

Opinion

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EDITORIAL

Calm, not chaos

It lasted for only about an hour.
It was mostly quiet.
It was completely peaceful.

Perhaps most important, the vigil for George Floyd that took place Monday evening at Baker City's Central Park proved that it's quite possible to reflect on the tragic death of a person without the somber event being marred by arson, vandalism and other sorts of mayhem.

The vigil organized by Boston Colton of Baker City was a welcome antidote to the scenes of chaos we've been watching elsewhere for the past week or so.

Baker City, in common with other small towns, is certainly much less prone to the kinds of violent demonstrations that have plagued big cities such as Portland and Seattle.

All things being equal, the fewer people, the lower the odds that any group will include a handful of malcontents whose only interest is damaging property or looting.

But if 115 or so people can gather in Baker City and do so without incident, there's no legitimate reason why 10 or 20 times that number can't do the same.

—Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald

OTHER VIEWS

Americans must unite in standing against racism

Editorial from The San Jose Mercury News and East Bay Times

As a nation, we must wake up to, speak out against and stop the racism that black Americans experience and fear every day.

We must acknowledge that more than six decades after the birth of the civil rights movement, we remain a grossly unequal society in which people of color — especially black men — face disparate treatment because of the pigment of their skin.

Disparate treatment most disturbingly from people in power: From the Minneapolis police officer who held his knee on George Floyd's neck for about eight minutes as he stopped breathing; the Georgia officials who ignored the fatal shooting of jogger Ahmaud Arbery; and the off-duty police officer who walked into the wrong Dallas apartment and murdered Botham Jean.

Those are just some in an endless list of cases that make many African Americans fear the people who are supposed to protect them, worry about walking down the street, agonize about the safety of their children and hesitate at reporting crime.

We must speak up against the racism and against the economic injustices that have historically made — and continue today to make — it impossible to truly equalize our society. We must speak up and speak out — but we must do so peacefully.

Sadly, that's not what we've witnessed on recent nights. While most seek nonviolent tactics to make themselves heard, once again some are determined to wreak havoc on our cities.

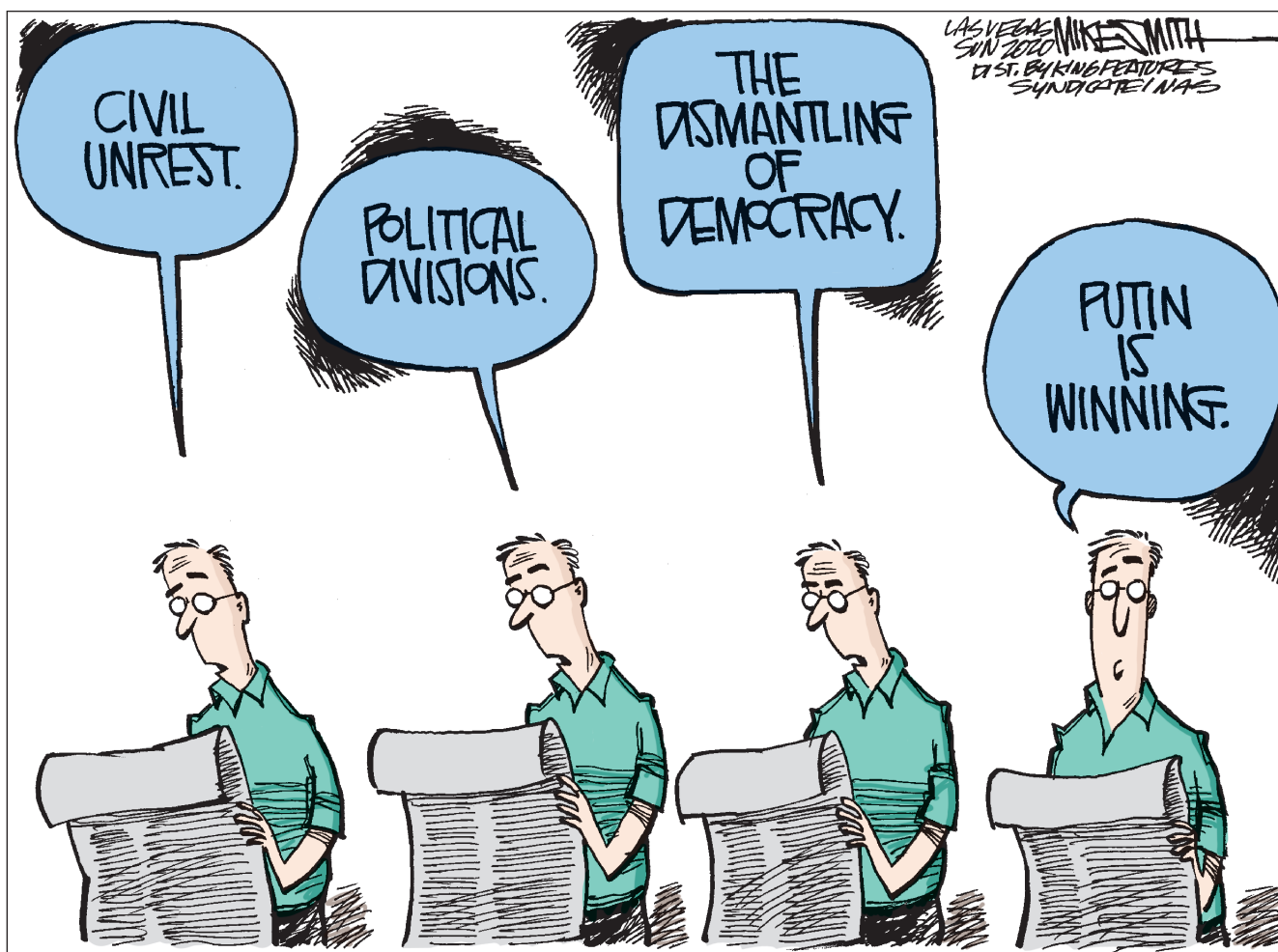
The trashing of our communities solves nothing. It only makes the economic injustice worse for it damages the businesses that employ us and serve us all, and it drains the already-scarce public resources needed to help the neediest. The destruction is an indictment of wrong-minded protesters bent on violence and should not be taken as a reflection on those who gathered with legitimate cause.

