

PROTESTS OF POLICE BRUTALITY

Blaming looters misses point, ignore real issue

In early April, the Tribune-Herald was gracious enough to include a piece I'd written for the Opinion page. The column was about entitlement in the age of COVID-19. On April 11th, the day the column appeared, the United States had just surpassed 20,000 COVID-19 deaths. Today, a mere two months later, that number is more than 115,000 and climbing rapidly.



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While this column is not about COVID-19, please don't lose sight of this tragedy and those lost lives.

The final paragraph of my April column read, "It's my hope and prayer that all Americans reflect deeply on our own varying sense of entitlement . . . and realize it's not about me, rather it's about us . . . Perhaps this will lead to a better America when we're on the other side."

I thought about that paragraph and the overarching theme of entitlement when I read last Sunday's Waco Tribune-Herald Opinion page, which was wholly devoted to the civic unrest in our country. One columnist characterized ALL protesters as "anarchistic, arsonist rioters and looters" and accused "anyone who

sympathizes with this group" as "just part of the problem." The entire column completely missed the point and showed a deep knowledge void as well as a lack of empathy, compassion and understanding. On the other hand, Dr. Peaches Henry's column denounced looting and destruction without placing blame on all protesters or on one particular group — right or left — because she wisely knows that's NOT the point, that's NOT the issue.

What we can't replace

In a recent interview with the only four black CEOs of Fortune 500 companies (let that sink in for a moment, there are only four black CEOs of the 500 Fortune 500 companies), Jide Zeitlin, CEO of the luxury goods brand Tapestry which owns Kate Spade, Coach and Stuart Weitzman, reported that stores across the country were damaged from New York to San Francisco. Yet he viewed the destruction as secondary to the broader issue: "We can replace our windows and handbags, but we cannot bring back George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, Eric Garner, Trayvon



Martin, Emmett Till and too many others. Each of these black lives matter."

Mr. Zeitlin gets it. He didn't miss the point. He knows exactly what the issue is.

The issue, so beautifully articulated by Dr. Henry, president of the local NAACP chapter, in yet another Trib column is the continued collective pain and injustice of systemic racism AND the lack of response and lasting change. Dr. Henry outlined positive, concrete ways in which all Americans can stand with the African-American community. That's what this community needed to hear, that's what this country needs to hear. This community, this country does not need

to continue hearing the entitled, the privileged placing blame, missing the point and ignoring the real issue. The entitled, the privileged must listen to the cries of pain and suffering from our black and brown sisters and brothers. The entitled, the privileged must open their hearts and minds and realize this isn't about me, this is about us. America is in mourning.

Gradual awakening

Growing up in Savannah, Georgia, in a white, middle-class family during the turbulent 1960s, racism was, unfortunately, evident on a daily basis. There was, for me, never an epiphany or an "aha" moment when I realized I was racist and

that racism was wrong. It was a gradual awakening. Rather than live with that ugly truth about myself, I decided to change. I'm still on the journey.

There are many opportunities for all of us to continue our journey, to grow and to learn. Start with reading books — I'm reading "My Vanishing Country" by Bakari Sellers; watching documentaries — Netflix's "13th" takes a deep dive into systemic racism in the United States; listening to Podcasts — Berne' Brown's recent interview with professor Ibram X. Kendi, New York Times bestselling author of "How to Be an Antiracist" is excellent. The Waco and Cooper Foundations have

collaborated to create a Race Equity Institute full of opportunities to engage and to learn. There is no excuse to remain ignorant.

Deep inside

Several years ago, my pastor, Dr. Leslie King, told me folks in hospice care nearing the end of life have to work hard to die. I'd never thought of the process of dying as hard work. For many of us — the entitled, the privileged — the process of ridding oneself of racism is hard work, very much like dying. Giving up something buried so deeply within one's soul is not easy, it's a journey. In order for the journey to begin, one must first recognize and admit they've missed the point, they've ignored the real issue. It then takes continuous self-reflection. Sadly, not everyone is willing to do that hard work. They will be left behind for I'm convinced this is a pivotal moment in our country and America will move forward out of the darkness of racism and will be a better place when we're on the other side.

Civic leader LaRaine DuPuy serves on the board of Presbyterian Children's Homes and Services and the Today's Actions Tomorrow's Leaders Advisory Board, which oversees the Waco Foundation's LeadershipPlenty program. She is an elder of First Presbyterian Church of Waco.