

**Mayor Lovely A. Warren - Transcript**  
**Rebuilding and Recreating Speech**  
**Delivered on June 5, 2020**

A beautiful soul lost his life. He couldn't breathe after 8 minutes and 46 seconds at the hand of someone who was sworn to protect and serve! Some protested in silence. Some expressed outrage through words written. Some rioted and destroyed property in anger and disgust, and some developed pathways for change.

Here we are now, wondering what comes next. Any discussion of a path forward must first begin with us as a city, county, state, and nation accepting the undeniable truth that our nation's history was built on a foundation of inequality and racism—including the original sins of colonization and slavery. What we are witnessing and living through at this moment and the countless times before are the direct results of these historic atrocities.

I remember the feeling, the anger, the rage I felt watching Rodney King lying on that ground; and no help came his way. I was in college watching this unfold on the television screen. My classmates and I cried, swore, and screamed. We felt like justice had not been delivered. That was my first, but Rodney King was not the first. Nor was Amadou Diallo. Nor Eric Garner. Nor Brianna Taylor. Nor Christopher Pate. They were not the first.

You see, I do not know the name of the first person and neither do any of you. But what we all can attest to is that this has been happening for over 400 years.

How many lives have we lost? How many families have been destroyed? How many is enough? This is why I became an attorney. This is why I dedicated my life and my career to fighting against injustice, racism, and inequality in all its forms.

Now I am calling on our entire community to come together, just as you did last Sunday. Just as Joseph C. Wilson, founder of Xerox, and Minister Franklin Florence did after the riots of 1964. Let us collectively fight together against systemic and institutional inequities. Let us all dismantle the racism that continues to manifest itself across our city, region, state, and nation.

The structures of our legal, educational, economic, and political systems were designed to divide us and keep us from achieving our true, God-given potential as individuals and collectively as black and brown Americans.

You know what I mean. Redlining. Limited access to credit. Higher interest rates. Exclusion from upward mobility. Constant roadblocks, setbacks, and setups. The miseducation of our children. The imprisonment of our young men. Our entrapment within a vicious cycle of poverty. We have to understand that these systems were inherently designed to oppress us.

So while we must—and we will—rebuild, repair, and restore our city's business sector, we must meet the immediate needs of our citizens. I heard you. I heard you before and I hear you now. We will not stop at merely treating the symptoms of violence and its aftermath. We will dedicate ourselves to fundamentally changing our institutions, our economy, and our government in order to eradicate systemic inequality and racism.

Shirley Chisholm said, “You don't make progress by standing on the sidelines, you make progress by implementing ideas.”

As Mayor, I ask you, my fellow Rochesterians, to join with me and commit to implementing ideas and strategies to combat inequalities and help us build a stairway out of poverty. Help us provide our children with a fighting chance at life. Help us bring business opportunities to our challenged communities. Help our citizens open businesses in their own neighborhoods. Help us move Rochester from where we are today to where we know we can all go tomorrow.

This is not something that a city, county, state, or nation can do only in times of turmoil. We must be committed to doing this 365 days of the year.

That is why in Rochester we adopted NOBLES community policing policies **before** the events of last week. We banned chokeholds and provided de-escalation training. We require verbalized warnings and the exhaustion of all available alternatives before the use of force. We demand that our officers intervene when they see someone acting outside of our policies and we will hold them accountable when they fail to do so. We require that any use of force be documented and reported and we regularly review our policies and procedures and post them online for complete transparency.

We have adopted the most, or one of the most, comprehensive police accountability board legislation of any city. In this year's budget, we propose to have police officers removed from our schools and are calling on the school district to remove metal detectors. We are also asking the New York State Legislature to send legislation to the Governor that would repeal Section 50a of New York State Law that provides confidentiality protection for police officers, firefighters, and correction officers. We citizens must have transparency!

