

June 12, 2020

Dear J. Robert Gladden Orthopaedic Society Family and the Greater Orthopaedic Surgery Community,

“To deny people their human rights is to challenge their very humanity.”

- ***Nelson Mandela***

This latest chapter in the long history of injustice against black and brown bodies in America comes at a harrowing time as we battle a novel COVID 19 pandemic which is also devastating our community. As communities of color across the nation wrestle with yet another affront to the elusive promise of equality, it is imperative that our own JRGOS community remain a source of fellowship, healing, understanding and a voice of leadership. Now more than ever before, we are called upon to use the privileges afforded us as Orthopaedic Surgeons as a vehicle for change. Such violence impedes the pathway of our students and trainees in the form of subtle suggestions of inferiority or overt attempts to silence their humanity. It attacks the health of our patients by limiting access to care and propagating comorbidities and disparities further propagating the health care inequities. It manifests as stolen professional opportunities, deferred dreams of promotion and marginalization of individuals otherwise destined for brilliance. In a recent May 31, 2020 LA Times Op Ed by Kareem Abdul-Jabbar he commented, ***“African Americans have been living in a burning building for many years, choking on the smoke as the flames burn closer.”***

The recent events are another painful and frustrating reminder of how ingrained racial violence is in the American fabric. In our own profession, we are not strangers to pervasive racial violence of the physical and psychological sort. Orthopaedic Surgery as a profession remains one of, if not the, least diverse specialties in the field of medicine. Many of our own JRGOS members have very personal accounts of overt racism and marginalization within our professional lives. I reflect upon my own personal experiences with overt and violent racism from growing up as a young man growing up in Boston and constantly being racially profiled and stopped while ***“Driving While Black”*** by the Boston Police for no reason. My most terrifying experience occurred while I was a PGY2 in the Harvard University Orthopaedic Surgery program. While on my commute on foot to Brigham and Women’s Hospital at 5 in the morning, I was accosted and wrestled to the ground, restrained in handcuffs face down on the pavement with a gun from a Boston Policeman pointed to my head; along with 10 other young black men that looked just like me. I stood out in my white doctors’ jacket and fully visible Harvard University ID, but this obviously meant nothing in that moment. I was eventually released to make my way to the hospital for early morning rounds of which I was quite late. I was shaken up and all that went through my mind was, ***“Why me?”*** This altercation with the Boston Police was a direct result of a need to arrest someone related to the aftermath related to the murder of Carol Stuart, who was a prominent white woman who was 7 months pregnant, killed in cold blood in her car with her husband two days prior. This horrendous crime was blamed on a black suspect depicted in detail to the Boston Police by her husband who survived the shooting. The sketched black figure looked like me. I felt targeted, fear, anger, violated and disrespected. ***How could this happen to me?*** Days later, Charles Stuart, the surviving husband, took his own life by jumping off the Tobin Bridge and openly admitted staging the murder of his wife and falsely accused a ***“black man”***. The ugly scars in this Boston community resulting from this incident still haunts this community and myself to this day. With such nightmares and vivid

memories associated with that incident, fast forward 30 years, as I am still continuing to confront the same set of fears. I am now the concerned father of a young black male in his 20's. Over the years, I have shared my countless racial life experiences openly with him and given him "**the talk**" preparing him for his eventual interactions with the police. I am afraid for his safety and his life amidst the recent racial injustices.

The violence and rioting last week in many cities across the United States in response to police brutality are unwarranted and wrong. Vengeance will never be the solution for unjustified violence against a group of people. Massive peaceful marches and protests around this country and the world of many different people of different faith, color and religion will bring about the change necessary for equity and inclusion of all. The problem is racism is seen as a conscious and insidious in our society. Racism is a complex system of social and political levers and pulleys set up generations ago. The bully pulpit provided by our individual and collective accomplishments as Orthopaedic Surgeons grants us a voice that our opposition will have no choice but to reckon with. We must in unity and on one accord demand better from the leaders of our institutions and organizations to end the systematic oppression of black and brown persons. It is of the most importance that our country finally live up to its founding principles of equality for all its citizens. Our society is one of the most incredible collections of talented individuals in existence. Even as we wrestle with feelings of fear and tears of frustration, may we draw strength from the resilience of our peers and the inspiration of the giants who preceded us.

Our **President of the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons, Joseph Bosco III**, in his recent address to the fellows of AAOS, expressed compassion, empathy and words of sadness related to these many recent traumatic events. The acknowledgment and written words touched many of the JRGOS members. As he alluded to in his statement, his strategic plan is to create a more diverse AAOS with people of color. For many of us, this is **a starting point**, understanding that much more must be formulated with such a plan and implemented. As the leader of the JR Gladden Orthopaedic Society, I propose we raise our voices, mobilize, and be part of the solution to these racial and healthcare inequities and work hand and hand with the AAOS leadership to bring about the necessary change.

In conclusion, we need to come together and reach out to each other particularly those that may be experiencing despair, fear and frustration in the aftermath of these tragedies. Lurking behind these events are concerns and outrage of systemic racism, institutional violence and failed inclusion. Unfortunately, there remains those persons who wish to divide and conquer rather than unite and prosper. We must step up as health care providers and allow our voices to be heard to make a real difference in this society. I write these words and speak for all that have come before me and all those who will come after me. This is a time to stand up and be heard not be silent. We must be part of the solution.

HashTags:

#GeorgeFloyd, #ConcernedFacesInOrthopaedics, #BreonaTaylor, #BlackLivesMatter
#ICanNotBreathe, #WhiteCoatsforBlackLives, #Racialinjustice, #1.5%ofOrthopods, #Ahmaud Arbery
#HealthcareDisparity, #DiversityandInclusion, #MinoritiesinMedicine, #COVID19Disparity,
#PoliceReform, #BlackLiveMattersPlaza, #AntiRacism, #JRGladdenOrthopaedicSociety

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