

COVID-19 (Novel Coronavirus) Pandemic - Systemic Racism

June 4, 2020. The nightly demonstrations are continuing following the death of a black man at the hands of four Minneapolis police officers. As each day passes the protests seem to be getting more peaceful and at the same time all states are in the process of reopening the economy. Everyone is hopeful that things will get back to normal for both the health and economic vitality of the country.

The combined impact of the pandemic and racial unrest has shown a brighter spotlight on racial inequality in America. Because of COVID-19 minorities have experienced a disproportionately higher rate of infection and deaths from the virus. As a result of the shelter-in-place orders and the shutdown of businesses, unemployment has skyrocketed but also with higher rates or black and brown workers. So minority populations have been hurt the most by the pandemic.

The killing in Minnesota ignited a long-brewing discontent about the issue of police unfairly and disproportionately targeting black men. There are lots of examples racial episodes and statistics that point out higher rates of arrests and incarceration of black men. Listening to news analysts the talk is all about this being an inflection point; a moment when some real action will ensue to address racial inequality in America. I wish that was true but I am skeptical.

Yesterday I heard a friend, who is a Republican voter, state that this issue (police brutality) has been around for decades and past Presidents, particularly Obama, have done nothing to address the matter. The comment got me asking myself the question, "What will it take to really eliminate racism in America?" Not surprisingly my response was, "I have no idea." Unfortunately we can expect a lot of talk and token actions, such as business leaders issuing statements or token blacks being added to Boards. Of course the whole is going to get politicized especially in this Presidential election year.

Today the hot topic is back to Colin Kapernick's protesting by taking a knee during the national anthem, and Drew Brees chiming in commenting about disrespecting the American flag. As you might expect, people immediately came down on both sides of an issue that is basically symbolic. The point is, this level of disagreement is the kind of discourse that doesn't do anything if we are really interested in making progress.

What we should be doing is concentrating on what we, as a country, can do in the short-term to bring immediate relief to those Americans that have been disproportionately penalized by COVID-19. We need an immediate recognition and reaction to systemic racism, but I am not holding my breath.