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Mental Health Matters: A Monthly Blog from the Director

We See You: In Our Darkest Hour

Lately there seems to be so much darkness surrounding us. We see black men like George Floyd and Ahmaud Arbery violently murdered, caught on camera for all to see and witness. We see a world that has become more and more partisan, with heels dug in and an unwillingness to see or hear the other side. We see systemic racism and the harm it is doing to the black community. As we take in the news of recent events, American novelist and poet James Baldwin's poem, *The Darkest Hour*, has been resonating with me:

THE DARKEST HOUR
IS JUST BEFORE THE DAWN,
AND THAT, I SEE,
WHICH DOES NOT GUARANTEE
POWER TO DRAW THE NEXT BREATH,
NOR ABOLISH THE SUSPICION
THAT THE BRIGHTEST HOUR
WE WILL EVER SEE
OCCURS JUST BEFORE WE CEASE
TO BE.

- JAMES BALDWIN -

LIBQUOTES.COM

When Baldwin writes about the darkest hour, he notes that “4 a.m. can be a devastating hour.” His essays on this topic are not necessarily about an hour on the clock, but more about the concept of time and how we hover between the past and the future, between what was and what will be, between our failures and our triumphs.

Lately it has felt like the darkest hour in America, with systemic racism continuing to take its toll on our black friends and neighbors. Along with this, we have a pandemic that is claiming a higher percentage of deaths among the black community, further illustrating the health disparities that continue to exist. From a mental health standpoint, this is creating increased mental health concerns in the black community. According to Columbia University’s Department of Psychiatry, “The increased incidence of psychological difficulties in the Black community is related to the lack of access to appropriate and culturally responsive mental health care, prejudice and racism inherent in the daily environment of Black individuals, and historical trauma enacted on the Black community.”

We know that repeated views of violence against those in the black community take a toll on mental health and wellness. But what can we do in this darkest hour? Are we going to wake up and fight for criminal justice reform? Are we going to meet a new day with a commitment to combat systemic racism? Are we going to enter into this period of time and stand with our black brothers and sisters in solidarity?

Baldwin believed in the power of love and how having faith in human connection was inherent in all of us. “I think all of our voyages drive us there; for I have always felt that a human being could only be saved by another human being. I am aware that we do not save each other very often. But I am also aware that we save each other some of the time.”

Baldwin also said, “Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.” I hope we won’t waste this moment in time. Let’s take this “darkest hour” and make it a moment we come together to fight against injustice, inequality and inhumanity. Let’s work together to create a country where justice is given equally to all, where mental health access and resources exist for all...an America where the trauma ends and the healing begins.

At MHA, we see you. We see all of you who are struggling to find hope and solace in the idea of a better future. We join with our community in denouncing the racism and violence that disproportionately impacts communities of color. MHA will continue to advocate and fight for improved mental health systems and an end to systemic racism and the policies and attitudes that result from it.

Below are links to organizations supporting criminal justice reforms, as well as mental health resources, articles.

[The Sentencing Project](#)

[ACLU](#)

**“Not everything that is faced can be changed,
but nothing can be changed until it is faced.”
James Baldwin**



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Mental Health America of Central Carolinas is dedicated to providing help, offering hope and promoting mental wellness through advocacy, education and prevention in Mecklenburg and Cabarrus Counties.



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