

Injustice

MLK said, "an unjust law is one that binds one, but not another." Justice requires all people be given equal opportunity and equal treatment. In the beginning racism and other social injustices were allowed through an elite system.

As a colony we were subservient to English royalty. The charters, rules and taxations were devised to benefit those in charge. The common man was not equal in stature or rights. The seed of the revolution was born in American elitism. The organizers, the congressmen the scribes of the constitution were the moneyed class and the wealthy landowners who de-facto substituted themselves for the English. Although the basis for Democracy was built into our founding documents, the system was designed for the people who wrote and created it. Since many were rich farmers and slaves were necessary labor, slaves and other poorer citizen were left out.

As in any system of government laws are written by those who are elected. In our case those were rich white people. As we progress there was well-defined white supremacy. These lawmakers needed to protect their fortunes and thus the black man, indentured servants, child laborers, and women were seen as chattel and tools. The system was the problem as were the laws it created.

In 1863 the Emancipation Proclamation freed slaves which meant the laws that bound them were rescinded, at least on paper. After many years of Civil War costing thousands of lives, mostly white lives, the South was forced to capitulate. At the state level it was a different story. There were educational restrictions, voting laws that eliminated or restricted blacks from participating in the election process.

Throughout the next century laws began to change mostly at the federal level. It took until the 1950's and 1960's for the changes to hit the state level, primarily the southern states. "Separate But Equal" was set aside in 1954. Under MLK's leadership desegregation in employment, schooling and public places was abolished. He ushered in the voting act which eliminated many barriers to the electoral process. In that same decade riding on the civil rights coattails, came Title IX, and Children's Protection laws.

The next 50 years saw change after change, through elections, court cases and changes in public attitude. Yet here we are in 2020 talking about racism and white supremacy. Supremacy is code for who is in charge. When unjust laws disallowing universal participation in the electoral process were part of the fabric of government, we could appropriately blame the system; a system run by a white majority thus we could support the term White Supremacy. Today we have come a great distance from that world; there is diversity in our government, more open voting and few barriers to public participation. That said, the bold reality is that those that vote have power, those that don't take what is given.

MLK used protesting to get the attention of those who were elected. He did not demand change, he demanded negotiations to create change. The real power for cure lies not only in the ability to change a law, but by electing those who make the laws, those who would create justice.

One of the invisible problems in a voting democracy is how we elect. The present system encourages block voting. We hire marketing people to find out what a particular segment wants/needs and the candidates pander to these individual groups. The process encourages separation not unity; good for some, but not universal good. Those that vote get what they want. Over the years the competing blocks trade off favors and a new balance prevails among those in power. The driving force in getting to be an elector is literacy. Literacy is the pathway to jobs, jobs to economic affluence which allows movement to a different societal level. At these higher levels of living, lifestyle more closely matches the political, educational and social mores of our country. You vote, you are heard by those you elected. If, though, you are not mobile and stay in this impoverished population, you lack a voice and are divorced from the power structure and mainstream society, ergo are confined to and live by the mores of your cohort. In these conditions there is illiteracy, unemployment, crime and hopelessness. Families struggling to merely survive cannot raise children who thrive, thus the morass of this lifestyle perpetuates itself. This economic determinism is color blind; it is the living condition of generationally poor across the country, in fact the world.

When MLK tried to organize a march for janitors and other marginalized workers he included the poor white workers from Appalachia. He received no backing, race was the moving force. I purport that we are again at this crossroads using race as the metric when the data shows the problem's core is class.

Viewing the present data with a different lens creates a very different plan. Take the statement that 24% of Connecticut's population is Black, yet 71% of the prison population is Black. This data is used as the basis for an argument that the justice system is biased. To remedy this injustice we blame over-policing, racial bias and white power. One solution is giving power to the people of like color to oversee the racist police, in a word, diversity.

In cities where the population is majority black or minority, 40% of children score on level. In the white suburbs that number is in the 70-80% range; again an apparent racial divide. Similarly, the response to the divide in test scores is to hire more black teachers and administrators, diversity.

If we were to shift the focus to "impoverishment", the picture looks different. We'd see the vast majority of those incarcerated come from impoverished zip codes both in white and minority communities across the country.

In relation to police killings there are about 1,000 per year; about half are white, the vast majority of both races come from impoverished zip codes.

The argument for racism relies on a "one size fits all" foundation. There is a strong push for diversity in the schools. The concept is based on the premise that you need to be Black to understand Black children. Yet all the cities have been administered and staffed by minority faculty for years. In Bloomfield the entire town's educational structure, including the student population, is minority; it surpasses any diversity model's requirements by far, yet their performance is like other alliance districts that have a more traditionally mixed population and faculty.

If we were to typify those children who are not on level across the state, both in cities and suburbs, we'd find they come from impoverished backgrounds. We'd also discover that so called middle class Black kids do as well as white kids.

Shifting the metric to impoverishment needs a full airing. It may provide solutions to many of the questions facing us today. We need to evaluate why the changes and the millions of dollars spent on correcting racism have not produced the desired results for this class of people.

Affirmative action, voting rights legislation, race equity programs, diversity, have proven to be a great benefit to middle class minorities, but little has changed for the poor. It's their turn. It's time for elected officials to care for all constituents, even those that don't vote. Race of course is an issue but in 2020 it is not the cause.

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