

OPINION



the Astorian

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GUEST COLUMN

Confront the true history of our country

I never imagined that the incidents leading up to and following the killing of George Floyd by law enforcement officers in Minnesota would incite such volatile demonstrations and fuel discussion about similar incidents concerning the fate of African Americans in the United States.

The events reported in the media were viewed by all as reprehensible examples of racism and unconscious biases in our society. Everyone, black and white, has been affected in some way by what they saw and heard.

Most of us have been riveted by the scenes of demonstrations, fueled by the actions of local law enforcement officers specifically directed at members of the African American communities and other minorities in cities across our nation. Many individuals, both white and black, around the world, have participated in these demonstrations, but everyone is wondering, where do we go from here?

How do we progress to a place of healing and change? I propose that we cannot get to a better place unless we go to the fire, and feel the pain of the past that most white Americans never experienced and don't understand. We have all had an incomplete education, never confronted with the true history of our country.

In order to answer the question of where do we go from here, it becomes exceedingly necessary for all of us in America to look back and inside ourselves to recognize both personal and institutional racism in all of its ugly manifestations. Denial keeps us all marching in place and it has become excruciatingly evident that we cannot exist, repeating our same steps over and over.

We must study and analyze the past in order to surge forward. It requires research, answering hard questions and what's really scary — examining ourselves, emotionally and intellectually.

For the African American, reality comes from a place that bears witness to over 400 years of discrimination. Despite the fact that none of us today have experienced the existence in the institution of slavery, residual responses ingrained in American society are just as detrimental to the well-being and psyche of African Americans today as it was during that time in our history.



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian
Activists lined Main Avenue in Warrenton in June to rally for the Black Lives Matter movement.

Discrimination in all areas of our society has contributed to our present state of mind. As one demonstrator voiced, "Black America is just sick and tired of being sick and tired."

Racist attitudes, behaviors and unconscious biases that dwell just under the surface of present white American society must be confronted and examined.

As an educator, I hoped that maybe behaviors can change. I didn't realize how difficult or even impossible it would be to change the heart of people with embedded hatreds of people because of the color of their skin. It has become necessary that we engage in real discussion about race and racism; where it comes from, how it is being perpetrated, so that we can begin creating that more perfect union that we would all like to see and embrace.

What is the root of some of the attitudes and assumptions that some white Americans may have about Africans? In a book I read last year, "Stamped from the Beginning," by Ibram X. Kendi, the author researched how ideas about the inferiority of Africans Americans weaved their way into the minds and hearts of society, yesterday and today. These were the ideas and principles penned in official documents by the forefathers of this country. Their origins were not based on scientific facts, but on lies, perpetrated for the purpose of America's economic success that was built on the backs of Africans brought to the United States to provide slave labor

to the white settlers of a country that was stolen from another race of people that were also considered inferior.

Lies have permeated our society for 400 years to rationalize and legitimize discrimination against all nonwhite people in America. In most cases, attitudes underlying this discrimination were not always outwardly visible, but resting in the hearts, and over time, frequently unconscious minds, continually and systematically influencing race relations in America.

In order for any change to come in any sector of our society, white America must accept and reflect on the fact that these ideas come from a distant and dark place in our country's history. The American institution of slavery is what black America is referencing in insisting that we be acknowledged as equal members of the human race.

Black America can no longer be represented as three-fifths of a person as in past slavery times. As the demonstrators are saying, it is time that we take our rightful place in society as "complete" human beings with an equal right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

As inextricably tied to African American society, I've journeyed through too many years of unequal treatment in all areas of our "free" society: education, the health care system, the justice system, employment and unfair housing practices, always having to pay more and work harder.

This systemic racism is what many

RESOURCES TO INVESTIGATE

- Books**
- "White Fragility," Robin DiAngelo
 - "Stamped from the Beginning," Ibram X Kendi
 - "How to be an Antiracist," Ibram X. Kendi
 - "A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America," Ronald Takaki
 - "The Warmth of Other Suns," Isabel Wilkerson
 - "The Underground Railroad," Colson Whitehead
- Social justice organizations**
- Black Lives Matter • blacklivesmatter.com
 - Color of Change • colorofchange.org
 - Equal Justice Initiatives • eji.org

of the George Floyds of America have experienced. We have been knocked down repeatedly, but the time has come when those who still live have had enough. Like a pot that has been on the stove for too long simmering, the flames have been turned up and it is boiling over. The racism in all of our hearts must be exposed, examined and dismantled.

We need to begin the process of healing. There is no quick and easy solution. In order for us to start the process of reconciliation, I suggest that we listen, really listen, to others and to ourselves and work at discovering the source of why we may think, feel and behave the way we do toward people that look and act differently.

We need an open dialogue about racism in America, revealing what justice looks like for everyone. We must embark on a path of healing and reconciliation so that we are able to recognize the humanity that we share. We must all embark on a journey to dismantle attitudes, feelings and behaviors that discriminate against differences.

We cannot let our differences keep us from recognizing our common humanity. Change and healing can be the result of this upheaval created by both the coronavirus pandemic and actions that are a result of institutional injustices if we want to save ourselves and the soul of America.

Denise Reed is the conductor of the North Coast Chorale.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A treasure

May 29 marked the 62nd anniversary of Fort Clatsop's entrance into the national park system. What began in 1958 as the Fort Clatsop National Memorial is now the Lewis and Clark National Historical Park, and includes sites of importance to the Corps of Discovery Expedition.

The park is a cultural and historic treasure, as well as an important economic engine for Clatsop County. According to the National Park Service, in 2018, Lewis and Clark hosted 286,000 park visitors who spent an estimated \$16.9 million in surrounding communities. Those expenditures supported a total of 235 jobs.

