

Racism and Injustice

George Floyd’s statement, “I can’t breathe”, is one that has been said on several occasions in the face of injustice. I wear a “smart watch” which monitors my blood pressure and sometimes, when I just think about race relations and injustices in America, my watch advises me to pause and take deep breaths for at least one-minute. I have also noticed, in this time of COVID-19, that I hold my breath when crowded by unknown, unmasked persons. “Social distancing” allows me to breathe – freely. Staying away from messy discussions about racism keeps my blood pressure down. As I thought about writing this article, my watch advised me to have a minute of deep breathing – afterwards, I told myself to devote my time to other things on my busy schedule. Instead, I chose to share my thoughts about racism and injustice.

I was born and raised in segregated rural North Carolina. Early on, I was indoctrinated with American history, mostly from the white man’s perspective, and observed privileges that I did not have. I have been ridiculed, discounted, physically threatened, and called hurtful names. I made mental notes of things that provoked such unjust treatment. In other words, early in life, I unknowingly applied the “scientific method” to develop the following hypothesis about racism – “Racism is evil, and it fosters injustice.” For me, George Floyd’s killing was another validation of that hypothesis.

I moved to Charlotte in the mid-seventies and since then, have followed its efforts to promote diversity, inclusion, and community harmony. In the late seventies, I began participating in local politics and joined community organizations. I appreciate the hard work being done by the Mecklenburg Black Political Caucus, NAACP, and others to fight racism and injustice and there is still much work to be done. As we reflect on why racism in this country has survived and how we can accelerate its demise, I will take deep breaths, be encouraged and stay involved.

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An extended version of his article was published by the American Society of Civil Engineering as part of a video discussion about injustice. It is at the following link.

https://news.asce.org/engineering-a-culture-of-inclusion-in-the-face-of-injustice/?utm_campaign=Comm-20200619b-ASCE%20News%20weekly&utm_medium=email&utm_source=Eloqua