

An Open Letter to the Photographic Community

STATEMENT OF OUTRAGE



Screen grab from video captured on evening of May 25, 2020, by onlooker Darnella Frazier via CBS News

Since we are an organization that represents visual artists, it was important that we use visuals to help tell the story in our statement. We in no way use the above photos to be disrespectful to the family and memory of Mr. George Floyd. To the contrary I personally thought it was very important to show them to convey the weight of what sheer hate does to a people. The photos above of Mr. Floyd's death show the white police officer's knee in his neck which had been there for nearly 9 minutes. This is what eventually killed him as he begged for his life but was not obliged. The photos also show the officer's hands in his pockets as he kneeled on Mr. Floyd's neck which communicates his comfort and ease of mind in killing him. It was a 'Walk in the Park', it was an 'Easy Going Day', it was 'Just Another Day at the Office'.

As an organization that works for photographers and creatives of color to open doors of opportunity, helps them to become full time business owners and fights for equality in an already disadvantaged photography industry **'WE. ARE. OUTRAGED.'**

This is not the act of just a few racist or bad cops. This is the direct result of an American nation that has sustained a **culture** of systemic, institutional racism against black people for generations. The fact that the police officer was comfortable killing Mr. Floyd 'on camera' is proof of that.

There has been a proverbial knee in the necks of black people throughout the history of this country in every walk of life and we are tired of it. The death of George Floyd at the hands of American authority has marked a turning point in our approach to equality in an emotional, passionate and visceral way. We are only interested in working with organizations, leaders and companies who are authentic in wanting to see great change in this country, its institutions 'and also' within our own creative industry.

Authenticity is seen not only in '**OUT LOUD**' statements of disgust of racism 'and' support of people of color but also in an entity's **history of past work, significant budgets set, outlines of anti-racism campaigns/actions and pursuit of its own infrastructure reform.**

FOR DECENT WHITE RUN COMPANIES, ORGANIZATIONS, BUSINESSES, MUNICIPALITIES who know that words just aren't enough: This means seeing...

- ***More diverse leadership in major staff positions in the areas of Corporate Governance; Workforce Recruitment and Retention; Procurement and Entrepreneurship, Scholarships for Low-Income Consumers; and Philanthropy and Community Investment.***
- ***Moving toward 50/50 people of color on boards of directors.***
- ***Bringing in long term and full time cultural training.***
- ***Tearing down years old infrastructure and culture to rebuild and make diversity inclusive.***
- ***Having authentic, regular, uncomfortable conversations with your clients or constituents that lead to major change***
- ***Getting behind diverse candidates for public office that encompass the work of diversity.***
- ***Sizable contributions to organizations with a track record of working to eliminate racial divides in this country and the photography industry.***

These are just a few things but are a good start for those 'really' interested in change.

Statements are great, but statements that lack long term significant budget and plans that help stop the systems of racism in this country become '**False Statements**' that carry no weight.

We look forward to doing great work and collaborating with entities that lay a strong foundation for our next generation of creative, diverse leaders.

In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends.

The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.

-Martin Luther King Jr.

We leave you with George Floyd's last words as he was begging for his life

"It's my face man
I didn't do nothing serious man
please
please
please I can't breathe
please man
please somebody
please man
I can't breathe
I can't breathe
Please
(Inaudible)
man can't breathe, my face
just get up
I can't breathe
please (inaudible)
I can't breathe sh*t
I will
I can't move
mama
mama
I can't
my knee
my nuts
I'm through
I'm through
I'm claustrophobic
my stomach hurt
my neck hurts
everything hurts
some water or something
please
please
I can't breathe officer
don't kill me
they gon' kill me man
come on man
I cannot breathe
I cannot breathe
they gon' kill me
they gon' kill me
I can't breathe
I can't breathe
please sir
please
please
please I can't breathe"

Shawn Lee, CEO/President
Multicultural Association of Professional Photographers (MAPP)