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Confronting Institutional Racism

A week ago in Minneapolis, for all the world to see, a black man, George Floyd, was murdered by a policeman, Derek Chauvin. Protests broke out in nearly 100 American cities, and even worldwide, and have continued now for more than a week.

Murders of black men by police in America are not new. They are endemic. So why the deep, widespread, and sustained protests this time?

Certainly the nature of this particular murder explains in large part the especially angry protests and response. But it's not the entire explanation. Youth of all color, race and ethnicity are leading the demonstrations.

A Sadistic, Merciless & Intentional Killing

The killing of George Floyd was a particularly reprehensible police murder. It was clearly intended. It was merciless. It was sadistic. As the world has watched, Floyd was cuffed, face down on the street, pleading for his life. And the more he pleaded, the more Derek Chauvin, the cop, seemed determined and unrelenting, intent on keeping his knee on Floyd's neck. The first six minutes, as Floyd pleaded for his life, even pitifully calling out for his mother at the end, a sure indication he felt he was nearing his last moments of life. But for almost 3 minutes more Chauvin's knee remained after Floyd had already lost consciousness.

What angers those who observed the murder most is the lack of mercy shown by Chauvin and his three complicit partner officers. What they showed was clearly an intention to

kill. Chauvin appeared almost to take pleasure in keeping his knee on Floyd's neck for three minutes more after he lay motionless. That made it a particularly sadistic murder.

It suggested to observers of the video, especially to black folks, that the police in 2020 will show you no mercy. Plead all you want for your life when cuffed, helpless, face down in the dirt. They'll still murder you. And apparently enjoy it in the process!

The murder act was followed soon by another typical series of events, also all too often occurring in America today: Minneapolis police and the city's district attorney (DA) office prevaricated and hesitated taking action, only responding when protests erupted. That delay suggested a typical cover up was underway, as is so often the response of local authorities in such cases.

There's a big problem in America today: the cozy relationships that exist between police and DA offices. Both 'scratch each others' backs', as the saying goes: The DA depends on police testimony to get convictions in court; in turn the DAs go light and help protect the police in exchange for their favorable testimonies. Police unions frequently provide significant campaign donations to District Attorney candidates that favor them, creating a kind of political 'conflict of interest' by Das. Coroner offices play a contributing role, by providing whatever autopsy results are necessary to support the DA. Carefully selected Grand Juries, should legal challenges to murder get that far, then endorse their joint mutual cover ups. It's an institutional arrangement that too often thwarts the process of Justice.

So it's not just an occasional racist cop. It's institutionalized racism. A pattern that repeats over and over again. This is what the protesters of Floyd's murder also realize and demonstrate against. They've seen it before. Time and again.

Black folks today know that pleading for your life when about to be murdered—like pleading for Justice after the fact—will more often than not fall on institutional deaf ears when police brutality is concerned. No mercy and no justice come in the same institutionalized racist package.

Protests As Acts of Solidarity

The immediate and increasingly angry protests that followed the murder of George Floyd are not due solely to the police killing of Floyd. The media would have you think so. That it's only about the murder of Floyd and police brutality. The politicians would like you to think so. All those leaders calling for calm and dialogue want you to believe so.

Floyd may have been murdered in nine minutes. But many youth in America today, especially but not only youth of color, feel their own lives are slowly and steadily being drained on a daily basis, sucked dry by the unfairness and injustice of 'the system'. They feel that system—a capitalist system that increasingly rewards the wealthy and ignores the rest as never before in its history—has its knee on their necks too. And that system, that knee, is no less unrelenting, shows no mercy, and has no intent on relieving the pressure.

Working class youth of all color today know their lives are being destroyed more insidiously, step by step, year by year, as they struggle to survive: laid off and moving from low paid job to job, accumulating crushing debt laid upon debt, lacking minimal health benefits, changing apartment to apartment as rents are continually raised, with no hope of ever having a normal family life, of ever paying off student loans, in effect having to live a 21st century form of economic indentureship, a second or even third class economic citizenship—while they watch multimillionaires and billionaires almost exponentially add to their wealth.

In just the last three years under Trump, corporations registered record profits, wealthy investors and 1% were given \$4.9T in tax cuts and \$3.4T in stock buybacks and dividend payouts. While the rich and their corporations get richer, the rest make due with stagnant or falling wages, working two and three jobs, and constant job loss and turnover.

