

I stand before you grateful for the opportunity to speak and humbled that I was even asked. One of the many reasons we are here today is because there are far too many people who do not have the privilege of having their voice heard, and the fact that I am able to take advantage of this platform is not lost on me and I do not take this responsibility lightly, and I do not take my time in front of you for granted.

That being said, I do feel that it is much more important that I am clear and direct, than it is that I get down from here leaving everyone feeling warm or even hopeful. I will not be calling for peace or requesting we join hands. My role here today is to do my best, as a Black man in this country, to give voice to the many who do not enjoy the opportunities that are promised to all hard working, law abiding citizens. I have three Black children and I cannot sit by and send them into a world that refuses to learn lessons from its past.

Black Americans are not perfect. But no demographic of America is. We are all flawed human beings mostly trying our best to live as happily as possible in a world we were brought into. There is no excuse for crime and shootings. But Black and Brown people are not dumb. We know who truly cares about those issues in our community. And it is obvious when people are using buzzword comments like “Black on Black crime” and “What about Chicago?” and “All Lives Matter” to silence and ignore us and rush us back to their own personal safe status quo. I have to let you know: we are done accepting these unrelated straw men as ways to silence us when we speak about oppression and marginalization. I refuse to accept people being loud with outrage about looting and property damage, but they cannot be bothered to put in the work addressing why so much pent up anger is finally being released. Black people, people of

color, and marginalized people in general are not here to hold White hands that slow us down on the march towards justice with more concern for the status quo than the lives of the people the status quo continuously fails to protect. We are here for White allies and accomplices, and any allies and accomplices, ready to do the work with us.

Why are we here? We are here because of countless incidents too numerous to name. We must start with America's history regarding Black Americans. Yes, we must acknowledge that creating a nation with slavery woven into its fabric means the effects do not go away merely because some laws changed. We must acknowledge that segregation and Jim Crow crippled far too many of our ancestors who wanted to establish generational wealth. We must talk about the devastating effects of redlining and unfair bank policies and building interstates through Black communities. And we must talk about how that led to diminished educational and economic opportunities for far too many Black Americans. Institutional racism keeps too many of us from fully enjoying the alleged American dream, and a key to that institutional racism is privileged White people both denying their privileges, and assuming Black folks just aren't working hard enough.

We are not here because 1,2,3, or 20 Black people have died. We are here because cries about oppression have gone unheard, from the dead and the living. Poor Black people have been ignored and vilified, and Black folks with any amount of privilege or success have been ignored when they speak for their siblings and have been used as a shield for those who pretend the system works for everyone. We all remember how Colin Kaepernick was mocked and eventually

blackballed from the NFL because his peaceful protest was deemed too offensive.

We are here because too many people of privilege choose to repeat this process and uphold a status quo that does not work for the least of these, rather than risk any amount of privilege to make this nation the best it can be for everyone.

I shouldn't have to say this, but I'm not naive, so I will. I don't want law enforcement in danger. I don't want businesses damaged. I don't like watching our cities and our country burn. I want safety and comfort, too. I know I live in a historically great community with great schools and great people. But I have a responsibility to speak truth for the least of these, and when the least of these have this same melanin I do, I can't be comfortable. And I can't let you be comfortable.

The deaths of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd which led to the protests and the destructive unrest we see is a big reason why we're here. But before we can take serious any complaints about the rioting and looting, we must see a genuine attempt to understand why the blatant and systemic lack of action in those deaths lead us here. Ahmaud Arbery was murdered by 3 men who initially walked off scot free. The murderers had ties to law enforcement and everyone took it at their word that Ahmaud was a threat. Multiple prosecutors failed to bring them to justice. It was only when a video showing his murder - a video that only got out because they thought it would ABSOLVE them - that Ahmaud's death was taken seriously as a homicide. Breonna Taylor was shot dead in her home while sleeping because officers executed a no knock warrant on the wrong address. You would think law

enforcement officials would be bending over backwards to apologize and take accountability. But no, they instead arrested her boyfriend and charged him with attempted murder because he understandably believed his home was being broken into and fired at officers he assumed were burglars who just killed his girlfriend. Those officers remain on administrative leave. With George Floyd, we have a video of an officer with a knee on his neck and George telling them he couldn't breathe, and rather than arrest a single officer, the law enforcement officials scrambled to find an excuse for their inaction, and have even now only arrested one officer, even though three officers were there and did nothing. The one officer they did arrest has a laundry list of complaints and bad behavior and was still put back out on the streets.

It's easy after the fact to condemn these singular officers, and quickly move on to making sure we understand not all cops are bad. But what you should be asking is why this fundamental breakdown keeps happening.

