



## Accountability First, Then Justice

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*"It's been too hard living  
But I'm afraid to die  
'Cause I don't know what's up there  
Beyond the sky.*

*"It's been a long  
A long time coming  
But I know a change gonna come  
Oh, yes it will."*

Hauntingly compelling lyrics, a soul-stirring musical arrangement, and emotionally charged feelings, swaying between angst and hope, are beautifully belted out by Sam Cooke's "[A Change Is Gonna Come](#)." This powerful hit song, which some describe as the "unofficial anthem of the civil rights movement," has been disquieting my spirit ever since the Derek Chauvin guilty verdicts came in last week.

While the reasons for my spiritual distress are many, one word—one distress—undergirds this editorial: R-A-C-E, a.k.a. [racism](#), a.k.a. America's original sin.

Although I am cautiously encouraged by the present-day awakening to racism, I am wise enough to know that this sin's grasp upon all citizenry, African-descended and non, has not yet yielded. Perhaps this is why Mr. Cooke's spiritual has been ruminating in my soul.

"In some ways a musical companion to Martin Luther King Jr.'s 'I Have a Dream' speech..., "A Change Is Gonna Come" is infused with defiance and courage," [writes Jeremy Helligar](#).

He continues, "The lyrics express a similar longing and hopefulness, a dream that must have felt near-impossible during the darkest days of the early 1960s. For

Black men to envision such a wonderful world must have seemed like the ultimate act of bravery at the time.”

Helligar further asserts, “The change Cooke sang about would come sooner than he probably anticipated, in the form of the [Civil Rights Act of 1964](#), which U.S. President Lyndon B. Johnson signed some four months after the song’s arrival. But how much did it really change? More than five decades later, we’re no longer banished to ‘separate but equal’ facilities, but race remains the single most divisive factor in a country that has never fully recovered from the scourge of slavery and the horrors of the post-Reconstruction Jim Crow era.”

This reality is deeply disconcerting to most African-descended people, as well as to our countless allies, as we suffer trauma after trauma, generation after generation, under a racist system that often refuses to enforce our full human rights protections as provided under the Constitution and our numerous laws.

Violent acts motivated by racial bias have increased exponentially over the past five years in the U.S. [The Washington Post](#) has compiled one of the most thorough datasets available when it comes to fatal police shootings, pointing to racial bias in police killings. Since 2015, more than 5,000 police-involved shootings have been recorded, and Black Americans are murdered at a much higher rate than White Americans.

We must, and we will, demand accountability for the violent taking of the lives of our family members within the African-descendant community, who did not have to die by bullets or knees on their necks. The guilty verdict of Derek Chauvin provides the African-descendant community, as well as the rest of the world, an opportunity to lean into a hope that white cops might be held accountable for the numerous murders of Black persons. To circle back to Sam Cooke’s song: A change is gonna come!

The time for an outcome of “not guilty” has ended for law enforcement. Last week’s guilty verdict is a step in the right direction. We will continue to demand accountability as we journey toward justice.

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## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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