

Cindy suggests we read this: “The narrative around the killing of George Floyd is destructively false”

[The Bethlehem Gadfly Police](#) August 22, 2020

 *Latest in a series of posts about the Bethlehem Police* 

*Good conversation builds community.
The Gadfly*

In her comment during the August 11 Public Safety Committee meeting, Cindy O’Brien, as you saw in our last “conversation” post, suggested we read this article. If you know Cindy, be sure to tell her we are doing so.

from [Wilfred C. Riley, “America Run Riot.” Commentary, July/August 2020.](#)

George Floyd was brutally killed by police officers—probably murdered, in fact, in the technical legal sense of that term. However, beyond that fact, which virtually all people of good will agree on, nearly every aspect of the narrative that grew up instantly around his tragic and senseless death has collapsed or seems likely to do so.

The already-standard account is that Floyd was killed by white cops in a vicious display of pure racism, that the killing is evidence of patterns of institutional bias throughout policing and America itself, and that the riots following Floyd’s death represented an almost-justified lashing out at white society.

All of this is questionable or outright false, and the mainstream media, which abandoned a previous frenzied narrative about COVID-19 for this older one of race war, bears great responsibility for presenting it.

In reality, fairly little evidence points to Floyd’s killing being an act specifically of racism, rather than of criminally bad policing that should be punished by jury and judge. Virtually forgotten in the entire George Floyd conversation is that there were four officers on the scene when he died, at least three of whom apparently restrained Floyd—only two of whom could be considered white. Tou Thao, age 34, is of Hmong

descent, while J. Alexander Kueng is a Korean-surnamed speaker of multiple languages with a college degree in sociology. Neither of these officers apparently confronted the knee-wielding Sergeant Derek Chauvin at any point during his restraint of Floyd.

Even the conclusion that Chauvin's own motivation was "anti-blackness" is far from obvious. The most disturbing of several misconduct charges against him came from white Twin Cities resident Melissa Borton. Moreover, Chauvin was in an interracial marriage with a woman from the Philippines at the time of Floyd's death. It is also notable that Floyd himself had worked security at the same Minneapolis club that employed a moonlighting Chauvin, and that the two might well have known and personally disliked each other.

Many recent "race violence" stories have shared this tendency—the denial of all-too-human complexity in favor of a simple and crude storyline. . . . The narratives of undeniable racism surrounding individual tragedies such as Floyd's begin to lose their clarity upon close examination. But close examination is not what we get from our town criers. The consensus position of the center-left in the United States is that there is an extraordinary wave of widely tolerated police and citizen violence against people of color.

Excellent data on police violence are easily available, and they torpedo the "genocide" claim—and for that matter any narrative about generally out-of-control policing. According to the *Washington Post's* police-killings database, the gold standard in this field from a left-leaning publication, the *total* number of unarmed black persons killed by police during 2019 was 15. There are 42 million Black people in the United States. The overall number of unarmed individuals killed by police during that year was 56. Even adding in all those armed with a weapon or attacking officers, police in 2019 took exactly 229 black lives, out of a total of 1,004 among the 330 million people living in America.

The situation surrounding the death of George Floyd is complex, because human beings and the world we occupy are complex. Certainly, the standard three-part conventional-liberal narrative about the tragedy should collapse upon any serious contemplation. George Floyd's death was an example of brutal and abusive policing, but there is little evidence

that the team of officers, 50 percent of whom qualify as “people of color,” was composed of rabid racists.

What to do about all this? Strong leadership from the White House, ranging from a major policy speech on policing to deployment of the National Guard where still needed, would be extraordinarily welcome. At the local and regional level, leaders must protect both the right of activists to peacefully protest and the right of all citizens to be secure in their homes and businesses. But we should also, now and in the future, take an additional step and loudly demand some actual facts from those whose job it is to provide them.