

Racism in the United States

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If anyone needed another reminder that Black lives simply don't matter in the United States of America, the police in Minneapolis have clearly demonstrated that fact.

It will be a long time before I will forget the picture of **Derek Chauvin** kneeling on **George Floyd's** neck. Even that statement is shocking. I still have not forgotten a very similar picture from 2014: a Black man on the ground being choked by a white policeman. In that earlier time, the victim was **Eric Garner**. His murderer, **Daniel Pantaleo**, faced no charges. Chauvin has been charged with third degree murder three days after his crime was committed. The Minnesota attorney who announced those charges commented how quickly they came about: only four days after the crime was committed.

For those four days, Chauvin was a free man. All it took was four days of investigation, coupled with major protests across the country, for the charges to be laid. **Why in the 'enlightened' United States, is video evidence of a violent murder not sufficient?** Why is it necessary for the people to rise up in protest for any semblance of justice to be achieved?



The late **Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.**, once said that “a riot is the language of the unheard.” If the people of Minneapolis believed that this crime against an unarmed Black man would be treated the same way as the murder of an unarmed white man, the third precinct building might still be standing today. The other stores and buildings that have burned to the ground might still be operating. This destruction is part of the ‘language of the unheard’. People who are ‘unheard’ for generations, and who face the kind of repression, harassment and discrimination that people of color in the United States experience, will, eventually, take their rage to the streets.

Chauvin has been charged; we will see how his trial proceeds. But one of the many meaningless gestures we can now expect from elected and appointed officials is for additional training of the police, so they know how to handle such situation.

After I heard of the tragic death of Mr. Floyd, I picked up a book I had obtained sometime earlier called *This Stops Today* written by Gwen Carr, the mother of Eric Garner. In the book, she quotes the **Rev. Al Sharpton**: “You don't need training to stop choking a man saying ‘I

can't breathe."

The police in the United States can be trained from now until the end of time, but until the racism that is so inherent in U.S. governance, including within the so-called justice system, ends, there will be more Eric Garners, George Floyds, Michael Browns, Philandro Castiles, etc., etc.

Just a few days prior to Mr. Floyd's murder, a man in New York City's Central Park escaped a deadly fate. **Christian Cooper**, a Black man, was bird watching in a section of the park where dogs are required to be leashed. He encountered Amy Cooper (no relation), a racist, entitled white woman, walking in that section with her dog unleashed. When he asked her to please leash her dog, as required by law, so the many ground-nesting birds and the plants in that particular section would not be disturbed, she refused. She then threatened to call the police and tell them that an African-American man was threatening her in the park. She did so, imbuing her voice with a sufficient amount of alarm to give her lie credence. However, before the police arrived, both she and Christian Cooper left the area. One can only wonder at the outcome if both had been present when the police arrived. Mr. Cooper was indeed fortunate.

And it doesn't stop with the immediate victim. **Ramsey Orta** was one of the people who filmed Mr. Garner's death in 2014. As a result, his name and face became well-known. A year after this murder, his house was raided, and he was arrested on a drug charge and accepted a plea deal that included incarceration. During that time, he was sometimes denied visitors, spent time in solitary confinement, and was moved from facility to facility for no apparent reason other than to make it difficult for anyone to visit him.

Taisha Allen, who also filmed that murder, was continually harassed by the police. In addition to verbal harassment ("Oh, you are that bitch that filmed the Eric Garner video"), on various occasions she was thrown to the ground, dragged by her feet and beaten with a baton. She, like Ramsey Orta, was guilty of attempting to hold criminal police accountable.

None of this should be surprising. The earliest documents establishing the United States as a country stated that governance would be by white, male landowners only. This occurred years after the settlers began sailing to the continent of Africa, kidnapping thousands of people and bringing them to North America as slaves. By the time of the nation's founding, the Natives who lived in North America were seen as less than human, and their destruction is one of the most horrific genocides the world has ever known. It seems to be a given in the U.S. that to be white is better than to be Black or Brown, and to be white and male is the highest honor with which one can be born.

Minnesota Democratic **Senator Amy Klobuchar**, who sought the Democratic presidential nomination this year and is now hoping to be selected as apparent nominee Joe Biden's running mate, is under scrutiny for her time as Hennepin County Minnesota's top prosecutor. It appears that she was, at best, lax in dealing with earlier crimes committed by Chauvin. She referred them to the local Grand Jury, which generally sides with the police over the public. Had Chauvin been prosecuted for some of his earlier crimes, perhaps Mr. Floyd would be alive today. In the long tradition of chameleon-style U.S. politicians, Klobuchar now says this: "I think that was wrong. I think it would have been much better if I took the responsibility and looked at the cases and made the decision myself." And Biden

says he was wrong to vote for the Iraq war. And former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg says he was wrong to enforce racial profiling in that city. It seems that many politicians do many things wrong until they run for higher office, when they suddenly have an epiphany and realize the errors of their ways.

It seems that the Ku Klux Klan has exchanged the white robes and hoods of the first half of the twentieth century for a new uniform, this one blue and adorned with a badge. The lynchings of an earlier day have been substituted for the shootings and strangulations of today, with the consequences mainly being unchanged. Panteleo was fired from his job five years after he murdered Mr. Garner, but he was never charged with any crime. The Grand Juries in most, if not all, states act as accomplices to the many murders committed by the police.

What is to be done? How will such deeply ingrained racism ever be defeated in the United States? It will never change as long as the special interests are in charge. If only the members of the voting populace realized the power that they have! Electoral choices are not limited to the Republican and Democratic Parties; their continued election only validates their awful policies. It is long past time to vote for third-party candidates. They are there; the two major parties will do all that they can to suppress them, but with the Internet, they are not hard to find. This year, let's let those two parties know that we know we have choices, and that we are going to use them.

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