

OPINION

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Police Forfeit Benefit of Doubt Argument

Commitment to accountability is what's needed

BY LAKAYANA DRURY

Our city made national news with the explosive release of text messages between a police lieutenant and leader from Patriot Prayer, an alt-right group with white supremacist sympathies. Was this an egregious breach of protocol or just a misinterpretation of standard conduct? It depends on who you ask.

I spoke with a police officer who said there weren't enough facts to determine the situation. I spoke with community members who sent me articles showing that this was just standard police procedure. I spoke with others who were alarmed but not at all shocked. What concerns me most was how quickly and confidently people were willing to extend the benefit of the doubt to police.

Who is afforded the benefit of the doubt in our country? At face value it would seem that everyone should be afforded the benefit of the doubt. But when we take a closer look we see that the benefit of the doubt is closely tied to privilege and dominant culture.

In light of the text incident, I was alarmed by the number of people who were willing to give the Portland Police Bureau the benefit of the



doubt. Considering the history of Portland as a safe-haven for white supremacists, the fact that the police bureau is under a Department of Justice settlement for excessive use of force, and its troubled history of race relations, why are Portland police given the benefit of the doubt that this was just another gross misunderstanding?

The fact is that black people and young black men in particular are never given the benefit of the doubt in our country. Trayvon Martin was not given the benefit of the doubt when he was walking home with a bag of skittles and ice tea, minding his own business. Tamir Rice was never given the benefit of the doubt when he was shot and killed by the police in a park in Cleveland, Ohio before it was later discovered that the suspicious object he was holding was a toy gun.

Quanice Hayes was not given the benefit of the doubt as he crouched down on all fours here in Portland. Jermaine Massey was not given the benefit of the doubt when he was speaking on the phone with his mom in a Portland hotel lobby. Black people are never afforded the benefit of the doubt; not at Starbucks, not when we are holding our personal belongings, not when we are in school. So why are we so willing to be lenient with the police and willing to consider the situation and facts when that same right is not afforded to black people and

people of color? From jokes about shooting black people, to use of force when other options are available, the Portland Police Bureau is continually given the benefit of the doubt. In the larger scale of society, white people and white men in particular and white culture as a whole are also always given the benefit of the doubt. Whether it be clothing that masquerades with racist imagery or politicians that make racially charged comments or white people who commit crimes, the benefit of the doubt is always extended to them immediately and insulates them from criticism.

On the other hand, black people are almost always presumed guilty or in the wrong. For whites, the benefit of the doubt is a matter of a slap on the wrist or jail time, for blacks, it can often be life or death. I challenge us as a community to replace that benefit of the doubt with the commitment of accountability. The benefit of the doubt is an unearned privilege that must be rejected and further damages the relationships within the community. Accountability holds us responsible and unites communities.

The commitment of accountability means that instead of asking, "In this situation, was the officer overly friendly with a leader of an alt-right group?" to instead asking, "How does PPB hold its officers accountable and reform policies to stand against white supremacy?" Accountability isn't just about disciplining the individuals who com-

mitted the act as much as it is about changing the policies, systems and culture that gives those individuals the power to act in the first place. The benefit of the doubt protects individuals whereas the commitment of responsibility challenges institutions and systems and holds individuals responsible for their actions.

I am less concerned with the individual officer in this incident and more concerned with how PPB plans to change policies and institutional culture so that it firmly stands against white supremacy. I am less concerned with the officers on the street and more concerned with the policies that shape how they respond to calls and what behaviors are tolerated. The benefit of the doubt focuses on intent and commitment to accountability centers on the impact.

The impact of the "text incident" is that it fuels the narrative that PPB is not to be trusted in communities of color and that they are colluding with or at the least sympathetic to alt-right organizations. Many in the city are working to improve relationships between the police and the community including myself, and events like this make our work that much more challenging and lead us to question how invested police are to this process. The Portland Police Bureau must take the commitment to accountability seriously and focus not only on explaining the context of the messages and disciplining those involved but more importantly make a clear statement on where it stands

in regards to white supremacy. They should not shy away from the incident nor deflect blame but step boldly into the situation and firmly clarify where they stand.

The community should not have to doubt whether its police force stands against white supremacy and to have any doubt should alarm us all. PPB must focus on policy reform, transparency and work culture to change the current power dynamics. At every opportunity they should reject the benefit of the doubt argument which weakens trust and does not address institutional racism and bias. White community members must also reject the benefit of the doubt plea and not hand it out whenever controversy arises. The police must realize the racial roots of this benefit and realize that this benefit is not extended to their black neighbors.