All those protestors on the streets this past week—virtually all young folks—are not just demonstrating against the murder of Floyd and institutionalized racism. That's the tip of the protest spear. But it's more than that. It goes deeper than that. There's a deeper frustration and desperation behind it all, affecting tens of millions but especially American youth.

The youthful protesters looked at Floyd and they saw themselves. The protests are thus an eruption of social solidarity among wide sections of American youth! Not just among black and minority youth but American youth in general. Look at the composition of the demonstrators city after city. They are mostly Millennials and GenZers of all races and ethnicities and gender who feel they have been left behind by 'the system'. Left out and declared disposable. They are virtually all working class youth. What the protests show is that Class and Race are coming together! Especially among the youth.

They are fearful of police brutality, especially blacks and youth of color. But they are fearful as well of being condemned to a life of low paid, no benefits, insecure and futureless part time and temp work. Working often two and even three jobs cobbled together just to get by.

And now, with the advent of the Coronavirus pandemic, even those mostly low paid service jobs have been wiped out by the virus and recent economic crash—many of which, they sense, aren't coming back soon or even at all. The Congressional Budget Office today, June 2, 2020 announced it will likely take ten years for the jobs now being lost to come back, and many won't return at all! There will be no V-shape quick recovery. It will be W Shape, extended over a decade or more, with periodic brief and weak recoveries followed by repeated relapses and recessions—whether or not there are subsequent waves of the virus. The economic die is cast. The US economy (and global) have entered a phase of chronic, long run decline.

What the protestors don't realize yet, but will soon, is that more of their low paid jobs with no future are about to be wiped out by the coming Artificial Intelligence revolution and automation now ramping up. According to McKinsey Consulting, AI will eliminate 30% of all occupations in the next five to ten years. Even their low pay, futureless service jobs will be eliminated.

Add to all the above fears of the worsening climate crisis the protesting youth know they will have to live through. And to that the growing public awareness of a deepening political crisis in America, as the nation drifts into tyranny driven by the Trump wing of the US political elite.

The USA has entered a 'triple crisis': health care & environment, jobs and the economy, and a growing political crisis of Democracy in America itself. The protestors know this. They sense and feel it and are growing frustrated, angry and desperate. The youth of America are growing increasingly desperate. All that 'social crisis kindling' is feeding the protests. Police brutality, institutional racism, and murder is just the spark that has set it all off. It's not just about George Floyd any more.

WHAT TO DO? SOME PROPOSALS

So what's the solution(s)? To escalating police murders; to white supremacist provocateurs who are intent on stoking a race war (as they say in their own words); to the

sub-classless looters that prey upon the protests and demonstrations; to the local institutionalized racism. What might be done?

It's no longer acceptable to say, as elites of both parties and their media declare daily, that demonstrators should calm down, go home, and let's dialogue about how to reform the police. That's been done before. Many times. With little result. It's time for black folks, protestors and demonstrators on the streets today to develop their own independent solutions to the problem of police brutality.

There are three general actions that might be undertaken immediately to confront institutional racism in America that chronically gives us murders of George Floyds:

1. Break the iron nexus between Police Departments and District Attorney Offices
2. Launch a National 'Policing the Police' Movement
3. Form Local Community 'Committees of Safety'

At the core of institutional racism is the relationship between local police departments and District Attorneys. The police rely on the DAs to smother, delay and defuse investigations and prosecutions of police who have engaged in brutality and murder against black and other minorities. The DAs depend in turn on police testimony in court cases to enable them to win their cases and advance their personal careers. In exchange for police assistance, the DAs go light on police charged with brutality. Knowing they are covered, police feel more inclined to shoot first and not worry about the outcome. It's a 'scratch my back-I'll scratch yours' mentality that permeates both institutions—police departments and DA offices—nearly everywhere in America today.

Coroner's offices play a secondary but important role in the process when a murder is involved. They assist the DA by rendering a decision of the cause of death that conveniently points away from the police action in question. The deceased died of a heart attack and had underlying heart problems is often the official cause of death. It wasn't choking of the defendant by the police. It was a heart attack that would have occurred regardless of the choke hold. The guy had a bad heart or some other underlying condition was the cause of death—not the police tactic employed.

