

Ohio Justice and Policy Center

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://ohiojpc.org/2018/06/07/empathy-isnt-simple-walking-someones-shoes/>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

by [Marais Jacon-Duffy](#) | Jun 7, 2018 | [Blog](#), [Interns](#)

This blog was penned by Felicia White, a 2018 OJPC summer intern and Xavier University student.

I watched a powerful two-minute video a few days ago. [A video illustration](#), typography, of a spoken word poem, by Micah Bournes. It posed the question Is Justice worth fighting for?

To so many people that question, though understandable, is absolutely ridiculous. *OF COURSE ITS WORTH IT, peoples lives are at stake here!* may seem like the obvious answer.

As the video points out, however, those fighting for the lives of people who are meticulously abused by various systems in this country know whose lives are at stake, rather than just knowing about them. They know their stories, their families, their pain. So much so that their stories get their own chapter in our books. Their pain becomes our pain. They become friends and family. Those who commune and identify with those who suffer, they would never ask such insane questions such as is this even worth my time?

Why? Because it is human nature that you never stop fighting for your own. ^[1] The question at hand is then rather, what then makes them our own?

Empathy. The video never says this explicitly, but it is talking about empathy. Those who are a part of the league of defenders of justice have a high capacity for empathy.

The phrase walk a mile in my shoes is often used to represent what empathy is. To me, however, this phrase is a bit problematic. Empathy, the way I see it, is not really about shared experiences, it is deeper than that. It is not on the physical level that walking in someone elses shoes implies. You cannot simply read the news, do intensive research, participate in simulations, and or volunteer behind a counter at soup kitchen in order to walk in the shoes of another those shoes probably do not fit you. How do you even learn to walk in someone elses shoes when they arent there to show you how to put them on?

What we can do, though, is walk beside and listen to someone long enough so that our shoes start to feel like theirs. Until our feet start to hurt too. Continue to do so and you will never question whether justice is worth fighting for or not. Because true defenders of justice are close enough to those who suffer to see that even with all of rips and tears and holes in their shoes they somehow continue to walk. Those folks can see that their feet not only hurt, but they have remarkable blisters.

We acknowledge that our shoes are custom made to walk for justice because we have the privilege to *choose* this fight rather than living in it. Those who we fight with were given their shoes and told to run, catch up. We understand that they cannot just get a new pair either, that is precisely the purpose of oppression.

What really bonds us however, is the feeling invoked by our own blisters. Though our blisters may not look the same, they may not be as recent, and they may not still hurt to walk on. Regardless, we have all experienced what it feels like to walk with blisters on our feet, and I believe that is stronger than anything meant to divide us.

When you dedicate yourself to justice, every chain that bonds people to their current circumstance becomes personal. The chokehold of

oppression sucks the life from people even the strongest people. We, who choose to fight, feel that grip around our necks too. The only difference being that the grip only feels like its choking us, and it can be a powerful feeling that drains us of all hope.

Then, we remember: We are fighting for our own. So we find a way to get up, breath, and then never stop walking for justice. Empathy is why I am here at the OJPC and why I will never write people off.

[///](#) *World Relief and Micah Bournes. Is Justice Worth It? (Typography) Feat. Micah Bournes [World Relief]. YouTube. June 18, 2013. Accessed June 05, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fpl84D-uNmY>.*

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