

Statement from Ethan Wayne, John Wayne's son, 6.29.2020

Let me make one thing clear -- John Wayne was not a racist. I know that term is casually tossed around these days, but I take it very seriously. I also understand how we got to this point.

There is no question that the words spoken by John Wayne in an interview 50 years ago have caused pain and anger. They pained him as well, as he realized his true feelings were wrongly conveyed.

The truth is, as we have seen in papers from his archives, he did not support “white supremacy” in any way and believed that responsible people should gain power without the use of violence. Those who knew him, knew he judged everyone as an individual and believed everyone deserved an equal opportunity. He called out bigotry when he saw it. He hired and worked with people of all races, creeds, and sexual orientations. John Wayne stood for the very best for all of us -- a society that doesn't discriminate against anyone seeking the American dream. It would be an injustice to judge him based on a single interview, as opposed to the full picture of who he was. The current focus on social justice is absolutely valid and necessary. But attempts by some to use it for political advantage distract from real opportunities for reform.

One thing we know – if John Wayne were here today, he would be in the forefront demanding fairness and justice for all people. He would have pulled those officers off of George Floyd, because that was the right thing to do. He would stand for everyone's right to protest and work toward change.

Since his death more than 40 years ago, his legacy continues through the John Wayne Cancer Foundation, which has helped provide courage, strength and grit to the fight against cancer, and through his extensive film library. My father believed that we can learn from yesterday, but not by erasing the past. His name, no matter where it is, will always embody these values, and our family knows the positive impact that he made on the world will never be diminished.