

Year in Review 2020: Social Justice



Eastonites joined with other Americans calling for social change following the horrific death of George Floyd, 46, during a police arrest on May 25 in Minneapolis. Protests in response to Floyd's brutal death and to police violence against other Black Americans spread quickly across the United States.

More than 300 community members turned out for the June 8 Vigil for George Floyd on the Morehouse Road playing fields. Wearing masks and staying socially distanced, some carried signs while others lit candles. Some just sat and listened. Easton residents Devon Wible, Tara Gottlieb and Sarah Lehberger organized the vigil.

Speakers included First Selectman David Bindelglass, Easton Police Chief Rich Doyle, state Rep. Anne Hughes and residents Lila Estime and Wiley Mullins. Doyle recited some of the message he released condemning the killing of Floyd. Chief State's Attorney Richard J. Colangelo Jr., who is chairman of the Easton Police Commission, also released a statement decrying the officers' actions as "reprehensible, heart-wrenching, and criminal."

Vigil for George Floyd: A Moment or a Movement?

Easton celebrated Juneteenth with music, history lessons, and socially distant picnicking. The goal was to bring together the community to meet neighbors and learn about the history and traditions of Juneteenth.

Juneteenth Celebration Highlights Historic Importance of the Day

The Easton, Redding and Region 9 Boards of Education created Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committees, Barlow alumni and students formed Social Justice Clubs, and the Board of Selectmen approved the formation of a Diversity and Inclusion Task Force. The task force experienced some differences of opinion and is a work in progress.

Easton Responds to Calls for Anti-Racism

The Easton Public Library stocked books on the topic of racial justice and systemic racism and chose “Small Great Things” by Jodi Picoult as its 2021 One Book/One Town Community Read. The novel, published in 2016, includes themes of race, privilege, prejudice, justice, and compassion.

Library Announces One Book/One Town Community Read

The Weight of The World



There's something especially inspiring when standing in front of your old elementary school playground at this age. It's oddly sentimental. In front of you, memories of yourself dangling midair; suspended by a very lopsided moving merry-go-round with your friends. Not a worry in the world. Suddenly, the jolting weight of others cause your hand grip to loosen, and the wheel to pick up speed. It flings you onto the playground woodchips. You're not alone.

One by one, people are flung to the ground, laughing and bruised, grown-ups nearing to inspect the scene. I can picture little old me all over again, ready for round three. The physics behind it was not something I could articulate at the time. I just knew the fewer kids gripping on the circular wheel above us meant the faster it spun, taking full advantage of the now lessened load. And of course, you had better hoped you weren't the last one dangling. I want to believe that how I felt as a kid on the playground will take me farther into my adult years.

On June 19th, I'd just gotten off from work and was heading to the school I grew up in long before the working age. Samuel Staples Elementary School is always bright and beautiful against the pane of open space, and pulling up closer, I could see many people surrounding the pavilion. In a predominately white, small town like Easton, I can't express how moving it was to see my community come together to learn about what Freedom Day means to minorities and Black residents like myself. That Friday evening, local music played, and people got together to learn more about the oldest nationally celebrated commemoration to the ending of slavery in the United States. We socially distanced. We brought blankets and snacks. We listened to speakers talk about the events of Galveston, Texas in 1865.

Residents showed up in their worry and their burden toward the racial inequality and systemic racism in this country. The disparity puts us at a duo pandemic: COVID-19 and racism. One had gone on longer than the other. In the past month, the racial disparities in our health care system were acknowledged on a wide scale. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Long-standing systemic health and social inequities have put some members of racial and ethnic minority groups at increased risk of getting COVID-19 or experiencing severe illness, regardless of age.”

We wore masks to protect ourselves, yet we were distantly hand in hand. We were shaking our heads and holding our hearts, hugging the words of each speaker so closely. It was at the vigil for George Floyd where my eyes wandered and my initial thoughts of recess and fourth grade down time commenced. That darned merry-go-round.

I loved that gyrating carousel thingy. The collective weight of its participants directly determined how fast it would spin. I could see my friends across from me and next to me when it would spin slow. It was relaxing. We were all together, and I could see everything around me. We’d laugh and wiggle our legs. The more weight or the more people on the wheel, the slower it spun. I was illuminated by this fact as a child. And when people vacated, there was some excitement in knowing it would eventually spin out of control.

“If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.” — African Proverb

I feel like in the wake of George Floyd’s death, Easton united for a bipartisan change and to acknowledge the death that shook a nation. The Vigil for George Floyd took place at the same pavilion about two weeks prior, where speakers were highlighting stories revolving passive and sometimes blatant racism. When I kneeled to honor the loss of Black lives, my eyes were closed. When they opened, I gazed at the crowd and behind them, at the playground. This is not a moment, it’s a movement but for some reason, this moment was surreal for me.

At the pavilion, I started to think about the time I taught some of my friends how to Double Dutch, a jumping rope game originated among Dutch immigrants in New York City. That's where I learned it.

I was now teaching them the legitimacy of a holiday widely celebrated across our nation. In the same breath, I was informing my peers on systemic racism and the ongoing habits of police aggression that got George Floyd killed. I was happy to see a few childhood familiar faces in the crowd.

