



A Statement on Injustice

Daily the Negro is coming more and more to look upon law and justice, not as protecting safeguards, but as sources of humiliation and oppression. The laws are made by men who have little interest in him; they are executed by men who have absolutely no motive for treating the black people with courtesy or consideration; and, finally, the accused law-breaker is tried, not by his peers, but too often by men who would rather punish ten innocent Negroes than let one guilty one escape.

— *W.E.B. Du Bois, The Souls of Black Folk*

Black bodies as a canvas for violence is not a novel form of oppression. Violence against black people is in fact as American as apple pie. Remember Emmett Till like a strange fruit hanging from a poplar tree. There are no laws that have been consistently applied to us equally and justly. Remember crack cocaine and powder cocaine. There was no justice for just us. There have been hundreds of thousands of wrongful convictions of innocent black people. Remember the Central Park 5. They were five black boys who had their youth and innocence stolen from them.

For over half a century, television has shed light on our tragically mistreated and undervalued melanated bodies: from the Civil Rights Movement to Rodney King. Social media, however, has made this proliferation of violence almost a daily occurrence. Trayvon, Michael, Sarah, Tamir, Walter, Freddie, Philando, Eric, John, Botham, Atatiana, Breonna, Ahmaud and George, and, and. The souls of black folk are tired. And at some point black people begin to posit the following: Do I do nothing and die? Or do I do something and die?

The most dangerous creation of any society is the man who has nothing to lose.

— *James Baldwin, The Fire Next Time*

George Floyd is yet another devastating example of how black lives don't matter. Yes he allegedly did something wrong but when asked by law enforcement to comply he did so.

Yet he was still murdered.

And all of this is being contextualized in the midst of a worldwide pandemic. People are losing their jobs, their homes and their minds. We have been quarantined and isolated for months. The tension and stress across the country is palpable. We find ourselves in a time of no leadership, rudderless in the midst of a storm. Our own government is threatening to mobilize our own military against us. This is the type of tyranny that led the forefathers of America to found this country.

Our democracy was built to be resilient with checks and balances to keep us safe in times of war, trouble and uncertainty. It was built to protect us from harm within and from without. It was built on the idea that we as Americans could protest and allow our voices to be heard, even when the hearing created discomfort or elicited guilt. Our genetic composition is comprised of resistance and if we believe in nothing else we believe that we have the right to gather and peacefully resist oppression.

But I am struggling. As I write this I am thinking about my two boys, Carter 13 and Gabe 8. I am thinking about the light in their eyes, their quick giggles and laughs, their carefree attitudes. I am thinking about their innocence. And I am wondering whether their innocence will save them one day. I am wondering if they will have the right to be indignant when they are accused of having done something wrong when they did nothing at all. I am wondering whether their lives will be taken for no reason.

I am frightened every time my wife tells me she has let our sons ride their bikes from Washington, D.C. to the middle of Silver Spring. Sure I am concerned about the cars and pets and bugs. But I worry that someone might hurt them because they have the gift of melanin. We have had the discussion with them about their blackness and the threat of their blackness. And still I have no peace.

I am thinking about George Floyd: that giant of a black man who likely was felt in every room before he was seen or heard. I am thinking of his talent as a musician. I am thinking about how his daughter probably melted his heart when she looked up into his eyes. I am wondering whether the police thought the same thing. I want to know if they saw George's humanity, his shared experience with them as another human being. I wonder who George was in their eyes.

I know that the young people in these streets, black, brown, white and all the variations thereof are thinking the same things. But their voices are louder and harsher and filled with indignation because their generation is tired. They were born into this and came of age in it: this is what they know. And I know that if I was their age I would be raging too. They have a right to protest and to demand justice. They have a moral obligation to be civilly disobedient.

Why? Because I believe in America. I believe that America is a place where dreams can come true. My history in America and the plight of my people may not reconcile with my belief, but I still believe. I know that our democracy is resilient and yet unjust. I know that our so-called leaders are sometimes more focused on themselves than we, the people. I know that the law enforcers are sometimes willfully wrong but I still believe.

I believe all of this because I must. The universe has given my wife and me two beautiful black boys. I believe and must hope that one day they can exist in a country filled with life, liberty and justice for all.

I believe!

Christopher E. Donald

Interim Executive Director

District of Columbia Housing Finance Agency

