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## The Murder of George Floyd and The Complicating Factors of The Pandemic

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Within this submission I wanted to touch on the murder of George Floyd and the complicating factors of the pandemic.

I find racism and white supremacy a huge concern for humanity, and one that perpetually lives on despite efforts through the years towards some progress. I wanted to breakdown the climate Minneapolis was in prior to the uprising and what it has been like since. I wanted to provide a perspective to the situation from what I witnessed and how I saw the movement transformed in an intersectional movement. I also touch on what I feel are some important theories we collectively could use to combat racism and white supremacy in the United States and across the globe.

I moved to Minneapolis in June of 2019, before the world knew George Floyd or COVID-19. An outsider to middle America from California, I was amazed by the diversity found in the heart of America. What I discovered was a region filled with rich diversity. A “melting pot”—just as America is often described. Minneapolis in particular, a refuge for the BIPOC community, immigrants, and QTPOC folx seeking a sense of community, safety, and security. A rainbow of a city I found to be “America the Beautiful,” inside and out.

Liberalism and political activism were present. It did not take long to also discover that below the surface lies a willful ignorance ingrained in the fabric of Minnesota and in the

white community. The same ignorance found across America since its birth. A culture of assimilation, tradition, and hypermasculinity. What I found were white Americans with the assumption that racism must have ended with the Emancipation Proclamation. White Americans assuming racism was resolved following the Civil Rights Act of 1964. White Americans with the presumptuous that if a Black man could be President, then racism must be a thing of the past.

Protected by their white privilege, they lived comfortably colorblind to the strife of the Black community. The Black community is continuously battling the unresolved transgenerational trauma of centuries of oppression that is still as fresh as the day they were taken from their homeland, separated from their families, and turned into a commodity in the blink of an eye.

It all went unacknowledged. I could recognize the ignorance everywhere, within my colleagues, leaders, and authorities of the community who hide behind a progressive mirage. In hindsight it is no surprise that Minneapolis would be the tipping point of a much bigger issue that no one saw coming but the Black community. A movement long in the making was brewing.

Within the city limits you will find much segregation in Minneapolis. Throughout the inner city, especially in the Midtown neighborhood there is a total lack of development. In comparison to the wealthier neighborhoods and suburbs that surround the inner city, it is obvious that race and class are clearly playing a huge part in the area’s lack of funding from the city. Food deserts, lack of access to clean water, lack of healthcare, and lack of opportunity disproportionality impacted the most vulnerable communities here in Minneapolis before COVID-19 was even unleashed.

Resource scarcity was apparent pre-pandemic and was exacerbated come March of 2020 when COVID-19 began spreading across the city and the globe. We quickly come to find that

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the virus impacted the BIPOC community the hardest, making the events on May 25th even harder to process.<sup>1</sup> Once shutdowns began, city parks and highway overpasses began filling with tents. We saw massive job loss and poverty move into a new tier of despair. With no safety nets in place for a pandemic, local and federal government failed those who needed it the most. It was no surprise that the conditions of the city and the racism within would lead to an uprising come the evening George Floyd was murdered, bringing racial injustice and police brutality to the forefront, with Minneapolis at the center.

On the evening of Memorial Day, May 25<sup>th</sup>, a white police officer used his privilege and authority to take another Black life. A community already exhausted from centuries of minority stress, yet again, had to witness this tragic injustice—adding George Floyd’s name to the ever-growing list of Black lives taken like they didn’t matter at the hands of police.

George Floyd, a father, brother, partner, and friend, would unknowingly become a symbol of a racial injustice movement that would spread all over the world; he became a symbol for the disenfranchised. George Floyd represented America in its most fragile time in recent history.

The fight began the moment the world watched the 9-minute-and-29-second, viral video of the Minneapolis Police Department murdering him in the middle of a pandemic. With bystanders begging and pleading to get off of his neck and other officers standing by as accessory to murder, the world lost George Floyd. “I can’t breathe” being his last words while he called for his mother.

