

Reconciling Competing World Views

By Kenneth P. Williams



The past six months have clearly demonstrated that despite the improvement of opportunities and economic gains by minorities, including African Americans, the core of ongoing racial tension in the United States has never been fully addressed. Many in our country believe that the socio-economic improvement in the lives of many minorities is “proof” that the racial tension and divisiveness of the past has been dealt with, or at least has greatly improved since the 1960s. Others believe that the recent police shootings, resulting in the tragedies suffered by African Americans, are “proof” that there is widespread systemic racism in every institution of law enforcement. The outcry against police brutality and systemic racism has now spread to affect all facets of life. The unrest has been superimposed upon the global pandemic, which also continues to affect life in every sense. Various kinds of protests in response to or in support of either belief have spread across the country. The protesting has now been mixed with violence. The violence, theft, and destruction of property has now caused a great distraction from the underlying issues of race and equality in the United States. The nightly news has turned the focus from the protests to the violence. Despite the ongoing issues related to recent events, there has already been a subtle shift away from the issues toward the politicization of the responses.

Our country is experiencing a clash of ideologies and a battle of world views. One world view holds that there is systemic racism in every facet of every institution, not just limited to law enforcement, and complete change from the ground up must be initiated. The competing world view argues that the racism in the United States is not systemic and has vastly improved since the 1960s; the tragic deaths and injuries from recent times caused by law enforcement are isolated events. I do not believe there will be real change until those differing world views are explored and reconciled. There are powerful individuals and institutions on either side of the spectrum, and thus the interpretation

of past and present events and possible solutions differ greatly. Neither side will prevail in forcing one world view upon the other. Each world view is viewed as correct.

Real systemic changes both on an individual and institutional level cannot truly occur until the competing views are reconciled. The longer the protesting is overshadowed and politicized by the violence and destruction of property, the longer the delay to the implementation of real solutions will

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be. This is true notwithstanding the fact that many companies and organizations have not only embraced the need for change, but donated millions of dollars toward many of the organizations leading the movement. The early months of 2020 have proved that the consequence of ignoring the problems of racism and police

brutality and excessive force will be a long continuation of violence and backlash throughout our country.

Violence (murder, assault, rioting, destruction of property, and theft) in response to perceived social injustice and/or inequality will forever disfigure the message of where and how change needs to occur. The emotional response of violence causes the root issues to be buried until the perceived “lawlessness” is ended. It also pushes the competing world views further apart. In fact, many of the protests and most visible corporate “responses” have seemingly been in response to both the protests and the violence itself.

World views contain inherent bias. Those biases must be explored and addressed in an environment that can spark change—one in which true understanding can take place. The nature and extent of interaction with diverse people, and thus diverse world views, will differ based upon both geography and life experience. Opportunity for change travels along the pathways of human social connection. The greater the opportunity for interaction with diverse people, the more opportunity we have to see others as human beings, not as races, cultures, stereotypes, or archetypes of different world views. World views are shared and explored

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through direct interaction, and this is how people learn, grow, and come together despite diverse backgrounds.

If the combined world view results in a belief that there is systemic racism in this country, what has to be addressed is whether the experience of African Americans with law enforcement is the result of that systemic racism. There is a vast disagreement within the media and political arenas on this issue, thus the need for resolution. That conclusion should guide all efforts toward a solution. If those latter issues are not a result of “systemic racism,” then the entire societal narrative is flawed. The most tragic result that could emerge from 2020 is that all of the loss of life, the destruction of property, the tragic interactions between African Americans and law enforcement—along with all of the peaceful protesting—become past events, soon to be forgotten, or events from which American society has “moved on.”

Interestingly, there is a meaningful passage on how to create change in a document from a few years ago in the Report of the Michigan Commission on Law Enforcement Standards: Fostering Public Trust in Law Enforcement in Michigan (April 19, 2017, 112–113).

The latest findings in the psychological sciences indicate that one’s view of the world can become more universal through positive contacts with other belief systems, other cultures, and with those who think differently than he or she does. This contact must occur in an environment where a true exchanges of views can take place. This is one way to avoid the pitfalls of faulty intuition, which often leads to inappropriate stereotyping and bias. Recruits often do not have an opportunity to interact with those with diverse belief systems. Both the Commission staff and the training directors must work together to enable students to interact with the public through assignments, projects, practical exercises, or just casual conversation to help widen worldview. This helps avoid potential unconscious biases that creep into decision making and judgment.

This quote seems not only appropriate for law enforcement but for our society at large. Clearly, there is a need

for law enforcement to embrace the community it serves, outside of enforcing the law. But it is also incumbent upon every individual who seeks reconciliation in the United States among human beings and societal institutions, to address the flaws of the popular narratives in our country first and drill down to where and why real change needs to occur. Now is the time to vote. Now is the time to volunteer. Now is the time to take diversity and inclusion beyond a slogan and explore and interact with individuals of diverse backgrounds and diverse perspectives. Now is the time to speak up and have the conversation with those within my network, so that competing world views can be exchanged. Now is the time to practice law outside of the courtroom in a way that positively affects society around me. Now is the time to engage law enforcement in a meaningful discourse consistent with the above 2017 directive to new recruits. The power to change rests on every one of us, but it can only happen intentionally in environments where true exchanges of views can take place.

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