

Now We All Know What Matters

Fifth Estate Collective

2020

The summary execution of George Floyd by a defender of white supremacy has its antecedents in the contact of Europeans with Africans in the early 17th century. Since then, black people have been killed when any resistance was offered or even suspected.

In villages in Gambia, on slave ships, in Charleston Harbor, on plantations, in small towns and on back roads of the South, on the streets of any city in America today at the hands of police, unchronicled violence was and is practiced as terror and punishment against black people for not accepting their assigned lowly status. Few ever had their names said the way George Floyd's has all over the world.

Black people were killed by slave traders, ship captains, plantation overseers, sheriffs and cops, with no notice by whites and rarely a consequence. Killed by the lash, by the rope, by the club, by the gun.

White people never saw any of this. One can't when eyes are turned away.

Suddenly what happened in Minneapolis opened them to what black people have seen clearly for hundreds of years, and was no less there for whites to see, but who refused for so long. George Floyd's execution for not submitting changed everything.

That incident was only the spark. It was the culmination of the rage and indignation present in black people since 1619 that too slowly found its way to white people erupting in protests across the country and world-wide. Black people have responded on their own to racist cop killings or beatings in past years by exacting social revenge in the form of urban conflagrations such as last in Ferguson, Missouri. This is the response of rage in a people with little social or political power.

Large sectors of white people, the social and economic benefactors of racism, dropped their historic complicity in having the police and mobs enforce a subordinate economic and social role for black people as they have for hundreds of years.

The Black Lives Matter demonstrations, with as many as 21 million involved, have gone on for months, seemed implausible the day before they began. In many, black people are the leadership. In some small towns, only whites participated. The most heartening are the thoroughly integrated ones that prefigure the society we want. But all demand an end to racism and police violence, and many call for economic justice.

Where will this all go? It's impossible to say. Is reform of the police even possible, those agents of the class of rulers whose existence demands suppression of sectors of the population? The advocates of desperately needed police reforms have different demands to stop the killing of black people. They should be implemented.

However, even if the worst authoritarian, brutal, corrupt, perjurous cops are rooted out of the nation's forces, the best of them, when ordered to shoot into a demonstration, at strikers, or those poised to make a revolution, they would do as ordered. Such is the nature of the police, the defenders of capitalism and the state.

The sweep of events of the Black Lives Matter movement is too vast, told in so many places, and analyzed with such precision that we offer only some small reflections on what changed this country in the past months. As always, the future is unwritten. Let's make it what we want.

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