

Lelia DeAndrade: On our moment

Throughout my life, I've heard people, white people especially, rave about the great changes made by the Civil Rights Movement of the '60s. Those are the people who brightly tell me that things are so much better now. They are also people that often don't see that so many of the issues that were fought about then are still with us today. I mean capricious laws and practices that keep people of color from voting, owning homes and attending quality well-resourced schools, and the violence, pain and murder that are arbitrarily inflicted on people of color, by formal institutions and random citizens.

As I watch events unfold in the past weeks, I realized that we are entering another critical racial moment in this county. I fear that this will be a moment when we hear heartfelt, carefully-worded statements but back away from real change. I worry about a backlash, violent or otherwise, that will set us back even farther. I also hope desperately that we have the resilience and determination to convert this energy, and attention, into real change.

I think we can transform the situation we're in today into a moment of deep change but there are a few critical things we need to remember:

- **This is not about one man or one event.** The murder of George Floyd was tragic and brutal, but Mr. Floyd is one of too many that have been tortured, terrorized and/or murdered. We must do our part to know the scope and history of this issue, from Emmett Till and Rodney King to Tamir Rice and Breonna Taylor. Real solutions can't be limited to addressing that tragedy.
- **This is not just about the police.** The formal and informal practices and policies of police departments warrant examination and demand restructuring. But they are just the tip of the iceberg—the most visible part of the deep, destructive system of racism and white supremacy. Racism extends beyond police departments to other institutions and professions. Doctors, nurses, teachers, businesspeople, all engage in and support racism—just without the body cams and guns that make the racism of police departments so apparent, but not more lethal.
- **This is not just about unpleasant injustices.** Racism *is* lethal. It's death by a thousand cuts for people of color. It kills people of color through explicit acts of violence, and the slow killing through chronic disease, poverty, lack of health care, and the wearing grind of daily microaggressions, bias and degradation.
- **This is not about bad guys or evil people.** It is easy to think that only people like Derek Chauvin and his colleagues are perpetrating racism. Instead, remember that old, complex systems like this aren't propped up by a few outliers. Know that people you love and respect support racism every day.
- **This is not about other places or other people.** Many people in Maine may be tempted to think that this issue isn't important here, in Maine or in their town. They think of race as a problem in other places, big cities, places with more people of color. Racism, like

race, is everywhere. The most obvious and recent evidence of racism's presence in Maine is the fact that people of color have approximately 20% of the cases of COVID-19 in our state, when we compose just about 5% of the population.

- **This is about picking a side because there is no neutral when it comes to racism.** Either you learn about it and are actively engaged in challenging it, or you are supporting it. That's it! 2 sides- anti-racist or racist.

Finally, people often get stalled because they don't know what to do or what first step to take. That's when white people often turn to people of color to say, "I don't know what to do, how can I help?" Remember that you have skills, talents, a sphere of influence. That is where you start your anti-racist activism—where you know the most and can do the most. And then learn, learn learn....

The information that you need is all around you in a format you will like, if you just look for it. You can dive in as deeply as you want, from simply looking up the list of black victims of violence, to reading short essays and huge books. There are podcasts, movies, and stand-up comedians that can teach you a lot about race. Then you can take what you learned, bring it to your place of most skill and influence and join us in chipping down the iceberg.

Resources:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bjE8YfDR09Y>

<https://www.npr.org/podcasts/510312/codeswitch>

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/2020/06/history-of-lynching-violent-deaths-reflect-brutal-american-legacy/>

<https://www.zinnedproject.org/news/free-copy-young-peoples-history>