

# POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

## Truth and reconciliation

A brief look at the *Sound Off* page of *The Mercury* shows that the political polarization of the nation has gripped the Pottstown area as well.

Most of the postings are written by rabid partisans for either Trump or Biden thumbing their noses at each other.

Fully a third of Americans — including a majority of Republicans — believe that Joe Biden's election was illegitimate despite a complete lack of credible evidence to support that claim.

That's about the same percentage of doubters who have declined to be vaccinated for COVID 19. Even science has become politicized.

As bad as the American culture wars have become, they pale in comparison to the situation in South Africa in the era of apartheid.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu of Cape Town, who died last week at age 90, was a trailblazer in overcoming apartheid and healing his nation.

He set an example of the moderation sorely needed in America.

Beginning with the Dutch colonization of Cape Town in the 1600s, European settlers seized land and established dominance over the natives of today's South Africa.

Although whites comprised just 20 percent of South Africa's population, only they could vote and hold office in the South African legislature. In 1948, the legislature adopted the first in a series of laws, known as apartheid, which formalized the economic, political and social domination of the country's whites.

Everyone was officially categorized by race and issued an identity card. Interracial marriage and sexual relations were forbidden.

Housing was segregated, to the point where blacks were removed from their homes and forced into segregated neighborhoods. More than 3.5 million blacks were forcibly relocated between 1960 and 1983.

All public facilities were segregated. Blacks were not allowed to run businesses or practice professions in white areas. In fact, blacks were not allowed to work in

white areas unless they had a special pass.

To enforce the apartheid system, thousands of people were detailed without trial. Police brutality and torture were common.



Commentary by  
Tom Hylton

Standing in the face of this cruel racism was the Anglican church, which refused to obey the law requiring apartheid in churches. A well-educated black, Desmond Tutu, was appointed to a succession of leadership positions in the church, culminating with Archbishop of Cape Town, the highest post in the African Anglican Church.

Tutu decried apartheid and helped bring international pressure on the South African government to reform. He fostered widespread boycotts of South African products and industry.

Even staunch white supremacists began to realize that apartheid was unsustainable, and governmental leaders, fearing a bloody racial war, began to negotiate its end.

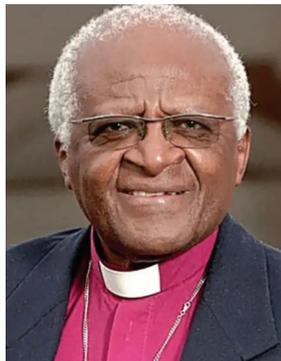
The most prominent anti-apartheid political leader, Nelson Mandela, was freed in 1990 after serving 27 years in prison, and negotiated the establishment of South Africa's first multi-racial general election.

Mandela was elected president in 1994. He established a Truth and Reconciliation Commission and appointed Tutu as its chairman.

The commission was tasked with examining the human rights abuses of the apartheid era without seeking punishment for wrong-doers.

Tutu carried out this mission, "hated by many white South Africans for being too radical and scorned by many black militants for being too moderate," as one biographer wrote.

But the peaceful transfer of power from a racist white population to an oppressed black population, that could have easily been goaded to exact vengeance, is one of the triumphs of human history.



Desmond Tutu

*Thursday: Biologist Edward O. Wilson, who also died last week, at age 92, called on us to preserve the earth's biodiversity.*