

George Floyd's America (2): "Floyd had long seen sports as his path out of the poverty, crime and drugs of Houston's Third Ward"

The Bethlehem Gadfly George Floyd killing November 24, 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, 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.

“Looking for his ticket out: At Jack Yates High, No. 88 pinned his dreams on sports”

HOUSTON — Shortly before the kickoff of the 1992 state championship game, George Floyd, the starting tight end for mighty Jack Yates High School, stepped onto the field at the University of Texas.

As he took in the stadium, packed then with nearly 78,000 seats, Floyd bumped into Ralph Cooper, a sports radio personality who had had him on his show a few times. Over the years, he had gently pressed the basketball and football star to take the school part of school more seriously.



There, surrounded by the state’s flagship university and all it had to offer, Floyd wondered aloud whether he should have listened. “Now I see what some of you all were talking about in regards to making that extra effort in the classroom,” Cooper recalled Floyd telling him.

At that moment, Floyd's future was already in jeopardy. He had tried and failed at least twice to pass a mandatory state exam. If he couldn't pass it, he wouldn't graduate. A big-time college scholarship would be out of the question.

Floyd had long seen sports as his path out of the poverty, crime and drugs of Houston's Third Ward. At 6 feet 6 inches, he excelled at basketball and then football, and his talents repeatedly gave him a shot at a different life. But, just as often, Floyd's shaky education stood in his way.

Jack Yates High School has long been a source of identity, pride and affection in Houston's Black community. Founded in 1926, it was named for a formerly enslaved man who became an influential minister. Graduates include city leaders and national figures such as broadcaster Roland Martin, actress Phylicia Rashad and her sister, the choreographer Debbie Allen. It has thrived in sports, producing, in 1985, what some say is the best high school team in Texas football history.

But for decades Yates has struggled in its central mission to educate students, a victim of a U.S. educational system that concentrates the poorest, highest-need children together, setting them up for failure.

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the second part in a 6-part series

The Bethlehem Gadfly