

REFLECTIONS ON THE KILLING OF GEORGE FLOYD

By Ashby L. Camp

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It is easy to be misunderstood and misjudged when saying anything on a racially charged subject, but I believe the following affirmations related to the killing of George Floyd are worth the risk. I hope they will contribute to unity by identifying common ground or by revealing where perspectives diverge and showing the reasonableness of those differences. In the face of forces working to pull us apart, may God help us as his people to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

1. All human beings are made in God's image (Gen. 1:26-27, 9:6) and are descendants of Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:20; Acts 17:26) through Noah, his sons, and their wives (Gen. 7:3, 22-23; 2 Pet. 2:5). Racism, the negative prejudging of someone on the basis of their race, is sinful. It denies to a family member and fellow bearer of God's image the dignity inherent in that status, violates the command to love one's neighbor as oneself (Lev. 19:18, Mat. 22:39; Mk. 12:31; Lk. 10:27; Gal. 5:14), and violates the "Golden Rule" (Mat. 7:12; Lk. 6:31) by treating another person in a way one would not like to be treated. There certainly is no room for racism in the body of Christ. The church in all its racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity is declared to be one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:27-28; Col. 3:11). Our mutual sharing in the Spirit of God is a unifying bond that transcends all our differences (1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 4:1-6). Christ's sacrificial work created "one new man" not only from the diversity of Jew and Gentile (Eph. 2:14-16) but from the diversity of all humanity. It is the unified diversity of the church, represented by the unity of Jew and Gentile, that proclaims the Lord's glory, his multifaceted wisdom, to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places (Eph. 2:4-10). This is so significant that in Rev. 5:8-10 the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders sing praises to Jesus for his having ransomed people for God "from every tribe and language and people and nation" and having made them a kingdom and priests to God (see also, Rev. 7:9-12).

2. George Floyd was a victim of outrageous police brutality and excessive use of force.¹ The perpetrator, Derek Chauvin, and the other officers on the scene (Tou Thao, J. Alexander Kueng and Thomas Lane) should be held accountable through due process of law for whatever crimes they committed. That is what justice means, applying the law evenhandedly to all people. To that end, Chauvin has been charged with second-degree murder, third-degree murder, and second-degree manslaughter. The other officers have been charged with aiding and abetting second-degree murder while committing a felony and with aiding and abetting second-degree manslaughter with culpable negligence (see [here](#)). Former federal prosecutor Andrew McCarthy analyzes the charges [here](#). The U.S. Department of Justice also is [investigating](#) whether the

¹ This affirmation, which seemed so clear on the basis of the initial video of the incident, now strikes me as debatable (as I was warned might happen). See especially, "[Who Killed George Floyd?](#)" and "[The George Floyd Fall Guys](#)."

officers violated Floyd's civil rights, and a wrongful death [civil action](#) against the police department on behalf of Floyd's estate is in the works. The wheels of justice are grinding.

3. There is at present no evidence that Chauvin's actions were motivated by bigotry or racial animus. There are nearly [700,000](#) law enforcement officers in the United States, of varying temperaments, training, and professionalism, and they have [over 50 million](#) encounters with citizens each year. Sometimes cops kill people without justification, but as Sharif Khan [explained recently](#), one cannot jump to the conclusion that unjustified uses of lethal force are racially motivated simply because the perpetrator and victim were of different races. The same incompetence, fear, aggression, anger, ego, or callousness that led police to kill a white man who was [begging for his life](#), to kill a handcuffed white man by [kneeling on his back and neck](#) for nearly fourteen minutes (video [here](#)), or to deliberately [shoot a white woman](#) standing next to a police car in her pajamas (in the same county where Floyd was killed) could explain an interracial killing. (See [here](#) for further examples of police shootings of unarmed white people chosen at random from the year 2015.) Without proof that Chauvin's conduct was racially motivated, it is both wrong and harmful to declare that it was. It is speaking evil of someone with no basis, and it wrongfully fuels animosity toward the police. Should evidence emerge which proves Chauvin acted out of racism, he is to be condemned for that in addition to being condemned for his brutality and excessive use of force.

4. Chauvin's conduct provides no justification for anyone to commit crimes against property and people, to engage in vandalism, arson, theft, assault, and murder. Refusing to condemn such criminal conduct unequivocally, to wink at or excuse it as a just recompense for perceived social evils is to approve of sinful violence and to encourage rebellion against the governing authorities. It is wrong regardless of one's politics. To excuse this conduct is to bless injustice in the name of protesting injustice. In the [words](#) of African-American academic Glenn Loury:

In cities across our country we have witnessed, often in real time, violent attacks on the police, looting of commercial outlets, and torching of the property of innocent bystanders. That is, some of the protests have descended into riots. This rioting is also [like Chauvin's conduct] contemptible, and it, too, demands our unreserved condemnation. Not only are theft, arson, and violence immoral, but they are also politically counterproductive.

