In the midst of the corona virus pandemic the United States is experiencing tremendous instability as all of our institutions are stressed in response to the crisis. A lot of things are undergoing rapid change in response to corona, but our racial cleavages are not changing. They're simply being more deeply exposed. And in these last couple of weeks we've now had news of the white vigilante killing of Ahmad Arbery in Georgia, and white police killings of Breonna Taylor in Louisville and George Floyd in Minneapolis. In Georgia the prosecutors were sitting on Arbery's case, until the video of it was leaked. Then the state bureau of investigation took it over and indicted the perpetrators. Taylor's case is now under FBI investigation. And the cop who was on video pinning his knee on Mr. Floyd's neck has been arrested, but a full four days after his execution was captured on video and put out. And the three officers who were accomplices to the crime have yet to be arrested.

In the past we have seen initial optimism of investigations and indictments dissipate as cases made their way through the system. In the murders of Eric Garner, Freddie Gray and Philando Castile perpetrating officers got off as the federal Department of Justice failed to press charges (Garner), or trial juries failed to convict (Gray, Castile).

Here is a short list of things that law enforcement agencies across this country can implement.

- New standards for the use of force involving de-escalation techniques
- Emphasis on “meaningful community engagement” including community policing and “greater civilian oversight of police departments
- Zero tolerance for the abuse of police power including rigorous investigation of alleged abuses and vigorous prosecution when warranted
- Police forces that reflect the diversity of the communities they work in. This starts with the leadership of departments and includes rigorous training in areas such as cultural sensitivity and implicit bias.

Can we change the callous way that our criminal (in)justice system treats Black bodies? That's what many of us are literally “dying” to know.

Vernon D. Johnson
Director, Ralph Munro Institute for Civic Education