


The Future Will Require Learning How to Exist in a Multicultural Society

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The Future Will Require Learning How to Exist in a Multicultural Society

By Vanessa Lopez-Littleton
UCF Forum columnist
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Why should I have to tell my sons to respect the police?

My sons are both military veterans, the oldest having served in the U.S. Air Force in Afghanistan and the younger in the U.S. Army in Iraq. Both served during wartime campaigns.

I am certain my oldest son would respect the police and would comply with any instructions given, provoked or not. I worry about my younger son because he is a bit more spirited and may be more confrontational with authority he deems misplaced. I am more concerned than ever about their safety in interacting with the police as well as in some black communities across the country.

As a black parent, I have always told my sons to avoid confrontation with police officers, respect authority and know their own rights. Recent prominent cases have increased my concern about their safety, if they were to encounter a police officer.

In speaking with a member of law enforcement, I was told that many police officers have Type A personalities and are trained to demonstrate what he termed "officer presence." His position was that the personality type combined with legal authority, confidence and training in escalation/de-escalation techniques are purposeful to defuse potential situations and to deter criminal acts.

In his opinion, what many of us have sarcastically called arrogance is considered a necessary tactic that supports their ability to be effective in their role as officers of the law.

In contrast, a retired police officer suggested there are officers who are afraid and intimidated by black men. In his opinion, this sets the stage for an increased number of confrontations and arrests.

Whether it's "officer presence," fear, uncertainty or some other factor, citizens deserve a system of law enforcement that is fair, unbiased and constitutional.

But this issue is broader than just focusing on the actions of the police. We need to examine the conditions in black communities that create climates where these situations are more likely to occur. We need to understand the social, economic and political context in which poverty in black communities is perpetuated. We need to understand why black males are perceived as threatening and intimidating. We need a system that ensures the rights and liberties of all citizens are not infringed upon by anyone, including the police.

Many are calling for community policing. But community policing without a clear focus on crime risk factors does not have an effect on crime.

The issues underlying criminal activity are complex and a manifestation of many underlying societal issues. In many black communities intergenerational poverty has been fueled by poor-quality education systems, few jobs and job training programs, a lack of social cohesion to address shared concerns, and very few opportunities for social mobility.

To address the myriad of social issues erupting in the cities across America, we need localized strategic efforts to interrupt the vicious cycle of poverty, end the culture of poverty, identify and build trust among citizens and government, and improve the health of people in urban communities.

The way forward will require earnest mechanisms where people can see their voices in action.

The way forward will require the development of systems to build trust between citizens and government.

The way forward will require that we examine and understand institutionalized racism and how it has contributed to widespread disparities in health, education, incarceration and many other outcomes.

The way forward will require everyone learning how to exist in a multicultural/multiracial society.

If we can be successful, I don't have to worry about what I should tell my sons. My sons will be a part of a system that treats them fairly. The burden will be on them to be positive contributors to society.

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