A DEBT STILL TO BE PAID

As Martin Luther King Jr. said in his famous "I Have a Dream" speech there is a promissory note that was written when the white, slaveholding architects of the United States Constitution and the Declaration of Independence stated that "all men, yes black men as well as white men would be guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

Even though King was referring to the United States, those glorious words can also be used as touchstones for a debt that all colonial governments owe from when they established their global empires. They built their societies on the graves of Indigenous peoples and established a governance structure that inculcated a white power structure that has lasted into the 21st century.

That promissory note contains a sacred obligation of liberty and equality, and diverse communities across the world are now asking those in power to honour it.

The very public death of George Floyd at the hands and knee of a police officer — a familiar icon of an oppressive governing body — is the final straw. Diverse communities across countries are prepared to rise up and demand that promises made so long ago now be paid in full.

Cries to defund police are only one facet of a movement that wants the rules of the game to change. There have been recent minor moves by governments and businesses to address the historical racism and bias that have rigged the economic, political and social environments, but more needs to be done.

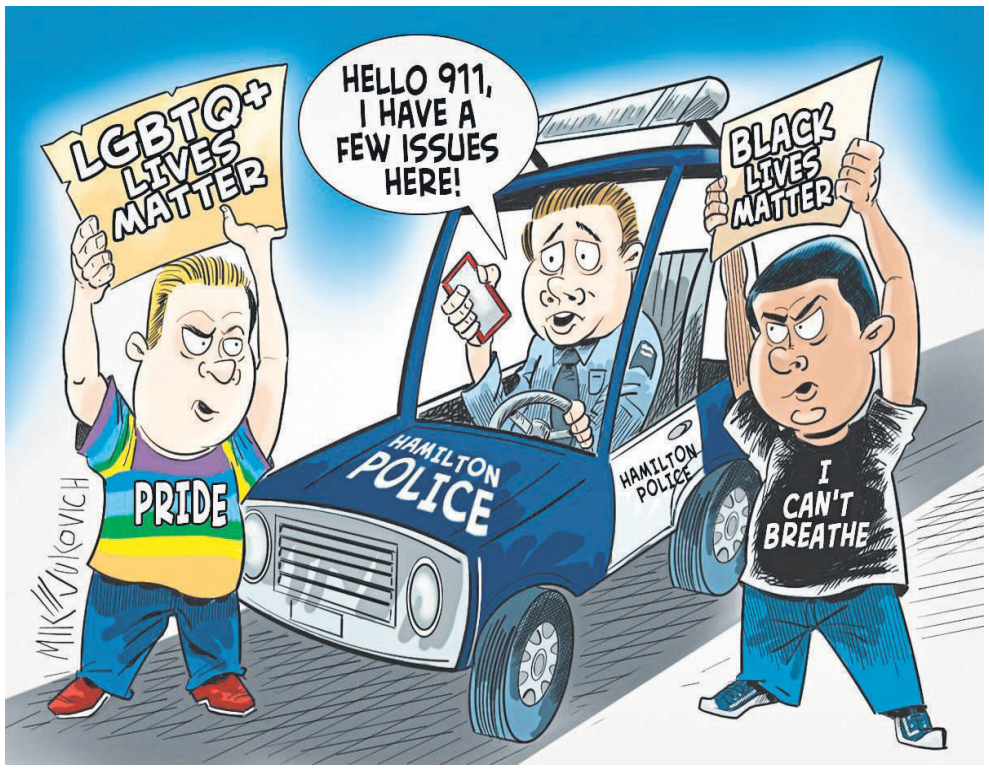
Should there be a version of a truth and reconciliation commission in each country as was first done in South Africa to reveal the truth and allow for a reckoning of what has been done to various Indigenous and diverse populations for hundreds of years?

What South Africa discovered is that it takes a long time to talk, absorb and understand how to navigate a complicated past. At the moment, the protests in Canada are more of a scattershot approach to seeking redress; vilifying streets, schools and towns after British figures, or calling for the defunding of police departments.

