

COVID 19 – A MIRROR INTO HUMAN RIGHTS

From the beginning of America, African Americans have born a greater burden on most every aspect of life than the majority population. While Covid-19 weighs heavy on all, the burden is, again, born most heavily by African Americans. Covid-19 is a mirror into human rights.

On Friday, April 18, 2020, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that 30% of all Covid patients whose race was known are African American who are only 14% of the U.S. population. The Associated Press corroborated that nearly 1/3 of those who have died from Covid 19 are African American. African Americans are more likely:

- * to be uninsured,**
- * to have inequitable access to health care throughout their lives,**
- *to encounter inadequate healthcare equipment in medical facilities which serve them,**
- * to live in neighborhoods with few or no primary care physicians,**
- * to live in densely populated areas,**
- * to live in environments which damage their long-term health by exposure to pollution, manufacturing, industry, oil and gas refineries,**
- * to be subjected to generational poorer housing due to discrimination in federally backed loans, lending, redlining, poverty and segregation,**
- *to suffer from lower socio-economic status including inequitable access to remote learning, transportation, food and medical testing,**
- * to have low paying jobs which require face to face exposure with no sick leave or child care,**
- * to be more dependent upon public transportation and to suffer pre-existing medical conditions, often related to the above factors.**

Even when African Americans are known to suffer health disparities, resources are not proportionately committed. For example, less than 5% of National Institutes of Health funded respiratory research included racial or ethnic minorities according to a 2015 study in the American Journal of Respiratory Critical Care Medicine. Similar disparities exist for cancer, heart disease and diabetes research.

As of this week in America:

Chicago, April 6, 2020: CBS News reported that over 70% of the people who have died (67 of 98) in Chicago are African American who make up only 30% of the population.

Houston, April 9, 2020: ABC, 13 Eyewitness News reported that 8 of the 12 deaths in Houston were African Americans.

Louisiana, April 7, 2020 Newsweek reported that 70% of the Covid 19 deaths in Louisiana were African Americans who make up only 33% of the population.

Louisville, April 15, 2020 The Louisville Courier Journal reported that African Americans make up only 23.5% of the city's population but are 34% of the Covid 19 deaths.

Maryland, April 12, 2020 The Republican Governor reported that 52% of the Covid 19 deaths in Maryland were African American who make up only 31% of the population.

Michigan, April 18, 2020 The Detroit Free Press reported that 33% of the 2,308 Covid deaths in Michigan were African American though the state's population is only 14% black

Mississippi, April 18, 2020 The Mississippi State Department of Health reported that 2,203 of that state's 4,274 Covid cases and 100 of its 159 deaths are African American though the state's population is 60% White.

Ohio, April 17, 2020 Cleveland.Com reported that 24.3% of the number of Covid 19 cases where race is known are African American who make up only 13% of a state that is 81.9% White.

St. Louis, April 9, 2020 Newsweek reported that 100% of the deaths in St. Louis, Missouri were African American.

Covid 19 is one mirror in a 400-year kaleidoscope of disparate African American suffering. Each turn of the kaleidoscope changes the picture to jobs, education, mortality, wealth, environment, housing, but the disparate suffering remains.

In the 17th century, African Americans were enslaved. The U.S. Constitution defined them to be 3/5 of a person. In 1857, the U.S. Supreme Court and majority population declared that God created African Americans to be inferior. It ruled that man "cannot reverse *the decision of the Most High*...Happily for the whole human family, their rights have been defined, declared, and decided in a court higher than the Supreme Court...A black man has no rights which the white man is bound to respect." After the Civil War, the "Reconstruction" of America was reversed, slavery morphed into Jim Crow and Northern discrimination pervaded. African Americans were widely disenfranchised and lynched well into the 20th century. After Reconstruction, no African American was elected to the U.S. Senate until Edward W. Brooke of Massachusetts in 1966.

The kaleidoscope of disproportionate suffering of African Americans continues:

Minorities make up 84.9% of state prison commitments for drug offenses...Even within poverty areas, Black and Hispanic state prison commitment rates are over five times higher than White rates. 1997 William Brownsberger, Assistant Attorney General of Massachusetts and Research Fellow of Harvard Medical School

From 1930 – 1976, of 455 executions for rape, 90% were black. The rate of death penalty prosecutions for drug-related crimes by race, 1988 – 1994, 78% African American verses 11% White. In 82% of cases, the death penalty was applied for crimes in which the victims were White. American Civil Liberties Union

Mean wealth of White families \$ 509,142 verses Black \$ 233,415. Mean value of Liquid Assets for White households \$ 12,602 verses Black \$ \$ 2,312; Stocks for Whites \$ 7,181 verses Blacks \$ 2,202; Bonds for Whites \$ 870 verses Blacks \$ 28; IRAs and Keoghs for Whites \$ 6,459 verses Blacks \$ 685; Other \$ 3,094 Whites verses Blacks \$ 228. 2002 U.S. Social Security Administration

In 1995 blacks were 88.3% of all federal crack distribution convictions and whites only 4.1% though whites were 52% of crack and 75% of powder cocaine users. United States Sentencing Commission

Only 17% of U.S. businesses were minority owned in 2014 when minorities made up 38% of the U.S. population, and the monies generated from them made up only 3% of the total. African Americans tended to be single owners with no employees. U.S. Census, US News 2016

