

# Thursday's Floyd rally at Payrow Plaza: "It's time to break the silence . . . to call out racism"

The Bethlehem Gadfly George Floyd killing June 5, 2020

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



Protest in Bethlehem

Speaker Joshua Smith, who helped organize Thursday's rally at Payrow Plaza in Bethlehem, raises his hand as he addresses the crowd. "Until we are all sick and tired, change won't even begin to happen," he said. (April Gamiz/The Morning Call)

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*April Gamiz, "Bethlehem protest over George Floyd death."  
Morning Call, June 4, 2020.*

Series of two dozen photos by Gamiz. Good stuff. The crowd was estimated at 1,000.

Did any attending Gadfly followers capture audio or video?

*from Laurie Mason Schroeder and Andrew Wagaman, "Protests kick off simultaneously in Allentown and Bethlehem, demanding justice for George Floyd." Morning Call, June 4, 2020.*

Peaceful rallies were held simultaneously in Allentown and Bethlehem on Thursday afternoon, kicking off at 3 p.m. at 12th and Hamilton streets

and in Payrow Plaza, with both calling for an end to police brutality in light of the killing of George Floyd while under restraint by Minneapolis police on Memorial Day.

In Bethlehem, about 1,000 people gathered, chanting “black lives matter” and “no justice, no peace.”

“Until we are all sick and tired, change won’t even begin to happen,” Joshua Smith, one of the Bethlehem organizers, told the crowd. “My skin color should not be perceived as aggressive,” he said. “I’m tired of getting panic attacks anytime I see a cop, not because I fear one or I want to disrespect one, but because I actually fear my life might be taken by one.” Said Cyndria Pugh, “I am sick of people with my skin color feeling threatened by someone else’s skin color.”

The Bethlehem protest was coordinated by Black Lives Matter Lehigh Valley Support, which urged people, through social media, to “Come with a peaceful heart and a loud voice” if not Thursday then Saturday, when the group is planning an Allentown protest. Also Saturday, the Allentown, Bethlehem and Easton chapters of the NAACP will hold a vigil for Floyd at noon at Payrow Plaza.

The sun was hot and the forecast threatening when Thursday’s rallies started. After a Bethlehem demonstrator appeared to faint from the heat, which hovered around 88 degrees, organizers called for a break so everyone could get a drink, and water bottles were passed out.

Though the protest was held next to the police station, officers were not visible in Bethlehem.

In Bethlehem, Mike Henriguez urged everyone to carry the momentum. “It’s an ongoing process and you have to keep it going,” he said. “What is a protest if we do nothing after this?”

Speakers asked for a civilian review board for police misconduct to overcome the “blue wall of silence,” and for the Bethlehem Area School District to remove police officers from school buildings.

Kennedy Hughes read a long list of names of black people killed by police, as the crowd interjected angrily. “Police brutality is not new. Black bodies being killed is not new,” she said. “Black people have been screaming for years, asking the world to pay attention. ... Some of you screamed back at us.”

*from Sarah Cassi, “Hundreds protest police brutality at Black Lives Matter rally in Bethlehem.” lehighvalleylive.com, June 4, 2020.*

Hundreds of black-clad participants, many carrying signs, filled the plaza on the sunny and warm afternoon, and then listened to organizers speak on combating police brutality and racism, and using the movement for positive change in the future.

As organizers spoke, loud chants of “Black Lives Matter,” “No justice no peace” and “George Floyd,” reverberated between the buildings and could be heard from blocks away in the surrounding neighborhood.

Protest organizer Kennedy Hughes began listing the death toll, starting with Botham Jean, then Eric Garner, Tamir Rice, Eric Harris, Philando Castile and Ahmaud Arbery. When she finished talking about Floyd, people in the crowd shouted more names, including Breonna Taylor and Mike Brown.

“What needs to be said goes beyond just today, this week, or even this month. One of my greatest fears is that after the social media posts and the protests slow down, and we go back to work, and after the world returns to somewhat normal, the majority of America will be silent again until another murder is caught on film,” organizer Joshua Smith, 27, told the crowd. “That can’t happen.” Smith said he wanted to be able to feel safe in his own country. “I’m tired of my skin color being taken as a threat before someone even knows my character. I’m tired of me and black bothers and sisters being pulled over because our skin color creates suspicious activity,” he said.

Cyndria Pugh, an organizer from Montgomery County, read the rules of police officers' use of force, which ends with killing a suspect. "Why is that the first one they go to?" she asked, as someone in the crowd yelled, "I can't breathe!"

Organizer Sydney Duffy, who is from Bethlehem, spoke of the "sacrifice" white people will need to make to combat racism in their own lives. "There will be times where you may lose friendships or family relationships due to the ignorance that they choose to pursue," she said, later adding, "Fight for what matters. Fight for justice. Fight for their human rights."

The speakers urged support for black businesses, for the crowd to educate themselves on black art and culture, and to give space and amplify black voices. They touched on improving mental health resources and funding, establishing a civil review board for misconduct in local police departments, and for the Bethlehem Area School District to end its use of city police as school resource officers.

"We need healing from the trauma America has inflicted upon us for hundreds of years. This is not — is not — an issue that can be solved overnight. At all," Matty Fall said. "We will be doing this for years to come, and years after, and we're going to keep working toward it until we see the results we want to see. It's an ongoing process and we have to keep on working at it, and I hope it really doesn't stop here."

The protest comes a day after Bethlehem police Chief Mark DiLuzio released a statement that he was horrified at "the callous actions of the police officer kneeling on Mr. Floyd's neck" and the inaction of the three other police officers. He also denounced looting and violence at nationwide protests.

Organizer Michael Henriquez urged attendees to look at their relationships, with family and friends and at their jobs. "It's time to break the silence. ... It is always an appropriate time to call out racism," he said. "No one is free until everyone, including black lives, are free." For those that stay silent, who ignore cries from the black community, "You have as much blood on your hands as the offenders," Henriquez said. "We are the change America needs to see. We are the future."