We can’t let the alleged criminal acts of a few select take away from what we’ve learned in the year after Michael Brown’s death. We just can’t.

On Sunday, the nation watched as law enforcement addressed the anniversary of the initial events in Ferguson involving Brown and police officer Darren Wilson. The incident sparked a national self-reflection about race relations and opportunity (or lack thereof) in America.

But then as night descended on Ferguson, two incidents — an alleged firing upon police SUVs and a police officer shooting a car — shows the need to improve police-community dialogue. The cynical among us will look at the happenings of the past year and say that nothing’s changed. We still have discriminatory policing, a lack of community dialogue, stark contrasts in how those of different races are treated and inequality in the prospects for opportunity, access and satisfaction.

That may all be true as far as it goes, but there are plenty of positive changes as well. In this year of power- ful discussion, we’ve talked about so many things.

Police: Despite no prosecution issuing in the Brown case by either local or federal authorities, a United States grand jury voted not to indict Ferguson’s police department and practices. Addressing discriminatory attitudes of police has become an essential element of hiring, training and evaluation. Encouraging use of body cameras to escape subjective narratives about awful events becomes a cornerstone of community dialogue, stark contrasts in how those of different races are treated and inequality in the prospects for opportunity, access and satisfaction.

We've had some breakthroughs, but if we don’t, the lessons of the past are repeated. If we do keep the issues at the forefront of our mind, we must continue examining historical blunders.

The virtual debate among Coates, Brooks and others is critically important. It is essential that we each continue to speak about the matter, and speak with integrity and conviction. Those values should be part of our moral fabric as we work through and, if possible, past, our racial challenges. One major contribution was the African-American journalist Ta-Nehisi Coates’ book-length letter to his son, “Between the World And Me.” Coates’ beautifully written and insightful tome about the plight of blacks in this country, highly subjective and passionate, offered an open and inclusive space for informed discussion about race relations and opportunity for all and will continue to work for a St. Louis community dedicated to addressing what divides us and finding positive solutions moving forward.

Robert D. Millestone, President
Baty Abramson-Goldstein, Executive Director

Response to editorial

The Jewish Light’s July 1 editorial ("Making Love Legal") was a virtual celebration of the Supreme Court’s narrow decision finding state laws prohibiting marriage contracts between same-sex couples in violation of the constitution. Regardless of how the Light’s staff and even the majority of the St. Louis Jewish community greeted this, there is no excuse for the paper’s editorial writers to conflate treatment of Jews wherever Germany held power with that of gays during the era of National Socialism. To do so is not only historically incorrect, but also completely misinter- preted the genocidal uniqueness of the German “war against the Jews” and the exceptionalism of the Shoah in the history of genocide.

Unlike generations before and after the National Socialist Era, the Shoah’s aim was the eradication of every Jew any- where in the world. This is extraordinarily different than the treatment of any other groups (with the exception per- haps of the mentally ill and the Romany). Every Jew was the genetic enemy of the Nordic/Aryan and had to be destroyed. No other groups, and certainly not gays, were marked in this way. To commit gay acts was a crime, yet many Nazis were gay, especially in the early leadership of the SA. Gays could avoid criminalization by not engaging in homosexual acts. If caught, imprisonment in concentration camps, not necessarily death camps, with identifying pink triangles on their uniform was a not unusual penalty. While this was certainly wrong and immunosuppressed, that doesn’t mean that just because one’s choice of actions and that it rarely resulted in death are startlingly different than the fate of the Jews whose fate was determined by their “Jewishness,” not actions.

Stephen S. Lefkak, M.D., Emeritus Professor of Medicine
Washington University School of Medicine