

## Reflections on race, diversity, and progress

By Victor Crawford, Chief Executive Officer of the Pharmaceutical segment at Cardinal Health



Like many Black Americans, I can say that I had more conversations about race in America in 2020 than I've ever had in my life. The dismantling, sad, and unfortunate events that were aired on a global scale brought our collective minds to a place in our country where we had to have the real and uncomfortable discussions about the divisions of race relations.

The tenor and tone of 2021's Black History Month has taken on an unprecedented and resounding cascade of symbolism and importance, unmatched in its history. I can't imagine what its founder historian Carter G. Woodson, would think of where we are today as a country. For it was he, whom in 1926, worked to mark the second week of February as "Negro History Week"—an effort to both recognize the pivotal achievements of Black Americans in the U.S. as well as educate Americans and others around the world as to what people – no matter their race – can, and have accomplished. It wasn't until 1976, that U.S. President Gerald Ford first officially recognized and designated the month of February as Black History Month, and it has since been acknowledged by several countries around the world.

As I reflect on this month and the celebration of Black history, I am moved by the positive, rich tapestry that African Americans have created, making our nation a more just and perfect Union. From the arts and humanities, to the business, civic and political, scientific, and medical contributions, these accomplishments are not just reflective of Black History, they are *American* history.

For the African Diaspora and their descendants – and many other people of color -- our history also includes events that we wish had never happened. Many incidents and endeavors have taken place since the founding of this nation. Moments good and bad; milestones that were influential alongside ones that were devastating; movements that took lives, and others that empowered masses. The thread that weaves this history together is one thing – **progress**.

My history, for example, includes witnessing the Detroit Race Riots of 1967, and many other obstacles that I've had to face as I have made my way through childhood and adulthood – obstacles that have existed simply because of the color of my skin. However, when sharing my story, I lean into the words of James Baldwin, "I am what time, circumstance, history, have made of me, certainly, but I am also, much more than that. So are we all."

I lean in even more to progress.

I am not ignorant to the significance of my leadership role. As an African American in the United States, I'm a minority. As an African American who is a senior leader of a Fortune 20 company, I'm an even *smaller* minority. But if I think back to how far we've come, even just in the past year, it's again about those slight triumphs, that open a pathway for continued progress.

Last week I celebrated the news of two former classmates – Rosalind Brewer and Karen Lynch – who now, alongside Heyward Donigan, are the three female leaders of the three largest pharmacy retail chains in America. While Ms. Brewer will only be the third Black female to ever lead a Fortune 500 company . . . *that's* progress.

On January 20, Kamala Harris was sworn in as vice president of the United States, becoming the first woman, first Black person and first Asian American to hold the office . . . *that's* progress.

As we begin a new year, we find ourselves in this clash of monumental progress and sobering setbacks when it comes to equity, inclusion, and acceptance. But progress is not a sprint – no matter how much we wish it was. Nor is it a road straight and narrow. There are mountains and valleys, bridges and curves, and yes red lights – but they are always followed by ones that switch to green. As a country, we are bound by a duty to keep

running towards the perfection of a more purposeful union for all our citizens.

I am grateful to work at Cardinal Health for many reasons. But in this moment, I'm most appreciative for our commitment to, and understanding of, **progress**. We don't pretend to be perfect, but instead strive to do better. We don't know all the answers, but we're not afraid to ask honest questions of ourselves and of others. We continue removing barriers so that everyone can bring 100 percent of themselves to work no matter ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation. Our focus on race and diversity is inspiring important dialogues, both within the company and within our communities. Some of these conversations are difficult and uncomfortable – but we're leaning into that discomfort to drive real change. And, as our CEO, Mike Kaufmann has said, "... It's about doing the right thing even when it is hard. Treating people with dignity and respect will make Cardinal Health a stronger company and improve the lives of many people along the way."

My challenge to you, not just for this month, but for every day is to focus on progress. Ask questions, learn from mistakes, educate yourself and others, do whatever you can to offer empathy, gain understanding and approach situations with a lens of inclusivity. Be that small step that changes the red light to green along our roadway to progress.

We often think of history as what happened yesterday – but history is what we all collectively, are creating today.

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