



The Revolution is Still NOT Being Televised

By Educator Barnes – June 29, 2020

During my senior year at Purdue University, I decided to join Haraka Writers. It was a spoken word performing arts ensemble of the Black Cultural Center. Khari Bowden, as known as Khari B. or the Discopoet, was and still is the Artist in Residence that led the group. He decided to update Gil Scott-Heron's poem and song, "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised" with modern references for three members of our ensemble to perform at the December show. One of those members was me. The show included the other performing ensembles and was

called Fade to Black. We all went to California to study Black people in film and media. This show was a culmination of our research trip.

To perform a piece well, you have to know the origin. You have to know the meaning and purpose. I listened to the original version, and then I learned the message that Gil Scott-Heron was trying to share. Unfortunately, people mistakenly believe that his words were wrong. They actually believe that now the revolution is being televised after the murder of George Floyd at the hands of the police. I assert that it is not, and it never will be.

Just because our social media feeds and televisions are showing us what is happening, this does not mean the revolution is being televised. Yes, statues of slaveholders and colonizers are coming down. Yes, we have flesh-toned bandages. Yes, there has been protesting world-wide. This is not revolution, nor is it the change that Black people want to see. Holding signs in the street saying "I can't breathe" doesn't mean another Black life won't be snuffed out by police or some self-deputized citizen. Declaring that racism is a public health crisis does not mean my application for a job will not get thrown out based on just my name. Removing the police from schools does not mean that Black students will still not have a disproportionate rate of discipline compared to white students.

If you don't believe me, listen to what Gil Scott-Heron had to say when he was asked if the revolution would be televised in the 90s.

The catchphrase ... what that was all about ... the revolution would not be televised, that was about the fact that the first change that takes place is in your mind. You have to change your mind before you change the way you are living and the way you move. So when we said that the revolution would not be televised, we were saying that like the thing that is going to change people is something that no one will be ever able to capture on film. It will be something that you see and all of the sudden you realize, I am on the wrong page, or I'm on the right page, but I'm on the wrong note, and I've got to get in sync with everyone else to know what is happening in this country.

We need changed mindsets, and we are not going to know if that's true from a television set. It is easy to be on television wearing a Black Lives Matters t-shirt with your fist in the air, but it is much harder to show that Black Lives Matters by pushing back on policies that are discriminatory. It is easy to put out a diversity statement, but it's harder to speak up and demand change when you see racism. It is easy to talk about, but it is so much harder to be

about the real work that must happen if this country is ever going to break free of the grip of white supremacy.

The revolution must take place inside of all of us, and it will show up when each of us is revolutionary in the places we visit and in the aspects of life that we control. This video of me alongside two fellow Harakites is from December 2005. I did not just show up and start advocating for change because it became popular. Writing this piece or reciting a revised poem is not enough. Whether people started anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion work years ago or are just starting today, a revolution should happen because a person with a changed mindset is present. When people in all aspects of our society such as school, police, health care, the government have a revolutionary mindset then, and only then, will the true revolution take place. All of those actions, both big and small, can't be captured by the media. This is why the revolution will not be televised. This work is a work of heart that should emanate into all of the places we go to.

When no one is watching is the most important time to be revolutionary. If a person is on social media protesting and making statements of solidarity with the Black community but is not about the work, that person is just participating in a fake revolution. That's not needed. Thanks for reading. Now get offline and go be revolutionary!