

What comes after Chauvin verdict is up to all of us



Patrick Henry
Special to St. Cloud Times
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Inflection point. Watershed. Crossroad. Metaphors proliferate as we try to speak accurately about what the conviction of Derek Chauvin for the murder of George Floyd means.

Everybody – around the world – recognized a seismic shift. Where does it register on the social, cultural, political, religious Richter scale?

The answer was stated succinctly, eloquently, and pointedly by Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison, who oversaw the prosecution. “I would not call today’s verdict ‘justice,’” he said, “because justice implies true restoration. But it is accountability, which is the first step towards justice. And now the cause of justice is in your hands. And when I say your hands, I mean the hands of the people of the United States.”

Yes, there is work for police chiefs and review boards and city councils and attorneys general and state and federal legislators to do, but it is up to all of us to call them – and each other – to account. If we don’t, we’ll be confirming those Black writers who say that after so long, even with this striking verdict, they remain skeptical that anything much will change.

Ellison celebrated those who just happened to be walking by the corner of Chicago and 38th: “A bouquet of humanity, old, young, men and women, black and white.” What did they do? “They stopped and they raised their voices because they knew that what they were seeing was wrong.”

Death – of George Floyd and of all the others whose names we must say and keep saying – has waked me up. In recent months I have been startled and embarrassed as I’ve learned that scholars and journalists have been writing for decades about systemic racism in America and I didn’t pay attention. I knew racism wasn’t just a matter of my individual attitudes – though I still figured I could say “I’m not a racist” with a straight face.

But the extent to which I, as white, and a male into the bargain, am a beneficiary of four centuries of public and private affirmative action on behalf of people like me – it just didn’t register. I could see things were “wrong.” I was oblivious to how deep the wrong is embedded in the world I inhabit and how thoroughly I am enmeshed in a web of racial distortion.

I am grateful to be waking up here, in the greater St. Cloud area. I’ve cited this aphorism often – it never grows old: “Big enough to make a difference, small enough to make it work.” The phrase was coined seven years ago by Pastor James Alberts II, a community leader we would be fortunate to have at any time, and especially now.

He was among those who provided the initial inspiration for the Community Leaders Committed to Creating Place Equity ad that appeared with 70 signatures in the St. Cloud Times the third weekend in April, following the death of Daunte Wright in Brooklyn Center.

“Another African American male has lost his life.” Fact. “Many of us are in pain, many of us are conflicted, many of us are angry, many of us are tired.” Facts.

And what emerges from these facts? “Together we remain committed to securing a deeper understanding of the problem and creating solutions that lift us all.” To lift up, you first have to go deep – “despite the discomfort it might cause. We have done much, but we know it is not enough.”

The ad names two commitments.

First, for each of us to create safe spaces in our home, our workplace, our place of worship, for brave conversations to push against the ugliness of racism and build stronger relationships with those who join us. If the conversations are going to be brave, which they must if they’re to go beyond “Minnesota Nice,” the spaces have to be safe.

Second, a comprehensive list of place-based equity and anti-racist interventions in this area will be drawn up and communicated. I suspect that the amount of “sustained work of meaningful change [that] is occurring right now in our area” will come as a surprise to you, but that’s not a resting place. The next step is “to find the gaps in the current and/or planned offerings and strategize solutions to fill those gaps.” And the opening: “We will welcome feedback.”

I especially appreciate the conclusion, because it both encourages and supports my staying awake: “This is our community! We have all the talent and expertise needed to bring about and sustain substantive change for our children and families. ... We are dedicated to the success of all in OUR COMMUNITY and we commit to the work of making it happen.”

“I say your hands.” Attorney General Ellison was speaking to us. There’s evidence we’re listening. It’s a start. “The work of making it happen” – that’s the test.

— *This is the opinion of Times Writers Group member Patrick Henry, retired executive director of the Collegeville Institute for Ecumenical and Cultural Research. He is the author of “Flashes of Grace: 33 Encounters with God.” His column is published the first Sunday of the month.*

YOUR TURN

Are we really living in a representative democracy?

Anthony Akubue

St. Cloud

Every day as I watch the news, the phrase “democracy by representation” repeatedly roams my mind. With what I see unfolding before my eyes, I keep asking myself if representative democracy is what we still have in our great country. Why does it appear as if senators and representatives in the United States Congress no longer carry out the wishes of those they represent, even when polls indicate what a majority of them want?

The honorable Sen. Mitch McConnell, the Senate minority leader from the great state of Ohio, said he would see to it that no Senate Republican would vote for President Biden’s COVID-19 relief bill, and they didn’t.

Now Mr. McConnell says he will fight President Biden’s infrastructure plan every step of the way. Why? I can guess at least one likely reason. When the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, which cut the corporate tax rate all the way from 35% to 21% was signed into law by President Donald J. Trump on Dec. 22, 2017, Sen. McConnell was fine with it. Mr. McConnell now vows to fight President Biden every step of the way for raising the corporate tax rate a mere 7%, from President Trump’s 21% to 28%.

Unfortunately, when the members of any political party want to have their way when they are in the majority and also when they are in the minority, their political party becomes a party that has ceased working for the progress of America and Americans. In other words, the members of such a political party become obsessed with keeping their jobs and maintaining power, and no longer focus on serving the interests of their constituencies.

Saying things repeatedly that have been fact checked and found to be demonstrably false will not validate them. As Father Njume remarks in his Catholic meditation, truth is still the truth, even if no one believes it; and a lie is still a lie, even if everyone believes it.

The same people who wailed against the fortifica-

tion of the Capitol as a precaution against insurrection and possible fatalities are also the first to say that their thoughts and prayers go to the families of the members of Capitol police murdered in the absence of the fortification. These are people wont to do things that not only defy logic, but things that are conspicuously and egregiously hypocritical.

