

RACISM: THE KNEE ON THE NECK OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

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GRAND RAPIDS, MI, UNITED STATES, June 8, 2020 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Racism is the knee on the



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Dr. Linda F. Williams, DSW

neck of social justice. People of color are being subjected to what I call "horizontal lynching," in broad daylight and full public view. The only difference between the "strange fruit" of traditional lynching and lynching in the new millennium is that now the victims are laying in the street (or in their beds) instead of swinging from the trees.

Failure to understand the plight of people of color in the United States is bad enough. What's worse is not caring to understand. America was never "great" for people of color.

Not even for the Native Americans whose land was raped and pillaged in the interest of "manifest destiny." That concept was a construct that existed only in the minds of the oppressors. It was how they justified their actions. Their "destiny" meant death and destruction for anyone who got in their way. That air of privilege systemically prevails.

THE FEAR FACTOR

Fear is real. It grips you to the core. It is powerful—unrelenting. When it finally let's go, it leaves scars; scars nobody sees. Long after the threat has lifted, long after normalcy returns, fear prevails. For people of color, that fear is triggered when we leave our homes, as we walk or drive down the street, and whenever we are approached by law enforcement. It's a matter of life and death. It's fight or flight, neither of which results in a good outcome for people of color. Even totally respectful responses have resulted in a death sentence without the benefit of due process.

THE PERPETUAL INSULT

Judging people solely on appearance, as opposed to who they are (the content of their character), is the perpetual insult festering at the core of racism. What ticks people off is the failure of others to view them as who they are as individuals as opposed to who others think

they are based on erroneously preconceived notions.

People also do not don't want to hear altruistic statements such as, "I don't even see you as black." or "Your skin color doesn't matter to me." These statements set up exclusions in the interest of what is viewed as a negative to be overlooked in the interest of acceptance. It denies a part of who we are. Nobody should have to exclude my color to accept me. I am African American. I have dark skin. I don't get to deny that truth, and neither do you.

STOP TALKING . . . PLEASE!

This is but one girl's opinion, but I can't take another racism-related commentary, conflicting expert opinion, town halls, and presidential declarations regarding racism. Where are the results of all that? Can we all just STOP TALKING and GET RESULTS? My middle name is "Get Results" and screaming at one another is not yielding any.

This is my view of what it will take to facilitate meaningful conversations between opposing parties. Let's start by accepting these truths:

1. You can write laws and rules all day long. Until they are heeded without compromise, it is all for naught.
2. Training someone in what to do, and ensuring that they DO it, are two different things.
3. You cannot legislate the heart of a man or woman.
4. Information absent transformation is DOA.

Having a Productive Conversation

There is a big difference between talking and communicating. We've been talking at one another without the benefit of establishing an understanding. These elements will facilitate meaningfully moving the conversation forward:

- **Affirm:** Affirming one another means acknowledging one another's perspectives. Affirming does not mean you agree with each other. It just means you set aside your views long enough to hear the other side. Sometimes, a skilled facilitator can help in this regard. Nobody will hear you unless and until they feel heard. So, shut up, suck it up, and listen up long enough to get the communication ball rolling.

- **Listening versus Hearing:** Put aside everything you've learned about the art of listening and hear me. You can't listen without first hearing. The hearing takes heart. It requires our decision to honor and respect others whose perspectives don't align with ours.

- **Blame:** Nobody ever wins the blame game. It is counterproductive. We blame each other incessantly because we want the blamed to acknowledge their wrong. History speaks for itself and it's not going change based on anybody's refusal to acknowledge or own it. We need to

move on to solutions.

Forging Change

There is a difference between disparity and diversity. Failure to address the disparity, even with a diverse organization, is hypocrisy. After the conversation, focus on sustainable changes to impact systemic degradation of human rights. In doing so, beware of these dynamics:

- Everybody's Fake on it: Everybody acknowledges there is a problem. Everybody wants to rectify it. Yet, everybody has their view of how that end must be achieved. While viable solutions are on the table, nobody accepts any of them because everyone thinks their way is better than the other. While everybody's arguing about whose way is better, nothing changes.
- Faulty Focus: Symptom-focused problem solving is futile. We must address the core causes of the problems. While we are caught up in a symptom-chasing game of Whack-a-Mole the problem prevails. The core causes of social injustice consist of complicated psycho-social, socioeconomic, and sociopolitical variables. Addressing these matters will take a coordinated multidisciplinary team effort.
- Institutionalizing Solutions: The way to institutionalize the shift is to ensure that all stakeholders are held accountable for their part in the implementation and maintenance of the solutions. Communicate expectations and consequences. It is not enough to cheerlead from the social media sidelines. Forwarding a meme or commenting on a post means nothing if your boardroom, c-suite, and leadership are not reflective of those values. If not, there is work to do within the institution or organization.

Knowledge of the truth is the center of empowerment. It is only the truth we know, and act upon, that fosters change.

Dr. Linda F. Williams, DSW

Whose Apple Dynamic Coaching and Consulting Services

+1 888-486-4133

[email us here](#)

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