



Borough of Hillsdale

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John J. Ruocco, Mayor

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My fellow residents, the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis by a police officer has triggered numerous demonstrations throughout the nation. One was held here peacefully in Hillsdale this past Thursday.

Our nation still suffers from the prejudices of the past. I have asked myself “why” many times in my life. As the grandfather to a wonderful bi-racial child, I seek an answer more urgently now than ever before, as if in a race against time. The only answer that I can come up with, other than despairing over man’s capacity for inhumanity to his fellow man, is that anthropologists & sociologists say that humans are hardwired to be distrustful of others who do not look like themselves. This was a defense mechanism for our primitive ancestors thousands of years ago. But as someone educated in Judeo-Christian values, I believe that man was gifted with the ability to exercise free will in deciding right from wrong, and that God expects us to use that ability to overcome base behaviors. Besides, the Neanderthal Age ended millennia ago!!

Our nation fought a brutal civil war over slavery, and in the last 70 years great progress in race relations has been made. Things that were unacceptable to earlier generations are now common-place. We are a better society for that, but clearly there is room to improve. The tragedy of Mr. Floyd’s death and the actions of the police officers responsible should cause all of us to ponder what more we can do as individuals and as a society to treat our fellow man as we would want to be treated. The actions of those police officers are not representative of the profession, just like the actions of violent protesters do not represent African-Americans as a whole. We are a nation of laws, and under those laws, those who have committed crimes will be judged. In the meantime, it falls to each of us in our everyday lives to make the world more like what Dr. King urged back in the 1950s and 60s. That moral gauntlet still confronts us.

We in Hillsdale should take some comfort knowing that our police officers have been and continue to be trained in the best practices in law enforcement. The State of New Jersey has some of the most advanced training for officers in the nation. Our attorney general is in the forefront of making policing more transparent & professional, holding officers accountable for their actions. Our local police department spends a great deal of time doing outreach to our local citizens, and is in the middle of seeking formal accreditation for its efforts.

I urge all residents to reflect on the history of our nation, with all its imperfections and successes, and contemplate what it means “to walk in someone else’s shoes,” especially when that someone else has a different skin color than you.

Mayor John J. Ruocco