



YMCA of GREATER BOSTON

A Message from James Morton,

With love and hope in my heart . . .

In 1922, Poet Langston Hughes wrote a poem entitled **Harlem**, it reads:

*What happens to a dream deferred?
Does it dry up Like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore-- And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over-- like a syrupy sweet?
Maybe it just sags like a heavy load.
Or does it explode?*

As I offered open and honest responses to the tragic events of the day, I fought the impulse to explode.

As a public servant, I am deeply pained and angered by the tragic deaths of Ahmaud Aubery and George Floyd. Just as I have been saddened and angered by the deaths of other men and women of color throughout my lifetime and historic experience; men and women who were killed because they were born Black. Every time we witness a killing, a piece of us is cut away; one cannot witness injustice without being victimized by it. We cannot help but to see ourselves and our families in the faces of those who are killed while driving, walking or running **while** Black.

As a Black man, I feel like “prey” when all I want to do is “live” without the “struggles” that come with being Black in America. This song by Keedron Byrant best captures the feelings I’m trying to convey -

<https://youtu.be/UluSLBX74Ac>.

As a sexagenarian, I worry that our generation has failed to address the racism we have experienced, such that the next generation will inherit the crippling reality of feeling like prey, while wanting to live. I am afraid the next generation will also have a knee on the neck and a barrier called Blackness.

As a human-being who loves other human-beings, I am crushed and saddened by the open contempt we witness daily, as we have been forced to live through centuries of oppression; oppression that today manifests itself in the form of disproportional health disparities, incarceration, academic achievement, mental illness, homelessness, hunger and poverty.

As a citizen, I am angered by calls to “shoot the looters” coming from the Oval Office – it does not matter whether or not he knew the racist history of said directive; the call for the law enforcement to shoot other human-beings is simply irresponsible and wrong. Where is the call for calm and understanding? Where is the compassion and empathy for the victims? Where is the outrage? Where is the call for justice? Where is the “heavy” heart? None of that can be found in “When the looting starts, the shooting starts.”



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As a leader, I am emboldened to persist in the effort to bring an end to poverty and racism through “constructive revenge” and servant leadership.

Please forgive the focus on “my” feelings/experiences; they are offered as a means of being clear about what motivates and inspires the action steps set forth below. I believe it is time for us to boldly step into the pain surrounding us, and to provide ways for all of us to take “constructive revenge” on racism in the name of justice, equity and equality – in the name of humanity.

We, the YMCA of Greater Boston, will commit ourselves to being anti-racist in all aspects of our work. This means, among other things, that we will:

1. Have zero tolerance for racism and bigotry;
2. Counteract the manifestations of oppression and racism;
3. Be people-centric – always endeavoring to have children, families and seniors at the center of our actions;
4. Work affirmatively to eliminate racism by advocating for equity and justice;
5. Connect communities across greater Boston in order to create greater harmony, understanding and interconnectedness;
6. Double-down on our commitment to a culture that values diversity and inclusion;
7. Partner with others for greater collective impact; and
8. Educate ourselves, across our Association, on what it truly means to be for all.

The foregoing action steps and commitments are some of the ways we will act moving forward, and nothing in these action steps is meant to be an indictment of our current practices, as many of these actions currently guide our work; however, these action steps (and those created as we continue to grow and learn) will be taken consciously and intentionally.

In the coming days and weeks, we will undoubtedly continue to experience the pain and sorrow of injustice, neglect and contempt. We must act, as a team, to counteract what we will witness and experience. We must remain connected and conversant, and resist the impulse to hate and resent. We must remember that we are in this together. And we will succeed or fail in contributing to a better world - together.

Permit me to close with the notion that we are all victims of the death and tragedy we are witnessing. No one is immune to it; however, there is a vaccine. We can cure ourselves (and our country) by changing the way we think about and act toward one another. Let’s all commit to developing a deeper understanding of what keeps us from thinking and acting differently. This is the question before us: “Are we willing to think and act differently?”



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In the coming weeks, we will continue our dialogue; determine whether the foregoing action steps are the “right” action steps; and act in ways consistent with our collective hopes and aspirations.

The content of this message is meant to provide us with a starting point for our work together.

I love you and look forward to learning and growing with you.

James

