

Resist and Reject  
June 6, 2020

“...This is a time of decision  
Tell me, what is your plan? yeah  
Onward, forward, don't step backward  
Step out of Babylon  
Onward, forward, don't step backward  
Step out of Babylon  
Straight is the road that leads to destruction Ooh yeah  
The road to righteousness is narrow...”  
Max Romeo – One Step Forward

Status:

What a week it has been, it is almost surreal how it has felt like the longest and shortest week in my life. Like a lot of POC my emotions and feelings at this point continue to run the gamut and my reactions to others do the same. I'm appreciative that people have offered me all forms of support from food to listening to hugs but folks have also given me space when needed. I think it's safe to say most of us are in pain and we are all looking for answers including looking for the answer of where do we fit into all of this. I wish I had the answers. I also don't want to overlook that we are looking for answers while being buried by the perfect storm that includes the continued fear and concern over Covid-19, most people in more isolation leading to more consumption of social media and the news, the financial crisis, high unemployment along with other issues. These are not easy times to clearly process anything. Once again what I'm sharing is long, and it is not meant to be a definitive list of actions, it is the exploration of a critical and challenging personal framework that may help some folks in navigating their own decision making processes, which will be most effective towards building a successful movement.

I have shared some of what is going on in Philadelphia, which like a lot of major cities saw protests, economic protests, the increased militarization of policing in our city center and neighborhoods and the backlash of white vigilantes. My neighborhood in particular is a complex place where everyone is struggling somehow, which is what happens when you take the second poorest congressional district, add the center of the US opioid epidemic, place that on top of historical and often brutal disproportionate police contact, then toss in riots, and you have the trauma of simply living. Folks here aren't just familiar with systemic racism, this is the neighborhood that systemic racism built. In one way everyone is shook by what has been occurring and in another way everything that people are now seeing happen in the world and shocks them, happens within 20 feet of my neighbors everyday and they pick themselves up and keep moving forward. Through all of this our assets are shining, people who do because it has to get done are out checking on neighbors, cleaning up, doing what a failed system will not do.

A week ago I wrote a piece I titled. "Thoughts on White Ally In/Action", my uncle called it a treatise and said he summarized it as, "Is there anything more I could be doing that I'm not doing?", and I think that's an appropriate summation. I have had a wide range of responses to that piece, some that stand out though are the number of people that have told me how uncomfortable it made them feel and how difficult it was to reflect on what was in the document. I have had several people not just say that they read the whole thing but they listed the specific things that hit them and they were going to focus on, and I've had several people say that they are having their whole family read so that they can use as a discussion piece. I was also surprised to discover that it made it outside of my immediate social circle and that everything from organizations to bands were utilizing the words as starting points for discussions to discuss next steps. I also received several very concrete examples of not what people were going to do but what they did in response to the piece. I know that in an age of memes to convey information, receiving a 7-8 page summary of one random persons thoughts is not the usual, so I do appreciate everyone that not only took the time to read but also the time to reflect on what I shared.

I also want to make clear that this has been a period of reflection and new actions for me as well. Just like I asked everyone else to assess where they were at, and what they were willing to sacrifice I have been doing the same for myself and I have been having very complex and difficult conversations with other Black people and POC. My reflection has included reviewing mistakes I've made in the past including amends in some cases, as well as discovering ways that I can move forward with new actions. I have also taken a number of very direct actions including sharing my thoughts through writing, which is out of my comfort zone but has surprisingly yielded significant results.

So what's next? After a recognition that Racism and White Supremacy exists and that it manifests in every way possible ranging from violence to employment and housing patterns, we then need to critically and unflinchingly continue to look into where we fit into it all and how it manifests in our lives, taking our own inventory not just other peoples, while also asking ourselves what am I truly willing to sacrifice for the struggle? To me that includes reviewing what we have learned in just this past week, it is understanding what will be coming from those that seek to maintain the current system, it is connecting actions to what we have learned and what we know will be coming, it is knowing what supports exist for all of us to reach our full potential, as the power of the collective is truly something to behold. Finally it is thinking about Hope, because I do believe that all things are possible, hope because knowing our flaws isn't a burden but an opportunity to change and hope because I am not just looking to deconstruct and destroy but I am looking to help build a better way.

