

My Wish for the World

Like most of you, I have followed the series of disconcerting events that appeared to be endless as they permeated the country. The tragic deaths of one African-American after another. We must recognize that America's justice system is not infallible and policies and procedures should be evaluated and revised.

I, like you, am experiencing a myriad of emotions ranging from Joy to Sorrow, Tragedy to Triumph, Pain to Prosperity and Hopelessness to Hopefulness.

Today's presentation for some will be a reminder of where we have been; for others a look at where we are; and I hope for all of us a rekindling of the hope and spirit of where we can go.

When listening to a presentation, we draw conclusions in two ways: the credibility of the messenger and the content of the message itself.

While I am troubled and angry about certain situations in the world, I don't want this message dismissed as just another angry Black man. Hopefully, my credibility gets me beyond that assumption.

As I try to do with most situations, I want to listen, learn and gather as much information as possible. What I thought I would do today is follow the format I did in writing my dissertation for my doctorate. Those who are familiar with the amount of time and work that goes into a dissertation are already worried that we are going to be here all day. Relax, the presentation will follow some of the format, but certainly not the range of content and time required.

The dissertation usually begins with a hypothesis and ends with a conclusion. A hypothesis is a supposition or proposed explanation made on the basis of limited evidence as a starting point for further investigation. My

hypothesis today is: The American people are, in the words of Civil Rights leader Fannie Lou Hamer, “sick and tired of being sick and tired.”

With the dissertation, there has to be a review of the literature. Because we celebrated our country’s Birthday on Saturday, it is appropriate to begin the review with the Declaration of Independence. “It’s passage in 1776 came to represent a moral standard by which the United States should strive (Wikipedia.org).” Probably the most well-known statement on human rights is the second sentence which reads, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these

are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.”

Ironically, Thomas Jefferson, the chief author of the Declaration of Independence, was a slave owner.

Between 1776 and the end of the Civil War in 1865, history reveals that African-Americans and Native Americans were not treated as equals. Jefferson should have included an asterisk with the Declaration of Independence that read, “It does not apply to African-Americans and Native Americans.”

The invention of the cotton gin in 1796 by Eli Whitney all but assured African-Americans would be enslaved until the Emancipation Proclamation in 1862 or the ratified 13th Amendment of 1865.

Following the Civil War and passage of the 13th Amendment, we entered the Reconstruction Period. In 1870, the 15th Amendment was adopted supposedly giving all citizens the right to vote. Black Americans won elections in the southern states to the dismay of many White southerners. The emergence of White protective societies like the Ku Klux Klan emerged and used violence to intimidate Black voters. Federal soldiers had departed the South by 1877 and protection no longer existed for former slaves. The economic, political and social opportunities gained became non-existent. Most African-Americans were relegated to share-cropping.

By 1885, Jim Crow laws were in full force. By 1896 in Plessy versus Ferguson, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled separate but equal was acceptable. Totally disregarding the 14th Amendment. This ruling remained intact until Brown versus Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas in 1954 ruled separate but equal was unconstitutional. Many Blacks began demanding better educational, housing, social, economic and political opportunities and conditions. As many as 500,000 Black Americans had served in World War II. Only to return home as second-class citizens instead of war heroes. My grandfather and uncle were two such men.

What is called by many, the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement, Rosa Parks, a Black woman in Montgomery, Alabama, decided she was not going to relinquish her seat on the bus to a White man. Many other marches and protests followed. In 1964, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act of 1965. Resistance to its passage was followed by acts of violence and discrimination targeting African Americans.

The Civil Rights Movement sometimes called the “I Have a Dream Movement” now brings us to the “Black Lives Matter Movement” which is called by some, “I Can’t Breathe Movement.” The series of deaths, including Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery and George Floyd

screamed to the world, “Enough is Enough.” Please understand this list does not include the names of countless others.

The callous disregard for human life exhibited by the Minneapolis police officers touched the hearts and souls of individuals world-wide while the officer he held his knee to 46-year-old George Floyd’s throat for eight minutes and forty-six seconds. The officer’s derelict duty outraged all human beings with any fiber of decency in their bodies. Is a man’s life worth a counterfeit \$20 bill? I hope the answer to that question is a resounding no.

The Review of Literature revealed that in spite of the challenges associated with social injustice, unprovoked violence, economic depression, inadequate housing, sub-par educational resources and opportunities, racial discrimination, bogus policies and constitutional privileges, we still have survived. Not only survived in some instances, but excelled.

We now ask that America grant people of color an unapologetic opportunity to succeed. As stated on the website of the United Negro College Fund, “We can’t simply believe in equality in education. We have to create it.” It should be a partnership of people representing every walk of life. Please understand this is not going to be easy

for some individuals in our American society that have become comfortable with life giving them an unfair advantage. An advantage that was earned by some but inherited by others. It is time for all Americans to be uncomfortable and dissatisfied with what America has become and welcome the difficult conversations we must have to initiate change.