There needs to be an opportunity to eliminate the constant cycles of retribution, retaliation and violence that has plagued communities as they transform from oppression to true democracy. There needs to be an opportunity for groups, individuals and victims to tell their stories and unburden themselves from the pain and suffering they experienced, before our society pledges to do better and begin the healing process.

For our communities to unite, all groups, and all peoples need a true reconciliation; for peace to endure requires an embrace of our mistakes and a willingness to do better. True reconciliation is supported by a strong foundation of forgiveness.

Only then can we make good on that promissory note, not only to the diverse community who deserve a proper return on their investment for enduring and sacrificing their lives for their country, but also for all people to better understand that a divided country cannot stand.



STRONG ENOUGH TO LISTEN

COLUMNIST GORDON CAMERON WE HAVE A CHOICE

GORDON CAMERON
Column

I have a good friend who edits a paper in Gettysburg, South Dakota. As you may have guessed, her town is named after the famous American Civil War battle that took place 2,200 km to the east. The area was settled by veterans from both sides, although the ex-Union soldiers outnumbered ex-Confederates. An interesting origin story for the community, but one that doesn't seem worth writing about in a Hamilton paper.

But Gettysburg has been in the news of late for two reasons: 1) It's the home of George Floyd's uncle Selwyn Jones and 2) The local police's uniform shoulder patch design consists of a cannon underneath crossed American and Confederate flags.

Needless to say, there has been a fierce debate over the future of the logo (a debate which predates Floyd's death) with many in town arguing that the inclusion of the Confederate flag isn't about hate, but history.

"If I thought for a minute it had something to do with racism that would be a whole different ball game, but it doesn't and it didn't," Gettysburg Mayor Bill Wuttke told the Rapid City Journal earlier in June. "It's just strictly to do with the history of our community."

What struck me most when I read Wuttke's comments is how hard it is for us to put ourselves in someone else's shoes when it comes to looking at uncomfortable topics. That flag is a Rorschach test. When he looks at it he sees his community's founders. While when others look at it they see a symbol of hatred and oppression under which the defenders of the slavery fought to preserve that despicable practice. Between those opposing viewpoints there isn't much room for room for compromise. There's no middle ground.

It's never a comfortable thing to have your beliefs and assumptions challenged. Our natural reaction is to get defensive and to reflexively fight back. However, we have the power to transcend our basic, primal instincts. We can choose to listen to those who we disagree with. We can choose to try and understand their perspective. We can choose to re-evaluate what we think. We can choose to see beyond what we were taught and to let go of things that put more pain into the world than they do joy.

We have the choice.

We just need to be strong enough to make it.

Gordon Cameron is the group managing editor for Hamilton Community News. gocameron@hamiltonnews.com

ABOUT US

This newspaper, published every Thursday, is a division of the Metroland Media Group Ltd., a wholly-owned subsidiary of Torstar Corporation. The Metroland family of newspapers is comprised of more than 80 community publications across Ontario.

This newspaper is a member of the National NewsMedia Council. Complainants are urged to bring their concerns to the attention of the newspaper and, if not satisfied, write The National NewsMedia Council, Suite 200, 890 Yonge St., Toronto, ON M4W 2H2.
Phone: 416-340-1981
Web: www.mediacouncil.ca

mpearson@hamiltonnews.com
facebook.com/HamiltonCommunityNewsOfficial
@AncDunNews

WHO WE ARE

VP, Regional Publisher
Kelly Montague
General Manager
Nelson Parreira
Group Managing Editor
Gordon Cameron
News Editor Mike Pearson
Director of Advertising
Melinda Therrien Bos
Office Manager
Lorna Lester
Regional Production Manager
Rhonda Ridgway

CONTACT US

Ancaster News | Dundas Star
333 Arvin Ave.
Stoney Creek, ON L8E 2M6
Phone: 905-523-5800
Fax: 905-664-3319

Letters to the editor
All letters must be fewer than 320 words and include your name and telephone number for verification purposes. We reserve the right to edit, condense or reject letters. Published letters will appear in print and/or online at hamiltonnews.com

Delivery
For all delivery inquiries, e-mail customerservice@metroland.com or call 1-866-838-8960.