

A HORRIFIC AND BARBARIC MURDER IN AMERICA



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Tuesday, June 9, 2020

The horrific and barbaric murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis on May 25, 2020 by police officer Derek Chauvin set off a global explosion of shock, revulsion and protest. Floyd's pleas of "I can't breathe" spawned anger, marches and protests, in Columbia, Maryland as well, that have not been seen probably since the civil rights protests of the 60's.

People have just had enough of the killing of unarmed black men by hateful police officers, Michael Brown, Walter Scott, Jamal Clark, Breonna Taylor, Eric Garner, Philando Castille, Laquan McDonald, and others. This time the murder of George Floyd was seen in real time by millions of people, who maybe because of Covid-19 were shut-in, could bear witness to police brutality. This time those who protested represented a diversity of ethnicity, race, age and gender. I was deeply heartened to witness young black and white people walking shoulder to shoulder, carrying signs "Black Lives Matter", "No Justice No Peace", and "End Police Brutality Now".

Real change will come from youth engagement of the type we observe over the past two weeks and the type of change America experienced during the Civil Rights Movement.

No longer would mere adjustments in recruiting, vetting and training of prospective police officers be enough. The objective is fundamental, systemic and concrete changes. There has to be a change in the police culture and laws governing police misconduct and illegal acts and practices. Howard County Police is not immune to the need for change, though progress has been made over the years and the new Police Chief, Lisa Myers, I sure will implement more. But, in 1990, the Howard County NAACP branded the Department with the "Dirty Harry Award" for hostility to the public. Dirty Harry was a Clint Eastwood movie character whereby the law officer was judge, jury and executioner.

As a member of the Howard County Council, I sponsored in 1991 a bill to create a Civilian Review Board. It failed, though there were 2400 signatures on a supportive petition.

But, the protests of the past two weeks were about much more than ending police murder and brutality. It was also about the elimination of institutional and systemic bias and racism.

Far too long poverty, injustices and inequities in economics, jobs, income, health, to include environmental health, and housing have been tolerated and allowed to exist. The demographics of Covid-19 graphically illuminated the underbelly of these inequities and disparities. These young people are saying half measures will not do; they will not be quiet; they will not be patient. They want real and concrete solutions to these real problems, which have been only superficially addressed in the past. I stand with them; I support them. The Police Reform Bill in Congress is a beginning. It will address issues of qualified immunity for police officers, among others reforms. This bill is sponsored in the House by Karen Bass, Chair, Congressional Black Caucus and Jerry Nadler, Chair, Judiciary Committee and in the Senate by Corey Booker and Kamala Harris. But each of us in our local communities has a responsibility to ensure that reforms occur where we are.

In college, I sat in at restaurants that would not serve blacks, I picketed movie theaters that would not admit blacks and I marched in the March on Washington in 1963 for Jobs and Freedom. I can attest that protests, marches and righteous anger can bring about change. So, I say to the young people do not keep quiet, be impatient, keep up your protest, and keep up your fierce determination for as the songwriter says "A Change Gonna Come".