

Anti-racism letters in the Benicia Herald

Wednesday, April 21, 2021, by Benicia Mayor Steve Young

On the hate crime last weekend and the arrest



Benicia Mayor Steve Young

I recently received an email from a member of the community asking me to push back against the idea that Benicia has a problem with racism.

They argued that Benicia Black Lives Matter is overstating the degree of racism in our town. I responded by saying that there was, in fact, a problem here that needed to be acknowledged. They politely, but firmly, disagreed.

The incident on April 10 in the Raley's parking lot, where three young Black teenagers were subjected to racial slurs by a white Benicia resident who later threatened them with an airsoft pistol, showed that an idealized version of Benicia is not the reality. It was the most recent and overt example of racism here, but it was not the only one. A white Benicia fisherman was captured on camera berating a group of Asian-Americans on the pier for fishing in "his" spot, and asking where "they" came from.

The young victims at the Raley's center are understandably traumatized by this act of racist hate and intimidation. The alleged perpetrator was quickly arrested by Benicia police on several counts, including perpetrating a hate crime. He is currently out on bail, and charging decisions will be made by the District Attorney.

There are clearly too many people in Benicia, be they citizens or visitors, who still suffer from racial bias (both conscious and unconscious), and too many people of color who suffer direct and indirect discrimination. Whether the bias comes from blatant hatred, ignorance or lack of education/information, it is real and it needs to be acknowledged before it can be meaningfully addressed.

The City has taken the first steps by hiring a part-time Racial and Equity Manager to help us review our own practices. Benicia is approximately 30% minority, but the makeup of our various Boards and Commissions, as well as our overall city employment, does not reflect that level of representation.

**BLACK
LIVES
MATTER**

The logo for Black Lives Matter, featuring the words "BLACK LIVES MATTER" in a bold, black, sans-serif font. Below the text are three horizontal yellow lines of varying lengths, with the longest line under "MATTER".

Clearly, there is work that needs to be done to make our community more inclusive and welcoming to all of our residents. But that work must start with acknowledging that we do, in fact, have a problem.

We can do better as a community by opening our mind and listening to each other. Hate and racism have no place in Benicia, and we must do our best to make this a more welcoming and inclusive city.

Steve Young
Mayor, City of Benicia