

This week in America is our mirror.

The events at the Capitol, at the seat of our democracy, happen to Black Americans their entire lives - their houses are raided, their existence is threatened, and their lives are taken. These events are now happening to our nation, and will continue to happen, for exactly the same reasons.

Throughout our history, we have taken these actions against smaller groups of Americans, including Black Americans, Native communities, women and minorities. We have perpetuated these actions or turned the other way because subjugating someone else makes reconciling our own identity and life a little easier. Wednesday's events occurred in our house because the only group left to subjugate was our principles.

Our individual acceptance of racism, discrimination and the diminishing of another's humanity helps us avoid questions like "why was I born?" and "what if I fail?" While these are the very real, existential questions that define our daily actions, and inform our fears of the future, the costs of avoiding them can no longer simply be transferred to our children, our neighbors and those around the world.

We are now clearly and presently facing our reckoning in real time. Our solution, for ourselves and for our future, must be just, in both method and motive. We must make the practice and experience of democracy and the freedom it promised real for everyone.

When I was in college, one of my professors asked: What do you think of President Lincoln? I felt the answer was obvious. He had won the Civil War and signed the Emancipation Proclamation. Yet, many of the students in my Black American History class saw more clearly.

They wanted to know why he waited so long.

Justice demanded that, if Lincoln thought slavery was wrong, then the Emancipation Proclamation should have followed naturally from his convictions. They felt that if we are all created equal, then waiting even one day to bestow this birthright to Black Americans took too long. They were right.

We can act justly in this moment and each future moment. We can act consistently with the principles of our democracy. Our laws can be fair. Our application of them can be consistent with both their spirit and their letter. Our institutions and policy making can engender the trust that we must have in one another to face the future.

If we don't face the questions of "what if I fail?" together, we will certainly fail alone. We must not fail.