

“Addressing the Most Painful Discrimination”

by

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No question about it, racial discrimination is a very pernicious form of discrimination. However, if there is one thing that we have come to recognize, it is that humans will discriminate: Despite the existence of laws against discrimination, in spite of social pressures to not discriminate; and irrespective of the degradation that discrimination causes to our own bottom line.

However, when we really take time to consider the facts, there is one form of discrimination that can be even more pernicious, more painful, than racial discrimination. The reference here is to the way nature discriminates and selectively decides who is to experience the pain and suffering of currently incurable diseases: e.g., sickle-cell anemia; diabetes, and cancer. Only selected ones from among us suffer from these diseases. All we know is that our genetic make-up predisposes us to these diseases and, to our knowledge, scientists have not yet arrived at cures for them.

Laws cannot be passed to prevent them, our friends cannot stop them, and all of our own efforts cannot keep them from immobilizing our efforts to go about our daily business—no matter what that might be. Once nature discriminates and selects one for a disease, one will inevitably feel the pain and suffering that ensues.

All is not lost, however. Scientists all over the world are seeking cures for diseases. As we speak, laboratories everywhere are abuzz with research efforts to find cures to diseases—cures that will wipe away the painful effects of “disease discrimination.”

As Black Americans, we often complain about, and fight, racial discrimination. Occasionally, we spend great sums to litigate discrimination cases just so a few individuals can be compensated for the harm caused by that discrimination. The problem is that, a week, month, or years later, a similar case may have to be fought in the courts to resuscitate justice. Given the latter outcome and what we know about disease discrimination, we might consider altering the way we expend some of our valuable resources.

Let’s consider what would happen if we dedicated enough funds to find a cure for a disease that discriminates particularly against Black Americans? Suppose we found a cure for sickle cell anemia? Once found, a cure for the disease would be everlasting. Not one more Black American would ever have to undergo the pain and suffering of the sickle cell disease. Sickle cell discrimination would have been halted in its tracks.

Now let’s go beyond hypothesizing to operationalizing a plan to make this happen. All we need do is gather our resources, identify researchers who are best suited for finding the cure, extend the resources to them, and let them go about their business. It may take a few years, but sooner than latter, given recent advances in genetic science, we can be assured that a cure will be identified. Disease discrimination in the form of sickle cell anemia can be eliminated.

Why haven't the leading Black American organizations developed a plan for stopping disease discrimination? Do they not have the vision to comprehend the real possibility of halting disease discrimination? Don't they recognize that they can stop the pain of disease discrimination?

We are all humans who should be wise enough to recognize that discrimination is flat out wrong; and no one wants to be on the receiving end of discrimination in any form. The reality is that humans are not perfect and they will discriminate. They always have and, barring a major change in the way the world turns, they always will. However, there is joy and hope in knowing that today's science makes it possible for us to eliminate disease discrimination. We can stop the pain. We can stop the suffering.

If we use our resources to direct science to cure disease discrimination, then we can save lives, we can obliterate the pain, and we can enable those Black Americans who are cured to be in a position to freely fight all other forms of discrimination that they may face. As the late great James Brown said, "They can open up the door, and get it themselves."

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