Another institutional player in the charade is often a local Grand Jury. This archaic institution is nothing like a real 'jury', although called that. It is a selected group of often pro-police and so-called 'upstanding citizens'—meaning more often than not white,

conservative and business oriented. Grand juries often rule to throw out charges, giving the DA cover not to proceed to prosecution. Should the DA still proceed, the charges are reduced from murder to something less based on Grand Jury lesser recommendations. If convicted, the police in question's penalty is often reduced to only employment termination. But he is then eligible to go to another police dept. and rehired. Police departments often have a silent understanding to rehire each other's 'bad apples'. Thus a cop with a long record of abusing blacks and minorities continues to work somewhere 'down the road'. It's not unlike the Catholic church simply moving some pederast priest to another parish.

Breaking the Police-District Attorney Cover-Up Nexus

- Local DA's must be prohibited from prosecuting their local police in cases of racist related brutality and murder. The prosecution responsibility must be moved to an independent source outside the county or city.
- Police department unions and organizations should be prohibited from contributing to DA election campaigns
- Coroners should be selected by the murdered party's family to ensure impartiality
- Grand Juries should be abolished, especially and starting with cases involving police brutality and killing
- A police discharged for cause, involving a racist brutality case, should be prevented from rehire by another police department anywhere

Launching a national 'Policing the Police' Movement

- A national 'Policing the Police' movement should be launched. Wherever a cop confronts and stops someone, the public should use smartphones or other photo devices to record the interaction. This is now done haphazardly and occasionally. There should be a general education effort nationwide to get everyone to engage in the practice of video recording police whenever they see a police interaction with any citizen.
- An independent national database of photos and video recording of confrontations should be created.
- A public education campaign should be launched as well, encouraging the public to immediately send all videos to the independent national database.
- The public database should be accessible to everyone online

Forming Local Community ‘Committees of Safety’

- All cities should form local community ‘Committees of Safety’ to police the police, to gather information on confrontations and make the information available to the general public
- The Committees should organize protests and demonstrations and coordinate with other Committees outside their local area to organize larger protests and demonstrations
- During protests and demonstrations, Committee members should undertake the task of identifying, confronting, and rooting out provocateurs. And distribute photo leaflets of known white supremacists and provocateurs to participants in the protests and demonstrations
- The Committees of Safety should publicize to the community at large those identified as looters during the protests and demonstrations
- Committees should endorse and run candidates for city councils, city managers, DAs, and local elected judgeships that are committed to, and supportive of, black lives matter and other minority civil rights
- Committees would raise demands for local ordinance changes and state wide legislation to protect the rights of demonstrators, and organize recalls of politicians who do not
- Committees would undertake other measures as necessary to ensure the safety of protestors from provocateurs, white supremacist violence, and other proponents of violence against people or property during demonstrations

Many of these proposals are not new. Others are being introduced by protestors right now. But the point is the protests and demonstrations should be taken to the next organizational level. They cannot go on as just spontaneous events. They will eventually dissipate without organization. Or be captured by provocateurs and looters. Or manipulated by politicians for purposes of personal election and careers. Or all the above.

Without organization, the ‘I Can’t Breathe’ anti-racist, anti-policy brutality movement that has swept the country runs the risk of eventually fading—just as had other promising popular movements like ‘Occupy’ in 2011 and the ‘Yellow Vests’ in France of a few years ago. Without organization, the provocateurs and looters will also increasingly displace the protestors in the media—providing cover for a ‘law and order’ right wing reaction that will use the violence to crush the demonstrations while ushering in still

further restrictions on civil liberty rights of assembly and expression. Nor will the police and politicians rid the protests of provocateurs and looters. The protestors must do so themselves. But that cannot be done without organization.

The other even greater risk, absent organization, is that mainstream politicians will divert the energy and anger of the protestors into channels to get themselves elected.

Organization is needed as well simply in order to expand and build the protests and demonstrations, and to ensure they continue with ever larger turnout.

Forming local community ‘Committees of Safety’ are the core organizational element necessary for building the organizational power of the protests and demonstrations. Launching a ‘policing the police’ movement is a way to connect the general ranks of the demonstrators—and the public in general—to the work of the Committees of Safety. And the Committees and the public Policing the Police movement are together the means by which to independently politically attack the institutionalized racism embedded today in the relationships between police departments, district attorneys, coroners, and Grand Juries.

Breaking institutional racism requires an independent political movement, with a grass roots organizational structure. That independent movement is on the streets of America right now. Will it take the movement to the next level, a level necessary to break the embedded local institutions of racism?

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