We see you:

In addition to a lot of other things I do professionally I am a researcher and one way I am trained as a researcher is as an Ethnographer. A simple way of describing that is that instead of using surveys or more controlled techniques of gathering

information, when given the opportunity I spend days, weeks, months and sometimes years with groups of people as they are just doing what they do. Yes along the way I am conducting very structured research and I'm learning all sorts of things that are quite valuable but also very importantly people are becoming more and more comfortable with my presence and acting more and more naturally. Again this is valuable but the most valuable times is when a crisis hits because it is in a crisis that people show exactly who they are through their actions, they revert to their instincts and core beliefs. For most of us the past week in this crisis has laid things bare, and in many cases what we have seen has been uncomfortable and difficult to see and it makes it almost impossible for some to remain on the fence as the evidence is clear about where different people, organizations, institutions are firmly positioned.

A lot has occurred but here are just a few of the things that we might have seen. If you are on social media many folks have been surprised at that friend or relative who is on such a different page than you are that you almost don't know what to do with it. We have seen that POC haven't been making it up, that police often use unnecessary violent tactics. Particularly we have seen middle class white people shocked to discover that the white people they decided to move near who also chose not to live near POC are racist. We saw how quickly white allies were able to find angles to make whatever happened that day to be about them and suddenly become the victims. We saw that everyone now has the language and the access to memes to declare themselves aligned with the movement and to declare themselves anti racist. We saw that at this point every non-profit and for profit has access to the same language but in their cases at this point it is almost required to take a stance for them to continue receiving support and resources, so many of them make these statements only hoping to capitalize despite over the years never having implemented anything that aligns with these values. We have seen people actually being quite generous calling out many of these groups for their performative alignment while not actually calling them out for actually profiteering, getting more than they already shouldn't have, by aligning. As POC as things get laid bare we have the pain we have had our whole lives of discovering more people in our lives that are racist or unconcerned with our suffering. We have also seen people share their ignorance, hear peoples thoughts and begin a path towards becoming better informed, growth is appreciated. I could go on and on, but I think my point is clear, we have seen the actions of people, organizations and institutions in this crisis and we now know who many of them are if we didn't know before. We see them. While this knowledge and the backlash against continued racist behavior is a good thing it has also sent some back into hiding so we are going to have to pay more attention and stay aware.

I also want to point out that we didn't only see bad things, I know I saw POC that aren't Black showing an incredible amount of generosity by letting Black voices be heard and to lead, I see that it is Pride month and the LGBTQ community has made space, and I want to acknowledge those selfless yet collective acts. I also have seen

some white people listening, stepping back from leading, and importantly taking new actions in their lives.

So what do we do with all of this uncomfortable stuff that we have seen? Yes we need to lay out action plans but I would also suggest that we also first need to accept what we have seen. We need to go through all of the stages of grief about what we learned and the people we learned it about, we need to experience, denial, anger, bargaining, depression and get to Acceptance. It has been said that essentially when I'm out of sorts its because I can't accept someone, some thing, or some situation as being exactly what it is at the moment. Our acceptance can lead to serenity and if we are able to find some sense of serenity in the midst of all of this chaos then we will be centered and able to make the best decisions we are capable of. We need our heads, hearts, and bodies for what has to be done. Acceptance allows us to let go and then move on so that we can get to action.

What's Coming:

To truly have a plan of action, not only do we have to understand what has happened but we have to at least have an idea of what is coming because that is the context in which our actions will take place. The primary context is that this isn't a game. We are trying to destroy white supremacy, oppression and inequality, and for those that benefit from the above they will defend it with their lives. Understand that even as its getting ground into the sidewalk it will continue to fight back, be aware that just like a drowning person those defending their way of life will drag everything down with it to save themselves, and that includes you if you are not careful. Right now a symbol of this is that the president has now created a private army and is living behind a wall separated from those he claims to represent. This isn't like the movies where people hold one march and the whole system falls or where the superhero puts the other guy in some weird hold and boom they are dead. This is more like how they killed George Floyd, it took 8 minutes and 46 seconds of someone choking a man to death. It's like how these 3 racists hunted down and then corralled Ahmaud Arbery with their pick up trucks as he ran for his life, exactly how you hunt for wild game, until they had him cornered, and then they jumped out and murdered him with shotgun blasts before the system did everything it could to prevent anyone from being held accountable. Understand that this is how serious they are and committed they are to killing and with deepening their control so that even without an actual majority of support they will still control through the courts, unjust laws and institutions of oppression. The people leading this are driven by fear and insecurity, they have been used to having everything and can't comprehend the idea of others having anything too, they don't realize there is room at the table of the future for them if they choose to take a different path, so they choose to fight to keep everything. There are those that will do the literal killing and those whose job is to further entrench white supremacy in the country, keep an eye on both and both of their tactics.

