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PERSPECTIVE

Where do we go from here?

By Thomas M. Madruga

Times are different now, really different. Society is searching for an identity. Wisdom has been replaced with ignorance, honor with contempt, and loyalty with duplicity. Are the police the good guys or the bad guys? Are employers the salvation for jobs, or a mechanism for discrimination and oppression? Mr. Potato Head is gone, but not forgotten, at least not yet. He will be. Everything now is questioned. Science, medicine, elections and, yes, the legal system. I read recently that Abe Lincoln was a slave owner — really. Maybe the world is flat, too, and maybe no one landed on the moon. We just might be living in the Twilight Zone, who knows. Rod Serling was right about one thing: “For civilization to survive, the human race has to remain civilized.”

The jury got it wrong in the Rodney King case ... and then again in the OJ Simpson case ... maybe two wrongs do make a right? It's not emblematic of truth or justice, but it's the American way — I guess. Perhaps it all got resolved with George Floyd. Maybe. Yet, a twice-impeached, one-term president, who can't pronounce Yosemite, is still the leader of the Republican Party — politics, I guess. Good against evil, right against wrong, blue states, red states, anything but the United States. At least not right now, maybe later, maybe never, or so it seems.

The laws are not always enforced fairly, sometimes not at all. Verdicts are not always right,



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or just, sometimes just wrong — it is a game of percentages. Most juries get it right, I think, I hope. And not all wronged citizens file lawsuits, thankfully, but many who have not been wronged, file one, or two or three. I know. I defend them. So long as the system gets it right more often than wrong, and delivers justice more than injustice, we can live with it. Or can we? We are not living with it so well right now.

It is hard to determine where reform is needed, or what exactly to reform. Are the “laws” in need of reformation or the “people”? Good question. Tough answer. Do we turn to legislators or psychologists? Probably both. But laws are only as good as the people who enforce them, or in many cases, abuse them. They are designed to protect the people,

or so we hope, but which people? There are good people on both sides — bad choice of words — but really, for every cop that exceeds permissible force, there is a victim. For every boss that engages in an unlawful employment activity, there is victim. But there are good cops and good bosses too, who get sued for doing the right thing — not the system's fault, or is it? Did the law fail, or the people? Who is at fault, who is to blame? Everyone and no one. We live in democracy, or at least we used to, an imperfect system under which we demand perfect perfection, but why not. We shoot for the stars so we can land on the moon. A wise man once wrote that “the American justice system is the worst system ever designed to find the truth, but it is better than any other.”

Ironically, and sadly, many of those who complain the loudest about our jury system, have never served, opting instead for a convenient excuse not to serve. Too busy, no pay, can't make it, got kids ... the shallowest brooks tend to run the loudest.

American citizenship comes with a price. Our justice system could use more active participation and less active criticism. The system also requires honesty and integrity, and yes, self-policing, there is no honor among thieves.

So where do we go from here? More questions than answers, more problems than solutions — maybe. Perhaps we can agree that the justice system cannot enforce morality. It cannot demand honesty nor compel integrity. That must come from within, and if it does, there is a better chance the system will get to the truth faster and deliver justice more often — or so it seems. ■

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