

Reflections on Charlottesville

The events in Charlottesville, Virginia, this past weekend were a stark reminder of the chasm between our nation's founding ideals and present-day reality for so many Americans. Safety and happiness are out of reach for an unacceptable number of people in our communities, and sadly, there are extremists who want to keep it that way.

At the Y, we resolve to be light in this darkness. We stand strongly in opposition to the hate, racism and white supremacist ideology that fueled the violence in Charlottesville. We stand against hate and violence anywhere, in any form. We stand for all. We stand for caring, honesty, respect and responsibility—values that can lead the way to a brighter tomorrow for our nation and for all who do and all who wish to call it home.

To be clear, this is not about politics. Hate and racism know no boundaries, political or otherwise. This is about right and wrong. Those of us who work toward love, inclusion and equity—no matter where we come from or what party we support—will be on the right side of history. And we must work tirelessly, to assure our story is the one told years from now about this point in time.

I believe deeply in the power of the Y's mission and cause, and in our collective capacity to move the country forward by giving voice to the marginalized and underserved and promoting community cohesion. As an organization and as individuals privileged to play this vital role, we have an obligation to be purposely and fully inclusive, across all dimensions of diversity. Many of us have made a point to reach out to those with different viewpoints as a means of finding common ground. We need to stay on this path. We should never accommodate or legitimize hate, but we should continue to build bridges with reasonable people who challenge us to consider other perspectives. Unity requires all of us—For a better us.

It has taken me a few days to process the horrific images and videos I saw from Charlottesville, and frankly, I'm still not sure I fully understand how and why this is happening in our country in 2017. But I do know that I am choosing optimism over despair, purpose over inaction, love over hate. I invite you to join me.

Sincerely,

Kevin Washington
President and CEO
YMCA of the USA