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Virtue-Signaling Isn't Courage

By Matt A. Mayer

It is completely understandable for African Americans to be outraged at yet another death of a black man by overly aggressive police officers. That outrage, when channeled into legitimate protests and marches, could become a force for good. Ultimately, protests and marches, like those in the 1960s led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., could increase the awareness among non-African Americans of the constant sense of trepidation and fear felt by African Americans. This could help spur the urgent reforms needed to push America towards that 'more perfect Union'.

Unfortunately, it appears there were as many violent riots as peaceful protests in city after city. Most Americans have seen images of buildings burning, looting at stores, and beatings of Americans trying to protect their businesses and communities.

Roughly a dozen people have been killed during the riots, including a [retired African American police officer](#) guarding his friend's pawn shop. How will those deaths fix America?

More troubling, the image of the storeowner being savagely beaten and left lying awkwardly strewn on the ground with blood around him in Dallas is now just as searing as the image of Floyd begging for air under the knee of Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin. A Black Lives Matter video shows an alleged employee telling a clearly frightened woman she needed to kneel before him and apologize for her 'white privilege'. Kneeling in solidarity with others is one thing, but such demanding such actions from random people is simply un-American.

Within hours of Floyd's death, cowardly Democratic politicians who were failing to protect the public tried to blame Donald Trump, out-of-town white supremacist, and (eye-roll) Russians for the violence. Some of those politicians walked back their comments as news organizations analyzed arrest records that clearly showed the perpetrators were largely residents of Minnesota, with the left-wing group, antifa, playing its predictable role in agitating for violence. Ironically, Trump served as an almost moderating voice: he acknowledged the travesty of what happened to Floyd and the right of people to protest, but also called for an end to the rioting.

It was hard to find instances of true courage over the past week. Instead, we witnessed a further degradation of our language in which courage has been defined downward.

For example, in a LinkedIn post by Mike Roman, the Chairman

and CEO of Minneapolis-based 3M, wrote:

'Like all 3Mers, I am heartbroken and appalled at the senseless death of George Floyd earlier this week, and I offer my condolences to his family and friends, the entire Twin Cities community, and especially the African American community. We are looking to our leaders for swift and thorough justice. Watching the video of the incident was both dispiriting and infuriating, and is made even more real knowing it occurred in the community that has been 3M's home for decades. This tragedy has taken the life of one of our neighbors and is another sobering reminder that this is a daily reality for many in our communities. We have so much more to do to build a safe America for all people.'

'Our community is grieving and angry, and we join in condemning police brutality and demanding better. We also fully support the peaceful expression of political and other personal opinions, including by our employees if they choose to do so.'

'The solution is bigger than any single law or the efforts of any single organization, yet businesses have a responsibility to help lead. 3M is proud of our long record of supporting our communities, but this is a sobering reminder that there is so much more to do. As CEO I commit that we will do even more going forward. We will invest more time and energy into lifting up all people. And we will continue to step up our commitment to our values, and strive to create a more inclusive, diverse and empathetic culture – both inside and outside 3M.'

This represented Roman's full statement. Comment after comment posted by his followers applauded Roman's statement and thanked him for his 'courage' in issuing the statement. Courage for stating the obvious? Roman said what everyone who watched the video would say except white supremacists. His statement was little more than the virtue-signaling we've heard too often in the past few years.

Noticeably absent from Roman's statement or any statement thereafter as the weekend unfolded was any condemnation of the rioters and the violence that ravaged the city just a stone's throw from 3M's headquarters. Roman would have showed true courage had he included such a condemnation in his statement or at any time thereafter. It is highly likely 3M employees who live in the area of the riots were impacted far more by the rioting than Floyd's death.

What will Roman and 3M do for African American

Minneapolis firefighter Korboi Balla who watched his life's savings go up in flames as rioters torched his sports bar Scores? Or the residents of the low-income housing development that was burned to the ground? Or the Dallas small business owner who clings to life in the hospital? NFL commissioner Roger Goodell issued a [similarly feckless statement](#) that failed to condemn the rioting and violence. After New Orleans Saints quarterback Drew Brees made a fairly even-handed statement why he would never disrespect the American flag or National Anthem, he was soon pressured to issue an [apology](#) and reassure the world he wasn't a racist.

Even worse, it took Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden two days to issue a second statement condemning the violence. He didn't lose any time on Friday attacking Trump in his first statement on the events in Minneapolis. Meanwhile, Biden staffers and America's entertainment elite raised funds to cover the bail of those arrested rioting. Biden and the Democrats spent more time attacking Trump hoping to gain an electoral advantage than speaking out against the rioting and violence. They would do well to remember who won the 1968 presidential election after rioting. For those with short memories, it was Republican Richard Nixon in a landslide.

This episode is reminiscent of the NBA's cowardice when dealing with China over a Houston Rockets executive's pro-Hong Kong tweet back in October. Ironically, that tweet was in support of peaceful pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong against the massively repressive communist Chinese government. Even LeBron James decided his pocketbook was more important than backing the protesters in Hong Kong. Not surprisingly, James found his 'courage' to comment on Floyd's death and blame Trump. When James wore an 'I can't breathe' shirt in protest of Eric Garner's death at the hands of police six years ago, he didn't blame Barack Obama.

Courage is not doing what is easy or following the crowd. It certainly isn't issuing a cookie-cutter statement from the comfy confines of an executive C-Suite office or a multi-million-dollar mansion tucked quietly far away from where the rioting is occurring.

Lest we forget what courage really is, just look at the video of the handful of protesters in Louisville protecting a police officer who got separated from his squad from a mob of rioters. Or the unknown Chinese citizen who stood in front of the tanks in Tiananmen Square this week in 1989 before the mass killing of protesters by the Chinese military began. Or Dr King putting his life on the line march-after-march in a hostile and violent Democrat-led American South in the 1960s.

Our words must mean something, as too often these days our words are corrupted, watered-down, or misappropriated. Courage is doing or saying what is unpopular or putting your life on the line because it is the right thing to do. In times like this, America needs more courage, not platitudinal politically correct milquetoast.

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