

Opinion

GUEST EDITORIAL: Manasota Interracial Book Club, learning to read one another



y Vicki Wacksman and Janet Kastner Olshewsky

Posted Jun 12, 2020 at 6:00 AM

How many Americans can call three people of a different color “friend”? How many are willing to dedicate a few hours of their time to learn about each other, to embrace their differences that contribute to our humanity?

As founders of the Manasota Interracial Book Club, we feel it is necessary to speak out clearly about where we stand against hatred and bigotry and for the continual pursuit of equality and justice.

As we watch our country convulsed again with racism, too many white Americans shake our heads sadly and say, or think, “It’s awful what blacks have to endure, but there’s nothing I can do about it.” Black Americans think, “We’ve been down this road before, but not much changes.”

Since organizing in 2018, MIBC now has four book clubs in the Sarasota and Bradenton area. Each is interracially mixed. Our nearly 60 members are enjoying the rewards of “racial reconciliation.” It has been a life-changing experience to re-learn history and make friends of a different color.

Reading “Stamped from the Beginning,” by historian Dr. Ibram X. Kendi, we learned how racist ideas have been developed, disseminated and enshrined in American society. In “Sapiens,” by Yuval Noah Harari, we learned that race itself is a myth, that humans are all the same species. “The Half Has Never Been Told,” by Edward E. Baptist, revealed that our school history lessons failed to tell the

most important information about forced migration, physical brutality, and financial exploitation of blacks.

“White Fragility,” by Robin DiAngelo, and “Waking Up White,” by Debbie Irving, told how white Americans are socialized. White book club members were astonished, and black members couldn’t believe their new white friends had been so naïve. And a movie, “Just Mercy,” written by Bryon Stevenson, revealed the depths of injustice in America’s legal system.

We care deeply about justice and equality for all. Those of us who can are becoming more socially and politically involved. We believe every little step moves us forward. We urge our neighbors to join MIBC — by sending an email to janetolszewsky@verizon.net — or any other activity that will provide continuous experiences of multi-cultural dialogue.

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