

For me, for years, the phrase “Black Lives Matter” was just a ubiquitous slogan bandied about by the same segment of the American population defined by its allegiance to the concept of “political correctness.” Of course, in my line of work, political correctness isn’t really a choice, it’s the way things work. The rules are mutable. Certain references and social terms that were perfectly (or at least reasonably) acceptable last year are likely to elicit howls of anger and disgust when inserted into workplace conversation this year. On occasion, the shifting sands of political correctness can turn into a minefield that required serious focus and razor sharp awareness to navigate. Videos are introduced, classes are attended, everyone does their very best to toe the line and refrain from offending anyone by saying the wrong thing. For me...for years...”Black Lives Matter” was just another part of this ongoing effort to placate everyone, of every race, every religion (or no religion), every gender (or no gender), every whatever aspect of anyone that could ever possibly take offense at a word, phrase or off-handed intimation.

“Black Lives Matter!” Sure, they do! Of course! So do all lives! Let’s all just be one big happy family! But...wait. There’s something wrong here, isn’t there? It’s not quite as freewheeling and happy and rollicking as that, is it? Nope, it’s not. And I found that out, for the first time, really, when I witnessed George Floyd’s eight minute and forty-six second murder on TV three weeks ago.

You don’t watch a man die like a dog in the street and not feel anything. At least one would hope. For me, the emotions that the visual of George Floyd’s agonized expression under the weight of that murderous cop’s knee went way past the politically correct outlook that forty years in the workplace had cultivated in me: shock at first, followed quickly by horror, disbelief, and, finally, outrage. What kind of person, especially a cop, one whose sworn purpose is to protect and serve, presses his knee on another man’s neck, blithely ignores that man’s repeated cry of “I Can’t Breathe”, and withdraws the pressure only after the man has ceased to struggle for breathe....because he is dead? Clearly, many people shared my outrage. In

the last two weeks, the streets of most cities and towns across this country have played host to mainly peaceful protests on behalf of George Floyd. “I Can’t Breathe” has become a clarion call to all those...black, white, Asian, Latino...for whom George Floyd’s murder has become synonymous with the unfairness and inequality that characterize the way in which so many black people are treated by the American justice system.

But my outrage was underscored by incredulousness when some of my white friends expressed their contention that, while the by-now-famous televised death of George Floyd was certainly sad and hard to watch, it was just a wee bit frustrating that the reason the country was in such an uproar over it was that George Floyd was *black*.

“I mean,” One such friend said to me, “can you imagine if he had been white? None of this would even be happening!”

Ya think? And therein lies my point! Had George Floyd been white, that cop would very likely have chosen some other means of restricting the “offender’s” movement. In data compiled by the Washington Post, during 2015 to 2019, blacks accounted for 24.6 of all people killed by the use of lethal police force in *all* circumstances. The many videos showing blacks being manhandled and even killed by police are disproportionate to the fact that only 12 percent of this country’s population is black. My friend is right--if George Floyd had been white, none of what is happening in this country would be happening right now. Because there would be no reason for it to happen. Because what happened to George Floyd happened to him *because* he was a black man, a member of a race that has always existed within the margins of this country’s society; even when some of its members make it to the upper echelons of business and government, they are still, almost always, defined by their connection to their race.

Here it is, 2020, and some white people are still surprised to learn of a black billionaire or a black CEO of an important company. But even being a CEO is no surefire proof against the kind of death that George Floyd suffered. Let that black CEO put on a casual set of clothes, take a walk over

to a friend's house in a section of town where rich white people live, and catch the attention of a bigoted neighbor...well, you can probably imagine the ensuing scenario. Worried about a black man who looks out of place in her world, she calls the cops, they come over, and, well....you know the old story.

Black Lives Matter! The slogan has taken on an entirely new connotation for me now. Yes, there are those, who, hearing it, will feel compelled to retort, "All Lives Matter" or some variation thereof. If I happen to be in earshot, I'll try to set them straight. I'll tell them what my 21-year-old son told me a couple of weeks ago when I was just starting to realize how tone-deaf and unaware I had been until witnessing the murder of George Floyd.

"It's like this, Dad," he told me. "It's like there are all these houses that need repairs. They're all good houses and deserve to be repaired. But one of them is on fire. That's the one you have to worry about right now."

The "Black Lives Matter" movement is not political correctness. It's a matter of life and death, not just for the black men and women who have been and continue to be killed because they are, in essence, black. Living while black is not a crime. A house is on fire! Let's put that fire out and save the people inside!