

Will There Be Justice In Our Time?

BY FREDERICK K. BREWINGTON - AUGUST 2, 2020



Protesters march down the street in Huntington. (Photo by Mira Lerner)

9

- Sign up for [our COVID-19 newsletter](#) to stay up-to-date on the latest coronavirus news throughout New York

“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.”

These words echo in my heart these days as I observe firsthand the waves of Americans standing together, calling for change that has been too long in the offing. As the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. penned these words, as a prisoner in a Birmingham jail cell, he understood what was swirling around him in 1963. Those injustices that come with racism are no less impactful than they were 57 years ago.

In fact, the impact is more widespread and more obvious, given that those who continue to fan the flames of hatred and indifference cannot deny what millions of people saw all over the world as they watched once again a Black man, George Floyd, being murdered,

as his life was choked from him by a white police officer who showed no compassion or moral concern for the human he was victimizing.

It must not escape us that history teaches us that it was police officers and their deputized brethren, many of whom were members and sympathizers of the KKK, who beat protestors with sticks, unleashed attack dogs, trampled men, women and children with horses, and targeted the same with skin-ripping fire hoses in the 1960s. In countless cases, those actions were taken against peaceful protestors, who had been trained in nonviolence.

The reality of the deep-seated hate, based on race, was evidenced by the language, actions and fiery speeches which fueled and perpetuated racism from generation to generation. It is the same level of racial resentment that is etched into the hearts of those who demand the public flying of the Confederate battle flag and is part of the ever-present Jim Crow attitudes that have created a police culture that labels Black persons as the enemies, “perps,” “animals,” “n—s” and “monkeys,” as well as other dehumanizing labels.

It was the police who were hell-bent on using force and brutality to deter and punish Black Americans for speaking the truth, for demanding equity in the nation, and for not knowing “their place.” Locations like Birmingham, Selma, Montgomery, Atlanta, Philadelphia, Tulsa, Elizabeth, Chicago, Cambridge (Maryland), Detroit, Los Angeles, Rochester (New York), Greensboro, and Brooklyn, just to name a few, were cities in the 1960s where Black Americans were faced with levels of police abuse and brutality that is only illustrative of our recent history.

The institution of American policing is one that is riddled with contradictions. On a grand scale, we have not equipped the police with either the training or support to allow them to address things without the use of force. By depriving the police of tools and resources in situations that demand both time and caring to avoid the criminal legal system, we have rewarded those who have high arrest numbers and lauded conviction rates.

While claiming to protect and serve, the disproportionate incidents of violent and deadly force used by police against Black people have proven to be the malady now facing us. The cry for an end to police abuse is a byproduct of the demands that fueled that need for protest in the first place. The societally rooted abuses of the human soul which manifest themselves as inequities in education, housing, employment, essential governmental services, health care, food security, voting rights, and environmental justice are the cocktail which America has served up and continue to avoid addressing.

The reform of policing in America from “sea to shining sea” is undoubtedly necessary. But to stop with alterations of how police engage and are bridled, as a knee-jerk reaction to our voices today, is little more than placing a Band-Aid on a spouting artery. We will eventually bleed to death.

A spouting artery needs, and requires, immediate and prompt surgery. It is that very type of intervention and deep-focused change that is necessary in these times of our emergence from a global pandemic, which taught us very important lessons. Even with the disparities in the rates of infections and death between the whites’ communities and those persons in the Black and Brown communities, we were convicted with our sin of inferior health care in those communities.

Still, we learned that we can change our ways of how we conduct our daily lives and we can do so with our eyes fixed on what is good for us as a society and as a nation. While there were clearly episodes of those who decided not to abide by what was necessary to attack COVID-19, attack is what we did with prompt and emergent efforts to eradicate the virus, which threatened us all. With this example so vividly before us, there is no excuse for us to fail to acknowledge that the virus of racism, which has so infected our society and fiber of our national DNA, is a sickness that demands our urgent attention with resources and clear thinking as though we were faced with an acute threat to our being.

The issues, the needs, and the problems we see now are nothing new, but what we are seeing is being examined through a new prism — a prism that refracts our today through a history that has come home to roost on the neck of America. With Black America at the

center of this movement, the people of this country are echoing in unison that injustice any time is a threat to justice in our time. The injustices are not simple and the remedies, likewise, are not simple.

The entanglement of discrimination and race-based animus necessitates immediate, broad changes — not fixes — nationally and locally as we strip away those infections that serve to prevent equity in a world of plenty. It is not a question of ability, it is now a question of willingness — willingness to place the value of Black lives over power and profits and to humbly surrender to an overt recognition of what is required of those who have, for too long, placed excuses in the place of effort, while allowing white privilege and fragile egos to precede those excuses.

The time for doing the hard and painful work is now, and the failure to do so will likely send America into a deep social and political spiral that will result in a national state of despair, which no level of regret can heal. There is inequity, there is racism, and there is injustice. It is a fact that we are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality. Now is the time to decide if justice will prevail in our time!

Frederick K. Brewington is a civil rights attorney based in Hempstead.

For more editorials visit [longislandpress.com/category/perspectives](https://www.longislandpress.com/category/perspectives)

Sign up for Long Island Press' email newsletters [here](#). Sign up for home delivery of Long Island Press [here](#). Sign up for discounts by becoming a Long Island Press community partner [here](#).

Frederick K. Brewington