Stay aware that those on the fence are essentially quietly fighting to keep things as they are because it works to their advantage as well. Some will shudder at what I

have stated above, find it divisive and personally uncomfortable and I respond by saying that America has an open wound and because we have allowed our country to continue to be segregated, racially, economically, etc, usually only POC see and smell the wound every day, everyone is now subjected to what a festering wound looks, smells and feels like and it is uncomfortable, it will also not be fixed with a band aid or by looking away, it needs to be healed.

The presidents style of leadership is to lead through creating chaos and fear, this is what you do when you don't have a plan. It leads to distractions, a false sense of security for some and contradictions that the average person cant reconcile which is the point, it breeds more chaos, be prepared for more outrageous moments to keep chaos swirling.

Beware of the "Patriots" who just a few weeks ago were storming state capitals to defend personal liberty and freedom from an unjust government, We won't stay home!, Defend liberty! The greatest advocates for "I cant breathe" (through my mask) have fallen silent or worse yet screamed for the violent stomping out of this movement once I cant breathe was uttered by a Black man, what does that tell you? Don't fall for it. Patriots who suddenly forgot that this country was founded in civil unrest because of lack of representation. Accept that they are hypocrites and move on.

Conspiracies will proliferate within the expanding chaos. For most of us because we are scared, because we want answers, because we want our beliefs to be confirmed and we cant find evidence, we look for answers. For some, the conspiracies are also deeper and based in a very deep fear, in a need to belong to something, a desire to have some secret knowledge, a need to overcome a sense of powerlessness by finally being on the inside. Keep in mind you are probably being fed much of the conspiracy information by people from that latter group who have a completely different agenda than you have and that agenda is maintaining the current system. Because of the overall chaos of the situation, information will be confusing, sometimes contradicting and overwhelming, look deep, think about motivations and goals of where you collect info from, avoid confirmation bias, and then grab onto something and make your own decisions based on data not feelings and desires.

Just like with Covid-19, people will go through the long chain of obfuscation and processing, it's a hoax (racism doesn't exist), then the numbers are wrong (more white people are killed by the police than black people), they had pre-existing conditions (they had a record), then it's only killing useless old people (only bad black people are killed by the police), the economy will kill more than the Pandemic (All lives Matter!) and finally when each of the other arguments fails to materialize they will land on Freedom! (just not for Black People).

They will keep moving forward with their agenda while we are looking the other way. They will continue to flood the courts with judges, they will continue to erode

the safety net for our most vulnerable populations and more. We'll see things like false numbers about overall unemployment implying that unemployment is decreasing but even then they won't mention that within their fraudulent numbers black unemployment actually got worse, just like as Covid-19 deaths dropped they continued to not mention the disproportionately high number of Black deaths. So while we watch people celebrate all they are celebrating is more evidence of continued disparities in our country. Congratulations.

They will roll out all the Black folks they can find to support their thinking, a) it's the confirmation they want and b) they get to say, see I listen to black people I must not be racist! Don't fall for people putting quotes of icons like MLK or Malcolm X to justify their beliefs so they can scream look a black person said this! Again, the beauty of social media is that you can check their past receipts, check them, see how concerned they really are, don't be fooled they are working against you, not for you.

You will see many of the people previously mentioned who have seen raising hell, now start talking about unity, they will appeal to your discomfort with conflict, they will say we are actually on the same side, they just want us to unite against an unjust government, they are patriots! They will appeal to your desire to unite and will call you a divider if you don't. These messages will come from those that still want to maintain this oppression. You will be given false equivalencies which do more damage than good, the meme of the guy with a confederate flag shirt shaking hands with a guy with a BLM shirt saying "I got you brother" there is nothing equivalent about a group of treasonous people who fought to maintain slavery and a liberation movement, don't fall for it. They will flood your social media and news outlets with feel good stories of people kneeling together yet behind the scenes refusing to actually dialogue through a participatory process that shares power. They will give those little nuggets of "progress" that guess what, they gave last time, the memes of support, the commissions, the creation of the diversity officer position at the organization, the self loathing, but again, look where we are, right back where we started. You will be dragged back into the false narratives of peace but with no actual action or changing of power. And don't forget the current force beating down the door is what allows the peacemakers to eventually run through the door to make everyone feel better, problem is they didn't have the vision or drive to get there but they will be the ones to commodify the compromises made that will again hold back the movement, so they aren't the answer going forward.