The benefit of the doubt argument is tone deaf and privileged. White people must be allies to communities of color as we work to dismantle systems of oppression and demand the commitment of accountability from our institutions and leaders. We in the black community do not want the benefit of the doubt either. We want to benefit from life: To work, play, sit, talk and live like everyone else. That benefit starts with a commitment to accountability.

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They're Still Angry about the Pharaohs and the Moors

Why white people hate us so much

BY LEGRAND H. CLEGG II.

Several months ago, I wrote an article claiming that one of the driving forces behind White racism and animosity toward black people is that of retaliation. In summary, on a deep, subconscious level the white collective has inherited from its ancient and medieval ancestors an entrenched resentment of black people that was originally caused by black ostracism, domination and enslavement of primitive whites when Africans ruled the world. Given the fact that this is February of the Black quadricentennial year (1619-2019) of enslavement in America, and given recent racist events in this country, I have chosen to revisit and elaborate on my theory of global white resentment and retribution toward people of African descent.

The latest FBI crime statistics (2017) reveal that African Ameri-



cans remain the chief victims of hate crimes in the United States. School segregation is as pervasive as ever. Republican legislators are suppressing

black votes and gerrymandering local and statewide districts. Black people still suffer the highest unemployment rates and have the lowest net worth in the nation. African Americans are given the most severe sentences for criminal violations and are more likely than any other group to be victims of violence at the hands of the police. Furthermore, President Trump has condemned peacefully protesting black athletes as "sons of bitches."

In our confusion over the persistence of white racism across generations and in our effort to become accepted as ordinary American citizens just as everyone else, we, as black people, have appealed to the white collective with demonstrations, protests, petitions, prayer vigils, etc.; none of which has led to a genuine cessation of racism on the part of the white establishment or masses.

Rather than continue these modes

of thought and action, I believe we as a people should pause, gather our wits about us and calmly evaluate the true nature of white racism toward us. From such analysis we will find that today, as in the past, we are not just facing racial prejudice and intolerance but, rather, a deep-seated, visceral, reflexive loathing of black people by whites on a global scale that appears to defy all logic, has persisted over the centuries and is gaining renewed momentum during the age of Trump.

I theorize that this persistent white behavior toward people of African descent, which we call racism, is a result of at least three thousand years of black Pharaohs and generals (including Sesostrius, Thutmose III, Ramesses II, Taharka, Batricus, Hannibal and the Moors) raiding, invading, conquering, dominating, colonizing, oppressing and enslaving various European and Asian populations.

These periodic incursions and extended colonizations culminated in the European exploits of the great Carthaginian general, Hannibal; in the nearly eight hundred year reign (i.e., 711 A.D. to 1492 A.D.) of the Black

Moors over the Iberian Peninsula (Spain and Portugal) and in Moorish naval fleets dominating the Mediterranean Sea during the Middle Ages.

Although the Muslim Moors civilized Spain and Portugal (just as the ancient Egyptians civilized the white Greeks), ushered Europe out of the Dark Ages and laid the foundation for her modern hegemony, Europeans deeply resented Moorish rule. By 1492, the Spanish regained power, began driving the Moors from the Iberian Peninsula and exterminating many who remained. (Some black scholars believe that the Spanish bull fight and bull run are symbolic reenactments of Europeans driving the Moors from Spain).

When the tables were turned and the Portuguese and Spanish began enslaving Africans, whom they called Moors, the longstanding European hatred and resentment of their former African masters morphed into contempt and animosity toward black people in general. His sentiment became institutionalized and spread throughout Western Europe, crossed the Atlantic and reached the New World during

the African slave-trade. For centuries this internalized sense of white enmity and racism -- which I describe as subconscious vengeance -- that has been widely manifested toward people of African descent, has proven itself to be virtually impervious to change in the face of black appeals and agitation. Therefore, I humbly suggest that we, African Americans, cease appealing to the collective white conscience for change and, instead, utilize our vast consumer power to withhold our financial patronage (boycott) in wise and strategic ways, just as our revered leader, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., did with the successful Montgomery Bus Boycott of the 1950's that led to the end of segregation in public transportation. This is truly the best way to effectuate change in a capitalist system dominated by white supremacy and racism.

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