

An open letter to the Cleveland community on the killing of George Floyd:

Last week it happened again. Another killing of an unarmed Black man, recorded for all of us to see. Like so many in our city and across the country, I watched in disgust as a White police officer held his knee against George Floyd's neck for over 8 minutes. His pose, with one hand in his pocket, appeared so casual as if he was simply taking a short break before getting back to work, not squeezing the life out of another human being. Then, on Thursday night I watched in horror as community, state, and national leaders held a press conference essentially telling the citizens of Minneapolis that everything that could be done was being done while nothing had actually been done. And then to add even more insult to this latest horrific injury to our country, on Friday morning Minnesota State Patrol arrested Omar Jimenez, a CNN reporter – also a person of color – on live TV for doing absolutely nothing wrong. Arrested in front of our eyes simply for reporting on this latest crime against the Black community, and therefore against America.

There's been a lot of talk about this being another case of a few bad actors that have made all of law enforcement look bad. In part, that's true. An individual officer chose to hold his knee on the throat of a handcuffed Black man until he was dead. Other individual officers also chose to watch and do nothing. But this is much bigger than a few bad actors. The reason we have seen these killings over and over again is because we, as a people, haven't demanded change in the law enforcement system.

But make no mistake. These crimes aren't limited to law enforcement. Over the past several weeks, as we as a nation have experienced the COVID-19 public health emergency, we've seen other forms of brutal inequities violently exposed. Inequities that have been suffocating people of color for generations.

We've seen firsthand the millions of children and families living in such deep poverty that they literally can't afford to eat. And while we've worked hard to feed them, what have we done to change the system that allowed them to live in near starvation in the first place?

We've seen the huge need for high-speed reliable internet in communities of color across the nation. Our response? Cries to park school busses with internet access in parking lots across our city for Black and Brown families to lean against instead of a national outrage that would require our country to make internet a public utility in our homes where I enjoy it, instead of in parking lots.

We're seeing it in public health – with COVID-19 afflicting communities of color at four-times the rate of the White community – communities whose members are also being asked to serve in roles as essential workers, and communities whose members also have large numbers of underlying health conditions making them more prone

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to the dangers of this disease.

Inequities in access to food, high-speed internet, high-quality health care, well-paying jobs, great education, and basic community safety are driven by the systems we've created. And until we tear down these systems and replace them with systems built on racial equity and social justice, we will just keep killing each other.

The public health crisis in our country has created an opportunity to address the larger racial justice crisis that has been a public health emergency for far longer than this virus. We have an opportunity to reinvent our systems – not to put them back to 'normal', but to ensure we never go back there again.

Look around you. Our country is crying for it. Nothing we do today will give us back the life of George Floyd, or Ahmaud Arbery, or Breonna Taylor, or our own Tamir Rice, Timothy Russell, and Malissa Williams or the countless others whose lives have been taken from them. But what we do or don't do today will determine whether their lives are honored or not.

Each of us is part of the problem, or part of the solution. As we emerge from the public health, economic, and racial justice crises in America, I commit to working to build a new education system for Cleveland that is designed to ensure that my students, all of my students, have equitable access to the quality education they deserve. I commit to continuing the fight to make internet a public utility in Cleveland, and to work to disrupt the cycles of poverty that have plagued our city. To once and for all change the systems that, until now, have allowed a few bad actors to act so badly time and time again.



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