

“We’re out here raising awareness, spreading the word, and using our voices to try to get justice for all the black bodies that America has on its hands”

The Bethlehem Gadfly George Floyd killing June 3, 2020

 *Latest in a series of posts on the George Floyd killing* 

from Timothy Healy, “Rally against racism ‘It’s our job to protect one another.’” Bethlehem Press, June 2, 2020.

In light of the death of George Floyd, an unarmed African American who died at the hands of a Minnesota police officer, Lehigh Valley residents took to the streets in Bethlehem Saturday, marching for Floyd, for other African American police victims, and for the Black Lives Matter movement.

Activists Matty Fall, J. C. Lustre Villanueva and Michael Henriquez led the march, which gathered at the Rose Garden in Bethlehem at 3 p.m.

“It really weighs heavy on my mind and on my heart,” Fall told a park full of protestors, “when another black brother or sister has their life taken by someone in uniform.”

“This whole thing leaves me with so many questions,” Fall said. “I don’t have all the answers, but I know that we can do better. We really need to vote. We need to vote for people that care.”

Hundreds of protestors marched for nearly two hours, crossing the West Broad Street bridge, weaving through the streets of downtown Bethlehem, and rallying beside the Bethlehem Area Public Library before making their return to the Rose Garden.

Protesters from across the valley chanted “No justice, no peace,” “Say their names,” “Silence Is compliance.”

Pennsylvania residents are no strangers to questionable police actions against people of color. According to a press release by march organizers,

of the more than 1,000 incidents where people were killed by police in the United States last year, 165 of them happened in Pennsylvania.

“It’s our job — our duty as a community — to protect one another,” Lustre Villanueva said, “because when the government fails to protect its people, who else is going to take care of them?”

“Today we’re marching in support of the Black Lives Matter movement,” said Fall, who hopes to prevent violence towards the black community.

“People like me are in danger all the time,” she said. “It’s extremely uncomfortable.

“Today, with everyone uncomfortable in the heat, I don’t think that even equates to what a black person goes through on a day-to-day basis,” she added.

The turnout was like that of a Super Bowl parade, but while those participating in parades may celebrate a victory, those who marched both mourned a loss and shared a hope.

“We’re out here raising awareness, spreading the word, and using our voices to try to get justice for all the black bodies that America has on its hands,” Fall said.

The event concluded at the Rose Garden, where the crowd knelt down, raised their fists in the air, and listened as Ashleigh Strange read some names from the list of over a thousand Americans killed by police in 2019.

Fall said she helped plan the rally sort of at the last minute, thinking maybe 30 or 40 people would show up.

“I never thought it would get this big,” she said. “I feel so overwhelmed. I’m just so excited and happy that this many people care about my life, every other black life here, and every other black life in America.”