

“Tribute 2 Hymn: George Floyd Gone One Year”

May 24, 2021

Dear fellow members of the CFA: as tomorrow is the **one-year anniversary of the murder of George Floyd**, we wish to share this tribute, which was written by Mark Allan Davis, the chair of the CFASFSU’s Council on Racial and Social Justice, and endorsed by the Executive Board. It expresses our collective belief that racial and social justice remains elusive, including on our own campus and that **the memory of George Floyd must inspire all of us to work towards this critical goal.**

In Memoriam: Tribute 2 Hymn: George Floyd Gone One Year

by Mark Allan Davis



Gianna Floyd, George Floyd's daughter, now 7.

LIARS DON'T HEAL

George Floyd was publicly lynched one year ago on May 25, 2020. Ahmed Arbery, Breonna Taylor, Stephon Clark, Sandra Bland; we know the names, we say them. We know the long, exponential list as their names are embedded in our consciousnesses. Mr. Floyd, gone on Memorial Day, screamed out for his mother, gasping for breath with rasped, muffled exhalations. A crescendo and decrescendo of “Mama” sang from the depths of his sinews and marrow, his voice reaching out to his mother like the DNA helix that interwove mother and son in his creation. His cries for the life she had treasured were smothered by the tormentor's entire body weight concentrated onto one knee pressed against Floyd's neck. Outwards, George hailed, for he knew the best within him waned, but he must reach the constellations to the ears of the one to whom he mattered most. Larcenia "Cissy" Floyd, wasn't dead a year when the "tormenter"

chose to expedite the reunion of the beloved mother with her eldest child. The world saw, witnessing George Floyd's life unwillingly disembark his body, forced out with the brutality of the auction block, the emasculation of the ax, and whipping post exposed not as artifacts of the past but as the map to the perpetual, violent, consumption of Black life. The greatest sin is the great lie of our society's *goodness*, and "The Lie" will kill to protect itself from the very act of knowing George Floyd has love. He reminded us that we all have love.

"The Lie" must crush life and love and limb. George Floyd fought back by calling out to his mother and to his ancestors, "countering the dismembered past of slavery and its consequences" (Forbes, 617)

We remember that he called out to us that he had love, reminding us that we all do. When there is nowhere else to turn, our inherent need to come back to the place from whence we came has mortal immediacy. With his body pushed into concrete, crushing his heart and lungs, his life cried out with love.

The Battle Hymn of Racial Fatigue

verdict 1: the finding or decision of a jury on the matter submitted to it in a trial. 2: opinion, judgment.

In the new, four-part docuseries on HBO, *Exterminate All the Brutes*, Oscar-nominated Haitian film director Raoul Peck (*I Am Not Your Negro*), explains his film "is a sweeping journey back through some of the most horrific moments on civilization over the past half-millennium to trace the roots of humanity's worst impulses: genocide, slavery, deal with it fascism, white supremacy, colonialism." (The Guardian, April 7, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/tvand-radio/2021/apr/07/raoulpeckexterminate-all-the-brutes-colonialism-hbo>)

It is a painful, enthralling masterpiece. It is at once a familiar nightmare but as an amalgamation of once believed impenetrable nightmares of the truthful origins of white supremacy. It is a cascade of horrors that so many would deny or forget. The title alone *Exterminate. All. The. Brutes.* Is succinctly and fastidiously explained like open-heart surgery while, in the end, excluding the sutures. The four hours of this triumphant work perpetuate the truism that life cannot be believed without art perpetuating its truth.

Emmett Till's open casket funeral in 1955, ordered by his mother, Mamie Till, exposed the world to more than her son's bloated, mutilated body. Her decision focused attention not only on America's racism and the barbarism of lynching but also on the limitations and vulnerabilities of American democracy. Her insistence on the open casket and on the publication of graphic photos of her son's body in the pages of *Jet Magazine* and the *Chicago Defender* presaged the role of cell phones to expose this next era of anti-Black violence today. Mamie Till used the visual strategies of her time, an open casket and print journalism was her 'by any means necessary,' including re-traumatizing her community for the world to know what 'they did to her boy'. If Larcenia "Cissy" Floyd had seen what was done to her son would she have even survived? Yes, she would have survived; Black mothers have been forced to survive the execution of their children for four hundred years. Genocide does such things to mothers. Post. Traumatic. Slave. Syndrome.

When George Floyd was lynched his name landed on the *racist regime's* roster of greatest hits. Another *brute* exterminated. Unlike the men that tortured and killed Emmett Till for supposedly whistling at a white woman— and acquitted by an all-white jury—the "officer of the peace" who devoured Mr. Floyd was found guilty. Through this verdict, The Man Who Killed George Floyd (TMWKGF) perversely joins the regime's minions, breathing more new lifeblood into white supremacy. White society has loaded the

sins of the nation upon (TMWKGF) like the scapegoat of the Israelites before banishing him to the wilderness. For many property owners, business owners, mayors, and governors, this was indeed a hallelujah verdict: now that he's guilty *they* won't burn down our cities and towns, our halls of justice, our way of life; our system is safe from *them*.

For those that think in this myopic, systemic way, the verdict was a big *phew*. An exhalation centered on the self-regard intrinsic to supremacy. The man that killed George Floyd was America's *Great White Hope That He Gets Convicted*. Is it not plausible that a former slave as a Freedman could have said to his freeborn son, "We may be separate, but there won't ever come a time when they would let us ever be equal." That would've been *The Talk* in 1896. That would've been the year of Plessy vs. Ferguson which fueled more Jim Crow laws across the country and two years before the 1898 Insurrection and Massacre in Wilmington, North Carolina. The last bastion of the successes of Reconstruction held on as the flicker of hope for Freedmen and women was burned down, lynched, shot, and chopped. That insurrection was the only successful *coup d'etat* in American history. All the brutes were exterminated. But were they?



