

Say their names, learn their stories



By Nate Smelle

What can be said about the killing of Patrick Lyoya that hasn't already been said about George Floyd, Eric Garner, Breonna Taylor, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Laquan McDonald, Botham John, Jamar Clark, Stephon Clark, Philando Castile, Alton Sterling, Freddie Gray, or Walter Scott?

How many more times must we come face to face with videos of unarmed Black people being killed in the U.S. before we say enough is enough?

After being pulled over for having the wrong license plate on his car on April 4, Lyoya, age 26, was shot and killed by a member of the Grand Rapids Police Department. Clearly scared by the officers aggressive tone, Lyoya ? a refugee from the Democratic Republic of Congo ? attempted to flee on foot. Once caught, he struggled with the officer and was pinned to the ground face-first before being shot in the back of the head at point blank range.

American writer and artist William S. Burroughs once wrote ?There are no innocent bystanders.? Now that millions of people around the world have observed Lyoya's killing online, as responsible witnesses we are all obligated to speak out and take action against the racism and hate. No longer can we afford to keep repeating humanity's biggest mistake ? accepting racism, inequality, and hatred in the name of ?freedom.?

Some will inevitably question why I am writing about this repulsive American crime in the pages of Bancroft This Week? Well my friends, because racial violence, police brutality, and hate are not just American problems. Ask the families and friends of Colten Boushie, or Chantel Moore. Ask the surviving members of the Afzaal family in London, Ontario. Ask anyone who was worshiping in the mosque in Quebec City in January 2017 when a white supremacist terrorist stormed in and murdered six as the prayed.

In the spirit of being the best neighbours we can be, as Canadians we need to realize that the shamefully evil and dysfunctional virus of hatred oozing northward from the southern U.S. is a deadly contagion, that feeds on ignorance, and inequality. If former U.S president Donald Trump's failed attempt to overthrow the U.S. government on Jan. 6, 2021, and the recent ?Freedom? convoy taught us anything, it is that what happens in the U.S. does not stay in the U.S.

With this in mind, I leave you with a few details to go with the names of four other people not appearing in the first sentence of this

editorial.

While driving with his girlfriend in Minneapolis, Minnesota, Duante Wright, 20, was pulled over by police officers for a traffic violation. When Wright attempted to get back in his car, Brooklyn Center police officer Kim Potter shot him to death as his girlfriend watched. After claiming that she mistook her gun for a taser, Potter was charged with second-degree manslaughter.

In Columbus, Ohio, Andre Hill, age 47, was shot by Columbus Police officer Adam Coy as he walked out of his garage holding a cell phone. Coy then reportedly handcuffed Hill and left him to bleed to death on the ground for five minutes and 11 seconds.

Walking home from a convenience store in Tacoma, Washington, a 33-year-old man named Manuel Ellis, was confronted by officers from the Tacoma Police Department, who reportedly slammed the door of their patrol car into him, knocking him to the ground. Officers Christopher Burbank, Mathew Collins, and Timothy Rankine then allegedly tackled, hogtied, and beat Ellis to death. Collins and Burbank were charged with second-degree manslaughter; and Rankine was charged with first-degree manslaughter. In Atlanta, Georgia, officers Garret Rolfe and Devin Brosnan confronted Rayshard Brooks, after receiving a complaint that the young man was sleeping in his car. When the officers tried to restrain him, Brooks was shot twice in the back as he tried to run away.

Of course there are many more important details to each of these stories ? facts that must not be ignored in the unwritten pages of our history. For example, one undeniable truth linking the names mentioned here together is that in each case, the punishment was much worse than the crime. No matter what colour our skin may be, what country we come from, what god or planet we consider sacred, we are all human beings and we all benefit when we work together. As Christian minister and civil rights movement leader Martin Luther King Jr. once said, ?Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.?

If we are going to put an end to racism once and for all, it is not simply enough to just ?SAY THEIR NAMES!? as the protest signs declare. Before the change we need to see in our world will come, we first must take the time to honour the lives of those snuffed out for no good reason, by learning each of their stories.