

Martyrs, Meaningless Deaths, and the Monologue on Race

The death of George Floyd in Minneapolis has convulsed the entire country. His story has become an allegory for a malevolent criminal justice system indifferent to the lives of black men.

Not only did his death elevate the motto, "Black Lives Matter," it ushered in a summer of protests and unrest.

The Dead as Martyrs

But as it is in all myths, much is concealed in the service of the narrative. Floyd died as he lived: a criminal. He was on drugs and in the process of being arrested for passing counterfeit bills. He may actually have died from an [overdose](#), rather than suffocation after an extended restraint by one of the arresting officers. He had earlier done time for [armed robbery](#). He was no saint.

Of course, none of us are saints. Not all crimes are capital crimes. Those who have done their time often redeem themselves and deserve the opportunity to do so. It was unfortunate he died, disproportionate to the apparent offense, and the actions of Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin appeared unusual and callous.

Chauvin and three fellow officers were soon arrested, and now they will have to face the justice system. While we are told Floyd's death was part of a broader pattern of systemic racism and police brutality, it was actually quite exceptional. Police killings of all kinds are down relative [to a few decades ago](#) and are [not disproportionate among races](#) based on their prevalence among violent criminals.

Police violence is a [tiny fraction](#) of the threat young black men face from one another. Almost all of the time, police shootings are completely justified; sometimes, however, there is cause for concern.

Such [unrepresentative encounters](#) have been amplified by those who aim to foment disorder, delegitimize America, and encourage enmity between the races. The Floyd story – like those of Freddie Gray and Michael Brown – eclipsed other, more brutal killings that lacked a racial dimension.

Meaningless Death

Consider the death of [Jessica Whitaker](#). The 24-year-old white home health nurse had the temerity to say to a group of black people that “all lives matter.” For this, she was murdered in front of her fiancé. What she said was not even evil or provocative. It’s only controversial if you believe not in equality but subservience.

She leaves behind a 3-year-old daughter. Unlike George Floyd, she hadn’t done time for robbery, nor did she have drugs in her system. So far, no one has been arrested or punished for her murder.

Like so many such crimes, hers has gone unnoticed. The media often downplays violence against white victims like her with the language of nihilism: robberies gone wrong or being in the “wrong place at the wrong time.” The agency of the killers is diminished. It’s treated as no worse than a car accident or natural disaster.

There will be no marches and no murals for Jessica. No corporations will change their logos in her honor. It’s not a teachable moment. It’s barely even a knowable moment. It has been forgotten. It does not fit an approved narrative and, in fact, it casts the BLM movement in a sinister light. So it is suppressed.

The innocuous and otherwise uncontroversial expression, “Black Lives Matter,” appears to be a cover for something hateful and aggressive. The movement began, after all, in violent race riots following the killing of [Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri](#). This “gentle giant,” you may recall, was a robber, killed after he fractured the eye socket of Officer Darren Wilson. This was no cause to celebrate, nor even an injustice, but riots and mayhem and a lot of national soul searching ensued all the same.

The recent attacks on statutes and courthouses and cops represent more than a demand for equality; it’s a call for inequality and revenge. The movement expresses a Marxist concept of justice, where guilt and punishment should be imposed along racial, rather than individual lines. In other words, the BLM movement is a fraud, as such a system of justice *would be actual systemic racism...* against white people.

If you told someone a few years ago “all lives matter” would be controversial, that person would be shocked. Individual rights are at the foundation of American law and Christian morality. It expresses the fundamental idea that guilt and innocence, as well as responsibility, belong to the individual, not to his relatives or coethnics.

This philosophical foundation guided our country out of the thicket of racial injustice. Lynch mobs, whether aimed at blacks or whites, are not only wrong, they are a repudiation of the ideal of individualized justice, the right to due process, and equal protection under the law.

A National Monologue On Race

Plutarch was famous for his work *Parallel Lives*. He compared contemporary Roman figures with similar figures from Ancient Greece. Then, as now, historical types tended to repeat themselves, whether for their great virtues or great vices. By comparing the two, he found commonality in humanity across

time and place.

Similarly, American literature permitted white Americans to see the injustice done to black Americans. Whether it was in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* or *To Kill a Mockingbird*, we were guided to sense the humanity of people deemed the "other." In learning of their virtues, thoughts, struggles, and perspective, we open our eyes to the possibility of extending justice and compassion to them. We come to see the protagonists not as alien, but as countrymen and human beings.

The disparate treatment of parallel deaths has a different effect. Unlike Plutarch's work, it closes off the possibility of mutual understanding. Instead, one is popularized, mythologized, and humanized, as the other is forgotten, downplayed, and ignored.

By ignoring the murder of Jessica Whitaker, the national conversation on race is not a dialogue, with each side having something to say to the other, but a hectoring monologue, where one side is dehumanized as the implacable enemy. With perfect victimhood opposed by perfect criminality, one group becomes the source of all evil, all crime, and all injustice. This is simply a lie.

It's also dangerous. The pervasive talk of white privilege and evil Karens and systemic racism reduces whites into a caricatured class of villains, notable only for their crimes, unable to have grievances of their own. If the rhetoric of white superiority rightly bears some blame for the evils of slavery and the humiliations of Jim Crow, then the fanatical rhetoric against whites also bears some blame for the brutal crime that befell Jessica Whitaker.

Like every human being, Jessica Whitaker had a right to her own thoughts, to speak her mind, and to be safe in doing so. She even had a right to say something offensive. Like George Floyd's passing of a counterfeit \$20 bill, nothing she said

was a capital offense. Indeed, it was not a crime at all, but she paid with her life all the same. Her life mattered.

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