The video of George Floyd having his life taken away sent shockwaves across the globe. If you can only imagine how strong they were felt on the corner of 38<sup>th</sup> and Chicago Avenue that evening. The video erupted immediate response

from the Black community, advocates, and human rights groups. This was a crime against the Black community and a crime against humanity, for public authority to have taken another Black life when we were already surrounded by extreme loss, in a defenseless state due to the pandemic. We come to learn that the only reason George Floyd was in Minneapolis from Houston was due to jobless during the pandemic.

The community of Minneapolis, the country, and the world were in an unprecedented time of uncertainty. We were losing loved ones and losing our means of survival. There are many complicating factors that shaped the response to George’s Floyd’s murder. There was too much loss surrounding us, this lynching was the tipping point, and it was no surprise that it happened right here in Minneapolis. The racism in this city and this country reached its breaking point when we all woke to the disturbing video seen across the globe the following morning. Protested erupted city-wide and spread around the world as America was exposed with a tyrant in office who was responsible for the spread of white terrorism.

The world was already shut down, but Minneapolis quickly saw an invasion of the National Guard in their tanks, toting automatic weapons on street corners. We saw the police department deploying chemical weapons at close range while the community was demonstrating their right to assemble. Civil disobedience was the only option.

With the media twisting the movement into looped videos of “looting” and violence unrelated to the movement, it was a confusing situation to understand from the outside. The looting was a result of the virus, and unrelated to the movement, but they became intertwined for viewership. The movement became tainted by disrupters who traveled from out of state, who

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<sup>1</sup> Sherita Hill Golden, "Coronavirus in African Americans and Other People of Color," April 20,

2020, <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/coronavirus/covid19-racial-disparities>.

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took advantage of the situation, and created the negative framework that corporate media profited off of. The spreading of misinformation and disinformation online did not help the fight, causing panic and confusion. It did not show the movement for what it really was. They did not show the Black community in pain and the anguish that was felt. They did not show the peace and unity of the community coming together. The trauma of losing another Black life in such a senseless manner was not properly and respectfully represented in the media those many weeks following George Floyd's death.

Within the demonstrations you found diverse members of the community coming out to support. Churches, universities, and organizations set up booths with bottled water and milk of magnesia because no one was safe from the ruthless teargas, myself included.

It was in this initial stage of the protesting that the world finally learned of the tragic murder of Breonna Taylor, at the hands of the Louisville Police Department, just 12 days prior to George Floyd. George Floyd's murder opened Pandora's box in many ways. This movement evolved into something much bigger and blossomed into an intersectional movement. We saw the demonstration expand to include Black women and Black trans women when headlines grew about two consecutive murders. The world lost Riah Milton and Dominique "Rem'mie" Fells in June of 2020.<sup>2</sup>

Within these unifying moments, in the middle of a pandemic, the world saw America's true colors. Its ugly underbelly lay upward exposing the reality of Black life in America. With a racist in office, and white supremacy on the rise, it was abundantly clear that America had (and has) a serious problem with racism and over-policing that needed drastic and immediate reform.

The results of the months of uprising led to no reform or dismantlement of the corrupted systems that those locally and globally were hoping for. The Black community has been left with no resolution. The aftermath left Minneapolis in shambles. As to be expected, the inaction has impacted marginalized communities the hardest. Minneapolis is now divided more than ever between Black and Blue.

The systems and some citizens remain ignorant and resistant to change, especially within the police department and the white community. The city recently voted against a police reform bill that would have replaced and transformed the current agency to combat racism, violence, and over policing found within the current department. Campaigns to "defund the police" had push back through fear campaigns and misinformation. Members of the community were asking for funds to be reallocated towards training and education, mental health services, oversight committees for accountability, and community safety programs because businesses-as-usual did not cut it. Police, in the United States, are city employees. They work for the city to "protect and serve"—but who do you call for help when the police are the perpetrators?

