

Viewpoint: We appreciate our ‘allies’ in the fight for justice. But we need more than that.

By Brett Andrews, CEO of [PRC](#) | June 12, 2020



As I write this, our nation is socially rudderless – devoid of leadership to address the latest display of police brutality and endemic racism in America.

The intensity of the current social unrest should not come as a surprise to anyone following current events in recent years. In our lifetime, we’ve witnessed similar instances of George Floyd’s death, and often at the hand of those sworn to protect us. If we are willing to reach further back, we’ll find this abhorrent behavior exhibited in our society for centuries. As the COVID-19 pandemic began earlier this year, being a Black/African American in America went from consistently complicated to deadly.

A question for every American to consider is this: Did those in power today truly believe that a society which continues to be governed by a wealthy white aristocracy would remain in power in perpetuity, with no resistance from the oppressed? In other words, what led us to believe that black and brown people would be okay with a constant slate of abuse, brutality, and discrimination until the end of time? Unfortunately, the result of this man-made social construct of racism has withstood the test of time. The reason? **Fear.**

Fear is the primary fuel that ignites, energizes and animates those who wain nostalgic on a past that disempowered people of color in this country. The energy needed to dismantle racism must be commensurate to the energy it took to create it. I do not condone looting and destructive rioting. However, we must recognize that the civil unrest – which should be viewed as separate from peaceful American protests – may be the countervailing forces needed to grab the attention of those who have perpetuated structural, economic, and state-sanctioned racism since America was established. It’s hard to comprehend the amount of sustained efforts and resources that were laser-focused on segregating schools, housing, restaurants, nightclubs, stores, water fountains, hotels and the like.

In addressing the varying misperceptions of social justice movements like Black Lives Matter, it’s equally as complicated to consider how we ascribe to subdivisions within the human race that require victims and allies. While oppressed people in our society (black, brown, LGBTQ and others) appreciate the concept of having allies, we should reserve it for the inanimate tasks of supporting policies, positions and rights – not for identifying as fellow sentient human beings. The concept of being allies or in solidarity with others who are different from “us” has led to a less-than-helpful concept of “othering” – a well-meaning but unintentionally negative modality that creates an “us versus them”

reality for many. Instead, we must embrace a deeper, more fundamental human notion of “oneness.” Hence, if you see a child being mistreated by an adult, you wouldn’t need to ascribe to being an “ally” to all children in order to intervene. You simply intervene because you, too, are human.

I long for a future when simply being human can be enough for us to see ourselves in – and support – our fellow humans’ needs, suffering and oppression. This call to action is exactly what defines our mission at PRC. We operate under the belief that an individual is not a victim, but that their need is a symptom of our collective ecosystem that must be modified. If we change our ecosystem by improving our systems of care – health, education, housing, justice, etc. – we increase the opportunity for success. The challenge, however, is that America has created an oppressive ecosystem largely based on race and class – leaving 100 million Americans (nearly 1 in 3) living in or near poverty.

Through PRC’s Black/African American Leadership Council, we seek to consolidate and improve the ecosystem that hinders the health, economic and social conditions for black people to create better outcomes

As a 55-year old African American man, I’m saddened to be forced to live with the stark reality of surviving, and eerily sitting on the shoulders of my younger brothers and sisters – George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, Ahmaud Arbery and many others – who impermissibly sacrificed their lives by merely being black. While there is no salve to heal these wounds, there is an opportunity for us to recognize the importance of human rights for all.

It’s hard. It’s complicated. Yet, I cannot apologize for the “dis-ease” one may feel. This moment demands all of us to be uncomfortable. Centuries later, U.S. citizens must come to grips with America’s original sins of slavery and genocide and acknowledge the scars of our past. Those scars must still heal. I hope neither you nor I are ever in George Floyd’s situation. In the discomfort of writing or reading this, remember, we both have options to step away – options not afforded George Floyd.

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