

Intensive Care for Benicia – I see you differently now...

Sunday, May 23, 2021, by Roger Straw

A white American's deepening awareness of Black lives



I'm white. 39% of us who live here in Solano County are white.* For the last how many months now, our tv news has been loaded with images of Black and Asian victims of police shootings and hate crimes. The tv and radio air waves have been filled with reporters and commentators calling on white Americans to understand anew just how frightening it is to walk while Black, shop while Black, drive, sleep, or worship while Black.

Increasingly of late, I see an abundance of network tv anchors, interviewees and experts who are Black. We watched Mr. Blackwell, lead prosecution counsel in the Erik Chauvin / George Floyd murder trial, watched him admiringly and for days on end. We've tuned in to coverage of public protests, peaceful and understandably angry by day, and equally understandably but disturbingly violent after nightfall. And we've been amazed and heartened at the number of white people, young and old, among the protesters.

And... we've read local letters to the editor and online posts, and weighed in ourselves from time to time, raising the Black Lives Matter mantra, calling for anti-racism training, describing incidents of conscious and unconscious bias right here in our lovely hometown, in our own time, and wondering how and when the U.S. can get to a peaceful if not totally serene co-existence among neighbors of many races and ethnicities.

And I think all this is having an effect.

I confess, I am seeing my Black and Asian neighbors differently now. Passing in the parking lot or on the sidewalk, I find that I'm searching a Black face just a little more earnestly than ever before, looking for that moment of recognition: is this someone I know?

It's a small thing perhaps, but hugely important. To share this as something new in my consciousness is, yes, to confess that it wasn't always that way for me. I realize, with profound sadness, that I didn't have that openness in my mindset in the months and years gone by. I hate to go public with my blindness, but that's how it is for so many of us who grew up white in the U.S. Passing you while White, passing you my Black neighbor, I'd see color, and I'd presume

we were not known to each other, that you were not to be recognized, that (profoundly) you didn't exist to me.

It will take a lot of intensive effort to maintain and deepen this new awareness. It will take meeting and getting to know more Black neighbors, casual or not-so-casual conversations, shared meals, combined efforts and joining of hands in challenging systems that uphold a racist past.

It will take an intensive effort. Intensive care, if you will, intense caring. The doctor's prescription for White America.

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Solano County Population by Race - 2020 Census

Race	Residents	% of Total
Asian	63,494	14%
Black	63,274	14%
Hispanic	117,203	26%
White	175,650	39%
Multirace/Other	29,811	7%
Totals	449,432	100%

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Benicia