

Michael Johnson: This is Madison's defining moment



MARCH 15, 2015 5:25 AM • MICHAEL JOHNSON

Fear has two meanings: We can choose to “forget everything and run,” or we can “face all the disparities in our community and rise.”

The choice is ours to make, Madison. We are at a turning point in American history, and the decades-long struggle for racial equality is as real as it has ever been.

In the wake of the tragic shooting of Tony Robinson Jr., our community’s thoughts and

prayers are with Tony’s family and the family of Officer Matt Kenny, as both families are no doubt suffering from this incident.

To move forward, we must be willing to understand each other instead of just being understood. This is a defining moment for our city, and our goal is to engage our young people in positive solutions and to provide them with a sense of hope for a brighter future.

In the past week, I have watched many of our young people crying and in search of answers as to why this happened. They are deeply hurting, and it is our responsibility to help them make sense of the confusion and chaos this has caused. Our children possess unbelievable potential but need guidance to navigate this difficult situation.

As they pursue their dreams, they will likely face many challenges. My advice to our children is to get an education, develop a strong work ethic, pursue a career, network with different races and cultures, and surround yourself with positive people.

It is my hope that law enforcement officials can understand the profound grief many in our community are feeling. The death of Tony Robinson is a tragedy regardless of the circumstances. But it is also an opportunity for law enforcement to improve relations with communities of color, and to respond with empathy and compassion for those who are suffering.

Despite the Race to Equity report painting a grim picture of our communities of color and their challenges, many still overcome these barriers and thrive in leadership roles. Too often, we use “the system” as an excuse.

Evaluate your situation and determine your road map to a better future. Don’t allow institutional racism and other barriers to hinder your drive and motivation. While problems do exist, some of us have pointed fingers without offering realistic solutions. We must collaborate to help shape policy and inform decisions that impact people of color and all members of the community.

By creating a common agenda instead of operating in isolation, our chances for success will

be much higher.

Our community's involvement or lack thereof will have an everlasting impression on our kids' lives. Let's ensure that our kids are thriving and engaged and not simply data points at the bottom of school performance charts.

The key to success for our children is improved opportunities for education, and programs providing summer internships and jobs that keep them engaged and give them valuable experience for success in a career.

Let's rededicate our mission to improving the quality of life for all children and families.

I have enjoyed recent fellowship with many leaders in this community, and it has been a refreshing change. It needs to happen on a regular basis so we can better collaborate, advocate and unite for a greater cause.

Let's develop a plan to address issues in our community directly and minimize blaming institutions for our problems. We can no longer simply talk about equality. We must provide tangible solutions to engage young people and ensure they have the tools required for success.

Every great movement for change in this country has been inspired and carried out by our young people, and the current struggle for equality is no different.

Solving the systemic disparities that exist will take a bold vision: collaborative partnerships between government, nonprofits, faith-based communities, schools and businesses, as well as alignment with the proper resources to change the disparity that's hurting our community.

Any meaningful attempt to face issues about race and equality will require more than good intentions. It will take careful planning, systematic restructuring of resources, trusting partnerships and significant investment to make these goals a reality.

Let's go, Madison!