

Leonard Hamilton Hopes To See Organized Plan To Combat Ongoing Race Issues

By Curt Weiler

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Leonard Hamilton is making his voice heard.

The Florida State men's basketball coach, coming off arguably the best regular season in program history before the cancellation of the NCAA Tournament, is speaking out about the events of the last few weeks.

What began with the death of George Floyd in police custody May 25 has led to protests across the country calling out the ongoing inequality and police brutality issues that black people continue to face in the United States of America.

Hamilton knows a thing or two about helping bring about change in pursuit of equality for all people. He broke the color barrier in college basketball at both Gaston Community College and Austin Peay before becoming the first black assistant in Kentucky basketball history early in his coaching career.

With this unique perspective, Hamilton has plenty to say on the matter at hand, addressing the ongoing problems and how he sees them being fixed in an exclusive interview with the *Democrat*.

When we talked back in February about your role in breaking the color barrier, an overarching message for you was that things have gotten better for the black community since your time going through that, but there's still much room to grow. How have the last few weeks confirmed that to you?

Hamilton: Well, I think I have a different perspective on it. It can't help but be discouraging. It's obvious to me that we still have a lot of work to do, a long way to go in our society. The disappointing thing about the situation, the unfortunate thing that happened to Mr. Floyd is that we react, and we respond to that particular situation, but in reality, there's a reason we are consistently having these issues over and over and over.

It seems as though we have a lot of comments on it, all of them sincere, but we don't really seem to have a plan of how we can address it. It keeps up the same level of issues that we're having with the police brutality. It's still very much alive in so many other walks of life that we live in today. I'm anxious to see how we can come up with a plan to address the real issues that allows us to get to that point where we are losing lives.

Is frustration the word when you hear things about needing to improve this or that and not seeing any tangible progress being made?

Hamilton: We have so many organizations and initiatives locally as well as nationally, so many people with great intentions working in their own way to eliminate some of the challenges that we have in their society. But I don't see an official authorized, committed task force that really is using all our resources and our abilities to address what seems to be a reoccurring issue in so many different parts of our life on a regular basis.

I just don't want to be all about talk. I'm anxious to see some people come up with solutions. And it's not like I don't think people are trying, I believe we can get it done. It's just that we all seem to be working in different directions trying to fix issues that really need comprehensive attention.

Do you think there will be a watershed moment where the realization will be made that something like that is required?

Hamilton: When you use clichés like 'watershed moment' and stuff like that, that just doesn't get it. We all can identify the challenges that we have, but we need some solutions. I believe if we come up with a very serious and committed approach that we all buy in to and we identify as a project that's going to make us all better, I think we're

smart enough and have enough great minds in America that we can figure out to create a better atmosphere where we all enjoy life.

With your unique experience and perspective (in breaking the color barrier) and all the things that have come with that over your life, how has that shaped your desire to being a voice of change with regard to ongoing racial injustice?

Hamilton: I don't think that there can be a one-voice change. I don't think that there can be a watershed moment. I just think that we all need to be pulling in the right direction. For whatever reason, we have a mistrust, a disrespect, selfish motives. I just think we have drifted into a dark place in our society and the unfortunate thing is that it's not everybody. We have some of the greatest people in America, we have so many parts of our lives where we all show affection and care for one another and respect for another. But then we have that other element that seems to be distrusting of each other and almost disrespecting one another.

I don't believe any of us are born coming out of our mother's womb with hatred and disrespect. That's not something we are born with. So it's obvious that somewhere along the line in the process of growing and maturing, some people develop certain philosophies about life, some people develop others. Through the process, you have some people that grow and mature and find themselves in a different mindset than they started.

That's why I'm confident that a well-thought-out plan that's inclusive of everyone will be the best approach. Identifying the issue and placing the blame, as far as I'm concerned, is counterproductive. We can identify the issues and now let's try to see how we can create an atmosphere that can effectively change and make this a better place for everybody."