

Opinion

Civic struggles belie fact that we all share common goals

By DENNIS GRUBAUGH

In appearance, we're all different. Yet, really, we are the same, deep down inside.

From the moment we are born, we share the same natal allegiance to our mothers.



Grubaugh

us even realizing it, subtle situations influence how we see things, how we feel about things, how we form opinions about things, even in the face of fact. Then comes kindergarten, and our sociology test really hits the fan. Our world changes forever. Before we know it, we've formed biases on everything from color to character.

Racism is many things, but foremost it's about ignorance, and while ignorance may be bliss in some circles, it is a heavy weight when it comes to lifting ourselves up to the point where we respect all individuals — until they give us a reason otherwise.

Current events give us pause to consider

how we might become better people, to perhaps shed a few of our preconceived notions and try to see each other more clearly. After all, most of us tread the same path, trying to do right by providing for our families, being good citizens, etc. What's the harm in trying to show empathy for people who are different? Those differences have made our country profoundly great.

Peaceful protest is, at its core, about communicating the need for change to those people who can make the change. Those of us in a position to make the changes should be listening, and not just now, but always.

Regarding the protests, I've seen reactions I would never have expected and at speeds seemingly impossible only months ago. Companies with products from Uncle Ben's to Mrs. Butterworth are changing their brands because of their racial histories. Statues of people from Christopher Columbus to Gen. Robert E. Lee are being removed (some by force, which is wrong) because of their subjects' oppressive backgrounds. Communities from Minneapolis to San Diego are rethinking police protocols and training.

As to the three above points, some of this movement is eye opening but it's not necessarily a new trend:

- Quaker Oats first began tinkering with

the controversial image of Aunt Jemima — another brand soon gone — when it bought the company in 1989, making the familiar face on those pancake products more of a modern-day, motherly figure and less a stereotype.

- Gen. Lee himself supposedly said he was against monuments to the Confederacy because of lingering strife it would cause after the Civil War concluded.

- A 2018 report from the State of Policy in Law Enforcement suggested that 80 percent of law enforcement agencies within the United States agree that they need to increase training, recognizing the desire to improve.

While we're on law enforcement, let's get off this "defund the police" screed. We need police now more than ever. If someone's breaking into your house in the middle of the night, you're sure not going to notify your neighbor over 911. If you're in an accident, you're not going to hope a Good Samaritan happens along. And, if you're in the middle of a riot, you can't depend on being saved by circumstance. No, you know who you'll need.

And, if "defund" means to direct more money into social programs to help people, let's have that conversation, along with the push to get police more training. There are a lot of people in desperate need in this country, and we should help them — first

by showing respect and empathy for their plight.

Bias can be a terrible thing. It prevents us from enjoying life more fully simply because it eliminates choices that keep us locked in a box. How much better we would be if we accepted people regardless of their color, their weight, their physical ability, their personality, their occupation, their stature, their sexuality, or their religion (or their lack of it).

As a journalist, I'm taught to avoid bias like the plague, to keep my opinion out of stories, to avoid tainting facts. (As a columnist, I have more latitude.) That career has steered me well, but humanity make it's impossible to avoid bias altogether.

What we gain from everyday experience forms the preferences and negative feelings that guide our lives. But it's wrong to assume that we know everything about somebody without knowing more about them as individuals. Often those people are more like us than we might expect. Advice here is to walk the middle of the path, where you'll be in a better position to positively interact with those who come your way.

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Police unions need late labor leader's Business 101 philosophy

By ALAN J. ORTBALS

As the son of a staunch union man, I have always been a supporter of organized labor. I believe the decline in union membership over the last 40 years has



Ortbals

been one of the factors that has produced the extraordinary income gap between workers and CEOs as well as the remarkable consolidation of wealth in this country, both of which are detrimental to the overall health of the economy. But unions have their problems.

In the early 1980s a friend of mine worked at the refinery in Roxana. He was management but he, too, was pro-union. That is, however, until there was a problem with one of its members. He never understood why union leaders went to the mat to protect bad employees. It wasn't a question of whether the worker in question was a bad apple, everyone knew the truth, but the union protected them vociferously, making it virtually

impossible to fire them. All for one and one for all was a bedrock tenant of labor unions.

Over my years in the newspaper business, one of my favorite interviewees was the late Terry Nelson, the former head of the Carpenters Union based in St. Louis. The plain-spoken Nelson had a vastly different view of labor-management relations. He called it Business 101. As he saw it, management wasn't the adversary, it was the client. His business was to supply the best labor force that money could buy and to make sure that the client was happy with the results. He wanted that to be the Carpenters Union brand and so, as part of that, he told his clients that they wouldn't have to deal with malefactors among his members. He didn't want them either and wouldn't put up with inferior workmanship, lack of productivity or bad behavior.

But most unions don't operate that way and Nelson continually butted heads with other union leaders who adhered to the old ways. Unions need to change.

After the May 25 murder of George Floyd by a Minneapolis cop, facts came to the fore that made it clear that the police union fostered an environment in which malevolent officers were protected

and retained, undermining the entire department.

According to a Reuters analysis, of 3,000 complaints filed against Minneapolis police officers over the last eight years, 90 percent of them were absolved without punishment or even training to correct bad behavior. Only five were fired.

Reuters also inspected union contracts across the United States and found that Minneapolis's attitude was commonplace. For example, 46 of 82 police contracts they examined required departments to erase disciplinary records in as short as six months. Those of you who deal with human resources know how important it is to build a paper trail before releasing an employee. This practice makes it virtually impossible to build that trail and, such a provision also makes it easy for bad cops to jump from one department to another.

A former Minneapolis police chief, Janee Harteau, has described her frustration with how long it took to remove a police officer even with a long history of citizen complaints.

"The union's perspective is we need to support the cops no matter what," she said. "I support good work, but we cannot support or condone those that do not do a good job or act consistent with our core

beliefs and values."

Derek Chauvin, the policeman who crushed the life out of George Floyd on a Minneapolis street, had 18 complaints filed against him prior to that day, an average of one for every year he was on the force. And yet the union protected him and kept him and even made him a trainer of rookie cops. It was a disaster waiting to happen.

Chauvin should have been removed from the police force years ago and the union should have done it. By protecting members like him, the union not only damaged the reputation of the department but police forces everywhere. Police unions need to change their philosophy. Make it their responsibility to provide the best possible police force, take pride in the fact that they are the best, and make it clear that they do not harbor, protect or defend members who are anything less. Make it known that only the best will be accepted.

The union's standards should just be too high. Adopting Terry Nelson's Business 101 philosophy could go a long way in healing the damage that's been done by Derek Chauvin and others like him.

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