

George Floyd's America (5): "Being Black in America . . . is its own preexisting condition"

The Bethlehem Gadfly George Floyd killing November 27, 2020

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

"You and me, we had hurdles [speaking to Councilman Reynolds], 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. Gadfly would like you to join with him in reading one part of that remarkable series each day this week.

"Racism's hidden toll: In Minneapolis, the physical and mental strain of a lifetime confronting racism surfaced in George Floyd's final years"

MINNEAPOLIS — George Floyd came to this city with a broken body and wilted dreams, his many attempts at a better life out of his grasp. He was left with no college degree, no sports contract, no rap career, not even a steady job. At 43, what he had was an arrest record and a drug

problem, his hopes hinging on one last shot at healing.



So in February of 2017 he decided to board a bus in Houston and ride more than 1,100 miles on Interstate 35 almost straight north to Minneapolis. Waiting for him was his friend Aubrey Rhodes, who had taken the same journey a year earlier. Rhodes was now sober and working as a security guard at the Salvation Army.

“Damn, bro, it’s cold,” Rhodes recalled Floyd saying on what was, for Minnesota, a balmy 50-degree winter day.

“You ready for this?” Rhodes asked him. “You can get yourself together here. You can find a way to live.”

Finding a way to live has never been a sure thing for Black men in America, who are taught from an early age that any misstep could lead to a prison cell or a coffin. They have higher rates of hypertension, obesity and heart disease, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. They are twice as likely as White men to die of a cocaine overdose, twice as likely to be killed by police and, in Floyd’s age group, 10 times as likely to die of a homicide.

Public-health researchers and scientists once held that these disparities were the result of poor choices — bad diets, lack of exercise, being in the wrong place at the wrong time. But experts are increasingly pointing to

another culprit: systemic racism. Being Black in America, they have found, is its own preexisting condition.

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the fifth part in a 6-part series

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