



Two Pandemics

By Sara Scott, CEO of CLI

As the CEO of the Center for Legal Inclusiveness, I want to convey that the murder of George Floyd may at first appear tangential to our mission, but it falls squarely within our work.

A pandemic is defined as: “occurring over a wide geographic area and affecting an exceptionally high percentage of the population.” Before COVID-19 became a pandemic, the systematic and systemic killing of Black people by the police is a pandemic. The relationship between COVID-19 and Black people murdered by police is quite astonishing when you think about it: both are insidious, both are silent until deadly, both are unruly, both are unhinged, both are unapologetic, both are widespread, both have affected a high percentage of the population. Both are pandemics.

It is impossible to have conversations about diversity and inclusivity until we have conversations about the state of Black America.

You see, there is no diversity without a basic understanding that the plight of people of color – especially Black people – in the United States is different. Our experience is different; our expectations are different: we are taught differently by our elders. The very definition of inclusivity is the practice of including people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized. This is disproportionate to the way people of color have felt and been treated in this country. Instead of being seen as individuals, we are more often looked at as a group - even if there is only one of us in the room. By not bringing inclusivity into the way Black and Brown people are treated, stereotypes are allowed to perpetuate and grow. And our legal organizations, government entities and law firms are not exempt.

The policemen who ignored the statement “I can’t breathe” did not see George Floyd as an individual, as a person who was somebody’s son, somebody’s father, and who had his place in society. No, George Floyd was lumped into a category of all other Black men not seen as individuals, but instead categorized together like a shoal of piranhas that need to be destroyed. Inclusivity calls for humanizing people, for seeing them as unique, for understanding how they may view their own place within their family, within society, within this country, and especially within your legal organization.

Not only is the murder of George Floyd saddening, maddening, revolting and demonstrative of the worst in human beings, it also serves as a great example of White privilege. The same privilege to end Black lives as if they don’t matter.

Our work cannot begin until we appropriately pay homage to Mr. Floyd and the dozens of other lives lost based on stereotypes and overt racism. Before we can talk about diversity, we have to put aside privilege and accept the current state of affairs. Before we can move to inclusivity, we have to note the systemic failure of America to view people of color in an inclusive nature. Failure to recognize the direct relationship between the pandemic of police murdering Black men and how it is just as intertwined with the White privilege that gets in the way of diversity and inclusion in the legal profession will not only result in a myriad of dead angles, but will ensure that the needle does not move forward.