

I remember the first time I realized that I am white – it was just a few years ago. There are many parts of my identity – I am Jewish, a daughter, a sister, a mother, a wife, a friend, a colleague. I never would have described myself as white. I didn't need to. Now I know. And as Maya Angelou said, "Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better."

We are here today to do better. To remember the lives of our Black American brothers and sisters throughout our history who were also someone's child, perhaps someone's spouse, someone's parent, someone's colleague. They died before their time simply because they were not white. They died because they were dehumanized and devalued because they were not white.

During the 12 short years of post-Civil War reconstruction, more than 6500 Black Americans were the victims of racial terror lynching. Angered by prospects of racial equality promised by the federal government, terrorist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan intimidated, tortured, and killed Blacks to display and promote white supremacy. The federal government failed to stop these terrorists and the promise of Radical Reconstruction was killed along with over 6500 men, women, and children.

During the following 100 years known as the Jim Crow era, Black economic mobility was seen as a threat to white power and wealth. Blacks were systemically oppressed through a combination of laws, social norms, and mob violence. Continuing the false narrative of Blacks as inferior was instrumental to enforcing the laws and customs of Jim Crow. How else can we explain white lynching parties and picnics to celebrate the murder of people guilty only of being Black? Or the killing of Anthony Crawford who was killed in 1916 because he dared to dispute the low price offered him by a white man for Mr. Crawford's cotton seed? He was killed by a crowd of up to 400 people. His body was dragged through town as an example of what would happen to Blacks who were "insolent" and did not follow the rules of deference to white people. Mr. Crawford was just one of over 5000 victims of racial terror during Jim Crow.

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 was a turning point and the supposed end of Jim Crow. While it was indeed progress, it is also clear that it did not mark the absolute shift to justice for Black Americans. And today, we see attacks on those very voting rights in current legislation. We see the other vestiges of racial terror and perceiving Black lives as "less than" in disproportionate police violence against Black Americans and white civilians fostering white supremacy through acts of vigilantism, church bombings, redlining, the school to prison pipeline, and countless other acts of discrimination and bias.

We now know better and must do better.

"The dead cannot cry out for justice. It is a duty of the living to do so for them." Lois McMaster Bujold

As part of our tradition, we recognize the importance of remembering the dead. They say people die twice – once when their last breath leaves their body and again when their name or memory is evoked for the last time. Today we remember and honor the thousands of Black Americans who were victims of racial violence and died unjustly. Like Eric Garner, who had just broken up a fight. Trayvon Martin who was walking in a gated community on his way home from purchasing a bag of Skittles. Tamir Rice who was playing in a park, Myra Thompson who was in church, Tanisha Anderson who was experiencing a mental health crisis, Ahmaud Arbery who was jogging, Breonna Taylor who was asleep in her bed. And of course, George Floyd who was murdered in public while being detained for allegedly passing a counterfeit \$20 bill. We also remember those whose killings did not make headlines but who died equally unjustly and senselessly.