Prayers must be mingled with action, for it is in action that the invisible hands of God are embedded and unleashed. For example, David confronted Goliath the giant with a catapult (slingshot) after praying. The invisible hands of God accompanied the slingshot as it went from potential to kinetic energy to hit the bullseye, also known as Goliath’s forehead.

Our behavior as innocent lives are senselessly being cut short is appalling and unacceptable. We cannot continue to be all talk without action. There’s no reason, President Reagan remarked, why on the street today a citizen should be carrying a loaded weapon. To the United States representatives and senators concerned, you cannot continue to say the same thing each time a mass shooting occurs and expecting a different outcome. Recall that your predisposition to say the same thing without action is Einstein’s definition of insanity.

The frequency of mass shootings is increasing in our beloved country and all we say is that our thoughts and prayers go to the families of those murdered in cold blood. Any suggestion to mingle such thoughts and prayers with action, the people who call for action are falsely accused of politicizing the issue. Mass shooting has reached a level where doing nothing is no longer an option. Prayer is powerful and necessary, but it is not sufficient without an accompanying action.

Finally, I paraphrase Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and I say that what the world needs today are leaders not in love with money or power but in love with justice; leaders not in love with publicity and photo-ops but in love with humanity. U.S. representatives and senators, do the right things to save lives.

— *This is the opinion of St. Cloud resident Anthony Akubue.*

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

If you build EVs, people will buy

A decision is imminent on Minnesota’s rule requiring increased availability of low/zero emission vehicles. Beginning on Jan. 1, 2024, auto dealers will gradually increase the availability of electric vehicles in Minnesota.

But remember: The rule only requires auto dealers to stock some EVs. Will people buy EVs? Let’s take a look at what happened in 2020 in Europe. The EU has tightened fleet average emission standards with stiff fines for exceeding the limits. EU standards directly address CO2 emissions, since reduction is vital to mitigating climate change.

So what happened? European EV sales jumped from less than 600,000 units in 2019 to 1.4 million units in 2020, increasing the EV market share in Europe from 3.3% to 10.2%. There were 170 EV models

available in Europe vs. 50 models in the U.S. The U.S. market has been dominated by Tesla which sells 66% of all EVs. While 2020 total U.S. light duty vehicle sales were down by 14%, Tesla sales were up by 20%.

Polls demonstrate the demand for EVs, but in mid-April, Minnesota dealers had 33,930 passenger vehicles in stock, but only 469 EVs, showing how dealers have neglected this market. Minnesota’s new rule will change this at the moment that every manufacturer is bringing EVs to market. Sedans, crossovers, SUVs and pickup trucks will be manufactured. We just need to see them appear in Minnesota dealerships.

Full disclosure: I’ve owned my EV for a year, driven it to the West Coast and back, and have enjoyed every minute. Paraphrasing the Costner movie, “if they build them, buyers will buy.”

Bruce Anderson

St. Cloud

Outdoor

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St. Cloud to Clearwater is a designated scenic corridor that offers a fabulous experience to paddlers; from Clearwater to Anoka the river is designated “recreational” and while more heavily developed still offers great on-water experiences.

Camping is available in many state parks and forests, which drew over one million overnight visitors in 2017. Access to many of these DNR sites is free and an annual pass for all the state parks that charge entrance fees is just \$35.

For those with more time on their hands and an adventurous outlook, the federal government owns approximately 640 million acres of public land, the bulk of which is managed by the National Park Service, the U.S. Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Most are open for public recreation and of course include some of the world’s best-known natural wonders, like Yellowstone and Grand Canyon National Parks.

While 95% of these public lands are in the western

states and Alaska, we do have significant examples here in Minnesota as well. Close enough for a day trip is the Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge, over 30,000 acres of public land just 45 minutes to our east that offers hiking, bird watching, scenic drives and other outdoor activities while supporting an incredible population of resident and migratory wildlife. To our north, the Superior and Chippewa National Forests offer an even broader range of activities, including wilderness canoeing in the Boundary Waters. Minnesota’s only national park, Voyageurs, provides a similarly world-class setting for water-based recreation, while other NPS sites like Pipestone and Grand Portage National Monuments offer lessons in history and culture from opposite corners of the state.

Minnesota is blessed with an abundance of outdoor recreational opportunities. Now that vaccines are widely available and the CDC has offered new safety guidelines for outdoor activities, we can look forward to taking advantage of them again this summer.

— *This is the opinion of Times Writers Group member Derek Larson. He teaches history and environmental studies at The College of St. Benedict/St. John’s University. He welcomes your comments at twg@anderson-larson.net.*

Tax

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Minnesota projects that have taken place under the program since 2011 have generated \$3.5 billion in private sector economic activity and created more than 18,650 jobs since 2011, according to Erin Hanafin Berg, policy director at Rethos, formerly known as the Preservation Alliance of Minnesota.

In short, the math appears to work. If it did not, there would be no excuse for both houses of the Legislature to propose extending the program.

Why are historic properties special? In one way,

they aren’t. Minnesota supports businesses with many varieties of grants, tax credits and other incentive programs. Among them: the Angel Tax Credit, tax increment financing, Opportunity Zones, Enterprise Zones, innovation grants, data center tax exemptions, incentives for young farmers, and more.

Tax credits that help put Minnesota’s significant older buildings back in service for main street businesses make sense — not just because they can be beautiful connections to our communities’ pasts and enhance our quality of life. Handled well, the tax credit program pays off financially as well.

— *This is the opinion of the Times Editorial Board, which consists of News Director Lisa Schwarz and Content Coach Anna Haechler.*

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