However, age and visitation can take a toll on NPS sites, and Lewis and Clark is no exception, with a deferred maintenance backlog of nearly \$6 million. Systemwide, NPS is struggling with a nearly \$12 billion deferred maintenance backlog, including crumbling roads, deteriorating historic buildings, rundown trails, and outdated water, sewer and electrical systems.

Congress can help by passing the bipartisan Great American Outdoors Act (S. 3422). The bill will help address priority repairs in our national parks and on other public lands by directing up to \$9.5 billion over five years to address maintenance needs. This bill can help Lewis and Clark provide a safe, informative and enjoyable visitor experience for years to come.

Preserving national parks helps drive our tourism economy and preserves our heritage, which is a win-win. Congress should celebrate this anniversary of Lewis and Clark by passing the Great American Outdoors Act.

LIANNE THOMPSON
Clatsop County commissioner,
District 5

Kudos

Kudos to The Astorian reporter Nicole Bales for demonstrating how powerful honest news reporting can be! Her regular reporting on the Falcon Cove water moratorium showed that all voices need to be heard. Thank you for reporting.

KEN BROWN
Arch Cape

Prioritize pedestrians

In light of the serious threat of coronavirus air transmission, and social distancing measures affecting restaurant seating capacity, we should reconsider how our downtown design can better serve the community.

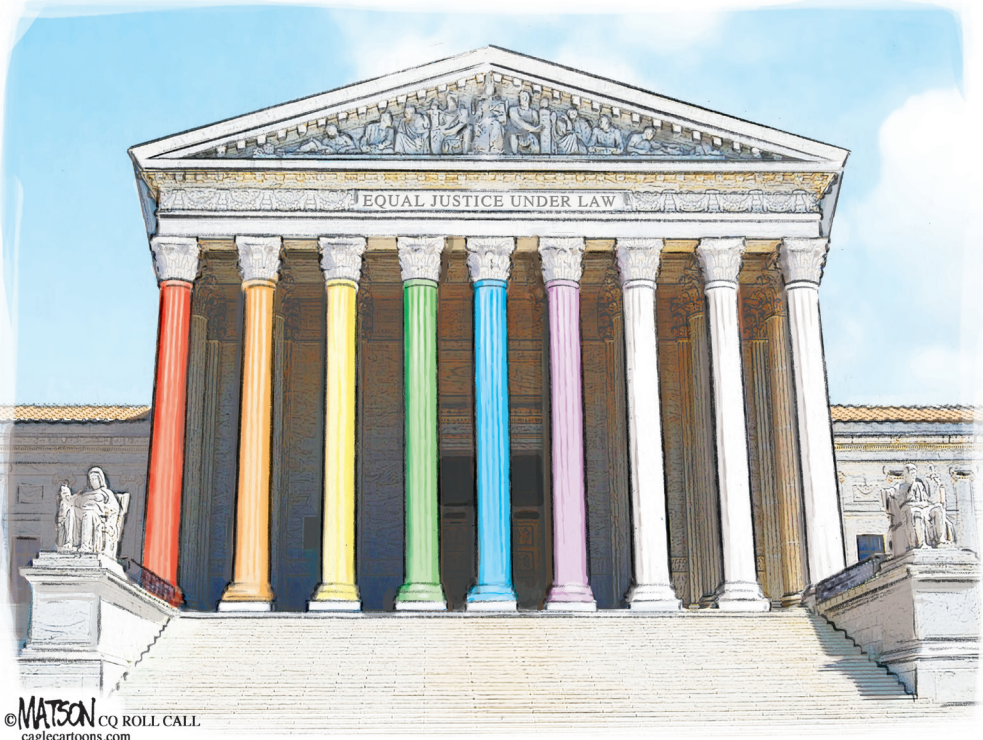
For instance, wouldn't it be lovely if 12th and 14th streets, between Duane Street and Marine Drive, were closed to cars for the summer? Nine restaurants/cafes sit along these corridors — imagine the impact on their summer revenue if they all had access to outdoor seating. We could bring in trees in wine barrels, and have the city match funds with restaurant owners to buy outdoor tables and chairs.

Seaside and Cannon Beach each gave direct financial payments to business owners to help weather this economic crisis. Ours could at least utilize the power of urban planning to give us all more space to enjoy the downtown restaurants.

There's plenty of parking downtown, as the recent study proved, and Hotel Elliot could temporarily reserve the space at 12th and Duane streets for guest loading.

The tourists are already here, why not help our local establishments serve them better?

LAURA JACKSON
Astoria



How dictatorships evolve

We the people have recently witnessed our fellow citizens being tear-gassed and forcibly removed while exercising their constitutional rights to protest peaceably. It was done so that President Donald Trump could stage a photo-op in front of a church that he has never entered, holding a book he appears to know little about.

Dictatorships are born out of instances such as these; the trampling of constitutional rights. Yet no one man can turn a democracy into a dictatorship. It also requires enablers, in the form of opportunistic politicians. It also requires the unswerving support and worship of millions of loyal followers.

We have seen this happen in Germany under Hitler. We have seen this happen

in Spain under Franco. We have seen this happen in Venezuela under Chavez. In each of these cases, enablers and followers willingly abandoned democracy to follow a would-be dictator. We can now see it happening here in the U.S.

On the positive side, democracy in the U.S. is robust. There are already a few honorable, prominent Republicans, especially those who have seen the dysfunction of the White House firsthand, who are prepared to speak out and put country before party. There are surely many ordinary Republicans who feel the same way.

Together, there is still time to save our country from the morass of lies, vindictiveness, divisiveness and authoritarianism into which it is sinking.

JOHN ROGAN
Tillamook