

Good signs of the Christmas season

The Bethlehem Gadfly George Floyd killing December 24, 2020

 *Latest in a series of posts in the wake of the George Floyd murder*


The headline on the [Associated Press story](#) on p. 13 of the print version of the *Morning Call* yesterday was “KC Star reckons with its past.”

KC Star. That’s the *Kansas City Star*. A major midwestern newspaper for over 140 years. Meaning it was founded in the post-Civil War generation. Just after the end of slavery. In the Reconstruction Era.

Gadfly has been fond of saying that the murder of George Floyd spurred a “nationwide reckoning with race.”

On December 20, the *Kansas City Star* editor Mike Fannin reckoned with the paper’s racial past: **“The truth in Black and white: An apology from The Kansas City Star.”**

It was brutal.

Today we are telling the story of a powerful local business that has done wrong.

For 140 years, it has been one of the most influential forces in shaping Kansas City and the region. And yet for much of its early history — through sins of both commission and omission — it disenfranchised, ignored and scorned generations of Black Kansas Citians. It reinforced

Jim Crow laws and redlining. Decade after early decade it robbed an entire community of opportunity, dignity, justice and recognition.

That business is The Kansas City Star.

Before I say more, I feel it to be my moral obligation to express what is in the hearts and minds of the leadership and staff of an organization that is nearly as old as the city it loves and covers:

We are sorry.

The Kansas City Star prides itself on holding power to account. Today we hold up the mirror to ourselves to see the historic role we have played, through both action and inaction, in shaping and misshaping Kansas City's landscape.

It is time that we own our history.

It is well past time for an apology, acknowledging, as we do so, that the sins of our past still reverberate today.

This spring, the Memorial Day death of George Floyd in Minneapolis beneath the knee of a white police officer ignited protests worldwide over racial injustice. In doing so, it has forced institutions to look inward.

Inside The Star, reporters and editors discussed how an honest examination of our own past might help us move forward. What started as a suggestion from reporter Mará Rose Williams quickly turned into a full-blown examination of The Star's coverage of race and the Black community dating to our founding in 1880. . . . Reporters were frequently sickened by what they found — decades of coverage that depicted Black Kansas Citians as criminals living in a crime-laden world. They felt shame at what was missing: the achievements, aspirations and

milestones of an entire population routinely overlooked, as if Black people were invisible.

Reporters felt regret that the papers' historic coverage not only did a disservice to Black Kansas Citians, but also to white readers deprived of the opportunity to understand the true richness Black citizens brought to Kansas City. . . .

We encourage other Kansas City businesses to come forward and own their history as well, tell their stories, get the poison out — for the sake of the community and their employees.

It still pains me personally to know that in The Star's monopolistic heyday — when it had the biggest media platform in the region — the paper did little to unify the city or recognize the inherent rights of all Kansas Citians.

But our history doesn't have to own us.

We are grateful for how far we've come. We are humbled by how far we still have to go.

In the wake of the murder of George Floyd, the *Kansas City Star* has taken an anti-racist step.

Gadfly has been scribbling such examples of institutional anti-racism he comes across on the back of an envelope. There have been many. Like Major League Baseball this month recognizing more than 3,400 players from seven distinct Negro leagues that operated between 1920 and 1948 as “major leaguers.” The *New York Times* called it **“righting a wrong.”**

The *Kansas City Star* and MLB took a knee.

Gadfly finds such “anti-racism” morally aphrodisiac.

And totally appropriate for this Christmas season of good will to all.

While he has been excited by the targeting of systemic racism in the discussions of our Community Engagement Initiative, he has been impatient with, in his opinion, the slow speed that concrete actions are taking place here.

He is afraid we are in danger of missing the George Floyd wave of concern for racial equity, and he hopes that anti-racism will be a feature of mayoral and Councilpersonic campaigns that are probably now shaping up for the spring.

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