtue, a philosophy held high in considering how to maintain a healthy Republic. There is a necessity for individual citizens to do the deeds that are necessary to stabilize and push forward our Republic. When citizens are full of civic virtue and are pushing toward achieving arete, hard work gets done and good things happen. For the groups who have been left out of the immediate promise of full rights under the law by our Framers, it is imperative that the nation is filled with citizens flush with civic virtue and are always moving with purpose to arete.