

Accountability the key to addressing the perception that police are racist

The Bethlehem Gadfly Police September 28, 2020

 *Latest in a series of posts about the Bethlehem Police* 

Knowing that Bethlehem, like virtually every city in the country after the murder of George Floyd, is scrutinizing the policies and practices of its police department, and knowing that Gadfly has been trying to open himself up to all information relevant to such inquiry, a follower called Gadfly's attention to a pertinent August 10 anti-bias program by the **National Law Enforcement Museum** with a half-dozen experts on the subject, one of whom was Bethlehem's own Guillermo Lopez. Over a series of posts, Gadfly will isolate short sections of the program and share them with you so that we can more knowledgeably participate, if only from a distance, in the local discussion here.

Another illuminating short section. The question cuts to the core of the issue. Why do so many people feel cops are racist? And the answer comes right back: accountability. Plain and simple. As we talk locally about the functioning of our police department, accountability deserves a high priority. Gadfly's one encounter with a police issue — the so-called Hayes St. traffic stop incident — was marred by mystery, silence, confusion, obfuscation, unanswered questions. Can be no trust in a situation like that. Interestingly, the conversation here moves to systemic racism and Bethlehem's Guillermo Lopez sounding, as Gadfly has remarked in the past, in tune with Councilman Reynolds on the importance of this bigger issue beyond the police.

“How is it that we address this perception that all law enforcement behavior is racist?”

- Not all people have that perception.
- The majority of the people even in the Black community think that the police have a purpose.

- Part of how we get rid of this perception that all cops are racists is how we hold ourselves accountable.
- Not everybody in the Black community thinks all white officers are racist.
- There are more people right now that think we are not holding police officers accountable for their conduct, and I think accountability is just something that we can't lose sight of.
- The problem is that there are some people in this space and time that don't want harmony, that don't want dialog, and they do everything they can to stop it.
- This is greater than just law enforcement, there are a lot of issues here that are challenging, that are causing a lot of issues in our community, and if we don't take them all head on and have realistic conversations about them, we are going to find ourselves here again having the same conversation down the road.
- When people are oppressed, and when they are oppressed enough to push back, when they look up to see who's holding them down, and right now when they look up they see the police.
- Police are being used as middle agents in our society, and it's not fair.
- I think the other thing that has to happen is that we have to learn in law enforcement and leadership to understand that when people are bringing up the issue of systemic racism to not take it so personal, that systemic racism is centuries old . . . [we understand the damage it does] and we are saying more than anything that this systemic thing has to stop.
- Unfortunately, many people who don't understand the history of it are taking it personal.