

SHERIFF SPEAKS FROM HIS HEART

The senseless killing of George Floyd, the agonizing cries of a man created equal by God but treated much differently by four men, was the result of the brutal combination of an indifference to life and the signs of racism that our minority, and especially African American communities have endured and continued to endure in this country at the hands of evil and misguided individuals. Police Departments, Sheriff Officers, and all aspects of government are not immune from having those same racist and misguided individuals find their way into these governmental organizations, create pain and havoc, and spoil the good efforts and character of the many hardworking, caring, and forthright individuals within them. Finding a solution to this problem is not easy, but finding the starting place is. Put simply, there is no place in our world for racism and injustice and no place for racism and injustice among those that call themselves law enforcement. Law enforcement officials, from police to prosecutors, wield enormous power that is on a daily basis used against our fellow citizens in a manner that we hope is right action. But that action is not always right, we know that, we have seen that, we saw that for 8 minutes and 46 seconds. Our own city is not removed from the history of racial injustice in the country, nor is it immune to the actions of our citizens, law enforcement, and other government actors who fall short of the golden rule, which is to treat people the way you wish to be treated.

The principle of treating others the way you would want to be treated has been the rule and guide of my 38 years in law enforcement. For me, if someone is breaking the law, I stop them, that's my job, but I stop them while preserving their life and dignity as a human being and afford that person the due process owed as a citizen of the United States. That is what I would want afforded me, that is how I would want to be treated. But I know that our African American communities across the county are not always afforded this type of treatment, equality, or respect by law enforcement. I am angered and frustrated by that fact.

So how do we respond? We have responded as Americans who, as a nation, have had a rich tradition of peaceful protest and social discourse to find solutions to our problems and we should welcome the opportunity to find ways to allow liberty to flourish for all our communities, regardless of race, creed, color, religion, gender, or sexual orientation. How do I respond as the Sheriff of Suffolk? With the continued community engagement that has been the cornerstone of my Office and built the relationships with our fellow citizens that we still enjoy today. Also, it includes continued training and my continued requirement that my deputies are and will be the quality and compassionate human beings Suffolk deserves. How does the broader law enforcement community respond? By showing what good police officers are, sharpening their hiring and training processes, and by rooting out those officers that would damage the institution and cause the type of pain George Floyd's family is experiencing.

I don't have all the answers. I don't pretend to. But I realize if things were going right in our country, so many people wouldn't feel so wronged. So, as I listen to the experiences and stories of our minority community, their pain, their hope, their desires for change, what they are happy with and what has to improve, I am encouraged by their resolve, desire their trust, and realize that we as law enforcement still have a good way to go to strengthen that fragile and all important trust that exists between the police and the community it is policing.

I encourage the citizens of Suffolk to never forget the injustices we have seen and heard, to have the hard conversations that need to be had and have them with a heart filled with compassion and understanding, and above all else to care for one another.