

George Floyd's America (1): "Born with two strikes: How systemic racism shaped Floyd's life and hobbled his ambition"

The Bethlehem Gadfly George Floyd killing November 23, 2020

 Latest in a series of posts in the wake of the George Floyd murder 

"You and me [speaking to Councilman Reynolds] had one path in life, and we got to where we are because of that path. There's other people who don't have that path, don't have those opportunities. Ok, that's part of the problem, that goes back to housing, poverty, education, medical assistance in this country and a lot of other different issues. . . . This is something you talk about, the systemic racism, which is part of the problem in this country, and it's embedded in criminal justice, housing, and a lot of other things. . . . And I do have to agree with you, I'm not disagreeing with you . . . but what you're saying is exactly what the Captain has said, the Deputy has said, we talk among ourselves. It may not be here in the City, but it's in the overall system. And that's what we need to go after. And I understand the anger of people out there. I understand the anger of people of color out there. They have the feeling they are not getting their part of the American Dream. And that's what it is. A young kid should expect to grow up in a good family, go to high school, go to college, have a good paying job, but there's a lot of hurdles placed in front of certain kids, and they can't get over those hurdles. You and me, we had hurdles, but we were able to get over them. But everybody doesn't go that same route. I'm in agreement with what

you're saying. I don't know how we change that whole system."



Mark DiLuzio

Bethlehem Chief of Police

2014-2020

George Floyd died 6 months ago this week. The *Washington Post's* six-part series, **“George Floyd’s America,”** examines the role systemic racism played throughout Floyd’s 46-year life. The reporting explores the institutional and societal roadblocks Floyd encountered as a Black man from his birth in 1973 until his death. The series is based on a review of thousands of documents and more than 150 interviews with Floyd’s friends, colleagues, public officials, and scholars.

Gadfly would like you to join with him in reading one part of that remarkable series each day for the next six days, using as your frame the remarkable statement above about the reality of systemic racism by retired Chief Mark DiLuzio at the August 11 Public Safety Committee meeting as part of a conversation with current Chief Michelle Kott and

Councilman Willie Reynolds. The entire **6-minute exchange** is worth listening to.

Disputes over the reality of systemic racism disrupt and divide us nationally and locally, but our officers and our councilman agree that systemic racism not only lives but it haunts us.

“Born with two strikes: How systemic racism shaped Floyd’s life and hobbled his ambition”

His life began as the last embers of the civil rights movement were flickering out. Its horrific, videotaped end ignited the largest anti-racism movement since, with demonstrators the world over marching for racial justice in his name.

During the 46 years in between, George Perry Floyd came of age as the strictures of Jim Crow discrimination in America gave way to an insidious form of systemic racism, one that continually undercut his ambitions.

Early in life, he wanted to be a Supreme Court justice. Then, a pro athlete. At the end, he just longed for a little stability, training to be a commercial truck driver.

All were bigger dreams than he was able to achieve in his version of America. While his death was the catalyst for global protests against racial inequality, the nearly eight minutes Floyd spent suffocating under the knee of a White police officer were hardly the first time he faced oppression.

Throughout his lifetime, Floyd's identity as a Black man exposed him to a gantlet of injustices that derailed, diminished and ultimately destroyed him, according to an extensive review of his life based on hundreds of documents and interviews with more than 150 people, including his siblings, extended family members, friends, colleagues, public officials and scholars.

The picture that emerges is one that underscores how systemic racism has calcified within many of America's institutions, creating sharply disparate outcomes in housing, education, the economy, law enforcement and health care.

continue . . .

the first part in a 6-part series

The Bethlehem Gadfly