The violence must be stopped. Ripping apart our society is not the solution for fixing it.

At the same time, there must be wide room for the peaceful voices of protest to be heard. And it's incumbent on all of us to listen to those voices. To acknowledge that we remain an economically divided nation — and that it's only gotten worse in the past four years.

It's time for us to hear the pain and the feelings of helplessness — surely exacerbated by the feelings of quarantine as a pandemic ravages our nation and disproportionately attacks the very same minority communities that also experience the worst discrimination.

This is a time for America to search its national soul, to recognize the racism within and to work empathetically to correct it. We've ignored it for too long.



OTHER VIEWS

Our union can outlast this, too

Editorial from The Dallas Morning News:

The killing of George Floyd at the hands of the Minneapolis police is a single point in a larger narrative. It is personalizing, once again, a seemingly forever struggle, and it is testing anew this nation's commitment to justice on the individual level and across a land that always promises a brighter tomorrow even as basic hopes too often seem just out of reach.

Our country, at this moment, is facing a constellation of challenges that touch fundamental precepts of our society, and these are challenges that need to be met head on with courage and with commitment to the only values that can truly unite us — values of respect for each individual person and that foster a culture of inclusion and opportunity for every person.

If this nation feels like it is pulling itself apart, it is because Floyd's death is a Minneapolis story with a corollary in every community.

It's also because some would take us down the wrong path. While the underlying frustration is something everyone with an ounce of humanity should feel in response to this injustice, those who are responding with riots, violence and looting are making change harder to enact.

It's also true that when the president of the United States reacts to events with tweets using such loaded words as "thugs" and seeming to endorse callous use of lethal force, he is stoking fires rather than offering constructive leadership that can pull communities together. And leadership that can unite this country is what is sorely needed right now. We are battling a disease in racism that is as old as humanity itself and that fosters nervous separation rather than inclusiveness.

If ever there was a time we needed the best America, it is now. Instead, it feels as if we are getting the worst.

This was coming for a long time,

a slow train rolling in the distance. We've spent years feeding our divisions, instead of nurturing our unity. We have made the other of one another. We have looked out at our nation with eyes of contempt and spoken with tongues of enmity. We have closed our hearts to one another. We've let ourselves be isolated in the false world of our little internet silos. We've created all the fuel we need for our own burning. We just need a match.

George Floyd's killing should not be that match. It should instead be an awakening light. For this, we will insist on justice. For this, we will bolster the institutions we have created as a free people to deliver that justice.

There is justifying the anger. There is justifying the rage. There is no justifying destruction. There is no justifying stealing and hurting. Nothing about George Floyd's death should be used to justify opening that door.

There are those who will say this is the inevitable result of a system that has failed a people. To them, we say you are rejecting the history and the possibility of America. We believe our nation has struggled in blood and pain toward equality and toward justice.

The work is far from finished. Each terrible and evil killing is a wound against our progress. George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Botham Jean, Atatiana Jefferson, Breonna Taylor, Trayvon Martin, Emmett Till, Medgar Evers, Martin Luther King Jr. The list of names stretches so deeply into our history that we cannot know all the names — as many as the stars in the sky is all we know.

No, the work is not finished. It will never be finished. But the best America is the place where the work can be done. It is where the work has been done, from the bloody fields of Shiloh to the Pettus Bridge of Selma. The best America is a nation that embraces the brotherhood and sisterhood of humanity in a shared dignity and a natural

freedom protected under law for all.

Many of our people are scared or anxious about the future. They are worried and they are hurting. After all, we are inundated with images that cause trauma rather than healing, washed over with words calculated to divide rather than crafted to unify in common purpose.

It's important to remember, as we scroll and scroll the images and the words that bring the world so intimately to us, that we can have another reaction.

We can remember that we are together. We are still one as a people. We are Americans, and that needs to mean something good. It needs to mean that we are people who seek justice for all, who live to create a better nation, a more perfect union.

That word, union, stretches so deeply into our history. It was the Union that rejected human bondage. It was the Union that bled together against a rebellion committed to the evil of slavery.

It was the Union that stood against tyranny in the world. It was the Union that defeated imperial Japan and that freed Western Europe from a genocidal regime. It was the Union that stared down the Soviet threat through decades of fear and that restored nations to their own people. It was the Union that said enough to laws that codified our racist past.

It is our union now that will see us together through these times. Lincoln told us long ago that we could not let ourselves be divided. We have to stand with one another, hand in hand. We do not have to agree on every matter. But we need to be united in the understanding that our futures are intertwined. As Lincoln reminded us in a different but connected context, "We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies."

We are together. We are one with one another. We are Americans.

Letters to the editor

- We welcome letters on any issue of public interest. Customer complaints about specific businesses will not be printed.
- The Baker City Herald will not knowingly print false or misleading claims. However, we cannot verify the

accuracy of all statements in letters to the editor.

- Letters are limited to 350 words; longer letters will be edited for length. Writers are limited to one letter every 15 days.
- The writer must sign the letter and include an address and phone number (for verification only). Letters that do

not include this information cannot be published.

- Letters will be edited for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons.

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