

Protest participant: “To be a part of the future, you need to be a part of the solution”

The Bethlehem Gadfly George Floyd killing June 1, 2020

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

“We are one”

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photo by Tom Shortell, Morning Call

from Tom Shortell, “Voices from the weekend’s protests: Hundreds in Lehigh Valley speak up against police brutality.” Morning Call, May 31, 2020.

Two enormous crowds marched through Allentown and Bethlehem Saturday afternoon, joining a growing list of cities where citizens demonstrated their outrage against police brutality and the death of Minneapolis man George Floyd.

The Lehigh Valley’s protests drew a diverse group — locals and people from out of state, ranging in age from toddlers to senior citizens. Racial

identities were widespread as well; a majority of protesters in Bethlehem appeared to be white while Allentown's was predominantly people of color.

The roof of the champagne-colored BMW buckled but held as Jerome Wilson danced on it in front of Bethlehem's Payrow Plaza. He and his friends had driven the car from Newark and leaned on the horn as they escorted a river of protesters between Rose Garden Park and City Hall. Wilson previously lived in Bethlehem for a year, but he hadn't seen it like this.

"Everybody's here," he said between jubilant fist bumps with protesters. "White people. Black people. Hispanics. Chinese. Muslims."

Wilson said people are protesting after growing tired of a corrupt system. Too many black people are set up to fail in the justice system, he said, noting he first found himself in front of a judge in seventh grade. He's lost count of how many friends are in prison. But while he fed off the energy of the crowd's chanting vulgarities about police, it did nothing to settle his raw emotions.

"For every one of ours they've taken, I want to take two of theirs," he said.

Moments later, a protester fell to the ground after being hit by a slow-moving vehicle trying to pass through the throngs. Wilson and some friends charged toward the driver, but others jumped in between. It was an honest accident; The driver stopped and apologized, witnesses said. Wilson bounded away, back into the crowd.

Joanne Garcia walked along the fringes of the crowd at Rose Garden Park. As protesters chanted "No justice, no peace," her 2-year-old son casually eyed the swarm of humanity from his stroller.

As a Latina, Garcia said, interactions with police are a concern routinely weighing on the back of her mind even though she's never had any problems. But although she's watched news cycles of minorities dying in police custody for years, she had not joined any protests before. She couldn't explain why Floyd's death compelled her when others had not

but suspected it could be the little boy content to munch on graham crackers.

In a video of his final moments widely circulated online, the 46-year-old Floyd called out for his mother. She had died two years earlier.

“To be a part of the future, you need to be a part of the solution,” Garcia said as she pushed her baby buggy across Broad Street.