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## A Lesson from George Floyd

**"A man was lynched today"**

By Nik Mitchell, Ph.D.

### JSRI Future Activities

**July 1**

Deacon Chris Kellerman, SJ, will begin work with JSRI as our Visiting Fellow, focusing on Catholic Social Thought, racism, and other concerns.

JSRI staff and associates—working from home—will continue monitoring local, state, and federal administrative, legislative, and judicial actions regarding our priority issues and the impact of Covid-19; participating in advocacy communications with authorities; recommending resources on our website and by social media; research and writing for our publications; and activating our advocacy network as appropriate.

### JSRI Recent Activities

**May 28**

Fr. Fred Kammer, SJ, JD keynoted the first "Justice League" on-line book discussion of his first book *Doing Faithjustice* for the Ignatian Solidarity Network.

**May 29**

An [op-ed](#) drafted by Dr. Sue Weishar, and signed by nine faith leaders opposing concealed weapons in Louisiana churches was published in the New Orleans Advocate/Times-Picayune.

**June 3**

Fr. Kammer, Dr. Weishar, and JSRI Associate Ms. Mary Baudouin participated in a Zoom meeting organized by JSRI with Senator Bill Cassidy and members of the Louisiana Jesuit network on the intersection of COVID-19 public health concerns and immigrant justice issues including DACA and immigrant detention.

**June 3 and 4**

Dr. Weishar and Ms. Baudouin participated in the annual meeting of the U.S. and Canada Jesuit Migration Network via Zoom.

**June 12**

Dr. Dennis Kalob attended meetings (virtually) of the Care for Our Common Home Commission of the U.S. Central and Southern Jesuit Province.

**June 15**

Fr. Kammer met with the national board of the Jesuit Volunteer Corps, of which he is the vice-chairperson.

**June 17**

Dr. Weishar organized a sub-committee meeting of the [Louisiana Stop Solitary Coalition](#) to plan a webinar on engaging the faith community in reforming the use of solitary confinement in Louisiana jails and prisons.

**June 24**

Dr. Kalob, Fr. Kammer and Ms. McLaughlin met (virtually) with Mississippi advocates to discuss our draft of *The State of Working Mississippi*.

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I believe in the power of words and the necessity of describing events accurately. Words provide the means to meaning; and, too often, we bury the truth in euphemisms and abstractions. As Louisiana and the country stand at a turning point regarding our national character, each of us has the responsibility to speak the truth. The truth is that it is remiss of us to call what happened to George Floyd a murder. It was not a murder. This was no robbery gone wrong or crime of passion. He was killed in the most public manner imaginable, but he was not murdered. That description is inadequate for what he endured in his final moments. We have a word in English for what was done to Floyd—lynching. George Floyd was lynched on May 25, 2020, in Minneapolis, Minnesota.



Flag, announcing lynching, flown from the window of the NAACP headquarters on 69 Fifth Ave., New York City

Some may argue that people must be understanding of the difficult job that police must do day in and day out. I do not dispute that policing is a difficult and dangerous job where police officers routinely see the brutality that humans can inflict on one another; nor do I dispute that many police officers are good and decent people. Yet, this is irrelevant to the issue of police brutality—especially in instances where individuals are lynched for all the world to see. The police and the criminal justice system as a whole must be held to account, because society has consented to give these individuals the power to take a life if the situation warrants. Such power necessitates strict accountability. The Roman poet Juvenal famously wrote "Who will watch the watchmen?" In Louisiana and the country as a whole, it is the right of the citizenry to hold the watchmen accountable, because even they are accountable to the same laws as the rest of us.

Is it any wonder, then, that thousands of Americans have taken to the streets in demonstration against institutions that allow American citizens to be lynched? The First Amendment states that "the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances" shall not be infringed. The grievance is the continued state-sanctioned racism that inflicts suffering on black people fifty-two years after the collapse of Jim Crow. The extrajudicial murders were supposed to end then. Clearly, they have not.

One function of racism is to do violence and be able to ignore the screams as you do it. It is easy to dismiss racism as the product of the ignorant and poor people, but racism requires all levels of society to make an impact. So, while we focus on the actions of four police officers in Minneapolis, let us never forget that Jim Crow was created by educated men and women of means. Let us never forget that while the Ku Klux Klan may be popular in poor areas, it was founded by college-educated men who knew their Greek and Latin—the word "kuklos" means circle in Greek. Racism and the terrorism it breeds appeal to both the mansion and the slum. Terrorism is not new to American life, although many of us like to think of it that way. For African Americans, be it Emmett Till or Alton Sterling or Breonna Taylor, the specter of terrorism is of old age and intergenerational. African Americans across the country, including in New Orleans, were subject to pogroms, bombings, and lynchings well into the 20th century for such grievous offenses as swimming in a lake, a black boxer beating a white one in a heavyweight title bout, and competing for jobs.

During the depths of black life in Jim Crow America, the NAACP would hang a black banner emblazoned with white letters that read "A Man Was Lynched Yesterday" every time a lynching occurred in the United States. A lynching aims ultimately to be a warning of worse things to come and of how easy it would be to kill anyone who disrupts the status quo. Now is not the time to look away or try to explain away what happened in Minneapolis with equivocations and dodges. Those who stand in defense of the targets of white supremacy are required to speak clearly and forcefully. We owe it to the memory of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and all of those black bodies robbed of life by racists and the systems that protect them to say, "A Man Was Lynched on May 25, 2020."

Monthly articles reflect the opinions of the authors and not necessarily those of Loyola University New Orleans. Please

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