

"U" is for the Unknown

By: Jonathan W. Thompson II

Amadou Diallo, Ahmaud Arbery, Betty Jones, Breonna Taylor, Cornelius Brown, Dominic Fuller, Eric Garner, Emmett Till, Freddie Gray, George Floyd, Hector Morejon, India Kager, Jacob Blake, Jamar Clark, Khiel Coppin, LaQuan McDonald, Michael Brown, Nathaniel Pickett, Oscar Grant, Philando Castle, Quintonio LeGrier, Rodney King, Sandra Bland, Terrance Franklin, Trayvon Martin, Victo Larosa, Walter Scott, Xavier Rovie, Yusef Hawkins, Zamiel Crawford and "the U is for the unknown...who died by racism, their faces weren't shown." (Credit Papoose song "Tribute")

The above paragraph is a reminder of those people of color, primarily Black men and women, who were brutalized--many of them murdered--at the hands of law enforcement. This sentiment is captured by the above-listed names in the song "Tribute" by Papoose. I believe the lyric "the U is for the unknown" is poignant because so many more are not and may never be listed. If it were not for the courage of one young teenager with a camera, approximately 18 years of age, the over 9-minute execution of George Floyd would have fallen under the category of the Unknown. Police brutality has been caught "on tape" since the advent of technology, with little recourse. However, during a summer of COVID, many people were more tuned in than ever, and felt the pull to join Black people to say: enough is enough. As a Black man in the United States, there is a collective unspoken understanding about "our place" with the police. This disparity, which continues today, only highlights the ongoing lack of respect often given to Black life. This attitude is not surprising, given that the modern-day police system has its roots in slavery, deriving as it does from slave catchers.

The inequities of systemic and historical racism still exist and, in 2020, cost George Floyd his life. The police-officer-I-will-not-name displayed evidence of this when he chose, in an act of superiority, to put this Black man "in his place." His disregard for Mr. Floyd's life led to Mr. Floyd's death; meanwhile, the police-officer-I-will-not-name couldn't even be bothered to remove his hands from his pocket, while placing the fatal knee on Mr. Floyd's neck. I was surprised that he was eventually convicted for this murder, as Black people have seen way too many police officers murder someone and not be held accountable for their actions. The verdict in the George Floyd murder trial was one that I was relieved to hear about; however, I almost did not believe it, even after verifying it with several news outlets.

I want to appeal to anyone reading this that the work is not done and we need everyone's support. The Black community at large was thankful for all those who stood with us during the summer of 2020. I believe that it was the first time many people not in the so-called minority community started to have an understanding of what Black people endure on a daily basis. The police fired on all protestors, regardless of race, age, or gender, in many cities and towns. Numerous people are permanently scarred or disfigured due to "non-lethal" forms of "crowd control." These included rubber bullets, which blinded several young children, damage caused to limbs, and the trauma of seeing the police physically assault the crowd.

So what can be done? First, educate yourself on this topic. Black people are not a monolith. Everyone is not "African-American." Find out how each person prefers to be identified. Second, take some time to expand your mind by spending time with Black authors, poets, and essayists. Look for competing schools

of thought, so you can have meaningful conversations. Are you supporting the Black community? If you are, what are some ways to be of even more support--and, if not, why not? If you do not have Black people in your circle, what are you waiting for? We are awesome!

Racism occurs when some people believe they are superior due to the color of their skin. There are historical and systemic factors at play that lead to racism. Are you doing your part to challenge these systems of inequality, and to move the United States toward that more perfect union? If we want to move forward, the faces of those whose lives were ended suddenly must no longer be Unknown. SAY THEIR NAMES!!!