That segregation I wrote of earlier is now even more obvious in the aftermath of the protests. While the wealthier neighborhoods have since rebuilt and the trendy neighborhoods are back in action, Midtown lives in destruction. As you enter on Lake Street, buildings that were burned still remain charred and abandoned through many city blocks. Rubble remains on the street with no initiatives to clean up or rebuild. That food scarcity became even more grim following the protests, with the most vulnerable losing complete access to fresh food. Small businesses who already faced closer due to the

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<sup>2</sup> Cara Kelly, "Two Black Transgender Women were Killed Last Week, Thousands showed Up to Protest," *USA Today*, June 15,

2020, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2020/06/15/deaths-black-trans-women-riah-milton-dominique-fells-spur-protests/3191769001/>.

pandemic have since closed following the protest. Neighboring corporate stores are still going strong, with police officers planted outside full time. A twisted form of gentrification is taking place as a result.

After the social media trends ended and the stories became less sensational, some of that momentum was lost that we had initially saw following George Floyd's murder. The media left the city limits and moved onto their next headline. The city removed the community-built memorials and the "no police zones" that surrounded the area where George Floyd lost his life have been torn down and reduced to a smaller display. Public authority is unwilling to compromise and address their racist practices and have now resorted to a completely backing away. Gun violence and violent crime are now rampant due to complications of the pandemic and police-related issues.<sup>3</sup> North Minneapolis, in particular, has seen a huge increase in murders. A community so desperate for basic human rights and safety are now stuck in a void and the world is no longer watching.

The movement for Black Lives Matter will and must continue even if the media is not showing this to all of us. George Floyd must live on and his symbolism must remain. What we now face in America is a total violation of human rights country-wide. In the middle of a pandemic, the BIPOC community and the Black community, in particular, are seeing many attacks and backlash taking place as a result of the Black Live Matter movement. Police are continuing their violence and racist practices and, in recent times, the murder of Daunte Wright in 2021 is now center stage as the officer is now on trial.

In fact, within the year following the George Floyd murder, the police had already killed 1,068 people of varying ethnicities and backgrounds. Clearly lessons have not been learned. Critical Race Theory, which is a crucial method to better understand the strife and treatment of the Black community, especially with the "1619 Project," has been fully banned in certain states.<sup>4</sup>

Found within Critical Race Theory is what I feel is a part of the solution and the only way I see out of the current climate we are all in and have been in for hundreds of years. Because we are so divided into our individual compartments and pitted against each other, Intersectionality is the key to truly uniting us. That frightens those who benefit from the oppression of the marginalized. White supremacy does not win when we tackle these issues with an intersectional approach. There are more of us than the white, straight, cis, males in power. To have a united front would be a scary scenario to those in power.

There is an attack on women's rights in the United States which will disproportionality impact Black women as I draft this. With Black maternal deaths on the rise, these services are crucial for saving lives by having safe access to reproductive healthcare.<sup>5</sup> Anti-LGBTQ legislation is being pushed across the country, especially anti-trans bills. With trans murders on the rise in the United States, 2021 being the deadliest year on record, Black trans women will be impacted the hardest.<sup>6</sup> Black trans women being murdered at an alarming rate in the United States, these bills would lead to more discrimination and violence against a community already going extinct.

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, <https://www.mprnews.org/story/2021/07/27/violent-crime-surges-across-minnesota-with-record-murders>.

<sup>4</sup> Jack Dutton, "Critical Race Theory is Banned in these States," *Newsweek*, June 11, 2021, <https://www.newsweek.com/critical-race-theory-banned-these-states-1599712>.

<sup>5</sup> "Working Together to Reduce Black Maternal Mortality," April 6, 2022, <https://www.cdc.gov/healthequity/features/maternal-mortality/index.html>.

<sup>6</sup> See <https://www.glaad.org/blog/tdor-memoriam>.

For example, two days after George Floyd was killed, Tony McDade, a black trans man was murdered by Tallahassee Police—a murder that fell under the radar.<sup>7</sup> The QTPOC and other members of the LGBTQ community do not have federal protections in the United States Constitution. All communities that intersect within the LGBTQ spectrum are impacted by this lack of protections.

Intersectionality is crucial to better understand how our varying identities intersect and create adversity. We get to learn how these injustices are interconnected to so many communities through lessons in Critical Race Theory. If we can understand how these bills and practices ultimately harm Black lives and erase Black futures, we can unite together to take on all systems of oppression by using an intersectional approach to address many of our societal issues and injustices.

