

# Social Justice is Everyone's Business

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I recently read “Why We’re Polarized” by Vox founder Ezra Klein, in which he asserts that America’s dominant political coalitions have sorted themselves by myriad dimensions that transcend mere political identity, resulting in increasingly more extreme polarization. This polarization derived from a series of feedback loops in which politicians and organizations adopted gradually increasing polarized strategies to respond and appeal to a more polarized audience, which became a vicious cycle that continually begets itself polarizing both the

institutions and the audience in turn. Some examples he discusses in the book have to do with immigration reform and health care, which are directly related to socioeconomic status, poverty, and healthcare access (themselves examples of the relationship between power, privilege, and health equity). It’s been interesting to consider Klein’s broader explanation of how polarization has been affecting national political parties, driving identity politics and pushing the social consciousness of citizens to progressively more extreme attitudes, and reflect on how it impacts individual communities, such as Washington State and King County in particular, which has gradually become more and more liberal, and Seattle specifically, where residents are generally so left-leaning that they’re often accused of living in a “blue bubble.” This progressive migration leftward has coincided with my personal journey through nursing, which began in 2012. As I’ve become more exposed to healthcare needs of people who live in King County and the physiological and financial consequences and costs of inadequate health care, both for the individual and society, I’ve developed ideas that 2012 Angela would find utterly radical, but which 2020 Angela considers necessary, obvious, and humane. This coalesced in my participation with the Seattle-King County Clinic (SKCC).

In the article “How to Reduce Implicit Bias” by the Institute for Healthcare Improvement, the authors list some strategies to reduce implicit bias; one of them is to increase contact with people who are different from yourself. By building bridges with people from other communities, backgrounds, and identities, we can see each other as more than our racial or cultural stereotypes - we begin to see each other as fellow humans. It is this which drives me to collaborate with disenfranchised populations; illuminating the need for people with the means to do so (such as myself) to provide humane care and comfort for those who need it, and to work to promote increased equity in our healthcare systems and political structures. I was actively seeking ways to spread equality, perpetrate equity, explore my relationship to race and privilege, and find ways to use my status both as a white person and a nurse to make an impact in mitigating social determinants of health; SKCC was a good fit.

I’ve had to develop some cultural humility; if I want to help someone else, I have to try to understand them from their perspective. As Michaelangelo quipped, *ancora imparo* – I am still learning. Through my journey as a nurse, I have begun to learn about more than myself and my relationship to the world; I’m learning to consider people’s lives and perspectives very different from mine. For example, I was in the crowd on August 8, 2015, when Bernie Sanders’ speech was pre-empted in a chaotic confrontation with Black Lives Matter protesters. I didn’t understand what was happening, and I was terrified. While I felt horrified in general at

what I believed was disproportionate violence against black and brown people by police, as a white person, I was still relatively ignorant at that time of racial disparities and how they contribute to poor health outcomes. I felt helpless to do anything about it. However, through my commitment to understanding why the protestors were so angry that day, I have learned how to begin healing from my infection of implicit bias and start using my white privilege to be a force for social justice. I have tried to do this by learning from black and brown voices working to illuminate the importance of antiracism, such as Ijeoma Oluo, Ibram X. Kendi, Michelle Alexander, and Luce Watkins; I am immensely grateful for their work. If I can change, so can others, and I intend to be a leader in that change. I'm sick of trying to help one person at a time in a broken system; I want to change the system. Will you join me?

This paradigm shift's leading-edge is fixing power imbalances where none ought to exist, as in the health care disparities that disproportionately affect immigrants, people in poverty, the LGBTQ+ community, and people of color. In this spirit, I lend my heart, hands, and voice to the clinic where I work, SKCC, and other opportunities to collaborate to be a force for changes that support individuals' health and well-being communities. However, no matter how dedicated, most private individuals such as myself simply lack the social, political, or financial capital to make a significant impact alone. In committing to this shift, we partner with advocacy groups to effect change in systems that reinforce division.

Just like Bernie's 2016 rally in Seattle was the beginning of my personal awakening, current events are a clarion call to the private sector to examine their corporate identities with regard to how they can address social justice. Many public organizations, such as universities and government institutions, have recognized the importance of cultural humility, equality, equity, and antiracism and their impact on citizens and communities. While these public organizations may press and lead for a change, they cannot do it alone. The private sector must create and support programs and initiatives that promote health equity and social justice; what is good for customers and communities is good for business. To address power imbalances inherent in healthcare, organizations that operate within these systems must change.

"It's naive to think business doesn't have anything to do with the outside world. Business impacts how wealth is distributed, which in turn factors into gender, racial, and economic disparity," reflected Tiffany Apczynski, Vice President, Public Policy and Social Impact at Zendesk. "It makes for a more fair society when businesses work to break the cycle of poverty and systemic racism."

Corporations must engage with their communities to understand how they impact the social determinants of health and structural inequalities. Furthermore, they must acknowledge their influential role in addressing these issues. Some companies, such as Deloitte, have recognized the need for "business to take bold action now." Even Major League Baseball has taken a stand; MLB Commissioner Rob Manfred stated, "We proudly used our platform to encourage baseball fans and communities throughout our country to perform their civic duty..."

The MLB's decision to move the 2021 All-Star Game and Draft from Atlanta represents a direct expense to MLB, which they were willing to absorb to "express their dissatisfaction with [Georgia's] laws." Cecilia Rouse, the Chair of President Biden's Council of Economic Advisers, acknowledged there "will undoubtedly be a cost" to Atlanta's economy estimated to be \$100-190 million dollars. However, that economic stimulus is only lost to Georgia; the league will relocate the game to another city, benefiting a different group of workers, and supporting an economy whose values more closely align with their own. "That is exactly the message [MLB] was trying to send," Rouse said.

Until recently, the private sector has been largely absent. Taking a public position is just a start. "Demanding our corporations behave as well as any good citizen, is not only reasonable, it is necessary," says Maren Costa, Principal Lead Designer in Microsoft's Design, Experiences & Devices Group.

Companies must put their money where their mouth is and invest or donate capital to support and develop the equity and social justice necessary to ameliorate the social determinants of health. The public sector is still poorly funded or uncoordinated and lacks the impact of collaboration, integration, and support from corporate entities. We must collaborate to effect a paradigm shift that can have broad consequences in improving health outcomes and lowering health costs. The private sector must step up to the plate. Social justice is everyone's business.

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