Realizing we are not going to eradicate 400 years of oppression in one day, one year or ten years, but let's begin the journey together with meaningful, purposeful, genuine, and robust strategies. What began with prodigious language in the Declaration of Independence

and brings us to the “Black Lives Matter Movement” cannot be the blueprint we use in moving forward.

Next with the dissertation, we move to the results section.

The results section will be presented using a different format. In Arthur Ashe’s book, “Days of Grace,” there was a section dedicated to his daughter Camera which included his “Wish for the World.”

To give this proper context, the book was written during the time Ashe was dying of the Aids virus he contracted during heart surgery at a New York hospital when doctors used blood infected with the virus. While his life was

taken by tainted blood given to him, it should be noted that he chose not to sue the hospital.

Like Ashe, I also have some “wishes for the world.”

1. We have seen the “Black Lives Matter Movement” gain momentum. Streets are being painted, caps and t-shirts being worn, protests and marches taking place. Even the National Basketball Association will resume the season later this month at Disney World in Orlando with the courts painted with “Black Lives Matter.”

While I am honored with the focus being placed on the Movement, My Wish for the World is the police

cease the brutal and senseless killing of people of color so that we know, “Black Lives Do Matter.”

2. WNBA star Mya Moore put her career with basketball on hold so she could devote her life to defending imprisoned men of color that do not have the financial means or networking to defend themselves.

My Wish for the World is we have more Mya Moore's in the world to dedicate time, talents and resources to the less fortunate.

3. The City of Bakersfield again leads the state in percentage of homicides based on population. We see our children being murdered, increase in gang violence, homelessness and disregard for human life. The Black man is becoming an endangered species.

My Wish for the World is that we all take on the attitude of being My Brother's Keeper. That we understand it is more prudent to invest more money for educational and developmental programs and services for our youths with the hope that we will need to invest less in building prisons.

4. Christian Cooper, a Black man, exhibited unbelievable self-control while bird watching in New York City's Central Park. A White female, Amy Cooper, no relation, had her dog unleashed in the Park which violates the leash requirement. As recorded with his cell phone, Cooper calmly asked her to put her dog on a leash. She became angry and aggressive and said while approaching him, "I'm going to call the police and tell them there's an African-American man threatening my life," and she did. Knowing the perception that some police officers have of Black men, she was comfortable making such a statement.

My Wish for the World is the power and influence of good police officers, which I believe the majority to be, becomes strong and persuasive enough to weed out officers whose intent is not honorable.

My Wish for the World is that all police officers handle the situation in Central Park in the manner that these police officers did. Had the wrong officers answered the call, we could have had another major, unfortunate incident. I also wish for the day when Black and Brown fathers no longer have to explain to their sons what to do when pulled over by police officers when the only violation is the color of their skin.

5. Recently, I have heard some individuals criticizing those who are not participating in marches and protests.

My Wish for the World is we understand that individuals contribute to the cause in different ways. Marching, writing resolutions or proposals, rallying or encouraging change, speaking, or meeting with legislators are just some of the ways to make contributions. Please know it could be an elderly neighbor that offers encouragement or granddad that says to junior, “I am so proud of how well you are doing in school.”

6. June 23, 2020 an article in the Californian indicated that the President of our United States of America while speaking to a student gathering at a mega church in Phoenix, Arizona said, “You are the courageous warriors standing in the way of what they want to do and their goals. They hate our history. They hate our values, and they hate everything we prize as Americans.”

My Wish for the World is we get beyond using divisive measures to create tension and separation in the country. Regardless of one’s political persuasion, we must work together to face the difficult times ahead. We currently do not have a vaccine for

COVID-19, but we do have a vaccine for social injustice, hate, economic depression and police brutality. That vaccine is civility, understanding, faith, hope and love.

7. I Corinthians 13:13 reads, “Three things will last forever – faith, hope and love – and the greatest of these is love.”

My Wish for the World is that all Americans not only read this scripture but practice it in our daily interaction with each other.

The dissertation should always end with a conclusion. My conclusion is, if we are truly sick and tired of being sick and tired, we must seek understanding before healing. We must void all personal agendas.

We must move from the words *them*, *those* and *they* and practice including *us*, *we* and *our*.

We need each other. The lyrics from one of Barbara Streisand's songs says, "People who need people are the luckiest people in the world." We must become the luckiest people in the world.

I end with the prayer I begin each day.

I pray that we become advocates for love over hate; peace instead of war; justice rather than injustice; resolve over conflict; and civility over dissidence.

Thank you for allowing me to share my thoughts with you today.