I didn't hear the sound of screaming laughter and excitement from my friends, I heard music from the band Steve Clarke and Friends. Theresa Wright's voice stretched in notes that could be heard from the swings. Her sun-kissed skin beamed in the sun as her renditions of Bob Marley and Aretha Franklin serenaded over the field on Juneteenth.

It wasn't our annual SSES Ice-Cream Social in the courtyard; there wasn't any ice cream in sight. Instead, the flavors that evening were honesty, truth and history—in that order. We were learning, and listening. We were amplifying a *mélange* of voices. Juneteenth was a day to remember. The vigil was a day I won't forget.

I could spot my family in the crowd along with a few parents I grew up calling "mom" and "dad." We were grasping what seemed like the weight of the world in a carousel, but together. I imagine that's not always a bad thing. Sometimes the weight of the world in life will allow you to slow down and look at the people around you. Imagine if we all did that? Instead of turning a blind eye to civil unrest, we stuck together long enough to get a real good look at the harm and pain in all systems and institutions that effect our Black Americans. The grief may feel like we are individually responsible for the outcome of fixing a systemic issue. In some ways we are, but not without the help of one another.

I felt like Easton was sharing the same sentiments around social injustice, holding on tightly to the faith we have in the world but also recognizing the problem at hand. History repeats itself, like a wheel that keeps spinning around and around again. These

conversations are important and action is required. The load is heavy and we will certainly need each other. I keep reminding myself of the little Black girl I was on the playground. It was never too much fun spinning alone and maybe even quite dangerous. I recall the strength I had when I did, but it wasn't easy.

I can't emphasize enough how much we need each other. There isn't much excitement or joy when everyone departs out here in the real world. When we turn a blind eye is when things start moving out of control, or when society becomes complicit to the realities of these issues that affect us all. I remind myself of little old me on my favorite playground equipment, just holding on for the fun of it. If you were me, wouldn't you begin to think?

As a young adult, you may start to figure that maybe—just maybe—you've carried some of that strength with you, right? You clear the woodchips from your shirt and pants. You dust yourself off.

Somewhere inside of you, a young adult learns to get back up again.

'We Must Focus on Protecting Black Lives'



On Monday night I spoke at the community vigil for George Floyd. As part of my message, I said that Black Lives Matter, and also stated that blue lives and all lives matter. While I believe that all life is sacred, black lives specifically are at risk in our country because of systemic racism and police brutality, so we must focus on protecting black lives.

Saying that blue lives and all lives matter was insensitive, because the way some have used those phrases has made them into rallying cries for continued racism. I hope it was clear that I was in no way disregarding the systemic racism that has led to the senseless murder of countless black men and women. I apologize for my poor choice of words, and to those offended by them. I am listening, and I am learning.

The vigil was a powerful event where our citizens challenged each of us to reflect on how we can sacrifice for the greater good and practice humility when we make mistakes. I know that we have a difficult road ahead of us as we fight for equity and justice, and I believe that we can overcome these challenges to create a better future for our town, state, and country by working together.

A Message from First Selectman Bindelglass ... Update for 6/12/20



Good afternoon,

Today is Graduation Day at Joel Barlow High School for our seniors! Congratulations to all our graduates and their families. Despite the circumstances, this is truly a momentous occasion in the lives of our extraordinary young people. They have had to endure remote learning and the cancellation of many of the rites of passage afforded former senior graduation classes. "Go confidently in the direction of your dreams. Live the life you've imagined." - Anonymous

Our thoughts are still dominated by the call for change happening in our nation. On Monday night, a vigil for George Floyd was held with about 250 people at the Morehouse Fields. Several of our residents spoke eloquently about their experiences and the challenges before our nation. It was a powerful event, and showed how in Easton, those of us of different races and backgrounds can, and I believe will, come together.

On the COVID-19 front, our state and our town are slowly beginning to reopen. For Easton, the major changes will come in the expanded use of our fields and some athletic facilities. In accordance with the state's recommendations, there will be limited Little League practices and games. Since our town has done a good job in respecting the guidelines in place since we opened Lower Veteran's Field. The rest of the town's fields will open under the same guidelines.

Please check the Park and Recreation Facebook page and town website. I also want to congratulate our eateries for handling their gradual reopening's in a safe way, as certified by our Health Department. The Easton Library will continue with curbside service. In July, Town Hall will open to the public for the purpose of collecting taxes ONLY. All of these changes are subject to further review over time. The state has not yet made any decisions on guidelines for opening services specifically for our seniors.

I have approached the Town of Fairfield about allowing our residents access to Fairfield beaches, but they are not ready to make a decision.

As a cautionary tale, a number of states which began reopening before Connecticut have

seen significant increases in COVID-19 positive cases. We still need to be careful, social distance, wear masks and use good hygiene. Hopefully, we can avoid an increase in cases in our town and state.

Please remember if you are seeking an extension on your property taxes please see the town website www.eastonct.gov for the appropriate form or contact the Tax Collector at 203-268-6291. The Annual Town Report can be picked in the lobby of the Police Department on the drop off/pick up table.

South Park Bridge is now paved. There are a few more finishing touches to be completed and we should be announcing the opening very soon.

Have a great weekend. Enjoy our first cautious steps towards normalcy, but please be safe, and be well.