



Racial Injustice & Inequities Perspective A Personal Call to Action

by Kathlyn E. Fletcher, MD, MA

"With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right. Let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his

orphan – to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and a lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations."

Thus ends Abraham Lincoln's second inaugural address. The speech was given as the Union was close to winning the civil war, much of the country (particularly the South) was in ruins, the country mourned over 620,000 lives lost to battle and disease, and just weeks before Lincoln would be assassinated by John Wilkes Booth. This speech is beautiful in its brevity and prescient in its call to action.

With George Floyd's senseless and violent death, we see yet another stark example of structural racism. Like Lincoln's second inauguration, this moment in our history presents a call to action. In this moment, action can be large or small. In this moment, action can be public or personal. In this moment, action can be a quiet commitment or a loud chant. But action is required by each of us who wishes to "bind up the nation's wounds."

In a recent *New York Times* [column](#), David Brooks suggested that great leaders are able to use lessons from history and the humanities to guide their responses to crisis. He says that such leaders,

"...were educated under a curriculum that put character formation at the absolute center of education. They were trained by people who assumed

that life would throw up hard and unexpected tests, and it was the job of a school, as one headmaster put it, to produce young people who would be 'acceptable at a dance, invaluable in a shipwreck.'"

He goes on to say that we need our leaders to draw on both science and the humanities during crises like those we are facing:

"Right now, science and the humanities should be in lock step: science producing vaccines, with the humanities stocking leaders and citizens with the capacities of resilience, care and collaboration until they come. But, instead, the humanities are in crisis at the exact moment history is revealing how vital moral formation really is."

I believe that we can reintroduce the humanities into our lives and become the leaders that David Brooks is describing. Many of us have liberal arts backgrounds already. For those who do not have a humanities-based education, it is not too late. I didn't even read *Pride and Prejudice* until I was in medical school or *To Kill a Mockingbird* until residency.

In that spirit, we offer this opportunity to reflect on Lincoln's words and join a discussion in our community about what we can do to make our offices, our committees, our divisions and departments, our institution, our city, and indeed our country a place of "a just and a lasting peace" for all people. I, for one, plan to start with a commitment in the spirit of MCW's #IWill campaign. I will notice microaggressions in my sphere. I will call them out. I will listen more.

I will make mistakes, but mistakes will not stop me from trying to do better. Sometimes I will lead; sometimes I will follow. I will bring along as many people as I possibly can on the journey to create lasting peace for all people.

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