

We must unite to solve police issues

By James Gray

There comes a time when all Americans of goodwill must take a stand about the dissension now existing in our country. And the first thing that must be said here is that, unless my eyes were deceiving me, the murder of George Floyd at the hands of the Minneapolis policemen was a horrendous and unforgiveable criminal act.

It is hard to conclude that the act was caused by systematic racism by that city's police — particularly since the chief of police is African American. But it is not at all hard to conclude that racism has been in the minds of some individual police officers, and likely still is. That is what must be addressed and eradicated so that each one of us will see our police as "peace officers" instead of "them" solely being seen as law enforcement officers.

We should also firmly remember that we do have a history of racism in our country, such as the abominable way we treated Native Americans, slavery before the Civil War and Jim Crow's harsh injustices and even lynchings thereafter, mistreatment of Chinese workers building the railroads and, of course, the internment camps for the Japanese Americans during World War II. These must be openly acknowledged and fully taught.

Having said that, much of

this friction appears to have developed into a political climate of "us versus them," which is cancerous.

Yes, bad things have happened in this country that was established by people with defects. But the flag of the United States of America stands for our founding principle of liberty and respect for individual rights.

So let us learn from George Floyd and — tragically — many others like him who have been wrongly harmed by the police. Let's respond by insisting that all police officers wear body cameras whenever they interact with the public. That will result in both the officers and the people they serve being more accountable and even respectful.

Let's also reduce the ability of police unions (a public service union feared by many) to keep misbehaving officers from being punished or fired.

Let's insist that police be trained to be more aware of methods to scale down confrontations so that violence is much less likely. This should include training about how to have more racial and foreign heritage awareness, and also how to detect and deal with people with mental disabilities.

Let's repeal our failed policy of drug prohibition, which has militarized the police and caused them to be seen by many residents in minority communities as being an occupational force.

And let's all do our part by trying to be more sensitive to each other's views and needs.

But, at the same time, let's also understand that police have truly difficult jobs, and sometimes they must face difficult and even dangerous situations that can call for instantaneous decisions to be made at their peril. So let's take that into account when sitting in judgment about their actions.

In other words, let us all intentionally choose not to go down the road of "we are good, and you are evil." We are in this as Americans together. We must acknowledge our failings, but also continue to strive to be united in liberty — and in the responsibility that goes with it.

Polarization may sometimes make good politics, but in the end it harms us all.

Instead let's all strive to invoke the spirit of Dr. Martin Luther King, who said: "Yes, if you want to say that I was a drum major, say that I was a drum major for justice, drum major for peace (and) drum major for righteousness ..."

That is what America stands for, and that's what we now must do, be drum majors for the great things our country represents — together. It's the American way.

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