

First-person testimony necessary

The Bethlehem Gadfly George Floyd killing, Police June 24, 2020 3 Minutes

 *Latest in a series of posts in response to the George Floyd killing* 

Gadfly wants to hear all that Councilwoman Negron hears.

Why in God's good name would he want that?

For he has described her as a giant ear into which all the anguish of the Hispanic community pours. ***

Not so nice.

The reason he wants this crazy thing is because he needs data.

We will be talking about a Community Engagement Initiative because, so the proponents say, “a level of trust is still lacking” between the police department and the community — and for our purposes here, let's focus on the Hispanic community that makes up about 30% of our population.

How is Gadfly — who is white, middle-class, old, sedentary, a Northsider, for whom the police are more or less invisible — how is this Gadfly to know how to feel about such an endeavor without data?

Data. Evidence. That proves there is a problem. That proves such an endeavor is necessary.

Yes, certainly hard data like number of citizen complaints, law suits, and police department discipline cases relating to racial issues.

But, yes, also — and what is more powerful to Gadfly — to what might be called soft data in the way of stories, personal accounts — first-person testimony.

The Community Engagement Initiative memo speaks of giving “louder voice to *issues* of injustice.”

Gadfly would like louder voice given *to those* who suffer injustice.

Let's not talk of such serious issues as racism and discrimination and criminal justice reform in the abstract.

Where all this starts is with people in pain, in anger, in fear. Let's make sure we hear them.

How are we to gauge if we have a problem, how are we to gauge the scope of the problem, how are we to gauge the nature of the problem without . . . testimony?

But how are we to get such first-hand testimony?

Members of minority communities are sometimes reluctant to come forward officially. Instead, they will pour into willing ears like Councilwoman Negrón's.

If you agree that such testimony is crucially important, help me — what are your ideas?

- There may be letters, statements in the police department complaint file.
- We could set up an open mic at a Public Safety meeting, such as was done at the 2016 **NAACP forum**, at which some stories reportedly did come out, though it would take great fortitude for most people to make such statements, naked in a sense, in a Liberty auditorium perhaps even in front of the police.
- We could recommend the City hot line –610-865-7266 — on the **Controller** page, where people can report anonymously, or establish a hot line specifically for this purpose.

Or here's another idea. Refer people with complaints over racial issues with the police to Gadfly, who will, all in confidence, interview them, log their accounts, and publish them anonymously.

Mrs. Gadfly just said that is one of the worst ideas she has ever heard.

She may be right.

Mrs. Gadfly didn't raise six sons without some (un)common sense.

But, if there are problems that must be addressed, the real plight of real people, people who are our fellow residents as well as fellow human beings, is a powerful motivator for reform.

If there is a local Bethlehem problem, it is, frankly, not real for Gadfly yet, though it may be for others.

He sensed a problem in the way the Hayes St. case was handled, but he needs more.

Pass the word about the Gadfly suggestion if you think it makes any sense.

**** This Gadfly image of Councilwoman Negron deserves a treatment. Is there an artist out there, a caricaturist who would take a crack at Councilwoman Negron as a giant ear? Gene Mater, where are you?*