

# NCC interview with Justan Parker (1)

[The Bethlehem Gadfly](#) [George Floyd killing](#) October 26, 2020

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

## **The 2020 NCC Peace and Social Justice Conference**

October 13-15

### **Black Lives Matter panel video**

So much going on, Gadfly has gotten behind on conveying material he found so interesting at the NCC conference.

Remember that there was a presentation by the police “abolitionist” from Minneapolis that we slow-walked through. That was the first time that Gadfly had been able to hear an abolitionist in a low-key, low pressure, non-political, academic setting,

Same with the Black Lives Matter session. Justan Parker, head of Black Lives Matter Lehigh Valley, answered questions for an hour or so in the same kind of relaxed environment.

Gadfly’s going to break that interview up into short segments over several posts the better for you to focus on the questions and Justan’s answers.

The movement “Black Lives Matter” and the term “Black lives matter” are hot-buttons, and, as with the abolitionist, Gadfly appreciated the peace and time to reflect on them with the leader of a local group.

Gadfly has always sought different perspectives, and it occurs to him that it would make for good conversation if people with opposing views responded to Justan’s specific questions and specific answers.

“All lives matter” is such a standard come-back to “Black lives matter” that Gadfly wonders if someone(s) would want to respond to Justan here.

Perhaps someone who has parried “Black lives matter” with “All lives matter” or “Blue lives matter” could spin out their position a bit more so that we could compare.

*(Gadfly encourages you to listen to the audios. Do not just depend on his paraphrases.)*

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### **How did you happen to form the LV chapter of Black Lives Matter? (5 mins.)**

Parker recounts how 4 years ago he engaged in a solitary protest that went nowhere, and this year after Floyd he did the same thing and the response was so large that he formed Black Lives Matter Lehigh Valley, a grassroots group focused on the local area and not affiliated with the national BLM organization. Anyone can use the term, he said, it does not have to be associated with the national organization. With no political experience — “we’ll learn along the way” — he and a group of people interested in racial equality started activities including interacting with the Allentown Police Department and Allentown City Council and protests trying to get local people involved. Forget “Black Lives Matter” as an organization, he says, “Black lives matter” is only a sentence. The goal is peace, social justice, equality, and equity for all Black and Brown people.

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### **Why do you protest? (1 min.)**

It’s trauma related. When you see on tv over and over again a Black man with a knee on his neck, that is trauma. That could be me or one of my family and friends. When you see that, you need a channel to express your frustration and anger. People think of peaceful or non-violent protests an oxymoron, but they aren’t. We can be vocal and not violent.

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## **How do you respond to “All lives matter”? (2 mins.)**

All lives matter, but all lives don't matter till the black ones do. Come out of your tunnel vision to understand how hurtful that phrase is. It's shutting down the idea that Black lives matter. It's like saying to a cancer patient that, yes, you have breast cancer but all cancers matter. Yes, we understand the all lives matter, but right now we're talking about the disenfranchised ones, the oppressed ones, the murdered ones — it's dismissive. No one is saying that all lives don't matter. We're talking about people that have been enslaved and undergone subsequent discriminations. We're still feeling the negative effects of that. Our job is to engage and educate people to exactly what we are saying. It's not political, it's human decency to say Black lives matter.

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