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We continue to be sickened and outraged by the brutal murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police and the recent deaths of EMT Breonna Taylor and jogger Ahmaud Arbery and so many other men and women of color in our recent days and over the course of the past 400 years. Belmont Against Racism's origin stems from the beating of Rodney King. More recently, we have witnessed Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Philando Castile, Sandra Bland, and a seemingly never-ending list of Black men and women with families left to grieve.

This Thursday evening, June 4, the Belmont Religious Council is offering prayers as we mourn these lives. We also mourn the lives lost to COVID-19, which has had a disproportionate effect on communities of color. We know that racism, housing discrimination, poor air quality, food insecurity, and healthcare inequities have played a large role in the causes of pre-existing conditions that lead to worse outcomes for those with the virus. And there is also something deeply wrong in America when a Black man cannot go bird watching in Central Park without the fear that the power of the police will be used against him. This is the insidious illness of racism that denies a fellow human being the dignity of equal treatment and that sees a person based on just one physical detail, instead of who they truly are.

We commend Chief Jamie MacIsaac for his thoughtful letter to our community. We are fortunate in Belmont to have leadership in our Town's Police Department who have embraced the 21st Century Policing Principles and are demonstrating their commitment to anti-racist policing in our town. But as Mike Collins said in his recent letter, this is not just a police problem. Police often reflect the culture of their upbringing and all of us in society bear responsibility. The idea that issues cannot arise in our town would be naïve. We have heard from young people of color in our community who have had to endure racial slurs from other students and in one case a noose. I remember hearing the words of a former Belmont High student, who spoke a few years ago at Belmont's Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Breakfast. She said that when she was home, she was just a kid, reading novels, playing games, and doing things like any other kid. But as soon as she left her front door, she was seen as a Black kid.

While police brutality in this country needs to be addressed, there are broader issues of systemic racism that need our attention. We need to shed a bright light on the economic challenges, the health disparities, the education disparities, voter suppression, the environmental effects of poor air and water quality in communities of color, and the inequities in the criminal justice system. Those of us who are white, and that is the majority in Belmont, must not turn away. We have work to do to educate ourselves, to listen and support Black leadership, support their organizations doing this work, and to work together toward ending all forms of systemic forms of racism. It is time to address income inequality so that the median net worth of a Black family who has had to endure Jim Crow, redlining, predatory lending, and lack of access to mortgages after WWI might be more than just \$8 in Boston, while the median net worth of a white family is \$247,500.

I was moved yesterday by our Belmont High School students who organized a Black Lives Matter gathering and who spoke eloquently about recent events. The civil rights movement was largely a movement of young people. They give us hope for real change.



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George Floyd's 6-year-old daughter, Gianna, said, "Daddy changed the world." Let us make this true for her and for all our children and grandchildren.

If our democracy is to live up to our ideals that we are all created equal and that we all have the right to justice under the law, we must act. This country's future is at stake.

Kathryn Bonfiglio, President  
*Belmont Against Racism*