We will see factions within the movement, that is ok, that is healthy! We need to ask the questions of where is the focus on the Black women dying? What about Trans Lives? and more. I understand that it can feel chaotic without a clear single leader but that is ok, it means that there is something organic about what is happening that everything isn't based on the past but is based on the future and has the space for new leaders to emerge to take us forward, we need that. There will be different and sometimes conflicting demands that are issued, that's ok, we will work it out. We will faction a bit and as we connect to our strengths and passions, we will find the part of the story that we connect with the best. All of these differences are valid, all

should be deeply considered, we are not divided we are nuanced and multi-faceted, that is what makes us beautiful.

Action:

We are finally back to Action, and again I want to say that people much smarter than me are putting out some amazing lists of ways what people can do to take direct action right now, I again encourage you to utilize those lists. What I am doing is giving some larger context to consider when you decide on the action steps that will make the most sense for you. I know this can seem hard to believe but this is the moment BEFORE the hard stuff, this is the easier softer way. I again recognize how uncomfortable conflict can feel to some people, but I can assure you there is much more ahead if we don't take advantage of this moment. I was at an organization that was going through the same issues the country is going through now, it was clear that if real changes weren't made it would get worse for everyone, but not everyone chose to act and then found out it gets much worse for all, disproportionately worse for POC and everyone probably wishes they had acted when they had the chance. The organization itself will not nor should it ever be the same, point is much more could have been salvaged if folks had taken the actual easier softer way. As we have all been doing, now is the time to look deep inside and assess what we are truly ready to let go of and what sacrifices we are willing to make not only for racial justice and black lives but now for basic freedoms that are being comprised in an attempt to insure that we don't achieve equity and justice for all. We assess our situation, we explore our level of willingness, we understand the context in which we are operating, we understand our strengths and our power, we receive guidance when needed, then we move forward towards making something beautiful from everything that is broken right now.

Mass appeal, mass action, massive refuse and resist. Even though it will often be met by violence the only peaceful solution left is to show massive numbers that indicate an outright rejection of the current system of oppression and its leadership. Be prepared to march, to protest, to do it for you and yourselves but also to represent people who are unable to be there due to health (Covid-19). Are you prepared to engage in a National Strike, a work stoppage, to indicate the seriousness of the situation. If you have vacation days, how many are you willing to commit to the cause? If you don't have any how much are you willing to be out there? Ask yourself now so you don't regret where we land later.

Increased militarization of communities. Demand that your Governor, Mayors, representatives in general refuse to maintain the National Guard in our communities. Refuse the plan put forth by the President to "Dominate" our communities, this is not the way forward. This is the act of a person who is living in complete fear, and insecurities and driven by ego. This President has spent his whole life including the Vietnam era, sending other people to die for him. He is now asking your family your friends to do the same and for them also to be willing to kill in an effort to protect not the country but to protect him. Do not put anyone in this position. This is also budget season for many municipalities, pay attention to what is

in them and whether those items support or impede the cause, for progress to be achieved it needs to be cooked not just into peoples minds but into the money and how its spent or not spent.

I am a middle aged black man from the Midwest who lives on the east coast, who plays music for fun, works in the social justice field, and is more of an introvert than an extrovert. I can't communicate with everyone, who do you communicate well with? Communicate with those people. If you are X, you are critical, if you are Y and people in that community respect you, you are critical. If you for instance have the respect of active law enforcement, or active military, have the conversations with them about what refusing and resisting unjust orders looks like, what it could mean, and how they might navigate their conflicted feelings. I am sympathetic to all of the situations we face as individuals but believe that collectively we can figure out how to proceed if we want to. As a personal example I have had to resist and refuse superiors in the workplace, directly demand the resignation of boards, all at the risk of career suicide, and now I need to share what I learned with other people in similar positions so that they can learn from my experiences.

Allow for guidance and support. I am blessed to come from a family where my parents have lived a lifetime of sacrifice for the greater good. Despite that, my arrogance and insecurities have often left me speaking rather than listening to guidance and expertise that they have to share. Listening to others that may have gone before us or those with other experiences doesn't minimize our current or potential contributions. We are selling ourselves short when we don't value and integrate all of the available expertise. At the same time its very important that older folks, myself included need to make space for and value the new ideas of younger folks, we need every tool that is available to accomplish our lofty goals.

