

The Berkeley Federation of Teachers stands in solidarity with all those who are fighting for racial justice in our schools and communities, and in the streets of Minneapolis, Louisville, Oakland, and hundreds of other cities across the U.S. Millions are rightly enraged at the recent murder of George Floyd, brutally murdered by the Minneapolis police while pleading for his life. I want to express personal thanks to those able to be out in the streets calling for justice. Many BFT members have joined thousands of others in the streets demanding that racism must be addressed now. Some have even organized demonstrations.

The George Floyd murder does not stand alone. Black and Brown communities in this country are systematically harassed, attacked, jailed and murdered by lawless police forces and targeted by white civilians who may not even think themselves racist. For those with the privilege to not experience this first hand, I recommend reading *The New Jim Crow* by Michelle Alexander. She explores each step of our criminal justice system from its roots in slavery to our modern day police state, from getting a ticket to death row. Slavery continues to cast its long shadow into our current times and the violence that has met every attempt at peaceful change is as present as ever.

There is a convergence of tragic and unacceptable events-- the continued state violence against Black people by unchecked police, and a swath of pain and suffering cutting through the Black community by the Covid-19 pandemic. The current economic collapse and longstanding unaffordable patchwork of a health care system have yet again exposed the true nature of our country.

We cannot treat this problem as an intellectual exercise. For educators, this means to actively ally ourselves with the victims of injustice and speak up with courage and respect. I believe we can do better and that we have the collective power to force change. Change never just happens, it must be demanded.

As educators, we get to have an outsized impact on the future. Every classroom is one where students' voices can be lifted, where we can recognize the inherent value of each individual student, where we can support those who are in pain and build a community that can fight for a better world. We can listen to the youth and follow their lead. This is our challenge regardless of grade level or subject area. We cannot send our students off into the summer break without letting them know we hear them, listening deeply to their complex emotional responses and being their allies in fighting for racial justice.

As a union, we also fight for changes to our economic system, steeped in racism, to one where workers, especially historically oppressed people, have voice, respect and power. We must work together to elect leaders and pass laws that make sure our public commons including education, health care, child care and a green future are fully funded and that the massive economic wealth of this country benefits those who create it. This is part of our organizing work.

As we grieve, we also must build. We can work every day to transform the world for our students and their families. We can speak of their struggles, see their pain, help them envision a safer and more fair world and give them the tools to bring it into existence. We can help them to rouse the conscience of the nation. We can follow their lead and support their struggles.

#JusticeforGeorgeFloyd #JusticeforAhmaudArbery #JusticeforBreonnaTaylor #BlackLivesMatter