For Immediate Release

Op Ed

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**In This Movement At This Moment**

As I consider the evolution of Black Lives Matter, it reminds me of the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 60s. Given work left undone after the assassination of so many leaders, it seemed inevitable Justice would return to bend the arc of history once again. For a time, I was deeply encouraged because it seemed like we would finish what we started over 70 years ago. And in many ways, I am still motivated. But I do have profound concerns and believe it is essential with all that is going on in our world right now that we ask ourselves an important question: Where are we in this movement, at this moment?

I pose this question in the context of this movement because I am concerned that we are losing focus. It is understandable in the face of pressing global issues like the COVID Pandemic and the rising threat of climate change. But if we allow ourselves to be displaced, I fear that we will once again find ourselves relegated to the back of the bus. We cannot, and must not, allow this to happen again. So, I hope that the observations I put forth here will help us see our fight more clearly. To be dragged under the wheels of the same systems of oppression that have bedeviled America's black communities for centuries is not an option.

The most glaring example of where we need to place our effort and attention urgently is the voter suppression laws sweeping through our nation unapologetically. We must see this for exactly what it is - the resurrection of Jim Crow. I know many in both the black and white communities understand what they see. I watch them talk about it nightly on news broadcasts, I read what they write in newspaper editorials, and I cannot avoid the never-ending glut of social media posts. And yet, I feel all of this will, in the end, avail us nothing. The only way to beat back the resurrected Dracula of Jim Crow is to organize. And so, in this movement, at this moment, with the 2022 and 2024 elections looming, I ask us all: are we ready?

Not unrelated to the attempt to erase black citizenship is the 2020 Census. In 2019, Governor Brown appointed me to serve on the statewide Oregon Complete Count Committee (Oregon's official 2020 Census advisory body). I continually cautioned the commission that the 2020 census could rival and even exceed the shocking failings of the Census of 2010, which failed to count approximately 2.1 percent of black Americans and 1.5 percent of Hispanics. Combined, the undercounting represented about 1.5 million citizens. The assuredness that launching an aggressive advertising and minority outreach effort would be made, just as there had been in 2010. However, those efforts failed again, just as they had in 2010, simultaneously pushing the total census costs to an unprecedented $20 billion.

The reason for this tragic failure primarily flies under the radar for most Americans. As a standard practice, the Census places Black communities named "hard-to-count groups." The result is a consistent undercounting of Black communities who will remain underfunded for vital social services. Based on Census data, federal dollars allocated to districts across the country represent better than $600 billion, or as much as $1.5 trillion for ten years. Given these kinds of numbers, the long-term impact of undercounted African American communities will not just be unfair; it will be devastating.

We should also be aware that the U.S. Census gives life to the political power structure. Miscounting makes way for Redistricting (the process of setting up district lines after reapportionment) to become Gerrymandering (drawing district boundaries to give one party an advantage). Gerrymandering enables politicians to pick their voters rather than allowing voters to elect their representatives, creating the conditions for the boldest attack on black voters since Jim Crow made his first appearance. Once again, I must ask us to see with eyes wide open the presence of our enemy who was, for decades, forced to prey in the dark. Given the current climate of racist permissiveness, Jim is free to attack us in the light of day openly.

There has been much talk of reparations allotted to Black Americans. I have heard the voices of some in our community speak strongly against the idea. Some echo that reparations are hapless and merely another request for a handout. However, I think that this mindset misses the point. There is no "ask" in reparations; there is only demand. We are still waiting for that forty-acres and that mule and will not surrender our claim until we have been made whole for the devastating crimes done against our humanity and community. We are not demanding their money. We are demanding our money as restitution from a nation with unprecedented wealth built on the broken backs of our stolen ancestors.

What puzzles me is why Black Americans do not meet the same considerations given to the restitution for 9/11 victims, reparations to Japanese Americans, and the continual support for Holocaust survivors in the U.S.? How are the crimes done against any of those communities any less heinous than those perpetrated against us? Additionally, research indicates that the overwhelming wealth gap between white and Black Americans has not moved in recent decades. Black Americans account for approximately 13 percent of America's population; however, we hold only 4 percent of the country's wealth. Unless there is immediate action to provide pipelines to adequate education, equal employment opportunity for Black communities, fixed housing disparities, and access to capital for black folks in this country, America will remain broken.

I am also troubled that in this movement, at this moment, there is a scarcity of Black voices. I understand why some might hesitate to speak out. It is a difficult time for heroes. But the truth is, it always has been. It takes great courage to stand in the public square and lift the problematic woes of inequality and non-inclusiveness. And yet, without them, we risk becoming a voiceless movement in a moment when we must make ourselves heard about the noise of a world in more chaos than ever before. It means that in this movement, at this moment, we must dig deep and take comfort and inspiration from those who came before us and risked so much. Harriet Tubman, W. E. B. Du Bois, Sojourner Truth, Medgar Evers, Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, and Malcolm X are not only our guides. They are also our angels encouraging us never to surrender the sanctified ground of equality and freedom as our birthright and dignified members of the human race.

And lastly, to our white allies, I say, join us. But remember that however helpful, it is not enough to post signs in yards, house windows, or on fences and billboards that say, Black Lives Matter and this outpouring of support is greatly appreciated. Black people did not create America's problem of inequity and most assuredly will not be eradicated at the solitary sound of Black voices. However, in this movement, at this moment, that we must lead our white brothers and sisters in making Black Lives Matter by taking Black action and center their attention on the Black Voices that cry out from the city square and in the hallowed halls of Justice.

In this movement, we must use the pain of our past to catapult us onward to finish the work started over 70 years ago. In this movement, at this moment, we must be steadfast, unmovable, and abounding in the work laid before us. We must realize that so long as we remain engaged, we will make it through any fire, survive any storm, correct dysfunction, and deliver every grievance.

And if I may be a preacher for a moment, I want to remind us that in this fight, we can solicit the common help given us by our higher power to birth philanthropy and goodwill. So let us lay hold to the contagiousness of preeminence and jubilation. It's time to press forward on the Great Pilgrimage to make earth as it is in heaven. And on that day, we will sing the autocratic songs of Justice and release the bowels of freedom to stand in the presence of Peace, knowing with pride and celebration in our hearts that together, we became the unsettling force.

If we do all of this, in this movement, at this moment, there is an assured victory.

E. D. Mondainé Jr.