Support those that might not be in a bubble of agreement. I am privileged enough that I can control much of my personal bubble, I can let in or push out ideas that I agree with. This is the case for many of us as technology allows us to make our worlds smaller even as the world gets bigger. Some of the responses I received from my previous piece as well as just looking on social media reminds me that everyone isn't in a situation where they put up a BLM meme and everyone makes them a hero. I am watching people going it alone, when they put up that same meme, everyone in their life, professionally, socially, family, pile on them to tell them how dumb they are, how brainwashed, how ashamed they are of them, they are being called the exact opposite of hero, there is no immediate award for them there is only pain. I tip my hat to those folks and do what I can to support them, please do the same.

Review the past. I have lived in my home for almost 20 years, plenty long enough to have lived through the probably half dozen major initiatives led by the city, the local non-profits, etc. to address crime, the drug epidemic, violence, poverty, lack of community engagement and on and on. In almost every case before the work even began the communications wing of whoever was doing something made sure a story was written about how great the project that didn't exist yet was. Every single one

of these projects failed miserably for the community but led to promotions, raises, kudos for the implementers. Now when something is launched I go directly to the implementer with all the old receipts and show them and I also share those receipts with others so that no one gets fooled again. Go back to people, organizations, institutions that you are intimately familiar with. Go back through emails, announcements, social media postings, go back to Charlottesville for instance and look and see what was promised in terms of surface as well as structural changes, and then look and see what they did. Bring the receipts when you go and challenge their latest assertions make them accountable before they make their promises that they don't plan on keeping.

#### Hope:

I am only writing all of this because I have hope. In the past week I have seen people react out of character and out of their comfort zone for what they believe is right. I have seen people who were already carrying the heavy load, who have been unwavering finally get some support. I have seen people willing to be quiet, and let other voices rise to the top. I have seen people allow themselves to be in an uncomfortable space and to learn from it. In a neighborhood that was literally burning a week ago I have seen neighbors care and provide for each other. All that I have seen has in turn helped me to act in ways that I am uncomfortable with, to let others lead, to look inside and see what more I can do.

I have hope because as I was writing this I took a quick five minute break and checked Facebook, and immediately saw an old friend who I know is not a fan of conflict calling out some very serious hypocrisy by an acquaintance of his and essentially saying hey "I see you"! He stated that when he became aware of the hypocrisy and was deciding what to do he thought back to information he took in over the last week, and the question of whether he was doing everything he could and he acted out of his comfort zone by speaking up, I applaud him. I have hope because a relative of mine, an elder who I look up to because of his life long commitment through action to a just world, sent me a note this week explaining how he assessed whether he was doing enough and then listed out actions he was going to take and he also sent a receipt for an action taken during the week. I had another young man reach out who is on the other side of the aisle than me and I don't want to tell his story but he took a strong stance and put himself at risk potentially preventing another case of extreme excessive force during an arrest because as he said he had listened and he needed to do the right thing. An action leads to a reaction, lets keep moving together, collectively, and keep inspiring each other and finding hope in each other.

In addition to the R and R of Resist and Reject I also remind you to Rest and Recuperate along the way. I recognize that I am imploring people to find immediacy and to become relentless in their pursuit of change but I also want to recognize that this will not end tomorrow and that we need people engaged as their best selves for the long haul. Again, do not take your foot off the gas pedal but make sure that you are finding some self-care along the way. Last week I found myself not eating,

wearing the same clothes, unable to sleep, not playing music and on and on. Some of that is the trauma of the situation and some of it is something that I just need to manage better. Not long ago I was at a job where these larger societal issues were playing out internally and the more I didn't take care of myself, the less I was myself and the less effective I was at making the change I desired to make, lesson learned. Make sure you get what you need, whatever that is, then get back in the game. This is also the beauty of doing something collectively, which is that if someone goes down for a few, someone else can step in. We can't abuse that as we have in the past as we have expected POC to carry the heavy load every day for all of our freedoms but we can learn to carry our parts. In the end we need all your strengths and we need you at full power to accomplish our vision of a more just and equitable society.

The song I reference at the top has an earlier line which says...

"...one step forward two steps backward..."

We can't continue to take one step forward followed by two steps backward. We can not let up. Always Forward.

Breathe, Center, Assess, Accept, Adjust, Act.

"...Onward, forward, don't step backward  
Step out of Babylon..."

Dr. Bill McKinney  
June 6, 2020