

June 2, 2020

As much focus, attention, and care that we spent celebrating Black excellence at last week's Rites of Passage ceremony, our minds and hearts were still heavy and hurting from the events that were occurring around us. The attack and murder of Ahmaud Arbery; the deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor due to police violence; and the deaths of Black trans and gender non-conforming individuals including Nina Pop and Tony McDade all resonate with us. Sadly, the list of Black people in America subjected to violence is long and getting longer. We also witnessed the experience of Christopher Cooper, where we see whiteness weaponized against Black bodies, reminiscent of historical events such as the brutal murder of Emmet Till. Black lives lost due to police violence and structures of white supremacy and anti-Blackness are constantly barraging our daily lives, even when we are trying to celebrate Black joy. To live with immense pain and joy simultaneously is a feeling that we equate with the Black experience in America.

All of the aforementioned events are happening in a fishbowl, as we watch from quarantined spaces and as we deal with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on our Black and Brown communities. The disparities as a result of the health and economic impacts of the virus further signal a need to address the persistent racial inequalities that exist still in America. Roxanne Gay recently wrote in the New York Times,

"Eventually doctors will find a coronavirus vaccine, but Black people will continue to wait, despite the futility of hope, for a cure for racism. We will live with the knowledge that a hashtag is not a cure for white supremacy.... The rest of the world yearns to get back to normal. For black people, normal is the very thing from which we yearn to be free."

Like many others, when we were younger, we used to ask our grandparents, what were they doing during the Civil Rights movement, to see how they stood up for justice. Similarly, we are asking ourselves now, as this moment we are in, feels so different than those that have come before, what can we do during this moment to effect change? As we shared at Rites of Passage, we have an obligation and a duty to confront anti-Blackness and disrupt silence on these issues. We encourage everyone to think of what they can do during this time to end injustice. As our esteemed alumnus Paul Robeson said, "The answer to injustice is not to silence the critic, but to end the injustice." Here are some ways you can take action, no matter where you are.

1. Demand police accountability from your legislators: make ending police brutality and violence a litmus test for your political support. Familiarize yourself with laws in your area and contact your representatives at all levels (local, state, and national) to press them for their plans on ending discrimination in law enforcement.
2. Make a Donation: If you have the financial means, consider making a donation, however small it might seem to you. You can donate directly to support victims of police violence or send your donation to an organization such as the ACLU, Black Lives Matter, or other grassroots organizations whose missions align with the cause you want to support.

(continued on next page)

June 2, 2020

(continued from previous page)

3. Join a protest, if you feel you can do so safely: If you choose to join a local protest, please remember that we are still dealing with a global health pandemic, and all cautions regarding your well-being should be adhered to including isolation if you are showing symptoms. If you decide to participate because police brutality poses an immediate risk to the health and well-being of our communities and is often a fatal risk, please wear a mask, and take other safety measures.
4. Offer resources to protestors and affected communities in your area: If you have the means, consider offering participants bottled water, food, masks, hand sanitizer, and other supplies ahead of protests in your area. Providing these basics is a way to support the cause even if you feel you cannot join in safely yourself.
5. Educate yourself, educate others: Take the time to learn how systemic racism operates in this county. Anti-racism demands that we identify hierarchies and power structures that disadvantage Black and Brown communities.
6. Build community, for yourself and others: Participate in or host a processing or healing space. Host a virtual session that can educate others. Find community, because all of us are witnessing the tragedies occurring right now and should not feel alone in this fight.

Being a Scarlet Knight and part of the Paul Robeson Cultural Center community means we welcome differences and challenge assumptions and are committed to being a place in the world where ideas, identities, and compassion converge. We must continue the hard work to create a campus where everyone matters and belongs. Where anyone can study, work, learn, teach, jog, and live their daily life without fear. Don't think this doesn't affect you. Don't sit back and be silent. Don't think that you cannot be part of the change. We will share information spaces where we can come together to process, heal, and engage together.

In solidarity,

The Paul Robeson Cultural Center Team  
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