



Hallie Q. Brown Community Center, Inc.



**May 25, 2023**

**Dear Friends of Hallie Q. Brown,**

Today, on the third anniversary of the murder of George Floyd, I thought it important to reflect on one of the contributing factors to his death and nearly every other racialized incident in our country: racial relativity.

In 1905, Albert Einstein published his Theory of Special Relativity, introducing the concept of space-time and positing, in brief, that space and time are inextricably connected and events that occur at the same time for one observer could occur at different times for another observer. But that theory didn't account for the effect of gravity, leading Einstein to introduce his Theory of General Relativity offering an idea of how gravity affects the fabric of space-time. The traditional view was that gravity was an invisible force pulling things together. General relativity states that gravity is how mass warps space and time. The bigger the mass, the more it warps things.

With apologies to Einstein, there is another factor that wasn't considered...race.

The impact of race on time and space has never been examined.

Three years ago, on May 25, 2020, a Black man was murdered on the streets of Minneapolis. George Floyd was accused of purchasing cigarettes with a counterfeit \$20 bill. Police showed up shortly after they were called, a little after 8:00pm. Officer Derek Chauvin arrived at 8:17pm. Twenty minutes later, two fire department medics boarded an ambulance and found Floyd pulseless and unresponsive. Less than 50 minutes later he was pronounced dead. Chauvin had knelt on his neck for 9 minutes and 29 seconds, murdering him in the streets of Minneapolis.

On May 29th, Derek Chauvin was **arrested at home** and charged with third degree murder and manslaughter, later upgraded to second degree murder.

On April 11, 2021, at 1:53pm, **DURING** the trial of Derek Chauvin, Daunte Wright was pulled over for having an air freshener hanging from his rearview mirror and/or having expired tags by an officer trainee. Officer Kim Potter had decided to use Wright as a training exercise for her trainees. During the stop, they discovered an arrest warrant that had just been issued for failure to appear in court and the decision was made to arrest him. 35 minutes later at 2:18pm, Wright was pronounced dead at the scene because Officer Potter pull her gun, allegedly mistaking it for her taser, and shot him.



On April 14th, Kim Potter was **arrested AT the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension**, charged with second degree manslaughter.

On May 1, 2023, around 2:27pm, New York police were called about a fight on the F Train. Jordan Neely, a Black man and homeless street performer struggling with grief and mental illness, was acting erratic and yelling about being hungry and thirsty and not minding going to jail, yet did not physically attack anyone. Daniel Penny, a white ex-Marine, took it upon himself to put Neely in a chokehold for 15 minutes. Neely was motionless when the fire department arrived at 2:46pm and transported him to the hospital where he was pronounced dead.

On May 3rd, the medical examiner declared Neely's death a homicide. On May 12th, Penny was charged with 2nd degree manslaughter. Penny **turned himself in** and was released on \$100,000 bail.

Are you beginning to see the pattern?

In each of the incidents above, a white person, *with specialized government training*, took it upon themselves to exceed their mandate, resulting in the death of a Black man. There were no immediate consequences; they were each allowed to retain their freedom until charged. And the more egregious the situation, the more warped, the longer it took for justice to come calling.



*THREE days after* mistaking her gun for her taser and killing Daunte Wright, Kim Potter was allowed to turn herself in after also being allowed to resign and stay at home. She served 16 months of a two-year sentence.

*FOUR days after* kneeling on George Floyd's back and neck for 9 minutes and 29 seconds resulting in his murder, Derek Chauvin was arrested at home. Minneapolis Police initially attempted to cover up the murder for Chauvin by omitting details of his action and claiming Floyd "appeared to be in medical distress" while in custody...until a video surfaced revealing Chauvin's actions. Several times, they attempted to charge him with lower crimes than the ones he was convicted of. Chauvin is currently serving a 22 1/2 year sentence.

*ELEVEN days after* holding Jordan Neely for 15 minutes in a chokehold that would incapacitate a person without killing them in a couple of minutes when done right, Daniel Penny, **who had no authority or reason to restrain** Jordan in the first place, as he was just a common white man, was able to turn himself in and be released on \$100,000 bond after killing a man.

But, it was a BLACK man.

Which brings us back to the introduction the Theory of Racial Relativity: the rate at which a person is held accountable for a crime is relative to their race and proportional to their whiteness. The more warped the situation is, the longer it takes justice to be administered.



Three Black men were each killed in under an hour after committing a low level or nuisance crime: passing a counterfeit \$20 bill, having expired tabs and an air freshener, disturbing the peace because they're hungry and hurt.

Three white people were allowed to initially walk free after killing a Black man without cause or authority. They were given lesser sentences than their crime demanded, if at all; they have the financial and moral support of large swaths of the white community, despite those people not knowing the facts of each situation....but they don't need to because they're not defending the killers' actions, they're defending their whiteness.



Even Andrew Lester, the 84-year old white man who shot a young Black man at close range for ringing his doorbell, was allowed to turn himself in when he wanted to. Ironically Lester's bail was double that of Penny's, even though Penny killed a man!

But again, it was a BLACK man...

The problem is what it has always been in this country...race.

It was the issue when the invasion of this land was justified.

It was the issue when the abduction and enslavement of a People was justified.

It was the issue when the policy of physical and bureaucratic walls replaced the policy of "give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free..."

It was the issue when internment camps housed Americans who looked like the Imperial Army, but not those who looked like the Nazis.

It IS the issue when you try to pretend that there are "*very fine people on both*

*sides."*

This is the problem as it stands today, with white supremacy so deeply entrenched, with systemic racism so deeply rooted that when you criticize or protest it, people think you're criticizing or protesting America.

And they will take that glorious misunderstanding and fan its flames until it spreads across the country like a brushfire. They will use that fire to burn down everything that is good and right in this country all while blaming it on you for daring to stand against America's internalized racism.



In point of fact, they already are...in places where they are criminalizing the discussion of race; in places where teachers can't discuss "divisive topics" like race; in places where they are insisting that no one bears any responsibility for the outcomes and outgrowths of Slavery, Jim Crow and systemic racism.

We are teetering on the edge of a moment in history, a moment that can define or destroy this generation. A moment that if we seize it to act, will serve to strike the iron of justice and launch the next phase of the revolution that began with the murder of George Floyd.

If we pause for a moment, and listen to the souls of George, Daunte and Jordan and take a lesson from the dead, hatred was what killed them. Justice is what set them free.

We cannot allow racial relativity to remain as the standard bearer for justice in this country. We cannot stand idly by while sycophants and hypocrites traffic in legislation and hyperbole meant to dismantle our principles and common decency.

This nation was founded on one principle above all else: the requirement that we stand up for what's right, for what we believe, no matter the odds or the consequences.



We must stand our ground now against racism and oppression. We must demand accountability for racial hatred. We must never forget that there are **NEVER** "very fine people" on both sides when it comes to racism. To continue to accept or allow that idea to circulate, even passively, is to embrace and empower racism. And that is the end of all that we've been fighting for. That is the end of the legacies of Frederick Douglass, Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., Harriet Tubman. That is the end of justice...

That is the end of America.

Three years ago, a man was murdered on the streets of Minneapolis, we must never let that be in vain.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'JP' followed by a stylized flourish.

Jonathan Palmer  
Executive Director

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