Near 1 in 3 young black men aged 20 – 29 is under criminal justice supervision every day. 1990 The Sentencing Project

African American women die from preventable pregnancy-related complications 3 to 4 times greater than the rate of White women and their infants die at 2 times the rate. 2020, Psychology Today

Temple University traffic survey by race on I-95 Maryland showed that 74% of violators were White verses 17.5% Black but 80.3% of all drivers stopped where racial minorities. All but 2 of 13 State Troopers assigned to I-95 stopped racial minorities 81.3 % - 100% of the time. 1993 Wilkins v. Maryland State Police, U.S. District Court of Maryland

The U.S. District Court of Massachusetts reported in that 100% of federal cocaine prosecutions and 90% of such state court prosecutions in several western Massachusetts counties were against people of color though whites made up 78 – 94% of those counties. 1999 U.S. v. Tuitt

Why does injustice take so long to undo? If the “arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice,” then how long? One answer is revealed in these quoted periodical responses to the reports of the Covid death disparities:

“I suppose there’s gonna be reparations for this too?”

“Darn Media Sensationalism. Can’t be real and honest.”

“Hooray. You made Covid-19 all about race. Well done. Pulitzer anyone?”

“Oh, there will be daly articles on this?”

“Certain people don’t like to obey the rules of social distancing and the meaning of life is nothing to them or they wouldn’t be shooting each other up...”

“Please Mista Gub’Mint, you gots ta hepp us. We just cain’t stay healthy no matta what we does. I cut down to only on pack of Newports and one fotey of Olde English and I still be scurred.”

Similar hatreds issued against the Emancipation Proclamation, Reconstruction, the Civil Rights Acts, desegregation, ending anti-miscegenation laws, affirmative action. Like the Pharaoh’s heart, the heart of injustice hardens, over and over, no matter how grievous the injustices.

During Covid, we must be aware and use good judgment when dealing with racial profiling. We must wear face coverings such as bandanas, scarfs and masks. Some African Americans fear wearing masks. Profiled African Americans lose their freedom, dignity and lives when driving, playing with toys or “fitting the description” of a criminal. We must do everything that we can to ensure that African Americans are not further persecuted for wearing a protective health mask.

We must also be aware that many African Americans have legitimate reasons to not fully trust the U.S. Healthcare system which may further place them at disproportionate risk. U.S. medical and other scientists gave historical license to forced sterilization, anti-miscegenation laws and castration of black people through the 19th century and promoted “eugenics” to “scientifically” justify population control, immigration barriers, selective breeding, disenfranchisement and discrimination in criminal justice, education, employment and the rights of mixed birth children to create “more suitable races and strains of blood.” James M. Sims, the “father of modern gynecology,” performed excruciating internal vaginal wall surgeries, including vesicovaginal fistula repair, on black women to ensure that they could produce and breed for their Masters. Anesthesia was not used on grounds that black people did not feel pain like white people. 30 operations were performed on one 17 year old girl to “perfect” the surgical methods. When black women died from the surgeries, Doctor Sims blamed “the sloth and ignorance of their mothers and the black midwives who attended to them.” When the surgeries became safer, they were then performed on white women using anesthesia. Medical eugenicists used cranial and

skeletal measurements, IQ testing and psychological and mental tests to prove the racial inferiority of black people. In 1892, an English father of eugenics, Sir Francis Galton postulated that black people have genetically “strong impulsive passions, and neither patience, reticence, nor dignity” and that the number of “half-witted men, is very large.” In 1932, the U.S. Public Health Service conducted a secret study of the progression to death of syphilis in cooperation with states such as Alabama. African Americans were offered “Free Blood Tests, Free Meals, Free Physicals and Free Burial Insurance” if they cooperated with government health departments and doctors. Over 600 black men participated. Medical care was withheld from the men who proved to have syphilis to study the disease progression at every stage including death. The trust of many African Americans of American medical institutions was destroyed and distrust persists. The Massachusetts Governor and Attorney General, joined by hospital executives and health care providers, issued a statewide message to communities of color and immigrants “Please go to the hospital...Hospitals and health care clinics are safe and here to protect you...” The Governor and Attorney General suggest that these populations are avoiding care because they fear contracting Covid; the deeper reasons for many lie in their fear and distrust of the government and medical institutions.

Fellow residents: Be Leaders. Speak out, take action and supply resources to redress the disparate suffering of African Americans. Buy from black owned businesses. Hire, promote, make partners of African Americans. Share community service organizations and houses of worship. When medically safe, enter the homes of African Americans, welcome them in your home and families, share intimately, and encourage your children to share intimately, your daily lives. Use your voting power to cause equal citizenship. Fight racial profiling. Educate yourselves more, then more about the 4 centuries African Americans have carried crosses of injustice every day. When planning for the welfare, transportation, quality of life, housing, employment, character, culture, wealth of your town, include in all of your plans and Master Plans measures likely to include African Americans and communities of color. Take direction from and respect worthy African American government, professional and religious leaders. Do all that you can to promote the sharing of executive positions, power and influence with African Americans. Do whatever you can to facilitate African American ownership of homes, equities, businesses and wealth which has disproportionately sustained white culture for 400 years. Look into the kaleidoscope. See yourself, your children and your loved ones on each mirror, suffering and carrying the heavy crosses on the backs of African Americans. Be then guided to what we must do and what we should have been doing for 400 years.

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