

A Message from the Chancellor: How Long Mr. George Floyd

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Sun 5/31/2020 4:16 PM

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Office of the Chancellor

How long? Not long.

Fifty-five years ago, the Reverend, Doctor Martin Luther King, Jr. asked this very question after he and 8,000 African American peaceful protesters endured police brutality and violence as they marched to the steps of the Alabama capital. Dr. King asked,

"How long will it take?" Somebody's asking, "How long will prejudice blind the visions of men, darken their understanding, and drive bright-eyed wisdom from her sacred throne?" Somebody's asking . . . "How long will justice be crucified, and truth buried?" . . . "How long? Not long, because the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice."

Dr. King asks us to hold America accountable for its blatant constitutional hypocrisy and legally sanctioned violence upon black bodies.

We are repeatedly confronted with instances of black people having their lives threatened or ended in legally sanctioned ways for walking, birdwatching, selling a single cigarette, studying, driving, napping, barbecuing, drinking coffee, renting Airbnb, vacationing, jogging, walking home with skittles, having a car breakdown, shopping, using a coupon, cutting the grass, selling hotdogs, selling water, selling lemonade, playing golf, working late, going to work, sleeping in our own beds, playing on the playground, swimming in a pool, playing a video game . . . And on and on and on. These are real, unexaggerated circumstances of danger for black men, women and children in the United States of America, not fifty years ago, but today. Today.

For those of us who feel this pain, live this reality and have to consider it first when we raise our children to achieve major milestones—like STAYING ALIVE and seeing the ripe old age of 25—these instances are exhausting and psychologically paralyzing. It is simply incapacitating to try to understand how someone can slowly, over 8 painstaking minutes, choke the life out of another human being, and . . . for the nation to watch with no intervention to save this man's life. So, we continue to ask, how long?

So as to keep us all in the state of discomfort, I want to ask you to close your eyes and imagine someone you love, pinned down under four grown men with one of the men kneeling on the neck of your father, mother, your child, niece, nephew, your son, your uncle—for eight minutes. Start your timer, see just how long eight minutes is to struggle to breathe, to experience your life being drained from your body. See how long eight minutes is to watch that loved one you imagined die right before your very eyes.

Don't stop, it's not over . . . I said eight minutes. Now take a moment to consider why this is so acceptable an occurrence in America that it persists, sanctioned by our laws, culture and system of "injustice." This is what white supremacy looks like.

"While white male supremacy is a universal concept that is not unique to the United States, it is a pillar upon which the nation was founded, the government was established, and the constitution was created. White male supremacy influences formal and informal relationships between and among people in public and private spheres of life. Social and political constructions of oppression and discrimination against women and people of color—in particular, people of African descent – remain embedded in American political, economic, religious and educational institutions (hooks, 1995). Dr. Regina Stanback Stroud -2009

What profound forces we are up against, but we are an even stronger force. At Peralta Community College District, we are a force committed to “. . . enhancing the region’s human, economic, environmental, and social development”—and to empowering “. . . our students to achieve their highest aspirations. We develop leaders who create opportunities and transform lives.” That is what brings us to serve every single day. Yet, to enhance lives and transform lives, we have to first make sure there is life.

Peralta’s Oakland Community is suffering under the weight of grief, pain, frustration, domination, exclusion and crushing oppression. The community took to the streets to say, “We Can’t Breathe!” So, what are we—in the Peralta Community College District—in service of the community and as a part of the community, prepared to do? Because do something, we must.

So, what can you do?

- Vote – the oppressive systems that are dehumanizing black people and destroying Black lives are in place by the will of the voting majority.
- Take a moment first and take care of yourself. Remember that you have access to [MHN](#) Employee Assistance Program (Company code: Peralta). “First, place your oxygen mask on” so you can breathe and be there to support others. Then, think of what you can do in your role to make things different – to deconstruct the system of white supremacy and racism that is literally choking the lives out of our community.
- Donate to memorial funds for the victims and their families.
- Contribute to the legal defense of arrested protesters.
- Use your voices, resources, and networks to condemn the attack on black humanity.
- Call out casual racism – sometimes described as micro-aggressions. An example is saying that a black person is “articulate”. The statement indicates a surprise that the black person is articulate. Consider how many times white speakers are described as articulate.
- Host a salon (currently – a virtual salon) of your friends to strategize around anti-racist efforts you can make to eliminate the racism that dehumanizes black lives. Read [Dr. Ibram X. Kendi’s](#) book, How to be an Anti-Racist.
- Educate yourself, friends and loved ones on the reality of black existence and the malice of seemingly benevolent habits of mind. Read [Dr. Ibram X. Kendi’s](#) book, Stamped from the Beginning.
- Listen, without judgement, to people expressing their pain even if it is being expressed in a voice, intonation, cadence, accent, vernacular you are unaccustomed to hearing and valuing.
- Develop a greater consciousness about the value of your comfort when compared to a black life. Read [Dr. Robin DiAngelo’s](#) book, White Fragility.
- Write locally elected officials and call on them to make the necessary changes to stop the legally sanctioned destruction of black bodies and lives.
- Show up (even if virtually) to City Council meetings and demand that the Mayor and City Council change the policies, practices, structure and culture of law enforcement systems that are paid for by the tax payers of our cities and counties.
- Avoid trying to define for black people, how they should feel or experience something – whether something is really all that bad or saying that you were not offended by that statement or action so you don’t know why they would be. Read [Ta-Nehisi Coates](#) book, Between the World and Me.
- Be racially conscious of the language you use taking care not to criminalize behavior that is not viewed as criminal when being done by someone who classifies themselves as white.
- Write to media outlets and confront them their intentional or unintentional perpetuation of white supremacy by the ways black images are depicted, described, and framed. Examples are calling black protesters thugs while white, armed protesters are patriots, describing black people as looters while describing whites who are doing the same thing as

resourceful, or repeatedly showing the same image of one person engaging in vandalism while the hundreds others are peacefully protesting, then describing the protest as a riot.

The sheer torture Mr. George Floyd experienced as he was slowly killed by an uncaring officer who did not see him as a person, a human being, has become one of many incidents that are all too frequent across our land today – still begging the question, How long?

Rest in peace and power, Mr. Floyd. Please rest in peace.



Dr. Regina Stanback Stroud
Chancellor

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