



COMMUNIQUE

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1 VIRUS SHUTS DOWN THE WORLD 1 MAN'S DEATH OPENS IT UP

IT TOOK JUST ONE VIRUS TO SHUT DOWN THE ENTIRE WORLD. One virus called SARS-CoV-2 that caused COVID-19 and spread like wildfire throughout China, Italy, and Europe before crossing the ocean to America. One virus that so far has killed more than half a million people and put the rest of the world into lockdown in order to survive.

During this tragic time, people from all walks of life banded together to fight the silent killer. Race, gender, nationality, age, and religion didn't matter to the virus, as everyone, everywhere was infected—the old, the young, the rich and the poor, and especially the black and the brown, which had significantly higher infection and death rates than any other race. No one was safe, and all were forced to persevere through what has truly been one of the worst health crises in recent history.

For three long months, most New Yorkers lived under stay-at-home orders, confined to the inner walls of their homes, stepping outside long enough simply to see sunlight and breathe a few moments of fresh air. For those deemed essential workers, the story was much different, but for everyone, lives were turned upside down to make sure that families, friends, neighbors, and coworkers all remained healthy—and stayed alive.

Friends helped friends. Younger neighbors checked on elderly neighbors. Healthy New Yorkers assisted those with chronic health issues. Everyone did what they could to help someone else because the whole state, the entire country, was in the same situation — locked up.

Despite one virus shutting down the entire world, almost three months later ... **ONE BLACK MAN'S DEATH OPENED IT BACK UP.**

With Minneapolis retail businesses having just started to reopen, on May 25 a 46-year-old Black man suspected of passing a counterfeit \$20 bill was handcuffed and pinned face down on the ground by a white police officer who pressed his knee against the man's neck for eight minutes and 46 seconds. That man, George Floyd, was unconscious, showing no signs of life.

His death sparked immediate unrest in Minneapolis where protesters set fire to buildings, and awakened a country that had been in lockdown for 90 days. Floyd's death also reignited the seven-year-old Black Lives Matter movement, once considered almost divisive, and made it massively mainstream.

"The problem is that 'Black Lives Matter' is not just a rallying cry, and neither is "Say His Name,"" said Local 1180 President Gloria Middleton in talking about the chant that resurfaced after Floyd's death. "While George Floyd's face has now become synonymous with the Black Lives Matter movement, it is about so much more than the death of just one person. America is in trouble, but the real problem is that America does not have a plan to correct these 400-plus years of disparate treatment on all levels for Black Americans."

As the city, state, and country are crawling out of this horrifying pandemic, beginning to reopen, and returning to some form of normalcy, thousands of Americans have taken to the streets to protest about racism, many for the first time in their lives. The crowds, overwhelmingly young and racially mixed, often wear masks but pay little attention to social-distancing constraints.

George Floyd is not the first Black person whose death at the hands of a white police officer has sparked massive protests; only this time, the response is much different. His death triggered demonstrations in all 50 states, in large cities and small towns, with protestors from all ethnicities standing with Black activists. Sports figures, businesses, educational institutions, governments, and foreign countries all joined in on the Black Lives Matter movement to effect real change by demanding justice, condemning racism, and speaking out against police brutality.

This time, it's more than just words of understanding and pacification. This time, the ball is in motion toward concrete action since America already had a series of congruent events in place that created the perfect storm for rebellion. George Floyd's death was just the straw that broke the camel's back. The year started with Trump's impeachment trial, several previous police killings of African-Americans, and then the pandemic and a country-wide imposed lockdown that led to the highest level of unemployment since the Great Depression in the 1930s. After months of being cooped up, Americans were looking for a reason to get outside and Floyd's death was more than enough reason.

"More people than ever were home watching the news because they were on lockdown, teleworking, or unemployed," Middleton said. "When the

video of George Floyd's death was broadcast, no one could look the other way. Everyone was paying attention because they were in front of a television or internet. There was no avoiding what was happening and no ignoring that our country is dealing with a much larger systemic problem."

Since Eric Garner's death in 2014 on Staten Island at the hands of a white New York City police officer when 43% of Americans reported these types of incidents reflected a broader problem, a similar ABC poll after George Floyd's death suggested that number is now up to 74%.

To appease the constituent masses since it is an election year, many governments, including those in New York State and City, now have started instituting police reform legislation. In addition, many other visible and swift changes are on the way: several confederate and slavery-linked statues around the world have been toppled; wide-ranging conversations have been sparked about the responsibility industries and organizations have to address institutional racism; the Grammy's announced they would no longer use the word "urban" to describe music of Black origin; PepsiCo Inc., which owns the Aunt Jemima pancake mix brand, said it would lose its name and brand image "to make progress toward racial equality"; Johnson & Johnson announced it would stop selling products used by some people to lighten their skin tone; five brands, including Uncle Ben's, Mrs. Butterworth's, and Cream of Wheat, revealed plans to change and reexamine their names, mascots, and logos with racist roots; Black Out Tuesday was created with the intention to "black out" usual social media activity and take the time to learn about the Black Lives Matter movement; street names were changed, including one in Washington D.C. leading up to the White House that is now renamed Black Lives Matter Plaza; prominent physician groups like the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Medical Association declared racism a public health crisis and called for an end to police brutality against Black Americans; and CEOs and prominent heads of businesses have stepped down after claims of racism and toxic company culture.

"Our country has a deep-rooted systemic problem going back as far as slavery when Blacks were bought and sold as free labor to build this country. Black men and women have been killed for no apparent reason for decades," Middleton said.

Black history is taught as a footnote to American history in public schools—a contributing factor to the ongoing systemic problem. The only generations who thoroughly know about Black history are the ones who lived through it or are a generation or two removed. The younger Black generations know very little about where their ancestors came from or what they went through — and forget about white children.

"With 80% of teachers being white and 40% of all public schools not having a single teacher of color, Black students across the country are being robbed of the opportunity to see themselves in what they're studying and experience the richness of Black history. Instead, they're bombarded with negative narratives based on biases, prejudices, and stereotypes, forcing them to settle for raggedy and distorted views of who they are and what their culture represents," according to The New Teacher Project.

If there was ever a time for change, it's now. Americans must understand that Black people are tired of sitting back and going along with the status quo. No where is that going to be more evident than in the upcoming November president election when Black Americans have the power to express themselves at the polls and make change.

With racism and police conduct as the two most important issues in their choice of presidential candidates, most Black Americans are sharply critical of President Trump on both matters and realize the high stakes in the outcome of the election, according to at least one poll. Not surprisingly, former Vice President Joe Biden currently leads Trump by a huge margin — 92% to 5% — among Black registered voters. This is not to say that those in favor of Biden actually support him, but rather they oppose Trump, and there is a difference. Now it's just up to Black registered voters to actually vote, Middleton said, which is something Local 1180 will be focusing on in the next several months.

"Black Americans are tired of hearing that all lives matter because if that were true, then Black lives would matter, too, but they don't, and unless we learn about our own history and come together to make real change in November, then Black lives will never matter," Middleton said. "So, it's time to **#speakout, #standup**, and let the world know that while **#AllLivesMatter**, so, too, do **#BlackLivesMatter!**" ■