

A PATH FORWARD Steven P. Dinkin

Let the journey toward becoming an antiracist begin

It's the dawn of a new year, which is bound to be bright because it isn't 2020. Now there's a year that should be forgot, and never brought to mind — unlike auld acquaintances.

Many of us have resolutions: exercise more, get organized, stay in touch with family and friends. Personally, I could stand to lose some of the weight I gained during hibernation, uh, I mean, quarantine.

But I have a bigger resolution in mind this year: I am going to embark on a personal journey to become an antiracist.

It starts by acknowledging the racial privileges I've experienced as a White man, throughout my life, and then continues with learning about the history of racism. I'm signing up for a racial reckoning of sorts.

If this sounds rather heavy, well, it is. But 2020 put racial injustice on full display in America.

We witnessed the tragic killings of George Floyd Jr. and Breonna Taylor by police and Ahmaud Arbery by neighborhood

vigilantes. And we saw the disproportionate ravages of COVID-19 on communities of color, stemming from real and persistent barriers to quality health care, among other factors.

There were more than 4,700 Black Lives Matter marches across the United States, following initial protests in Minneapolis on May 26.

Protesters turned out in about 2,500 small towns and large cities, and the size of these events ranged from dozens of people to tens of thousands. According to The New York Times, an estimated 25 million people of all races participated in the demonstrations.

Something has to change. Protests are one way to show that you're an ally, but real societal transformation takes more work. In order to quell racial injustice, we must start by confronting our racist history.

"Hazen's Elementary History of the United States: A Story and a Lesson," an early 20th-century textbook for young readers, described the arrival of the first

slaves from Africa: "The settlers bought them and found them so helpful in raising tobacco that more were brought in, and slavery became part of our history." This sanitized, say-nothing narrative remains largely unchanged in textbooks today.

Bryan Stevenson, founder and executive director of the Equal Justice Initiative — a human rights organization in Montgomery, Ala. — has said that the continued silence about our long history of racism is a curse. Stevenson observed, "We don't talk about lynching. We don't talk about segregation. We have a hard time talking about race and it has burdened us. We can't recover from this history until we deal with it."

Last year, NCRC launched the ART of Inclusive Communication 2.0, a workshop that teaches communication skills so people can engage in productive conversations on difficult topics like racial injustice.

Participants assess their relationship to racism on a continu-

um, from most racist (believing in racial supremacy) to least (or anti) racist.

As it turns out, I'm right in the middle. I'm not a racist, nor an antiracist. For most of my life, I've been comfortable in the belief that we are all created equal. I know that racism is wrong.

It's likely that many of you would describe yourselves the same way. But it's not enough, really, if we are to root out racism once and for all.

That's why I've resolved to begin my own journey toward antiracism.

Dr. Ibram X. Kendi, professor and bestselling author of "How to Be an Antiracist" contends that "(there) is no neutrality in the racism struggle. The opposite of 'racist' isn't 'not racist.' It is 'antiracist.'"

An antiracist is someone who sees racial groups as equals and supports policies that reduce racial inequity.

That's different from an assimilationist, who seeks to level the playing field through cultural and behavioral enrichment pro-

grams for racial groups considered to be disadvantaged.

Kendi considers the latter to be an inherently racist idea, even though it's popular among liberals and progressives. To an antiracist, no one group needs saving.

For Kendi, the only way to undo racism is to constantly identify and describe it — then dismantle it. Beyond tacitly acknowledging the existence of racism, take action.

If a policy or practice is racist, call it out. If an individual or group is being discriminated against, intervene. That's how we achieve social justice.

As I start the work toward becoming an antiracist, I am clear-eyed. It will take time and it may be uncomfortable. But I can't wait to begin. Won't you join me?

Dinkin is president of the National Conflict Resolution Center, a San Diego-based group working to create solutions to challenging issues, including intolerance and incivility. To learn about NCRC's programming, visit ncrconline.com

STORIES

FROM B1

In 2021, activists will continue pushing for police reform, as they have for decades, but will lawmakers and elected leaders still be listening without the protests spurred by Floyd's death? Will city councils heed calls to "defund the police," or at least reallocate money from law enforcement budgets to more social services? And will lawmakers reintroduce legislation aimed at police reform?

The answers to those questions — and the ever-present possibility of renewed protests sparked by the next Breonna Taylor or George Floyd — will shape just how much reform might come about in 2021.

ALEX RIGGINS U-T



Homelessness

San Diego has had one of the nation's largest homeless populations for years, and the new year may see new efforts to connect people with housing and services.

San Diego Mayor Todd Gloria, who has made battling homelessness a high priority for much of his career, is expected to continue that focus. As he begins his first year in office, several new innovations already are in place.

The city's Housing Navigation Center has been renamed the Homeless Response Center, to help homeless people connect with various services, replicating a model considered successful at the convention center shelter.

There may be a shift away from law enforcement's role in homeless outreach as a newly launched program will be manned by social workers rather than police officers. And the Housing Commission could explore purchasing more extended-stay hotels to house homeless people, a model called a game-changer when introduced in 2020.

GARY WARTH U-T



Development

San Diego is facing an existential fork — to build or not to build?

The region's newly minted political leadership wants to woo youth, diversity and sophistication by beefing up urban centers with new train stations and apartment buildings. They argue this increasingly metropolitan San Diego will be more egalitarian; as new buildings go up — literally, in multiple stories — housing costs will come down, they promise.

