

## **Upon the Raising of the Black Lives Matter Flag – Williston – March 1, 2021**

I want to personally thank the Williston Selectboard, the Town Manager, and the Director of the Community Justice Center for supporting the values of Williston. The Williston values include respect, honesty, integrity, responsibility, compassion, fairness, equity, safety, and health. I believe that the raising of the Black Lives Matter flag, along with the establishment of the Williston Racial Equity Partnership, create opportunities to build a better community for future generations. Thank you for the gift and your courage.

Flags are symbols. We must ask what is behind, as well as in front of, all symbols. What do they say about the now? And what do they say about our future together?

When considering flags as messengers I return to my youth in a racially segregated South Florida where we recited daily a pledge to the American flag. Yet I don't recall any real discussion on the meaning behind the flag nor the challenges of the words we pledged to uphold.

And now as an older man I have asked myself many times what "liberty and justice for all" actually means today. How do we find liberty? Can we agree on what justice actually means? And who is "for all"?

Flags as symbols are not without controversy. It is time to step beyond controversy and move our community forward. If one listens carefully then one can hear voices of community pride, celebration, respect, and recognition. We all have work to do as members of this community if we want to strive to fulfill that pledge of "justice for all".

I would like to share a short poem from Langston Hughes that captures a small slice of reality for some members of our community –

### **I, Too** **BY LANGSTON HUGHES**

I, too, sing America.

I am the darker brother.  
They send me to eat in the kitchen  
When company comes,  
But I laugh,  
And eat well,  
And grow strong.

Tomorrow,  
I'll be at the table  
When company comes.  
Nobody'll dare  
Say to me,  
"Eat in the kitchen," Then.

Besides,  
They'll see how beautiful I am  
And be ashamed—  
I, too, am America.

Thanks again to the Selectboard, Town Manager, and Director of the Community Justice Center. Now the hard work begins. Together we can advance a community that recognizes that overt and covert racism does exist, and create a community-based response to build a better life and future for us all.  
--Patrick Brown