Beyond our policing policies, we've positioned Rochester City government to address the fundamental challenges our citizens face by:

- Embedding the Race, Equity and Leadership (or REAL) initiative into our budget and strategic planning to ensure that every City department is intentionally focused on racial and equity work.
- Created the REAL Rapid Response Team as an active group working alongside all those speaking out and taking action to ensure we do so safely and with dignity.
- Appointed a Chief Equity Officer for the City of Rochester to support City and local workforce/business efforts to increase diversity across all sectors.
- Opened Financial Empowerment Centers to educate and provide our residents with the foundational knowledge to secure their family's financial future and purchase a new home.
- Created the Office of Community Wealth Building to help people start new businesses, earn and build wealth, as well as set the example for others to lift as they climb.
- Building La Marketa, an incubator for neighborhood economic development, fulfilling a promise made to our Latino community generations ago.
- Bringing new, affordable workforce housing to Joseph Avenue, Hudson Avenue, Jefferson Avenue, and every corner of our city. We know that the dignity of homeownership creates generational wealth and bridges the gap between people of different backgrounds and incomes.
- Launching the Rochester Revitalization Fund in partnership with REDCO, Empire State Development, and our banks to rebuild and strengthen our commercial corridors.

- Offering innovative youth programs, like the Mayor’s Youth Advisory Council, BizKids, youth sports, and open recreation to empower our city’s future leaders.

And we will not stop there. We will continue to work and focus every day on creating a city where equity, inclusion, and tolerance is at the forefront. We will work every day to drive out the darkness with every intention to eradicate systemic and institutionalized inequality and racism in its entirety by leading from the front.

That is why we have the most diverse and progressive City Hall this community has ever seen.

But let me be clear. Our problem did not start when George Floyd died. It did not start in 1964. So, the work will not be done in a month, or a year, or maybe not even in a decade. This work will last a lifetime. The work that I have to do, my daughter will have to do, and my future grandchildren will have to do. The goal is to continue to make progress, to move the goal post forward, to normalize equity and opportunity so that all can be uplifted.

We cannot do this alone. It will take every level of government and every elected official. It will take our employers, our schools, our houses of worship, our media. Most importantly, it will take each and every one of you.

Look into your hearts and minds. Examine your strengths, biases, and flaws. Let us collectively commit to change. Any government is only as good as the people it governs.

I am determined and dedicated to doing the work necessary within myself and within our City to work towards a more equitable society. I ask that you join me.

If you are an employer—like Joseph C. Wilson—examine your organization. Do you have people of color helping to lead your team? Do you have a plan to intentionally lift up others who do not look like you or come from the same background? Can you address the inequities and help right the wrongs of history through your work?

If you are an educator, do you truly understand how your students learn or the challenges and trauma they may face? Do you believe in the ability of all of your students to learn and excel to their fullest potential? Are you recognizing the bias you may bring into your classroom? How will you ensure that all children have the opportunity to reach their fullest potential?

If you are a parent, what role do you play in your child’s ability to be successful? Have you created the right environment at home for your child to thrive in the classroom—or is school their safe haven?

As a citizen and fellow human being, ask yourself, “What can I do to help?” “What beliefs am I holding that are keeping me from reaching out—from making a connection—with those who don’t look like me or come from a different perspective?”

Can you change your perspective and act not with disdain, but with empathy and compassion? As members of our faith community, what does Sunday morning—or Saturday morning for our Jewish brethren—look like to you? Can you make connections to other faith organizations to share, build, and learn from one another?

After you have asked those questions, realize that the answer lies within. We each have the power to change; to make different choices; to lend a helping hand up; to extend a kind word and act with grace.

But if you need help figuring out what and how you can play a role in uplifting Rochester, please contact us at [www.cityofrochester.gov/REAL](http://www.cityofrochester.gov/REAL). We look forward to hearing from you. We are here to help you to not just have the conversation of change but to walk alongside you as you implement the change within your business, your classroom, or your neighborhood.

I believe in the “Power of Us.” I believe in the power of each of us as Rochesterians. I believe in the potential of our great city and our great nation. I stand beside each of you in the fight for freedom, justice, and equity. And I know that with God’s grace in our hearts, we will prevail because “Greater is he that is within *us* than he that is in the world.”