



OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE

JESSE WHITE • Secretary of State

June 1, 2020

Dear Editor:

The images of George Floyd's murder are haunting, chilling, racist and inhuman. His death has inspired protests throughout the country and in Illinois – many of which have been peaceful but some unfortunately have devolved into looting, arson and destruction of neighborhood businesses.

I understand the anger over systemic racism. We need real change in this country, but I would like to encourage we channel our efforts to achieve this change peacefully.

I would like to take a moment to tell my story.

In the early 1950s, I left Chicago to attend Alabama State College – now Alabama State University – in Montgomery, Alabama. Leaving Chicago for Alabama brought many challenges and frustrations due to segregation. African Americans were not allowed to drink at certain water fountains. We were prohibited from sitting in certain seats on buses and banned from eating at many restaurants.

This systemic racism both hurt and angered me. It was the first time I encountered the ugliness of segregation. There were times I wanted to lash out. But my introduction to one man made a significant change in my life and my views on how I could try to make a difference.

During my time at Alabama State College, I attended church in northern Montgomery where Dr. Martin Luther King served as the pastor. Dr. King served as one of my earliest mentors. I had the privilege of listening and observing him firsthand. Following the lead of Dr. King, and other civil rights leaders, I participated in the Montgomery Bus Boycott that ultimately led to the desegregation of the public transit system. This peaceful protest taught me the importance of perseverance and working together toward a common goal.

I realize this was a long time ago. And I realize we still have a long way to go to achieve true equality. This is a hard truth we must embrace. The horrific murder of George Floyd serves as a clarion call for real and lasting change.

I urge everyone to take up this call, but to do so in a peaceful manner.

Sixty years ago, I established the Jesse White Tumbling Team as a way to give back to the community and to help young people in need of support and guidance. I encourage them every day to do something good for someone, to treat people as you want to be treated and to avoid ever playing the race card. That is the ugliest card in the deck. These young people have gone on to do amazing things in life.

It is my fervent hope that we all band together, the cries for equality are heard and we can finally achieve the American Dream that Dr. King outlined to us all in his iconic speech.

Sincerely,

Jesse White
Illinois Secretary of State