

Justice, Justice, you shall pursue!

The call is sung, the shofar blows, the chant is chanted, but do we listen? Love your neighbor as yourself, we hear time and time again. But do we love all of our neighbors equally, regardless of the color of their skin? Do we pursue justice with all our hearts, with all our soul, for all peoples, black, white, and brown? Do we listen to these calls, do we allow them to disturb us and to empower us? Do we see society for what it is, what it was, or what we can make it? Do we see people for their skin or for their spirit?

Why is it that we see black and white; why is it that we see poor and rich? Why is it that we see one side of a city and another? Why do we set barriers, whether we mean to or not? According to the Joint Economic Committee, The average black household income is \$29,000 less than the average white household income, and the black unemployment rate is twice as high as the white unemployment rate, while Native Americans have the highest unemployment rate in America as well as, along with blacks, the highest rates of many diseases, including diabetes. But it is not only about statistics, the racial injustices of our society are also based largely off of history as well and the views held by many Americans.

White superiority has been deeply rooted in America especially here in the south. When Europeans arrived, they sought to exterminate the existing Native American tribes by war, exploitation of natural resources, and by the arrival of European diseases. Before the importation of the black man, natives would be kidnapped into slavery, only to die of famine and disease. Then in later years, tribes saw broken treaties and forced assimilation into white culture. In the Massacre of

Wounded Knee in 1890, U.S. troops rounded up and killed 150 Sioux men, women, and children on Pine Ridge reservation, which today has one of the highest poverty rates in the country. In South Carolina, where a raging smallpox epidemic killed many natives, only one federally recognized tribe remains, the Catawba. Starting in the mid nineteenth century and ending in the mid twentieth century, Indian boarding schools were designed to assimilate native children into white culture. They were not allowed to speak their languages, could rarely afford to see their families, and often experienced abuse by teachers. Native American tribes in the nineteenth and twentieth century's demands for the government were spoken by the Indian Agent, who was usually a wealthy man of a cattle or railroad business trying to take over reservation land. It was thought that no Indian could be as responsible as a white man with no evidence other than a racist belief.

But the black man was considered perhaps even more inferior. Slave boats would import slaves from Africa to the U.S. in tight cramped conditions. Your wealth could be determined by number of slaves you owned and slavery was preached in churches. The black man was considered a creature bred for work and stripped of any capacity to learn. The work done by slaves earned massive revenue for southern states, including here in South Carolina. The confederate states were willing to go to war to continue the income that slaves provided them, yet they treated that same man like an abused animal as inferior as one may possibly be in society.

Over the many years following the civil war and up until now, racism continued in many forms, some of which are still continued today. There was violence. The ku klux klan and now modern day neo nazis perform racist acts in public and violent hate

crimes toward African Americans. In 2015, Dillon Roof opened fire at Emanuel AME Church, killing nine worshippers in a holy space, including Reverend Clementa Pinckney. What dark cloud of hate enveloped the space of his mind to cause him to do such evil? Black men are treated unfairly and wrongly accused by police as we have now seen time and time again. Here in Charleston, SC, Walter Scott, an unarmed black man, was pulled over by police for an automobile issue and shot eight times. Just this year, George Floyd was pulled over by cops and killed by suffocation for being a black man in a black tank top in the vicinity of a shoplifting incident. The officer struck his knee over George Floyd's neck for nine minutes. What were his motives as he perpetrated an act so evil, so in humane, so unlawful? What were his thoughts as Mr. Floyd screamed I can't breathe? What would you have done if you were a witness?

What can we do? What can we do to fulfill the demands of Judaism or of our society? How will we make justice pursue? The Charleston Area Justice Ministry reaches across barriers to help the members of our community. We target issues such as affordable housing, racial bias by police, and public transportation that often have racist effects on our society. Vote. Lives have been lost for black voting registration and still voter suppression is an issue in predominantly black areas. In South Carolina congressional districts have been divided for the simple purpose of limiting the impact of the black vote. You have a right to vote and can help register others to vote. Your voice and your acts are powerful. When you see injustice, speak out. Love your neighbor as yourself and justice, justice shall be pursued.