

“A HOPEFUL 2015”
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I approach 2015 with mixed emotions but remain hopeful. Our economy is improving from the collapse of 2008. Our stock market has rebounded, employment rates are on the rise – yet, the issue of racial inequity in this country is magnified more than ever. The ongoing protests of the deaths of unarmed Black men by law enforcement has drawn attention to the issues of inequality in the treatment of people of color by law enforcement, as well as issues of employment, housing and health disparities.

History has shown economic cycles come and go yet the attention to making market adjustments are a daily focus of our Administration, legislators, academics and those in the business community. Racial inequities are a constant, and the continued killing of unarmed black men and the subsequent protests are turning our communities upside down but don't get the same daily care as our financial markets. Demonstrations across America about police brutality show a vast difference of opinion regarding law enforcement and are deeply saddening. Behind this issue is a much bigger one which we constantly sweep under the rug – RACE.

Recently the Black Elected Officials and Faith Based Leaders of the East Bay held a community meeting attended by numerous faith leaders, elected and appointed representatives as well as law enforcement and public safety representatives. The audience of over 500 was predominately African American and a number of people voiced their observations and suggestions about daily police interactions and offered solutions to this troubling issue that included: police spending time in the classroom out of uniform, restorative justice activities between police officers and members of our community, and more local police living in and reflecting the communities they are hired to serve and protect.

The recent observations and demonstrations illustrate that place matters – race, age and where you live are predictors of your treatment by law enforcement, the criminal justice system and our other institutions, which highlights that our lives are a metaphorical “Tale of Two Cities”. When we look at the disparities in health, education, and prison populations that have existed since the Civil Rights Movement the question still being raised 50 years later, is how do we change historic and systemic conditions? Who is responsible for today's “Tale of Two Cities” and where and how do we begin to find solutions for change?

At the meeting, Wanda and Cepheus Johnson, the mother and uncle of Oscar Grant, who was killed on January 1, 2009, stated that change is a shared responsibility; it begins with each individual, family, neighborhood, school, government, and institution with which we interact. They acknowledged, as did most who attended, that the “Tale of Two Cities” exists; yet unfortunately, it is rarely acknowledged by those who govern.

We must begin working together to heal the deep-seeded feelings that allow erosive racial prejudices to persist if we are to dismantle the ongoing injustices that plague America.

Please visit www.blackelectedandfaithleaders.org to view suggestions offered at the meeting or offer your own.