We've been here before. Trayvon Martin is another young Black man gunned down by an overzealous vigilante who accosted him with no proof and no authority and lost control and shot this innocent Black child. Trayvon's killer remains free. Sandra Bland is a Black woman who died in police custody and we still have no idea what happened to her in that jail. Eric Garner is a Black man who cried out in 2014 that he couldn't breathe and died being detained by police. I can't breathe is an all too familiar rallying cry. And if we don't have video or their families don't speak up, they're likely just written off as criminals who died because they didn't choose to comply. What was learned?

Systems haunt us. Kalief Browder is a Black man who sat in jail for 3 years because he couldn't make bail, not because he was convicted of anything. And we learned he was innocent AFTER he had 3 years of his life taken. And 2 years after that? Kalief committed suicide. We are haunted by systems that looked to convict a 16 year old Cyntoia Brown, who was forced into sex work, and she killed her rapist in self defense, but prosecutors still felt compelled to throw the book at her. She was in jail fighting for 16 years until activists rallied to get her pardoned.

You've got homeowners accosting Black delivery men making legitimate deliveries for their job and detaining them as if they are police. You've got a White woman threatening to call the cops on a Black man because SHE didn't have her dog on a leash and was angry the Black man dared ask her to obey the law she was breaking. Serena Williams almost died after childbirth because too often, Black women are not believed when they relay their issues to health care workers. A blood clot she told the staff about was almost ignored but thankfully, her husband raised hell to get her the care she needed. This happens to Black women with nowhere near Serena's status. COVID 19 disproportionately affects and kills Black people and too many in this country want to open back up and put us and the elderly and the poor at even more risk, and we are left to wonder if the response would be the same if it overwhelmed a majority of White citizens. Even if you disagree with all that, you cannot dismiss our frustration as we ask ourselves what that means to us as Black Americans in this nation. The status quo fails us. if you're not willing to be as vocal about these issues, or willing to take us seriously, then we will be back here again in 2 years, and another 2 years, and again in 10 years. And we'll repeat this cycle, and this unnecessarily puts more

officers at risk, because too many of us would rather send officers to deal with a weary populace who is fed up, instead of talking to our leaders and elected officials about things like fair wages and living wages and economic opportunities and criminal justice reform. Officers are left dealing with destruction because too many good people continue to put their heads in the sand and let things go too far.

But there is hope here. People with influence and resources have to be willing to leverage their power to force systemic change to benefit the least of these. These people are generally White people. Black people can't fix systemic racism with speeches and kind words. It will take White Americans to make the choice to be actively anti-racist. Black people have a responsibility, yes, and the reality is marginalized people have a role in resisting oppression. But the bigger reality is the oppressed cannot resist oppression without the privileged joining in and doing anti oppression work. If you cannot do that, your commitment to equality is just lip service.

Racism is not merely the KKK or saying the N-Word. It is something ingrained in our history and it will take people relinquishing their own comfort to remove this stain. It will take bold policies. People must stop voting for their own wallets and start voting for the good of our fellow citizens. You must begin to hold all officials on any side of any aisle accountable. It takes more than a good heart and local charities to address the ills of our economic system. The change has to happen at the personal, local, state, and federal level. We have to stop seeing public assistance as a crutch, because the majority of assistance goes to the WORKING poor because we don't demand that people are paid living wages. We have to stop looking down at labor and

start looking positively at anyone who is willing to go to work and be a law abiding citizen. We should be guaranteeing the basic necessities needed to thrive in America - not merely survive, but thrive. Necessities that include fully equipped schools and access to adequate healthcare, no matter the zip code. And that will require resources and we have to be willing to sacrifice for the greater good.

I am not perfect. I've been wrong. I've had to be quiet and listen when officers I know have told me that easily shooting someone in the leg is generally Hollywood nonsense. Legs have major arteries, so when people suggest that, it's clear they don't understand police work. I have had to be called out for not taking serious the needs of other marginalized folks because they didn't look like me. I was certainly doing the bare minimum for my conscience when fighting sexism, and patriarchy, and xenophobia. I didn't take seriously the experience of queer persons and trans persons. I assumed I knew enough about my Asian siblings and my Native siblings. I've looked the other way but thought I was doing enough. I wasn't. And when I was told that, it was uncomfortable. I instinctively and unfairly felt attacked and lashed out to defend my good name. But that discomfort was necessary. I was forced to listen and learn that I had work to do if I wanted to truly be better. Listening helped me be a better person and helped me understand how connected oppression is and how much we need each other in this fight. My hope today is that you leave less comfortable but ready to do the necessary anti racist work and anti oppression work that this discomfort compels us all to do. And if you didn't agree with a thing I said, maybe just be open to listening to people close to you that understand my perspective. Amen.