

Community Comment, 1/11/17

We are in one of the most interesting and unfortunately, politically polarizing times in our nation's history. As we approach what would be Dr. Martin Luther King Jr's 88th birthday and also the inauguration of our 45th president, I feel compelled to discuss unity today.

I am inclined to believe in my mind and heart that much of the political, racial, socioeconomic and religious polarization that we see in mainstream media is catastrophized. Do I believe that discrimination is happening nationwide and that many are feeling directly attacked and/or affected? Yes, I have had negative experiences personally. Do I believe that everyone who voted for President elect Trump is something ending with an ist? Misogynist, racist, etc. No. What I believe is this. Many in our nation are feeling unheard, unsafe and disregarded, socially, financially, sexually and/or religiously marginalized and that this is manifesting in numerous ways. I believe that the election of Donald Trump gives us myriad, positive opportunities and blessings if we'll allow it. Opportunities to question how we define our neighbors, what ideals we would like to aspire to as Americans and how we'd like to enliven them, what level of government we would like to see and how as regular citizens we are to hold our elected officials accountable and perhaps most pressing right now, how we can discuss tough issues openly, with civility and compassion.

Many of you know me as CEO of the Boys & Girls Club of the Redwoods, an organization I have been proud to be a part of for 21 years and have had the honor to lead for the last 8. On Sunday, January 15th, I will be inducted as our region's NAACP President, a volunteer position. The NAACP is our nation's oldest civil rights organization, formed partly in response to the horrific practice of lynching and the 1908 race riot in Springfield, Illinois, the resting place of President Abraham Lincoln. Appalled at the violence that was committed against blacks, a group of white liberals that included Mary White Ovington and Oswald Garrison Villard, both the descendants of abolitionists, issued a call for a meeting to discuss racial justice. Some 60 people, seven of whom were African American signed the call, which was released on the centennial of Lincoln's birth.

Echoing the focus of Du Bois' Niagara Movement which began in 1905, the NAACP's stated goal was to secure **for all people**, the rights guaranteed in the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments to the United States Constitution, which promised an end to slavery, the equal protection of the law and universal adult male suffrage, respectively.

The NAACP's principal objective is to ensure the political, educational, social and economic equality of minority group citizens of United States and to eliminate racial prejudice.

I am proud and nervous about taking on the charge of NAACP President. All of my immediate, paternal family members have been lifetime members of the NAACP and we have done our best to help the NAACP enliven their stated tenets, as well as doing all that we can to be positive, contributing members to our respective communities. As NAACP President, I look forward to the opportunity to provide venues for people from all walks of life to have transparent, challenging, thought-provoking, heart opening and civil conversations about race and how we are more alike than we are different. I invite you to participate in our meetings, which take place the 3rd Sunday of every month at 3:30pm. Our next meeting will take place on