If All Lives Mattered, No One Would Have to Say “Black Lives Matter.”

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My opinion piece this month was supposed to be about campus communication and the way Metro State utilizes available platforms to reach students regarding important information. However, the murder of 24 year old Jamar Clark by a Minneapolis police officer has made it nearly impossible for me to write, much less think, about anything else. It’s a heart-aching, discouraging feeling that’s nearly impossible to explain within the confines of the English language. People who look like me are killed with impunity in a country where the phrase “Black Lives Matter” is countered with the widely held misconception that all lives matter. It’s the verbal equivalent of grabbing my wrist and using my own hand to slap me in the face.

I call it a misconception because that’s exactly what it is. The phrase “Black Lives Matter” is not about valuing the lives of black people more than the lives of any other social group. Rather, it’s about making sure that all lives are valued equally. It is about realizing that, after a history plagued with slavery, Jim Crow and mass incarceration, this nation is struggling to accept the fact that certain lives have never mattered here. It is about accepting that black and brown communities are facing very real, inescapable and statistically proven disparities, which include being unjustly incarcerated and killed.

If you’ve been paying attention to the news or have taken a drive down I-94 recently, you may have heard about protesters camped out at the Minneapolis Police Department’s Fourth Precinct. You may have also been a few hours late getting home from work because protesters took over the interstate and refused to go willingly. What’s the point? Why inconvenience tax paying citizens? Why break the law?

Well, maybe it’s because there has never been a social justice movement in history that hasn’t involved civil disobedience and disturbing the status quo. I can admit, it sucks being stuck in traffic for hours on end, but it also sucks that it had to come to that. Protesters held space at the Minneapolis precinct for over 24 hours before it came to that. They wanted answers from the people placed in their neighborhoods under the guise of serving the community, and they knew from experience that if they didn’t take drastic action quickly, they’d never get answers or solutions.

During the peak of the abolitionist movement, I’m sure it made the dominant social group very uncomfortable to have slaves illegally learning to read and seeking their own liberation by rebelling and running away. There is no doubt that the dominant social group felt extremely inconvenienced when they verbally harassed, physically abused, and sometimes killed black students for staging sit-ins at legally sanctioned whites-only spaces. So rest assured, when we exclaim that “Black Lives Matter,” it isn’t about the lives of the dominant social group. It’s about the lives of the abolitionists, the rebellion leaders, the civil rights protestors. When we exclaim that “Black Lives Matter,” we are letting you know that we’re ready to resist, disobey, and inconvenience whoever we have to, to make sure that the fight and legacy of our predecessors was not in vain.

As of this writing, Nov. 18, four days after the life of Jamar Clark was taken and less than two days after the protest on interstate I-94, elected officials are meeting the demands of the protestors. The names of the shooters have been released, and we hope to have the confiscated, unedited footage of the shooting released soon. We also hope that the murdering officers will be released from duty. Until these things happen, you will continue to experience inconveniences. It makes more sense to join us than to hate us. The sooner we get justice, the sooner you stop being inconvenienced. In the words of Desmond Tutu, “If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor.”