**People keep saying “It’s horrible that innocent black men and women were killed, but destroying property has to stop.”**

**What we should be saying “It’s horrible that property is being destroyed, but killing innocent black men and women has to stop.”**

**We are prioritizing the wrong part!**

For the last 60 years, those working in the cause of Community Economic Development have struggled against the institutionalized racism and economic subjugation that are part and parcel of this country, even now in the 21st century. We at CCEDA are angry and saddened that there seems no end to the physical violence inflected upon our brothers and sisters in the name of law and order. And we are frustrated with the talk of solutions and the lack of actual change while we are told that change will come.

The violence borne upon George Floyd is the continuing manifestation of a society that values property over people, and confuses order with peace. A society that allows a dysfunctional and inadequate health care system to sacrifice greater numbers of black, brown and Asian citizens in our communities, by percentage, to die from the coronavirus. Communities that are ravaged by unemployment and small business closures and ignored by assistance programs that were designed to benefit real estate developers, financial institutions and corporations. All of this while the economic recovery over the past 12 years has not restored the family wealth nor homes lost in the Great Recession, further exacerbating an income inequality that threatens the very soul of our country. Yes, our communities have achieved much politically but we have gained little economically. Real power and real change are in the economics.

CCEDA was borne of the community economic development (CED) movement over 30 years ago by Black, Latino, Asian, Native American and White leaders and founders of community development corporations and our financial institution supporters. And while the instruments of power and capital have been overwhelmingly white led, the CDCs of America reflect the diversity of America. These non profit organizations have always reflected the faces of the communities they sought to change for the better. CDCs are today as they were 60 years ago, instruments of racial equity and economic justice as they have built desperately needed affordable housing, created local and well-paying jobs, built charter schools, health centers and child care facilities. But we are a tiny piece of an industry that continues to give communities of color a handout rather than a hand up, applying band aids on the symptoms of a systemic tragedy. And without economic advancement and equity, why are we surprised that during this racially unequal pandemic, in the face of massive unemployment among the young diverse populations and swimming in a political cauldron of division and injustice, that another black death under blue knees lit a match on racial dynamite.

They should stop telling our communities that they should sit and talk. No! They all need to stand up and ACT. California elected officials and our government need to overhaul a property tax system that incredibly benefits corporate and monied real estate developers, and invest those dollars in education and vocational training. Corporations and financial institutions need to invest in all forms of community reinvestment not just those that are good marketing tools. Philanthropy must make real and long-term investments in local engines of change that are community controlled, not foundation controlled. And mayors and city governments across the state need to work with their police to ensure that death is not an acceptable outcome to a conflict that is not life threatening.

To our CCEDA members, we recommit ourselves to your future. To our supporters, we ask whether you are committed to real change, and if you are, reach out to the CDC, Community Action Agency or other community development non-profit in your area; look for real diversity in the agencies you support; find that black, brown or Asian leader; and support them and their organization in the hard work; have the uncomfortable conversation; invest in the riskier solution and seek real long lasting impact. Many of you have given, invested and supported safely for decades. Has it worked?

Participating in the protests with my children this week, I was humiliated when they asked me how could this happen and why things haven’t changed? And why, as children of color, must they fear the police. As fathers and mothers, as professionals and changemakers, as Black or Brown or White or Asian, the things we have done and invested in have not sufficiently worked and not changed communities on a meaningful level. We know what the real solutions are. We must look beyond our own self interest and false obstacles and make the change we talk about real. Today.

Roberto E. Barragan

Executive Director

A person wearing a suit and tie smiling at the camera

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