Friends, Silence Makes Us Complicit

In May 2020, George Floyd was killed while in police custody. And while this senseless, callous act was committed between a police officer against a human being, to my great horror, another equally ugly and grievous act was being committed — an Asian police officer stood by and did nothing to stop George Floyd's death. In response to this act, my cousin rightly pointed out that "it is not ok to stand silently by in quiet solidarity. Friends, silence makes us complicit." Boy, oh boy, did that last statement hit me like a ton of bricks! It made me realize that for far too long, I had been silent. But as an Asian American, where do I start finding my voice as an ally? How should I start leaning into anti-racism?

Acknowledgement

First, I had to acknowledge and confess some truths about myself. As I reflected on my experience concerning racism, I discovered that I am sometimes both victim and offender. As an Asian American, I experienced my fair share of racism — sometimes subtle, sometimes overt — but nothing like the recent aggressive attacks on elderly Asians across the country (a topic for another blog post!). However, the expectation to fit into the "model minority" role also enabled me to assimilate and be a recipient of privilege. This dichotomy made me feel uneasy and regretful, and perhaps it now continues to serve as the driving force for learning how to speak up against racial injustice.

Awareness

Realizing that I do not know enough about the Black American experience, I started reading books and watching videos so that I could gain an awareness of racism in America, but also how I could celebrate diversity and promote reconciliation. Here are a few of the resources that have made a big impact on how I am becoming more aware of racism in America:

How to Be an Antiracist, book by Ibram X. Kendi

I Am Not Your Negro, documentary by Raoul Peck

Just Mercy, movie directed by Destin Daniel Cretton, book written by Bryan Stevenson

Multiethnic Conversations, book by Mark DeMaz and Oneya Fennel Okuwobi

Roadmap to Reconciliation, book by Brenda Salter McNeil

Selma, movie directed by Ava DuVernay, book written by Paul Webb

Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You, book by Jason Reynolds

Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria, book by Beverly Daniel Tatum

Action

One of the vignettes described in Roadmap to Reconciliation was about a white woman who visited a museum documenting brutal and horrific lynchings. Her response to this experience resonated with me. She said, "I don't know what to do with what I just saw. I can't fix your pain, and I can't take it away, but I can *see* it. And I will work the rest of my life to fight for you and for your children so they won't experience it."

Like this woman, I too, feel the pain of what has happened in the past, including present day racial injustices. I want to contribute to and promote a more anti-racist society. My first step of action was to seek accountability in my personal journey to keep learning about racism in America, so I joined a discussion group. We have been meeting each week to share what we have been learning. At first, we reported different sources

of information but eventually the format of our meetings morphed into a book club where we all read and discussed the same book. Our last project together was to organize a community viewing and panel discussion of "'54," a documentary about Sunnyhills, the first planned integrated community in America. On a professional level, I helped organize parent workshops and found presenters to speak about how to raise anti-racist kids.

Change

These are just small steps in the larger anti-racism movement, but I am no longer silent.

Friends, what books or resources would you recommend as we continue leaning into anti-racism? What actions would you suggest so we can stand in solidarity against racial injustice?

My very best,

Jaime