



Are we Contributing or Complacent?

By Cathleen Raffaelli, CEO & Chairman of the Board Brookline College

I'm sharing my personal story today to stand in solidarity with George Floyd and the countless others who have felt the anguish of police exerting excessive force.

My white, often-misguided upper middle-class son was shot by police, in his bedroom at his father's condo, after placing a 911 call asking for help. The policeman who shot him had a history of a similar event and outcome in a previous situation. The state's attorney general's office reviewed the matter and deemed the officer had acted appropriately. Although I am well aware this happens exceedingly frequently in our black and brown communities, it can happen to anyone—in any community. That is both tragic and devastating.

Having lived through this tragedy, I believe I have the right to speak on this matter with the integrity and justification that comes with firsthand experience. I actively support our community police force. They undertake a dangerous and difficult job every day to protect my family and ensure our safety. I do not condemn "the police" for my son's death. Rather, I condemn the act of one individual police officer and those around him who did nothing to prevent him from using excessive force. I condemn the institutionalization of bias toward justifying law enforcement's actions and the lack of constructive civil challenge. The sublimation of a race and the demonization of the police are both destructive forces to a sound democracy.

My generation has the benefit of having seen this unrest for the second time. In my case, I was young, passionate and idealistic—and the civil rights movement was exciting and empowering; it was my chance to be a part of something bigger than myself. It represented an opportunity to change the very fabric of society in a manner that would produce a stronger democracy.

The time has come for those of us who, over the last year, actively turned off our TVs and threw the proverbial towel down in disgust, to reengage. We must restate our values as a community and learn to live, communicate and work in a developing multicultural society. We must listen to and learn from our black and brown communities. We cannot know what it is to live their life experience, but we must try to deepen our understanding. We must also ensure that our police forces have training and education to better manage the high stress demands of their roles. We must root out the people who are not emotionally or mentally equipped for that role. Just like we must reject the malevolent individuals destroying private property.

At Brookline College, our mission states "we believe in meeting the educational needs of a developing multicultural society." The knowledge, skills and opportunity created through education is one of the most powerful tools we have, as a society, in the fight against racism, oppression and discrimination to ensure social justice. It is my experience that ignorance is too frequently the barren soil where the weeds of racism and oppression flourish.

We must take great care in cultivating our minds through education. Part of this education must include fostering a greater understanding and sensitivity of all cultures. Effective immediately, we'll be adding "culture across our curriculum" and make sure we infuse conversations on race, social justice and democracy into our course work and classrooms to ensure that we play our destined role, as a College, to eliminating ignorance and bias.

I, personally, am not watching from the sidelines any longer. I'll use my network and influence to ensure all students and staff members engage in constructive dialogue about these sensitive topics and know how to make their voice heard.

We will start by educating our community on the [top 15 social justice organizations to support right now](#) and continue by creating a committee on diversity to elevate our multicultural values because there's no such thing as not participating: you're either contributing to progress or you are complacent. It is time to add your voice to the dialog.