



The Wait Is Over

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On April 16, 1963, while sitting inside a jail cell after being arrested for protesting and demonstrating peacefully in Birmingham Alabama, King wrote a response to eight white Alabama clergymen. The eight clergymen wrote a letter criticizing his presence in Birmingham and the aggressive approach to securing civil rights for black people in the state of Alabama. They were worried that the civil rights movement and its demands for equal justice would cause violence. Yet they and other whites across the country refused to acknowledge the centuries of violence perpetuated on black bodies since 1619.

Their concern for the comfort and safety of white people led them to oppose the civil rights movement. Equality and access to public spaces, education, housing, economic advancement, and political power would mean black people would no longer be seen as inferior, subservient, and 3/5ths of a person.

Jim Crow and Black Codes were institutional safeguards to ensure that black lives were never free and seen as equal to whites within the U.S. King was labeled an extremist and told they—black people—should be patient.

“You deplore the demonstrations taking place in Birmingham. But your statement, I am sorry to say, fails to express a similar concern for the conditions that brought about the demonstrations. I am sure that none of you would want to rest content with the superficial kind of social analysis that deals merely with effects and does not grapple with underlying causes. It is unfortunate that demonstrations are taking place in Birmingham, but it is even more unfortunate that the city’s white power structure left the Negro community with no alternative.” – Letter from a Birmingham Jail

This was America in 1963. It is 2020, and yet the New Jim Crow is upon us. Racists feel empowered by government supported state sanctioned militaristic weaponry and training. Let the visuals, voices, and people on the street be a witness to this truth—people of African descent are not waiting for the Christian Church to speak up and demand structural and institutional policy changes. As can be seen from daily protesters around the world, the wait is over and white Christians are not being asked to educate themselves on the long history of racism. Young people of African descent are leading this movement against the government.

They are showing up with solidarity partners for Black lives to matter.

As a clergyperson of African descent, and a racial justice practitioner my question is, what are clergy of European descent waiting for as black lives are being lynched on a daily basis—choked to death until the breath leaves our bodies, murdered with knees on our necks, left swinging from ropes in trees, and mutilated with bullets—shot while praying in church, jogging, sitting, kneeling, walking, driving, eating, and sleeping.

Dear white Christians, one workshop, one intensive weekend, one month of talking with your black friends, and one year of intense anti-racism work will not undo 500 years of entrenched feelings of white Christian supremacy.

Becoming an ant-racist is a life-long journey. It happens in community with other committed people who journey together and commit to decentering whiteness, leaning into practices to decolonize socialized patterns of thinking and behaviors. The process includes relearning history, correcting false narratives, and working towards radical shifts in policies and structures that harm black lives.

The movement to secure and protect Black lives is going forth. Answer the call, be an extremist, because patience has run out and the wait is over.

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