

TRAGIC MURDERS AND RACIAL INJUSTICE

In a 1967 speech before a gathering of mental health professionals in Washington D.C., Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., speaking about the ongoing challenges of racial discrimination and Civil Rights Movement, stated:

“The problem is deep. It is gigantic in extent, and chaotic in detail. And I do not believe that it will be solved until there is a kind of cosmic discontent enlarging in the bosoms of people of good will all over the nation....I am sure that we will recognize that there are some things in our society, some things in our world, to which we should never be adjusted. There are some things concerning which we must always be maladjusted if we are to be people of good will. We must never adjust ourselves to racial discrimination and racial segregation. We must never adjust ourselves to religious bigotry. We must never adjust ourselves to economic conditions that take necessities from the many to give luxuries to the few. We must never adjust to militarism, and the self-defeating effects of physical violence.” P. 4.

Now, 53 years after Dr. King spoke these words, after the murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and Rayshard Brooks, the latest grim casualties of racial injustice, we arrive at a time in our history when people of good will, in this country and across the world, have come to the momentous decision that systemic, dehumanizing, and life-erasing racial injustice can no longer continue as usual.

As clinical social workers, rooted both in our professional values and in psychoanalytic perspectives on human functioning, we know the detrimental, traumatizing, and multigenerational impact of institutionalized racial discrimination on health and wellbeing. We know that our talk about race cannot be truly about race if we are not also considering the numerous interrelated factors that contribute to keeping the veil of racial prejudice in place over every aspect of life. We also know that we are not immune to the corrosive dynamics of conscious and unconscious prejudicial forces. At AAPCSW, themes of “dignity violation” and “silence is not an option” have animated our public statements. It is now essential that along with these guiding principles, we invest energy in innovative and action-focused policies. We will more fully and consistently integrate knowledge and awareness of racial injustice into our professional lives. We join the powerful raised voices of others to encourage solidarity while honoring diversity and will continue to move toward eradicating the painful reality of racism in American life – as clinicians, as citizens, and as humans.

Reference:

King, M. L. (1968). The role of the behavioral Scientist in the Civil Rights Movement. *Journal of Social Issues*, 24 (1), 1-7.