

RACISM? OR JUST COMMON SENSE?

Monday

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I just seen a story on the news regarding the group, Black Lives Matter, and their most recent demand. In this case, they're insisting on more black police officers policing black communities. On the surface, this might sound like a good idea. After all, if the complaints all involve racist white police officers harassing and/or brutalizing black men, then using black police officers to police black communities might, at least in theory, solve the problem, but as for me, I think this sets a dangerous precedent, sets race relations back at least a century, all while ignoring the obvious: this does nothing to solve the problems associated with racial profiling, excessive uses of force and general harassment.

If a white person demanded that white communities see their current black officers replaced with white officers, would you have thought this a racist request? Then tell me, why is not racist for the black community to demand that white police officers in their communities be replaced with black officers? What's next? Are we going to insist upon separate schools and churches for blacks? Will we next be insisting that there be a water fountain for each race?

Instead of simply addressing the symptoms, perhaps what we need to be doing is figuring out a way to address the underlying issue, and in this instance, it's not a matter of "black and white." In case you missed it, there have been several instances which made the news in which the police officers involved were fellow black men killing black men. As someone who sees issues with abuse of authority on a daily basis, literally, I can tell you from firsthand experience that the problems have nothing whatsoever to do with race, and everything to do with an inadequate system of checks and balances.

For example, take a look at the prison system, for a moment. If an officer accuses an inmate of a rules violation report, there's a 100% chance that this inmate will be found guilty by the officer responsible for determining the inmate's guilt. When pressed on the issue, the Hearing Officer will explain that he's going to take the word of his officer over that of an inmate, every single day of the week, and twice on Sundays. This, in and of itself, creates a system just begging to be abused. What started as an officer exaggerating the facts to secure a guilty verdict on a rules violation report leads to officers openly lying to cover for each other. What started as looking the other way when a fellow officer was beating an inmate leads to openly covering for an officer who's sexually assaulted an inmate, and why wouldn't they? For starters, they know that anything they say, no matter how ridiculous, will be believed by those conducting the investigation, and if not, then in charge will at least attempt to cover up any evidence of wrongdoing.

Every now and then, society gets wind of what's going on, takes an active interest and sets out to try to change things. Unfortunately, change occurs slowly, and, more often than not, interest fades long before change actually happens, which means that plans to change are often abandoned. Knowing this, officers have nothing to fear.

Take, for instance, recent legislative changes to put a stop to the rampant sexual abuse of inmates. On the outside looking in, it truly seemed as if the prison was trying to put a stop to inmates being sexually assaulted by inmates and guards alike, but the truth was anything but. The prison's only concern was stopping the reports, not the actual assaults, and they did this by immediately locking up anyone who had the nerve to complain about being raped or otherwise molested. Once in "the hole," inmates were subjected to a new form of harassment, not just by their attackers, but also the friends and coworkers of those who'd attacked them. Before you knew it, reports of sexual assaults were down, but that didn't necessarily mean that sexual assaults were down, and knowing this, officers continued to violate the law, knowing that, in many instances, reporting the incident was far worse than the assault itself.

And this is exactly the situation we're now experiencing with law enforcement in the outside world, albeit with crimes other than sexual assault (usually). Police officers have went so long without having anyone question their authority that they think they're above the law, and why not? Think about it for a moment... What would have happened if the person who recorded the beating of Rodney King hadn't recorded it, but instead tried to step in and stop the beating? (S)he would have been beaten right along with Rodney King, after which (s)he would have been arrested for interfering with the performance of a law enforcement officer, a charge that would have not only stuck, but which would have impacted the remainder of this good samaritan's life.

To prevent this sort of rampant abuse, we've created agencies responsible for monitoring the police, but sadly, this doesn't work as well as intended, and why should it? After all, who's hired to work for these agencies? We either hire from the organization we're monitoring, or they work so closely with the agencies they're monitoring that it becomes impossible to take action against anyone because of the genuine friendships which were formed.

No matter how you choose to look at it, I truly don't think the problems involving the interactions of our police force with society have anything to do with racial hatred. Instead, it has to do with agencies which have went unchecked for so long that they literally think they're above the law. To prove this, take a look at the history of complaints filed against the officers recently accused of racism, and without exception, you'll find that they either had a history of unpunished excessive force, or they worked in an environment in which many of their coworkers had a history of unpunished complaints. Either way, the message was crystal clear to everyone: in all but the most blatant examples, you've got nothing to worry about, and why should they be worried? Look at what happened to the cops who viciously beat Rodney King. Where they found guilty? No. Despite having shown the jury video of the incident, they weren't convicted. If you show a jury a video of a bunch of cops almost beating a man to death and they're still not convicted, then why in the world should any other law enforcement professional have any reason to be concerned?

I suppose the real question is whether or not we can resolve these issues, and if so, how we'd go about doing it. Personally, I don't think that any of the issues we're facing today are insurmountable, but it's just as obvious to me that we need to go about handling them in a different way. As someone once said, the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and yet expecting a different result. With that said, were it up to me, I wouldn't run my internal affairs division with employees hired from the very police forces they're directed to police. Instead, I'd staff them with members from the community, in particular, members of the community who are most vocal about police practices. Like serving on a grand jury, it would be a temporary position, maybe a couple of years at-a-time, nor would I hire them to investigate the very agencies they complained about, but it would provide them with an invaluable opportunity to be a part of the solution, by giving them an opportunity to investigate complaints of wrongdoing. It would also provide them with an insider's view, and knowledge, of the complaint process, while at the same time giving them input into whether or not a particular complaint has any merit.

Anyone can claim to take our complaints seriously, but making us a part of the solution establishes just how seriously our concerns are being taken. Either way, what we shouldn't do, under any circumstances, is step backwards in our racial relations, and no matter how you look at it, determining who patrols what zones on the basis of race is a monumental step backwards. It shouldn't be tolerated, under any circumstances, not just because it sets race relations back at least a hundred years, but because it also fails to address the underlying problems in the first place. If the problems are truly racial related, as some have tried to argue, then perhaps what we need to be doing is ferreting our racial bias and eradicating it from our police forces, and any other agency or entity that has power and authority. If, however, the problem is a lack of adequate checks and balances, as I'm arguing, which has in turn led to rampant corruption, then perhaps what we need to be doing is coming up with a better system of checks and balances designed to eliminate the corruption causing problems.

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