

The birth of a new system



By Nate Smelle

On May 25, 2020 the life of George Floyd was snuffed out on camera by Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin for the world to see. By the time this video was reaching people's eyes and ears less than a week after Floyd's murder, the moral outrage it sparked had spread world-wide.

In the weeks and months to come, millions of people from more than 60 countries took to the streets to stand against racial injustice, hatred, and police brutality. Although public lynchings of Black people in the United States have been going on since the country's founding, there was something more disturbingly sinister about watching a man paid from the public's purse to protect and serve others, kneel on the throat of another man for nine minutes and 29 seconds while he screamed repeatedly through the terminal pressure, "I can't breathe!"

If it wasn't for the courage and strength of Darnella Frazier, the 17-year-old young woman who filmed Floyd's murder, his screams would not still be resonating with people so loudly. Knowing the danger she was in as a young Black woman while filming this heinous crime, she continued to record at her own risk.

Following the trial of Floyd's killer as it unfolded, one of the most saddening yet influential pieces of testimony came from Frazier when she was asked to describe how viewing and experiencing Floyd's murder had impacted her life.

Sharing her story while fighting off tears, Frazier said, "When I look at George Floyd, I look at my dad, I look at my brother, I look at my cousins, I look at my uncles, because they are all Black. I have a Black father, I have a Black brother, I have Black friends; and I look at that and I look at how that could have been one of them. It has been nights that I've stayed up apologizing, and apologizing to George Floyd for not doing more, and not physically interacting, and not saving his life."

Then, after expressing her remorse for not physically attempting to stop Chauvin from murdering Floyd, she declared, "It's not what I should have done. It's what he [Chauvin] should have done."

If history has taught us anything, we all know that if Frazier would have physically attempted to remove Chauvin from Floyd, she most likely would have been murdered as well. Without her video, without her testimony, would the Black Lives Matter movement still be changing the world on a daily basis as it is today? Would this movement have sprouted up in North Hastings as it did last summer?

Taking into consideration the prevalence of racism in the U.S., Canada, and around the globe, I believe it was just a matter of time before we reached a tipping point. Still, Frazier's role in growing this movement and exposing the horrific reality of systemic racism limiting our potential as human beings must be acknowledged.

By capturing and sharing the gruesome images and sounds of this murder online, Frazier shone a bright light on an ugliness that has existed for many centuries, and in many forms. Through our observations of colonization, slavery, the Holocaust, Trumpism, and genocide after genocide, we have proven that turning a blind eye to systemic racism allows hatred to flourish. Now that this hatred has been illuminated for all to see, there is no turning back. We as a society and a species are morally obligated to crush it at its root before it has the chance to grow.

As civil rights leader John Lewis once said, "It takes courage to admit that we participate in killing, violence, and hate around the world. And once you face the truth, it is difficult to retreat back into a state of unconsciousness. Becoming aware of the truth requires action, and that is when the struggle begins.?"