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A Call to Establish a Minnesota Truth and Reconciliation Commission

The horrific death of George Floyd and subsequent protests-turned riots/massive property destruction in the Twin Cities signal that Minnesota must address the pervasive systemic racism and oppression which infect the state at every level.

Today, we have true clarity about what it means to be an African American man or other person of color interacting with law enforcement in Minnesota.

However, the need for systemic reform goes much deeper than simply changing how Minnesota law enforcement agencies interact with persons of color. For too long, we have been content to create commissions or bodies to study racism and its effects; the net result has been a myriad of reports with no meaningful systemic change.

What our state has never done: engage in a deliberate, constructive state-wide interactive endeavor where those who have been marginalized are provided with a real opportunity to speak about what it's like to be "Other" in Minnesota (and America) because of one's skin color or country of origin, or the many other things that are used to demean and hold down non-white humans.

To date, we've done things backwards: we've attempted to solve the problems of racism and marginalization without ever honestly examining why it is that racism exists. As a result, we simply don't appreciate or understand the true depth of racism and marginalization in our state. Without that understanding, it's impossible to create lasting solutions; racism always seeps back in to undermine meaningful change.

Thus, we need to consistently hear from those impacted by a system that implicitly (and in some cases, explicitly) favors white-color skin over other skin colors.

Concomitantly, we need to hear from white-color Minnesotans as to why they have certain stereotypes about people of color and why they are fearful of humans who are "Other."

The process of exchanging about experiences, assumptions, and historical trauma will be painful and depressing. Yet, it will also be cleansing; let's get the racism out in the open so that we can address it.

There are relatively few American models for what I propose. See: <https://crj.northeastern.edu/home/about-us/truth-commissions/>

South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission also offers some guidance. See: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Truth_and_Reconciliation_Commission_\(South_Africa\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Truth_and_Reconciliation_Commission_(South_Africa)) While imperfect, that undertaking is credited with helping to guide South Africa to where the country could go forward.

Minnesota, for the most part, is on its own to fashion something that will work.

Toward that end, I propose:

1. That Governor Walz immediately issue an executive order creating a Truth and Reconciliation Commission comprised of no more than twenty members drawn from across the state.
2. Within sixty days, the Commission shall establish a protocol for conducting public hearings or convenings where African American, Latinx, and other Minnesotans of color are invited to share their experiences (positive or negative) about living in Minnesota, including but not limited to, interacting with law enforcement, governmental and educational entities, and community members.
3. The protocol should include giving white-color Minnesotans an opportunity to share their assumptions and stereotypes about, and experiences of interacting with, people of color.
4. Additionally, the protocol should include a mechanism for testimony/reports from diversity and inclusion experts, religious leaders, elected officials, and others who want to comment on Minnesota's current and historical policing, race, and marginalization issues.
5. Finally, the protocol must ensure that the goal of sharing about experiences around policing and systemic racism or marginalization is not to further divide, but instead, to provide true reconciliation and a sense of justice. The overriding goal is to reinforce our shared values as Minnesotans and Americans.
6. Thereafter, the Commission should proceed to conduct hearings and convenings across the state. We need to hear from Minnesotans from all walks of life.
7. Taking into account participant privacy concerns, the Commission's hearings/convenings should be televised/aired via radio and/or social media so that all Minnesotans can understand the depth of the state's policing issues and general racism and marginalization problems.
8. The Commission should also establish a procedure for "Talking Circles" (directed conversations based on the traditions of Native and indigenous people) in communities across Minnesota. The purpose of these circles would be to give Minnesotans another way to share about personal experiences around policing, racism, and marginalization. The Talking Circles can be facilitated by the Minnesota State Bureau of Mediation Services, Community Mediation Minnesota, and other organizations.
9. Information collected through hearings/convenings and Talking Circles should be codified into an Action Plan aimed at eliminating systemic/institutional and day-to-day racism and marginalization in Minnesota. The Commission's Action Plan must be concise, directed, and bold. It must include specific measures (such as state-wide diversity and inclusion education) that can be undertaken immediately. In other words, the Commission's work can't become another report that sits on a shelf.
10. The tendency for political line-drawing and infighting must be avoided throughout the truth and reconciliation process. Indeed, politics and group-identifying behaviors are much of the reason why Minnesota (and America) is at a critical

crossroads—they have prevented us from having the necessary difficult conversations around race, historical marginalization, and shared values.

I realize that the ideas in this document are relatively unconventional, and in Minnesota in particular, it's sometimes challenging to embrace the unconventional. However, if nothing else, the events of late demonstrate that we are at this juncture precisely because we've lacked imagination and have consistently refused to act boldly.

We owe the people of Minnesota, especially those who historically have not had a seat at the table, something different and better.

Most of all, we owe all Minnesotans a fresh start, which can only come with an honest and thorough examination of why so many humans favor white-color skin above all other skin colors.

Respectfully submitted,

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