

## **Floyd Death, and the Riots that Ensued, What Needs to Change?**

***By Richard Norman Rickey***

**June 6, 2020.**

I was appalled watching the video of the police officer actions against our fellow American citizen George Floyd. While we have made significant progress in race relations over the years, we are all justified in our anger and disgust when we witness a terrible injustice of the worst kind against another human being. It is also extremely concerning that so much vandalism, violence and isolated riots (yes, “riots”) have followed this horrible incident over these past several days. When we don’t have law and order many more of our fellow citizens will have their rights violated, and livelihoods destroyed.

These troubling events remind us all again that much work remains to be done, not just in personal race relations, but even more so in understanding the true underlying causes of institutional failures so we can fix them. Unfortunately, emotions, and outright bigotry, often override a clear and rationale perspective of what just happened, why it happened, and how to make sure it doesn’t happen again. Fortunately, there is scientific evidence showing us what is really going on, and the best way forward.

Numerous studies provide evidence that should make us question several narratives that are being perpetuated in the media from these events. One popular narrative is that we still have significant systemic white on black racism occurring in law enforcement, and in other American institutions, and that not much has changed positively over the past several generations. Empirical evidence shows that dramatic positive strides have been made in race relations, equal rights, and policing, especially since 1970. For example, check out the August 2019 Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences studies on police activity, or read the Steven Pinker book “Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress” Chapter 15 on Equal Rights. The evidence shows that in fact black people are underrepresented among those killed by police relative to their representation among those who commit violent crime, who commit murder, and who kill police officers. Since this can be proven, why do so many people think otherwise? For the terrorist activities of Antifa, and the Marxist ideology of the Black Lives Matter organization, it helps draw more money to their victimhood causes. As the great black economist Walter Williams has said, “There’s another set of beneficiaries to racial hoaxes and racial strife. These alleged incidents are invariably seized upon by politicians and activists looking to feed a sacrosanct belief among liberals that discrimination and oppression are the main drivers of inequality”. The actual facts negate their systemic racism narrative, so let’s move on to what is the real causes of police brutality and exaggerated enforcement.

It is harmful to the cause of justice when protesters overemphasize the role of institutional racism, and underestimate other significant factors that more often than not lead to a tragic Floyd incident. One contributing factor is the militarization of our law enforcement that

accelerated after 9-11. Another factor is that policing does seem to attract people who like to have power and control over others. This was found in a 1971 Stanford prison experiment. The experiment and its results were evaluated in University of Colorado political philosophy professor Michael Huemer's 2013 book *The Problem of Political Authority*. As he concludes from that study, "When some human beings are given great power over the lives of others, they often discover that the sense of power is intoxicating. They want to exercise their power more frequently and more fully, and they don't want to give that up."

Another factor to look into are qualified immunity laws, overzealous unions and a culture of impunity promote systemic incompetence by laying down mine fields one must navigate around before you can root out bad policing. These factors, and other many others, lead to poor management practices and other fixable causes that are not race based. In the Floyd case we now know that the officer charged with homicide had numerous complaints filed against him. It seems rationale to assume that officers with a higher incidence of complaints are more likely to commit a bad act at some point in time. Why was he allowed to continue on without more severe discipline, additional training, or removal? How does this happen? Are we really to believe that the whole department "has it out" for only people of color, and that is why he remained in his position? Of course not.

Over the past several years' incompetence, laziness and excuses are increasingly protected by unions, lawyers, and various "civil rights groups". Some labor laws, along with union actions, overprotect people from the consequences of their actions. Police and teacher unions are some of the worst offenders with their "tenure" arguments. I'm not ignoring the important historical role of unions that in many cases they have protected workers' constitutional rights when no one else would protect them. But the pendulum has swung too far in the opposite direction. We need to make sure our leaders are given the teeth to take a quick and forceful bite out of incompetence and bad behavior. We also should expect more transparency. Want to make a real change? Ask the institutional leaders in your neighborhood how you can help sharpen their teeth to do just that.

Instead of viewing our law enforcement abuses through this distorted lens of institutional racism, consider another cause anticipated by our Founders; the monopoly of power granted by the State to law enforcement over the lives of its citizens. Just as with any monopoly, the State can and does abuse its power. Our Founders knew this, and that is why James Madison led the push for a second amendment to our Constitution, the right for citizens to bear arms so that they may offer a check and counter to abuses of the State. And this is why we need to hold our elected leaders accountable. We the people are the civil power that is to have authority. How? By getting organized, mobilized and getting others out to vote. Most of our institutional leaders are elected. If you don't like someone's leadership, and what is going on in that organization, get the other gal in. Don't like what is happening with your police department? Then make sure your Mayor knows that you want him to get a better Police Chief in place. Effective leadership and administrative competence is underrated. Who is in charge is just as important as making sure

the leader has been given permission, and the resources, that the institution needs to rid itself of bad actors.

The vast majority of our police officers are not racist, and many do an outstanding job protecting us under difficult circumstances. Like our teachers, food workers, and other “essential workers”, they are often underappreciated. I do not deny that we still have individuals in positions of power who are racist, and/or just power hungry. I don’t expect racism will be totally eradicated, ever. Are we going to march, protest, blame it on some nebulous concept, vandalize, riot and kill innocent people every time we see another video of “institutional failure”, “systemic racism”, or whatever else it is called? I sure hope not. Instead I encourage all of us appalled by injustices of any kind to invest the resource of our time and/or money toward positive projects and movements that don’t make excuses for crime, or police brutality, but are doing the “rubber meets the road” work in disadvantaged neighborhoods. One such group is the Woodson Center ([www.woodsoncenter.org](http://www.woodsoncenter.org)). Organizations like this give our fellow citizens what they really need to overcome the roadblocks and barriers that keep so many from experiencing the American dream.