

What is to be done? Reflections on the Murder of George Floyd

Peggy Alford Trewn, PhD. RN
Eastern Michigan University
School of Nursing
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2020 is a year which will be remembered. While confronting the *COVID-19* pandemic which caused Americans to fear the unknown, America was further traumatized by the very policing system charged to protect American citizens. We witnessed the ***police murder George Floyd***; a Black man, son, father, brother, friend... and, most importantly, ***a human being***.

Martin Luther King Jr once said, *"Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter."* As a Black woman, nurse, teacher, educator, wife, and mother of three Black sons; I am outraged. I feel compelled to speak out because Black lives matter. Furthermore, I am sick and tired of this never-ending racial bias, differential treatment, racism, police brutality and structural violence.

Each of us, as nurses, vows to "do no harm." This is part of our code of ethics and honor. We take it with us wherever we go, work or play. Nurses understand what it means to treat people with respect and dignity. We understand what happens when you put a knee on the neck of an unarmed man for 8 minutes & 46 seconds. The murder of George Floyd provides evidence and a harsh reminder of how inhumane and deadly policing can be for Black people. Watching the tape made me cry for George and all the Black men and women who have died by unnecessary police force. I grieve the possibility that this could happen to any one of my sons, brothers, nephews, cousins, etc. I imagine it was as difficult for you as it was for me to watch the tape of George Floyd gasping to breathe and repeatedly saying "I can't breathe," calling out for his deceased mother. A few days ago, I watched the televised memorial for Mr. George Floyd. I stood still for 8 Minutes and 46 Seconds– the length of time that a policeman held his knee against the neck of George Floyd as he cried out "I can't breathe." Those 8 Minutes and 46 Seconds felt like an eternity; a lot of thoughts went through my mind during those eight minutes & 46 seconds. I am asking you as fellow nurses to lend your voice to fight for equality and end to police brutality.

I want give you a small glimpse of what it's like right now for me to as a Black woman in America. That is to say to be treated as if I am invisible, stalked while shopping (aka. shopping while Black), targeted while driving (aka. driving while Black), being watched like I'm prey; underestimated at work; passed over for advancement, accused before any question is asked, called undignified names; assumed to be incompetent; and harassed for no reason at all, just to name a few. It is absolutely exhausting being a Black woman in America. Still know that these are just a few examples of my day to day reality.

What can we do as nurses? I am asking you to open your hearts and mind and join the fight against police brutality and aggressive policing. Talk about race in spite of the discomfort that accompanies it. Examine closely indicators that point to health disparities such as the Flint water crisis and COVID19. Let's show solidarity by educating ourselves and those around us. Learn about the history of racism - slavery, Jim crow, lynching, legalized segregation and systemic racism. Advocate for change and a more inclusive & just society. Strive for-antiracism and work for social justice. Demonstrate empathy and work to undermine white privilege. Renounce/Condemn all forms of hatred and oppression. We can no longer afford to be silent or to wait for someone else to solve the problem. It is our collective problem and our collective responsibility and it will take all of us united to realize lasting change and a more inclusive society. Join me by letting your voice be heard.

Thank you for your ear,

Peggy Alford Trewn, PhD., RN

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