

Our Inability to Hear and Breathe Freely

A message from Our Board and Staff

June 5, 2020

More than 50 years ago, Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. prophetically spoke these words in a speech entitled *The Other America*:

"Let me say as I've always said and I will always continue to say, that riots are socially destructive and self-defeating. I'm still convinced that nonviolence is the most potent weapon available to oppressed people and their struggle for freedom and justice. I feel that violence will only create more social problems than they will solve. That in a real sense it is impractical for the negro to even think about mounting a violent revolution in the United States, so I will continue to condemn riots and continue to say to my brothers and sisters that this is not the way, and continue to affirm that there is another way.

But at the same time, it is as necessary for me to be as vigorous in condemning the conditions which cause persons to feel that they must engage in riotous activities as it is to me to condemn riots. I think that America must see that riots do not develop out of thin air. Certain conditions continue to exist in our society which must be condemned as vigorously as we condemn riots. But in the final analysis, a riot is the language of the unheard. What is it that American has failed to hear? It has failed to hear the plight of the negro poor has worsened over the last few years, it has failed to hear that the promises of freedom and justice have not been met, and it has failed to hear that large segments of white society are more concerned about tranquility and the status quo than about justice, equality, and humanity.

And so in a real sense, our nation's summers of riots are caused by our nation's winters of delay. And as long as America postpones justice, we stand in the position of having these recurrences of violence and riots over and over again. Social justice and progress are the absolute guarantors of riot prevention."

Then five days ago Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, recipient of the 2016 Presidential

Medal of Freedom, wrote these words that appeared in the Los Angeles Times:

“Racism in America is like dust in the air. It seems invisible – even if you’re choking on it – until you let the sun in. Then you see it’s everywhere. As long as we keep shining that light, we have a chance of cleaning it wherever it lands. But we have to stay vigilant, because it’s always still in the air.”

The sun is now shining, and we see the dust everywhere. All of us can see it. All of us hear the plight. Silence is complicity.

We are **all** choking. None of us is breathing as we should. And none of us will, until all of us can.

It is time to stand together in the sun; to embrace the light. To hear and speak the truth with one voice.

The air is not clear; the dust has not yet settled. We have not yet spoken with one voice. We must still act to deliver on the promises of freedom and the obligation of justice. We must, as Abdul-Jabbar states, “not rush to **judgment**, but rush to **justice**.”

“Prejudice is a burden that confuses the past, threatens the future, and renders the present inaccessible.”

-Maya Angelou

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