"Stay in your place!"

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The brutal murder of George Floyd in May 2020 sent shockwaves around the globe. The climate of the COVID-19 pandemic meant that for the first time in modern history the world was still, stationary in a state of environmentally imposed self-examination. This, coupled with the graphic nature of the footage of George Floyd being killed by a police officer – the very people entrusted with the protection of society – led to a perfect storm that became the catalyst for the global Black Lives Matter movement. People from all walks of life were awoken to a disturbing and, in some cases, unknown realisation of Black lives not having the same value as white lives. However, for the vast majority of Black people across the globe, this was not news. This has been our reality from the day that we were born.

For Black people, brutality and inequality are simply a part of life. Looking at how Black lives are treated in all areas of society, from healthcare and housing to child welfare and education, to criminal and civil justice, it is undeniable that, even as we enter the third decade of the 21st century, Black lives do not matter. This can seem an outrageous statement to many and is often met with retorts that point to successful Black public figures, or to the "progress" made from the time of the transatlantic slave trade or the Civil Rights movement. The unfortunate inaccuracy of these comparisons lies in the fact that the base attitudes that led to the atrocities of those times are still in existence and still accepted by those with the privilege that it bestows upon them. The proof of this? The very fact that government-appointed servants are comfortable enough to kill innocent Black people in a world full of smartphones and CCTV. They are comfortable enough to do so because an act of brutality upon a Black life will not be met with the same scrutiny as an act of brutality upon a white life. Essentially, you may take a Black life with guaranteed impunity. This has been proven repeatedly and is still happening right now. As I write this, a young Black man from Cardiff, Wales, has just died after receiving severe injuries in police custody. Sadly, I, just as other BLM activists and members of the Black community, know that this young man's family will almost certainly not receive either answers or justice for his death.

This is a reality that leads many people to ask "why?" Why do Black lives not matter? Why are Black people brutalised so deliberately? The answer is history. The history of Black existence in a society where laws, practices and norms were created with the ideology of white supremacy as the fundamental basis.

No matter how time moves on, history does not change; no matter how much progress is made, history does not change.

Those who benefit most from inequity and inequality are those least likely to challenge and attempt to change the status quo. Unfortunately, those who benefit the most are generally those who are in a position to redress the balance. Therefore, as time moves forward the changes made may, on the surface, seem significant, however, they are mainly tokenistic and, in turn, ineffectual, allowing those making the decisions to appear to be proactive, whilst simultaneously changing little for those who are negatively affected by inequity, all the while retaining the power and privilege to perpetuate this imbalance.

This leads us to explore how this conduct at the top leads to the brutalisation of Black lives. Simply put, it is conditioning and indoctrination. By virtue of the fact that we live in a world where we are continually bombarded with information from the media, as a

society we experience constant conditioning. Who controls the mass media? Who censors the media? Who owns the media? The very same people who wield the power, make the rules and enforce them. Therefore, this conditioning and indoctrination of Black lives not mattering is insidiously inflicted upon every person, even those who are left at a default disadvantage by it, and especially by those who implement and administer the outcomes. It is not in the interests of the individuals who are complicit in these behaviours to meaningfully scrutinise and punish those who are, essentially, only enforcing the rules, as they have been taught to and encouraged to, so much so that they have a firmly held belief that it is their duty and right to do so. The brutalisation of Black lives serves as a reminder to “stay in your place”, just as the whip of the white slave master did as it tore through Black skin. Just like the rope that choked the life from so many Black men, who had so much as dared to speak to a white woman. “STAY IN YOUR PLACE” – do not elevate, do not complain. The knee on the neck of George Floyd, the bullets that took the lives of Tamir Rice, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery and so many others – thousands of Black lives, these are acts of brutalisation that scream to us “you do not matter”, “your life does not hold any value”.

As horrific as this is, it is made worse by the fact that so many people still refuse to recognise this reality, much less challenge it or attempt to change it. As a Black woman and an activist, when explaining this, I am constantly met with deflection, excuses, attacks and accusations. Everything but acceptance, or even a willingness to listen. Therefore, we realise that it is imperative to continue our activism and education – it is literally a matter of life and death. We can no longer accept our lives not mattering, it is not up for debate – Black lives matter just as much as white lives, not more, not less – just as much. The BLM movement is not a moment, this world is no longer allowed the luxury of looking only through eyes of privilege as though that was the reality of every person. It is understood that even when this abhorrent inequality and brutalisation is presented and proven without a shadow of a doubt, there will be some people who still refuse to accept or challenge it for fear of losing their privilege. This will not stop us, because every person committed to the fight for justice and equality has made peace with the fact that the new world has no place for those who are steadfast in upholding systems and attitudes that place a lesser value on the life of any human being based on the melanin content of their skin. The movement is here to stay and we are the change. We will not stop until all lives matter.

Note

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