However, many residents enjoy the region's culture of single-family houses and car commuting. Affluent homeowners have banded together to repeatedly block developments that would obscure views, increase traffic or otherwise transform a neighborhood's character.

Officials will face tough decisions in the coming year over how hard to push their vision, including overhauling streets to widen sidewalks, adding bike lanes and removing parking. They will also have to work out the details on a \$177 billion plan to build hundreds of miles of new high-speed rail and agree on a strategy for bringing a needed tax increase to the ballot box, perhaps as soon as 2022.

Embracing such growth won't guarantee San Diego becomes affordable. Cities around California and the U.S. have built train stations, fancy bike lanes and lifted restrictions on new development only to see entire neighborhoods transformed into playgrounds for affluent young transplants. Critics argue that such an approach has too often displaced working-class families.

JOSHUA EMERSON SMITH U-T



K.C. ALFRED U-T FILE

The latest Del Mar bluff stabilization project began in 2020, shown here on May 11. In this phase, part of the stormwater drain near Seventh Street will be replaced and the bluff will be stabilized.



Back to college?

With the nation still in the grips of the coronavirus pandemic, San Diego County's colleges and universities will continue to offer most of their courses online this spring. But they're hoping that the COVID-19 vaccines will enable them to resume mostly in-person classes in the fall. Many students dislike online classes, saying they don't offer the richness of face-to-face teaching. Students also say they feel isolated and alone. The schools are anxious for things to return to normal. The pandemic is proving to be costly. UC San Diego says its losses will be in the \$300 million to \$500 million range.

GARY ROBBINS U-T



Fairgrounds future

Expect more drive-in movies, concerts and takeout food sales at the Del Mar Fairgrounds in 2021 as the state-owned facility searches for pandemic-safe ways to raise revenue.

But don't count on the San Diego County Fair, the largest single annual event, which attracted 1.5 million visitors in 2019. The fair was canceled in 2020. Instead, the parking lot hosted the Fair Food Fix. Drive-in customers bought midway favorites such as kettle corn and turkey legs, but it won't pay the bills at the fairgrounds.

Run by the 22nd District Agricultural Association, the fairgrounds collects no tax money and depends almost entirely on revenue from events, such as car shows and expos, which include rental payments, food sales and parking fees. The lost revenue slashed the fairgrounds' annual budget by almost 90 percent this year. Due to its oceanfront location, the fair board will have to decide if an agricultural focus is the best use of the property.

PHIL DIEHL U-T



Special election

Shirley Weber has represented California's 79th Assembly District — which includes San Diego, Chula Vista, National City and all of Lemon Grove and La Mesa — since 2012 and during her tenure has emerged as one of California's fiercest advocates for social justice causes.

Now, with her nomination to secretary of state, a special election will likely be held and a fierce battle will emerge among Democratic hopefuls aiming to succeed her.

Who San Diego County residents pick is important not just for San Diego's representation, but also because Weber is considered by many to be a unique political figure, a progressive Democrat with deep local roots who is unafraid to take on her own colleagues and powerful labor groups, including the police and teacher unions.

CHARLES T. CLARK U-T



Comic-Con Museum

Like a caped superhero swooping in to save the world, Comic-Con International's museum is set to make its long-awaited arrival this summer, just in time to feed pop-culture enthusiasts starving for some Batman, Pac-Man and more.

The year-round facility, which will be the first museum to open in Balboa Park in nearly two decades, will have a theater, two art galleries, an education center and a gift shop.

The museum takes over the 68,000-square-foot space formerly occupied by the San Diego Hall of Champions.

It is not expected to be 100 percent completed when it opens this year, though. Work will continue in phases until 2024.

MICHAEL JAMES ROCHA U-T

Del Mar bluffs

Efforts to shore up the Del Mar bluffs and protect the only rail line between San Diego and points north will continue in the new year, but the work for a while will be less visible to the public.

A major connector for commerce, commuters and the military, the tracks have become imperiled following a series of collapses along that stretch of coastline that have forced regional planners to step up the pace.

Pounded by rising sea levels and tidal erosion, the cliffs will not be able to support the commuter and freight trains forever.

The goal is to move the rail line inland, perhaps into a tunnel. But that's decades and billions of dollars away.

Meanwhile, the transit agency that owns the tracks and regional planners are finishing up one phase of a multimillion-dollar project to stabilize the area.

Planning is under way for the next round of construction needed to safeguard the tracks in place.

Construction is expected to resume in early 2022 on the next phase of work, budgeted for close to \$35 million.

PHIL DIEHL U-T



San Diego Symphony's The Shell

The opening of San Diego Symphony's new \$45 million outdoor concert venue may have been delayed by the pandemic, but this will be music to the ears of many: It is now expected to make its debut this year.

Just what the opening concert will look like is anyone's guess at this point, since the symphony and all live performance organizations are at the mercy of state and county health guidelines.

Last fall, San Diego Symphony CEO Martha Gilmer expressed disappointment at the initial delay but at the same time expressed hope for the future.

"It's a major disappointment," Gilmer said. "But the flip side is that we are the envy of many other orchestras. Because when we come back, we will have a beautiful new outdoor venue with a robust orchestra. And many people will be more accepting and comfortable to come to an outdoor venue."

MICHAEL JAMES ROCHA U-T