

**Comments of Maplewood Township Committee Member Frank McGehee  
August 1, 2017**

The events of July 5th 2016, are sickening and unacceptable. That evening, following our township's celebration of the 4th of July, Black Children, who were gathered on Valley were herded like cattle out of Maplewood -- a town that many of these children call home.

There is no greater message that you are not welcome than being driven out of your hometown simply because of the color of your skin. When did being black become a qualifying factor regarding residency in Maplewood?

Leadership matters. The abuse of power and poor leadership bathed in racial bias on display that night is disgusting.

Were it not for the directive from those in the position of leadership, this particular act of excessive force would not have occurred.

Research shows that black children and particularly black boys are policed disproportionately like no other demographic. They are seen as "out of place," virtually everywhere.

Research has also shown that adolescence is a critical time during which young people come to understand and respect or resent the law.

And as horrific as the July 5th event is, I do not want to paint our entire police department with a broad brush. Over the last several months, I have had the opportunity to work with many of these men and women directly to start the groundwork for a mentoring program for our young people. Several events have already taken place at Columbia High School and I am very concerned about the erosion of trust that the July 5th event has created and negative lasting effects going forward.

We like to believe that we live in a safe and nurturing environment for our children, but the acts of July 5th 2016 as well as other events in our town have brought a rash realization to many Maplewoodians that we are not the town that we think we are.

The claim that we are both diverse AND inclusive is aspirational, not a reality.

We all have work to do to live up to the claim that we are so proud to voice -- that Maplewood is a community that represents equality - a welcoming community.

The actions we take today moving forward will define if we really are who we say we are. Changes need to be made at all levels including at the policy level.

When just last fall a five year old black child playing in one of our public parks is told “Only white people,” You have to pause and ask yourself where does that come from. We have work to do.

When we can justify the act of putting pictures on the wall of a public school building portraying a slave auction which is my opinion no different than human trafficking and call it education, there is no justification, it is simply unacceptable. We have work to do.

When a new resident is told that the town in which they now call home is also known as Maplegood, Maplewood and Maplehood, we have work to do.

And these are merely the examples that we know about because we have read about them in the press or on social media.

The directive of July 5 th 2016 was inexcusable and senseless. These are our children. I cannot help but think of my own black daughter and the pervasive emotional and physical toll that this event likely continues to have on the families who were directly involved.

No person regardless of a title, rank, or tenure is above the law. The law is designed to serve and safeguard **all persons** within our Township. Being black is not a crime and wrong is wrong.

Tonight I grab onto the arc of a moral universe and bend it just a little more toward justice.

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