His Mercies Bear in Mind

What we must not forget are the mercies that George Floyd's death left us. Viewing all the people, flowers, and balloons that filled George Floyd Square in Minneapolis from the shoulders of her father's friend Stephen Jackson, George Floyd's now seven-year-old daughter Gianna happily shouted, "my daddy changed the world!"

Unearthing the performative allyship and virtue signaling of CEOs, legislators, and administrators provides a great opportunity to compare words and actions. The flood of statements from our corporations, institutions of higher learning, mayors, and governors showcasing pearl-clutching, breathy solidarity with Black Lives Matter are now exposed as empty gestures by the actions they have failed to take one year later. One of the many mercies George Floyd's tragedy has left us is the chance to view statements from our leadership to see how they hold up.

In a June 8th, 2020 article, *Higher Ed's Toothless Response to the Killing of George Floyd*, in the

Chronicle for Higher Education, written by two Black professors at Carnegie Mellon University, Jason Englund and Richard Purcell relate how the university leadership's statements showcase a struggle with the unholy alchemy of risk management, legal liability, and trustee anxiety. They write:

For instance, Lawrence S. Bacow, President of Harvard University called George Floyd's death "senseless" and condemned racism. But his statement, like many others, failed to acknowledge the demands of protesters and quickly pivoted to platitudes about his own beliefs. The statement from the chancellor of the University of California at San Diego addressed specifically to Black students and staff and faculty members, offers a true master class in the passive voice: "We condemn the racist and unjust rhetoric and actions that have resulted in more attacks on Black Americans." It is as if the same laws that shield the police from prosecution for killing Black women and men have been projected into the rules of grammar.

On our own campus website, one can read, in a public statement following the Amy Cooper, and Christopher Cooper (a Black, Harvard educated man) incident where Ms. Cooper (No relation) called the police on Mr. Cooper, screaming that an African-American man was threatening her life. This happened on the same day as George Floyd's killing as:

*"On May 25, Christian Cooper was birding in Central Park when a white woman **weaponized her race and gender to falsely accuse him of a crime.**"*

Amy Cooper did not only weaponize her privilege and *white woman tears*, she absolutely weaponized the police. She placed every Black man in a two-mile radius of her call from the Ramble in Central Park in mortal danger. By placing the blame solely on Ms. Cooper's actions regarding the weaponization of her race, police culpability is removed from the scenario, and the history of policing as a militia to capture runaway slaves and then to enforce the humiliations of Jim Crow is erased. Amy Cooper's distress and fragility are not far removed from Carolyn Bryant's, the white woman who told her husband that Emmett Till had flirted with her. Till was later taken that night from his uncle's home by two white men who pistol-whipped him, beat him, shot him, then tied his body to a large fan engine with barbed wire and disposed of 'it' in the Tallahatchie River.

George Floyd's death was a viral incident. Since the beginning of the trial of the police officer who killed George Floyd (early 2021), there were 64 deaths nationally related to police violence, and half of those reported deaths were of unarmed Black and Latinx people.

The mercies of George Floyd are not easily found, although they can be seen on web pages all around America. Solidarity for Black Lives Matter? The Mercies require your proactivity. Co-liberation and transformative justice must meet face-to-face with the creators of the systems that proffer deceptive messaging. From Purcell and Englund:

The right thing is not releasing statements that denounce a single killing while neglecting to connect that killing to the larger circumstances that made it inevitable. The right thing does not encourage us to mourn tragedies rather than attack systemic failings; to perform grief without admitting culpability. All of that is antithetical to the holistic analysis on which the best transformative scholarship hinges. The crises we face today are not isolated tragedies or a passing pandemic. They are manifestations of deep-seated, continuing injustices that are endemic to American society. The right thing is to acknowledge that truth and meet it head-on.

Exterminate All the Brutes has collages of imagery that cover the history of white supremacy at a blurring pace but at the same time, some moments appear decelerated. In one such moment the narrator, Raoul Peck, shows a map of North America with every single Native state and how the settlers of discovery and all the doctrines of the European settlers become an imperceptible eraser. All the native land crumbles away, disappearing as if engulfed in an invisible blaze, succumbing to genocide for more *free land*.

On Tuesday, May 25th, 2021 let us look back over this year through Zoom-fatigued eyes and racially battle-scarred minds, with more conflicts in the Middle East to scroll past, and neo-fascist policies burgeoning, Anti-Critical Race Theory legislation proliferating, and let us please not forget that by remembering and witnessing George Floyd's death we've become enlightened. We endure. Now, a year later have our institutions maintained all the "We will" "We must" "We have"? Therefore, there will never be a 'normal' again. We can't, nor will we ever be 'back to before.' How we learn, how we teach our young, our students, and ourselves to learn how to learn is the new horizon, and finally, 'back to the future.'

In closing, Englund, and Purcell,

Too many white people in this country are doggedly and blindly determined to preserve a false sense of innocence — of racism, of classism, of police brutality, of indecency. It's warped ethical alchemy that leads to mass cognitive dissonance and delusion. Black people pay a heavy price for reminding white people of how savage this society has been toward us. The empty statements by university leaders echo this moral relativism and delusion dressed up as civility and judiciousness.

George Floyd's justice is but one part of his mercies in elucidating the real message amidst all the false virtues that keep so many in the dark. Bearing in mind that his life was as great as any other; just horribly abbreviated, let us remember on May 25, 2021, that Memorial Day from now on will be a day of knowing. Remembering is knowing, and knowing is wisdom that should be passed on forever.

The CFA- SFSU CHAPTER EXECUTIVE BOARD

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