

To Our Clients of Polaris Financial Partners

By Bob Deitrick, CEO

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We have witnessed immeasurable amounts of pain since the murder of George Floyd. This pain is etched on the soul of our nation and in the hearts of millions of Americans. It is important that we discuss this openly. Further, we must stand up for one another, and recognize that fear and outrage are rightly provoked by George Floyd's senseless murder and by the history of racism in America.

Context is important; therefore, I want to share my personal story. I grew up in the commonwealth of Virginia. Like most homes in the South, ours was a culturally bigoted household. My father was born in Richmond - home of the confederacy. My great grandfather, born in 1801, William Alphonso Deitrick, was a wealthy plantation owner who grew tobacco and corn. He farmed 2000 acres in Henrico and Hanover Counties, owned over 275 slaves and was a multimillionaire of his day. I am not proud of this heritage. My family was on the wrong side of history in the Civil War, and I abhor everything they and the South stood for. I will not be on the wrong side of history in this moment.

My father, the smartest man I ever knew, died in March of 2009. I miss him every day. Like most in the south he had racist tendencies and he voted for George Wallace in 1968. Fortunately, my parents were intelligent, and matured. At the end of my dad's life, the same man who voted for a bigot and racist in 1968 also voted for the first African American to run for the White House in 2008 before he died. I was immensely proud of my parents as they were first in line on Election Day in Sarasota.

Fifty years after the Civil Rights Act, our tortured racial past is omnipresent today. Last Friday, a block from my apartment downtown, I watched thousands of young white and black folks march peacefully up High Street. I was proud watching this as I had never witnessed anything like it.



Photo taken with Henry a block from my home at Hubbard and High Streets on June 5th. Thousands marched by for over 30 minutes.

Several years ago, I mourned at our Christmas party about the murder of Tamir Rice – a 12-year old boy who was playing in a park in Cleveland with a toy airsoft gun. Police entered the park by car, opened the window, and without warning, a 26-year old cop, Tim Loehmann, (who had been fired by his police chief in Independence, Ohio, where it stated on his record that he lacked the stability to be a cop) murdered Tamir in the park - for no reason. In Virginia, one of my friends, with whom I attended

William and Mary, lost his 19-year old son at the hands of police in his own driveway. Jim York, a white 19-year old male was stopped by five police cars for a traffic stop. They struggled to get Jimmy out of his car as he panicked by the show of force. With his parents and friends watching, one of the policemen yelled; "he has a gun." The cops drew their weapons and Jimmy was murdered in his car as his friends and parents watched in horror. Jimmy had no gun at all. Too often, police show excessive force that clearly does not coincide with the mantra: "To protect and serve..."

I have heard a lot of our white friends and clients say: "these protests are not the right way to handle things". My response is simple: Then what is the right way to deal with black folks being murdered in our streets?

- *When Colin Kaepernick kneeled (and summarily was ostracized and fired) - he was told "this is not the right way to protest..." (Roger Goodell and the NFL reversed that decision last week).*
- *When Martin Luther King marched in Selma and Birmingham Alabama, He was told – "this is not the right way to do things..."*
- *When MLK marched with children as a part of his actual protests in the '60's - white people told him that "this was not the right way to do things..."*
- *When black American gold medalist Tommy Smith and medalist John Carlos gave the Black Power Salute during the Olympics in Mexico City in 1968 after MLK's assassination - with their heads bowed and fists raised - they were told "this is not the right way to do things..." In fact, when the head of the IOC, Avery Brundage - a racist, anti-Semite and Nazi sympathizer tried to strip these two men of their medals, he was told to go packing by the U.S. track team.*
- *When Gay Americans protested and rioted for five days during the Stonewall riots in 1970, to enforce their rights to be treated as human beings - they were told "this is not the right way to do things..."*
- *When black people led by Nelson Mandela marched in South Africa during Apartheid, they were told, again, "this is not the right way to do things..." Yet it worked.*
- *When people get angry and become violent and burn things in protest they are told – "this is not right the right way to do things..."*
- *When I hear people say that they do not understand the violence from protesters- then my response is simple. Stop killing black people in our streets. We are tired of watching our black and brown and Latino friends being treated so duplicitously.*
- *When we witness a 75-year-old white protester, who was trying to return a helmet to one of the cops in Buffalo get deliberately shoved by police. He hit his head so hard that he started bleeding from his ears. My question is simple. What were they thinking? How can one watch the violence administered by our own police and not become indignant?*
- *There is no playbook for the right way to do things when it comes to protesting. When you are treated unfairly, unethically, and without any respect, for no valid reason, you have the right to ensure your voice is heard. After all, this is America, our First Amendment gives us that right!*

When I hear folks say "I don't like the violence" – well, folks, we are, sadly, a violent country. We fought a Civil War and killed 700K of our own because we could not agree on something as criminal as slavery. How is it that Dylan Roof, a white man who murdered nine elderly black folks who were

praying in church gets escorted off to prison, unharmed, yet George Floyd, a black man, is strangled to death in broad daylight over a \$20 bill that even the vendor said George did not know was counterfeit.

Many of our citizens deal with deeply rooted racism and discrimination every day. It exists in our criminal justice system, inequalities in neighborhood services and in our education system. We are not professing all things should be equal, that will not happen, but they need to be more equitable. While the laws have changed, their protections are not universally employed.

We have seen progress, yet communities of color continue to endure discrimination and trauma. Last week, almost every business downtown, from the Capitol to the Short North to Ohio State to Clintonville was boarded up. Young white kids have been turning these boards into incredible murals. I have heard some of you express concern over the violence. However, we do not have a society we can celebrate until all our citizens, who gives America their love, labor, and life, live free from fear...



At mission at Polaris Financial has always been to improve the quality of our client's lives. We do this through a process designed to provide predictability and we strive to change our world through giving back to our community. Our country is a melting pot. Our strength is our diversity, and we should strive to build a nation that is more inclusive.

Having said that, we need to do more; therefore, Polaris Financial is making a donation to the Equal Justice Initiative, a non-profit committed to challenging racial injustice, ending mass incarceration, and protecting human rights of the most vulnerable people in our society.

To our clients and friends in the Black and Brown community - we see you. You matter, your lives matter, and you are valued.

This is a moment when many want a return to normal. As difficult as it is to admit, that desire is itself a sign of privilege. George Floyd's death is tragic proof that we must aim far higher than a "normal" future. We need to build one that lives up to the highest ideals of equality and justice for all Americans, not just a few. With every breath we take, we hope you will commit to being part of that change - to creating a better, more just world. Have a peaceful week!

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