

We have all seen the film of the death of George Floyd, and witnessed the still unfolding aftermath. All of us are shaken, not by the protests, but by the need for public protests to drive home the fact that much of the “progress” we congratulate ourselves on achieving is illusory, and that racism in our institutions is still a very real and pervasive part of American life.

We are arbitrators, and as arbitrators, we pride ourselves on approaching every situation on its merits, without any taint of preconception or generalization. No one can fully shed their life experiences, but we can and do approach each case with an open mind to the facts and arguments. Some of our members may well be called upon to sit in judgment of these four officers, and I know that they will undertake the task professionally, and without prejudgment.

We are also citizens, and as citizens, we have a right and an obligation to call out injustice when we see it. That obligation does not end when the protests die down, and the news coverage drifts away. An active and vocal citizenry is the only check against government overreach and government inaction. We are well educated and, in many ways, privileged. We should remember that the health of our democracy and justice in our society is not someone else’s job.

Finally, we are a professional organization. I am proud of the Academy, of the work that we do, and of the people I call friends and colleagues. Yet we have struggled for many years to achieve even a modicum of diversity in our ranks. We have many explanations, and some of them are plausible, but the fact remains that the vast majority of our membership is male (80% plus) and white (90% plus). We do not reflect the workplaces we serve. We have initiatives underway seeking to address that – outreach and mentoring, more realistic membership standards, the RCI project. But we have always had initiatives. Success is measured by succeeding, and so far we have not. I have no answer other than to keep working at it, which is feeble but honest.

Be active, but stay safe, and please remember to hold us to our noble words.

Dan Nielsen
President
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