
George Floyd and The Summer of 2020: Reflections from Minneapolis College

Paul Benjamin Cherlin

Minneapolis College

This special volume features essays from students who attend Minneapolis College.

Each author personally endured the hardships that our city faced during the summer of 2020 and its aftermath. The goal of this volume is simply to offer a place for these students to recount their experiences, a medium to have their voices heard. The authors, all former students of mine, volunteered their time and energy to make this special issue come to fruition; I invite you, the reader, to spend some time with these resilient and insightful individuals.

Minneapolis College is a two-year institution located in downtown Minneapolis. Here, the student-body represents a truly diverse range of cultures, nationalities, gender identities, ethnicities, ages, and religious backgrounds; enrollment currently sits at around 9,500 students, and most of our students are BIPOC. Many of our students are from the neighborhoods that directly surround the college, including the Powderhorn neighborhood where George Floyd was brutally murdered by Officer Chauvin on May 25th, 2020.

For the people living in the city, racism and economic inequalities were familiar long before 2020. Police violence towards minorities has been an ongoing problem. Many of our neighborhoods bear the scars of redlining, and thus remain racially segregated and are in economic decline. The tragic murder of Mr. Floyd was not terribly surprising or even unique—and yet, it

proved to be a singular event for Minneapolis and the greater Twin Cities area.

Our city quickly became the epicenter of national and international movements that called for social reform. Directly following the murder of Mr. Floyd, our days and nights were filled with protests, people marching in the streets and clashing with police. In some neighborhoods, the air was thick with smoke as buildings burned. After a while, the military presence was suffocating, and it seemed hard to go anywhere without seeing armored vehicles lining the streets. In the mornings, local residents would come out and clean up the neighborhoods. And that was our rhythm. Living in Minneapolis, it was clear that there was a shared sense of outrage, a feeling that the complacency and performative gestures engendered by a spiritless faith in gradualism had to give way to more urgent measures for social reform.

At the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic was surging, and it would still be almost a year before vaccines would be made available to the public. Our friends and loved ones were dying. The pandemic, too, disproportionately harmed minority communities. Moreover, the xenophobia and jingoism that marked much of the Trump presidency was further inflamed by the events of 2020. The summer, generally far slower to start in Minnesota, was quickly heated.

I write this introduction on the two-year anniversary of the murder of Mr. Floyd. America has a short memory and has always had difficulty reconciling its history. But the wounds of 2020 have yet to coagulate, scar. Even when they do, it is important to remember what caused those wounds. It is also important to anticipate recovery through fighting, through building better communities, through listening to the voices of those most effected, and responding to those voices in a sincere way. The need to remember, accompanied by the need to create a new social paradigm, is the overall spirit of the essays featured in this volume.