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## The Only Pathway Forward: Human Familiarity April 18, 2021

We will soon have the jury's verdict in the trial that seeks to hold Derek Chauvin accountable for the death of George Floyd. Regardless of how the jury decides, the verdict will ripple through America in historic ways.

The verdict will come as our country continues to grapple with violence, disparities, and marginalization aimed at people with skin colors that aren't white. Underlying this is the implicit messaging and socialization—beginning at birth—that by far, white is the preferred skin color, especially by those who hold power.

For decades we've created programs, devoted billions of dollars, and directed massive amounts of energy to remedying America's fixation on skin color. To a large degree, none of that has made a difference.

The reason?

As a country, we have utterly refused to do the incredibly difficult and horribly uncomfortable work of getting to know each other. "Safe" and segregated in our own individual bubbles, we've allowed stereotypes and suspicions to govern how we think of humans who aren't like "us." We've largely come to believe that "they" or "them" seek to take from "us" what we believe was rightly earned or acquired. Even worse, our fear of "Other" has caused many to double down on white nationalism ground in ancestry or religion.

None of this bodes well for America.

In my work as an "inclusionist," I have come to believe with all my heart that the only way for us to solve this country's skin color problem is through sitting in rooms with each other and talking. These convenings would bring together people of all skin colors, ages, and socioeconomic backgrounds to share about what it means to be "you"—your hopes, your fears, and the challenges and successes in your life.

If we do these convenings repeatedly and consistently, the power of human familiarity will gradually take hold. Yes, it's absolutely true: as we become familiar with "Other," our fears and prejudices fade away. Over time, we just simply become "us."

By pure coincidence, as I was preparing this blog piece, John Blake of CNN also wrote about the necessity of us talking to each other, something he calls "radical integration." (Click [here](#) to access John's article.)

Perhaps you think this is pie-in-the-sky? As a transgender woman whose voice doesn't match her appearance, I can personally attest to how human familiarity erodes fear and stereotypes. I'm convinced that human familiarity is the only pathway forward.

Unfortunately, other than small pockets, no one—no nonprofit, or government agency, or even any church—is doing this work. It requires brave, nonpartisan leadership and must be done immediately on a massive national scale. Without this work—without tackling the question of why white is considered “safe” compared to all other skin colors—we will fail.

Let me repeat: we can spend billions of dollars to fund hundreds of projects or initiatives to eliminate racial disparities, but without the basic tough work of breaking down our fear of “Other”/of addressing head-on the preference for white skin, we will fail.

Will you join me in calling upon our leaders to immediately launch a national program aimed at us talking to each other?

It's imperative that we collectively advocate for this. Please, we must do this.

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