

**Facing our Racial Demons and Healing Them:
An Open Letter to Friends and Colleagues
By Tina Byles Williams, Founder and CEO, Xponance**

“I’m tired of marching for something that should have been mine at birth.”

-Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., 1967

As people of good conscience raise their voices in response to the killing of George Floyd and a justice system whose impartiality too often excludes black and brown peoples, Dr. King’s words 60 years ago should haunt us all. I am sickened by the senselessness of Mr. Floyd’s death, stand with the peaceful protestors’ expression of justifiable outrage while condemning the few who have used them to wage destruction in our communities. I pray that as the national gaze turns to protecting property and treasure, we redouble our energy, imagination and resources towards addressing the ugly discrimination that Dr. King bemoaned sixty years ago and continues today.

I write this letter aware that I am among the fortunate; grateful for the opportunities to succeed; but saddened by our country’s pernicious degradation of so many that look like me. As a black female charged with stewarding the professional aspirations of many diverse professionals and a mother and grandmother of black men/boys, I am equally aware that the injustice faced by George Floyd could just as easily be faced by my own family, friends and colleagues. As a citizen aspiring to a more just nation, I therefore humbly submit the following:

1. While protests shine a necessary spotlight on injustice, in a democracy, systemic change primarily comes through public officials enacting more just laws and budgets, prosecutors and judges judging impartially, and school districts nurturing each child, irrespective of their pigmentation. Therefore, while the activism of people of all races is a hopeful sign of civic engagement, it must be transformed into action at the ballot box.
2. Whatever our parental socialization may have been, “otherizing” each other or reductively evaluating individual endowments to fit our pre-conceived notions about race or gender must stop now. In [Sister Outsider](#), the poet Audre Lorde described the dysfunctional state of America’s race relations:

“We have all been programmed to respond to the human differences between us with fear and loathing and to handle that difference in one of three ways: ignore it, and if that is not possible, copy it if we think it is dominant, or destroy it if we think it is subordinate. But we have no patterns for relating across our human differences as equals. As a result, those differences have been misnamed and misused in the service of separation and confusion.”

Despite attempts at increasing diversity, data on our industry's inclusiveness remain disheartening and inconsistent with research suggesting diversity's role in improving performance. On a personal note, my Ivy league education and over 30 years of investment experience, have not shielded me from either overt discriminate or belittling micro-aggressions engendered by my gender and skin color. Our efforts toward greater inclusiveness must also re-examine the biases underlying whom we consider industry subject-matter authorities. Black women can speak to more than gender and race, Latinos are not confined to issues of immigration and men can be permitted to speak about family and childcare issues. Moreover, our industry's outreach must engage George Floyd's children in addition to the children of the privileged few within the diverse community.

3. Healing will require all parties to drop their go-to defenses and preconceptions in order to hear each other's truth. To our white brothers and sisters, please understand that racial minorities experience America very differently and more tenuously. Shoulder shrugs and eye-rolls in response to such assertions, particularly in light of recent events, shut down any hope of honest relationship or reconciliation. One reason our nation is unhealed from its history of racial oppression is because we have resisted the basic acknowledgements that would lead us toward restoration. Our failure to name racism doesn't just keep us from addressing bigotry; it actually strengthens its hold on us. Racism is a yeast whose bread is denial. It lurks and enlarges itself by hiding in silence and darkness capable of taking root inside the human heart, whether we overtly choose it or not. Acknowledgement and confession names this demon and forces it from hiding behind false cultural narratives. Acknowledgement and confession also create space for genuine reconciliation. After all, it was South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission which helped that country to avoid an escalating cycle of retribution and retaliation after the brutal system of apartheid ended.
4. We must personally undertake the responsibility to educate ourselves on racial (and gender) injustices and support groups that advance social justice. We are tired of explaining racism to America. Historically, "it is the members of oppressed, objectified groups who (are) expected to stretch out and bridge the gap between the actualities of our lives and the consciousness of our oppressor....(it) is a constant drain of energy which might be better used in redefining ourselves and devising realistic scenarios for altering the present and constructing the future", (Audre Lorde, [Sister Outsider](#)). This [hyperlink site](#) provides useful resources and organizations who've been fighting the good fight at the local and national levels for years. The good news is that both the scope and contours of the problem, as well as advocacy groups to address it, are abundant. I am hoping that the brutal murders of [George Floyd](#), [Ahmaud Arbery](#) and [Breonna Taylor](#), as well as the racialized muscle memory that led Amy Cooper to instinctively and falsely accuse Christian Cooper of attacking her in Central Park, motivate us to move expeditiously from discovery and discussion to constructive solutions.

If we invest in understanding how our American experience has shaped us differently, elect and hold our leaders accountable for achieving a more perfect union, engage in honest conversations about our biased preconceptions, while honoring our common humanity, our future is ripe, and can be outrageously rich in its possibilities. The alternative is what we are witnessing today.