In modern times, Angela Davis and Ibram Kendi are a few examples of figures who are working to bridge the gaps. We can understand through Angela Davis book, *Women, Culture and Politics*, that many complexities and connections can be made and when we analyze the intersections of race, gender, and class. Before we had a term to call it intersectionality, Davis wrote that,

the roots of sexism and homophobia are found in the same economic and political institutions that serve as the foundation of racism in this country, more often than not, the same extremist circles that inflict violence on people of color are responsible for the eruption of violence inspired by sexist and homophobic biases. Our political activism must clearly manifest our understanding of these connections.<sup>8</sup>

Following the murder of George Floyd and many others before him, Ibram X. Kendi's book, *How to Be An Antiracist*, became an ever more important tool to not only unlearning racism but how to actively be antiracist.<sup>9</sup> Some of Kendi's work touches on how racism, sexism, and homophobic systems impact all of society and should be a collective battle to conquer. Found within his chapter on gender he writes on Kimberle Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality and how he has applied it to his evolution. "Contemporary Feminist and antiracist discourse has failed to consider intersectional identities such as women of color," Kimberle Crenshaw wrote in 1991.

All racial groups are a collection of intersectional identities differentiated by gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity, skin color, nationality, and culture, among a series of other identifiers. Black women first identified their own intersectional identity. Black Feminists first theorized the intersection of two forms of bigotry: sexism and racism. Intersectional theory now gives all of humanity the ability to understand the intersectional oppression of their identities, from poor Latinx to Black men to White women to Native Lesbians to transgender Asians.

A theory for Black women is a theory for humanity. No wonder Black feminists have been saying from the beginning that when humanity becomes serious about freedom of Black women, humanity becomes serious about the freedoms of humanity.

America is beautiful for its diversity, but we must not forget how it was created. It prides itself for its "liberty and justice for all" but, sadly, there is no true freedom or justice that we are witnessing in modern America, especially for the

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<sup>7</sup> Elliot Kozuch, "HRC Mourns Tony McDade, Black Trans Man Killed in Florida," May 29, 2020, <https://www.hrc.org/news/hrc-mourns-tony-mcdade-black-transgender-man-killed-in-florida>.

<sup>8</sup> Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Culture and Politics* (Westminster, UK: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2011).

<sup>9</sup> Ibram X. Kendi, *How to be an Antiracist* (London, UK: The Bodley Head, 2019).

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BIPOC community. Like philosophers that have come and gone, we had much warning. America has long been known to be plagued with racism and white supremacy. If we take from the wisdom of the past, America has not changed much from its foundation.

We are living in a Patriarchy, centuries in the making. A country harvested on stolen, sacred land from the Natives, colonized and built off the backs of the Black community, and filled within its veins we find toxic white supremacy pumping into every sector found in society and life in America.

We must not forget that racism is still very much alive, pre-George Floyd and post-George Floyd. It will not go away overnight. We must continue to fight for the greater good. America is a work in progress and by better understanding the complexities of the many identities found within this “melting pot,” we can set the example for the rest of the world. This will take time, deep reflection, and personal insight to unlearn the racism found within all of the white community across the globe.

It will take you holding yourself, loved ones, colleagues, and anyone you witness committing injustice, accountable. Make this fight for the oppressed. Combat systematic racism and oppression in your everyday life. Be willing to feel uncomfortable doing so.

The white community must commit to any measure to ensure that Black Lives inherently matter now and for future generations. Black Lives Matter, Black Women’s Live Matter, Black Queer Lives Matter, Black Trans Lives Matter, Black Children’s Live Matter, Black Lives Matter.

In a system that was built to work against an entire group of people for centuries, we must always remember that Black Lives Matter.

About the Author:

*A current student at Minneapolis Community and Technical college studying Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies and Nursing, Jessica has worked in health and human services for over a decade and is currently employed with the organization APLA Health (Aids Project of Los Angeles) in Los Angeles, California. Jessica is also a member and advocate of the LGBTQIA+ community.*