

Reflections on the Death of George Floyd

I awakened on this Friday morning to the news that the city of my birth, Minneapolis, had erupted in flames. The riots are the response to the police killing of an African-American man named George Floyd. There are videos of the killing, with the victim lying on the ground and a policeman holding him down with a knee on the back of his neck. Floyd is heard pleading with the officer, saying, "I can't breathe, I can't breathe," but there was no response of mercy. There, on the hard asphalt of a downtown street in Minneapolis, George Floyd lay pinned with a knee on his neck, for eight long minutes. Finally, his body succumbed to the pressure, and he died. His lifeless body was put on a stretcher and taken to a hospital, where he was pronounced dead on arrival.

I am not sure of the crime for which Mr. Floyd was being held, but it was certainly not punishable by a death sentence. This kind of killing is happening all too frequently in this country, whether by the police or by vigilantes who take the law into their own hands. The African-American newspaper columnist, Eugene Robinson, was asked in an interview what his thoughts were after this latest killing. He responded with a shrug of his shoulders, saying, "I don't know that I have it within me to write another column about police attacks on black people. I don't think there is anything new that I can say." This is a sad commentary on the frequency of this kind of thing happening, and it feels like it is happening all of the time. The actor, Will Smith has said, "Racism has not become worse in America, we are just filming it more frequently."

Minneapolis has a history of police attacks on minority communities. It is a terrible stain on an otherwise progressive and beautiful city. In the late 40's and early 50's, then Mayor Hubert Humphrey could see the racial difficulties of a city growing more diverse, and established the first Human Relations Committee of any major city in America. My father, who was then the Minister at the Minneapolis Friends Meeting, served on this Committee. It is hard to believe that in 2020, Minneapolis and America has not made much progress toward realizing the *Dream* of Martin Luther King, Jr., who envisioned a world where all races lived and worked together in peace.

And so we lament and we weep over the killing of another black man by the police. We pray and hold in the Light the family of George Floyd. We continue to work for justice and racial equality, and hope that we can move closer to the time when our Quaker Testimony on Equality becomes inscribed on the hearts of all people. We pray for peace to return to Minneapolis. In the words of the African-American Quaker, Bayard Rustin, "Let us be enraged about injustice, but let us not be destroyed by it."

-Jim Newby, Minister and Public Friend

Cincinnati Friends Meeting