It should be obvious that the outrageous injustice apparently perpetrated against George Floyd can in no way justify or excuse the criminal behaviors of those few who are using the chaos of mass protests as a cover for their sprees of looting, arson, and mayhem. No civilized society can allow righteous anger to become a license for indulging one's basest instincts. The violence, arson, and theft must stop. And so long as they continue, they must be forcefully condemned.

5. One cannot conflate the Christian's obligation to care about justice with the claim there is a systemic bias against blacks in the use of deadly force by the police. That is a prescription for division because honest people of good faith can reasonably believe that no such systemic bias exists. (I issue the same caution regarding other claims of systemic racism in my paper

[Neither Black Nor White But All One in Christ.](#)) In raw numbers, each year police officers fatally shoot [roughly twice as many](#) whites as blacks, and in 2019 they fatally shot [slightly over twice as many](#) *unarmed* whites (19) as *unarmed* blacks (9).² Though a higher percentage of the black population is killed, using population percentages as the only relevant benchmark can easily mislead. For example, the fact men are shot to death by police around *20 times more frequently than women*, despite the two sexes being evenly represented in the population, does not prove that police are biased against males. Rather, other sociological factors, such as the disproportionate involvement of men in higher-risk criminal conduct, account for the disparity. Recent studies, including two by an African-American professor at Harvard, apply more sophisticated benchmarks in analyzing racial disparities in lethal uses of force by the police and find no systemic bias. Here are some resources.

Academic papers and related explanatory material

- a. [Is There Evidence of Racial Disparity in Police Use of Deadly Force?](#)

[Are Black Americans shot by police more than we would expect?](#)
(description of the research)

- b. [Officer characteristics and racial disparities in fatal officer-involved shootings](#)

[Our database of police officers who shoot citizens reveals who shot citizens](#) (description of the research)

[Interview regarding the research](#)

[Reply to Knox and Mummolo and Schimmack and Carlsson: Controlling for crime and population rates](#) (reply to criticisms of the research)

- c. [An Empirical Analysis of Racial Differences in Police Use of Force](#)
- d. [What Factors Influence an Officer's Decision to Shoot?](#)
- e. [Reconciling Results on Racial Differences in Police Shootings](#)

Some popular-level articles

- a. [Dispelling the Myths Surrounding Police Use of Lethal Force](#)

² Heather Mac Donald [testified](#) before the House Committee on the Judiciary on June 10, 2020:

After the tally of nine unarmed black victims was reported in certain news outlets last week, the *Post* reclassified over a dozen of its armed victims of police shootings as unarmed. This reclassification occurred six months after the *Post* had already closed its 2019 data base. The reclassification was not done on the basis of any new information; it was undoubtedly done to get the black victim numbers up. The *Post* is now showing 15 unarmed black victims in 2019. That is 0.2 percent of all black homicide victims, still a negligible number.

- b. [There Is No Epidemic of Racist Police Shootings](#)
- c. [Researchers Find No Racial Disparity in Police Deadly Force](#)
- d. [Why the Claims by Black Lives Matter of Police Shootings Are False](#)
- e. [Darkness Falls](#)
- f. [The Myth of Systemic Police Racism](#)
- g. [Mac Donald: Statistics Do Not Support The Claim Of 'Systemic Police Racism'](#)
- h. [The Numbers Don't Support BLM Claims About the Police](#)
- i. [There Is No Systemic Racism in Policing](#)
- j. [Are Cops 'Hunting Down Black Men'? Statistics Say No](#)
- k. [The 'Institutional Racism' Canard](#)
- l. [Flames from False Narratives](#)
- m. [Let's Look At The Actual Facts About The Alleged Racism of Police](#)
- n. [Repudiate the Anti-Police Narrative](#)
- o. [Stories and Data - Reflections on race, riots, and police](#)

6. Denying or doubting there is systemic bias against blacks in the use of lethal force by the police is not to deny that racism still exists in our society or that it constitutes, at the very least, an emotional burden on black Americans. Nor is it to deny the unique distress of black Americans over the Floyd killing or that police departments should do a better job in limiting brutality and excessive uses of force. In rightly standing against racism, we must be careful not to define it according to our disputable judgments that we end up claiming Christ's authority for our own mission. As I say, that is a path to division.

May God grant us wisdom and a spirit of love and unity. Peace to all who are in Christ.