

# **Racism, Poverty, and the Murder of George Floyd**

***By Mike Curtis***

Racism motivated by exploitation, and perpetuated by the lack of opportunity, created poverty and took the life George Floyd and many others. Yet there IS a cure for the lack of opportunity, poverty, and the racism it engenders.

George Floyd was murdered by a policeman in Minneapolis. He was hand cuffed and held down by two policemen while a third pushed his knee against Floyd's neck, cutting off his air until he passed out and died. A fourth policeman stood by, looking away. All the time, cameras rolled and the world saw it replayed on television. From the video, the man who murdered George Floyd appeared to have his hand in his pocket, as though he had no worries, but was patiently waiting over eight minutes for George Floyd to die. I was reminded of the Folsom Prison Blues: "I killed a man just to watch him die".

There have been many murders of black people by police in recent decades as shown on TV. And probably many more, but the murders could not be proven because there were no videos. Police who are accused of murder have been afforded the privilege of conferring with their colleagues, many of whom have produced a plausible justification. How many have been executed or spent the rest of their lives in prison?

## **Crime**

In the United States there are more than 100,000 armed robberies each year — over 42,000 with guns, and 41,000 with knives. Couple that with 16,000 murders, and it is understandable why governments hire very rough and tough people for their police force. Ideally, we would have police officers who are only as violent as they need be in the case of robbers and murderers, and firm, but not violent when detaining or arresting un-armed suspects who pose no danger to the police or others.

I suspect, because of the violence that is sometimes required, violent people are attracted to police departments throughout the country. And because of the fact that they rely on each other in very dangerous situations, getting other officers to testify against a Killer Cop who they may need in the future. makes getting rid of them exceptionally difficult. Moreover, protecting property is a primary function of government and law enforcement. It requires the police to have a certain amount of psychological indifference toward anyone who challenges the police when protecting property - including striking workers and tenants being evicted. This may further help to explain the bond between police officers as each other's extended family.

## **The Roots of Violent Crime**

We know, statistically, that people who live in more affluent neighborhoods commit far less violent crimes. Serious reflection leads to the realization that poverty: anxiety, depravation, and desperation, coupled with the degradation and humiliation of being poor, is the very thing that precedes most violent criminal behavior. It is not only want and the fear of want that generates the grasping for wealth, but the humiliation and degradation of poverty that breeds the worship of wealth and the admiration that follows. The fatalism that risks all and withholds compassion for their victims is the struggle to get as far as possible beyond the necessities of life. It is the same psychology as the Billionaire, obsessed with

getting richer while his employees have no healthcare. Gangs, like armies, are often formed for defense, and evolve into criminal enterprise.

### **Racism & History**

The reason that black people in America are disproportionately poor is the result of racism. It started with the rationalization that justified Black slavery, and evolved into the Jim Crow serfdom that followed their declared freedom. They were segregated and discriminated against in hiring, housing, and finance. They were given inferior schools and medical care among other historical exclusions and exploitations in a society that has evolved into musical chairs. That is, a society in which the least educated and skilled do not get jobs or housing — because there aren't enough jobs or housing for everyone.

The cause of the proportionately higher propensity of black people to rob or steal in acquiring wealth is the poverty that such a large proportion of black people have been trapped in — unable to escape. Racism is the reason that black Americans make up a disproportionate share of the people who live in poverty. And it is logical that 400 years of cultural racism aimed at the exploitation of black people would add to the super contempt so many police officers have for people of color.

Right now, between 12 and 15% of all Americans live in poverty. Because of racism, a disproportionately large percentage of those people are black. If it weren't for racism, poverty would enslave Americans of all colors equally. There is no superior race. There are only variations in the color of the skin, hair, and facial features. All ethnic origins provide the same random levels of intelligence and human potential. If racial oppression, exploitation, and discrimination are ended, it will still take some time before impoverished black people are no more than their proportion of the population. It takes time to acquire an education, even when it is available to you. It takes a generation of being in the middle class before you can inherit a house, which is the most expensive thing the majority of people will ever own. Just try joining a game of monopoly after all the properties are owned. Going past GO, if you can get there, will not pay enough to get you around again.

### **Competition**

As long as there is a shortage of jobs and housing, every worker has a vested interest in keeping everyone else out of the workforce. The exclusion of every identifiable group, yields jobs for those who are left. Racial exclusion has a counter-constituency, and until there are enough jobs, racism and the effort to exclude others. will continue.

When there is a shortage of jobs, competition drives wages to a minimum which will give the least productive workers a bare existence. But, when there is an abundance of opportunity and a fair distribution, cooperation increases, synergistically, the wealth from which all others will share. The greater the community of cooperation, the greater the potential to specialize, to draw on the cultural specialties of every ethnic background, and to share in a far larger cooperation. Under abundant opportunity and equitable distribution, competition simply becomes a mechanism which directs each individual to the most efficient application of their labor — what an individual does best within the demands of the market.

### **The Cause of Poverty**

The reason that 12 to 15% of all Americans live in poverty is caused by another institution: private property in land. It includes minerals in the ground, and even the airwaves. Land, the gift of nature, is necessary to life and production. Private property in land has replaced chattel slavery with wage slavery. Under the present system, if it weren't for racism and the oppression of black people, 12 to 15% of all people regardless of color would be living in poverty. This is the reality.

While we must purge Killer Cops from all police forces, we must also work to eliminate poverty. Black people are not only victims of police brutality, they are subject to horrific crimes of violence by criminals within their own communities, and they are killed or debilitated by the air they must breathe and water they drink — asthma from the air, lead poisoning from the drinking water, and the paint that their children are subjected to. This as well as the food they can afford, and stress and anxiety of living in poverty, is prematurely killing some black people and shortening the lives of many others.

People who have a good job, a house, quality healthcare, and a chance to get a promotion at work, do not often sell illegal drugs, rob, or murder people. When they do, it is usually with a pen.

So, how do we restructure our society so that everyone has an opportunity to get a decent job, a house, a vacation and retirement at the age of 65? How do we share the socially-created wealth that could provide for national healthcare and social security, instead of adding to the unearned incomes of the one percent? Before the pandemic, there were estimates of socially-created values in the US that range from a total of six to eleven trillion dollars per year. They come from land and other monopolies. I believe some small percentage of that income would be needed to reward investments in research and product development, but the vast majority of that surplus wealth could be paid out in higher wages and social programs like national healthcare and social security, and it would actually stimulate productivity. It amounts to something between \$50,000 and \$130,000 per worker per year. However, that is just a starting point.

There are around 25 million working-age adults that are not employed. Some of them do not need to work; some of them are unable to work. The vast majority of them could and would work if jobs were created and they were able to keep enough of what they produced. By creating new jobs, there would be proportionately more produced, and proportionately less need to redistribute wealth to those who could work, but now receive welfare. The solution to poverty is to create jobs, increase wages, and increase the number of housing units available.

Why aren't there job opportunities for all those who are able and looking for work? They are willing to produce directly the food, clothing, and shelter they want. What prevents them from doing so? The answer is that you can't make something out of nothing; you can't even perform a service without some place to perform it.

### **Idle Land**

As you go about your travels, you will notice businesses that have not been open for years; factories that are sitting idle, some of them for decades; stores that are empty; vacant lots and empty houses in residential neighborhoods. There may be enough unused and underused sites in the United States right now to employ and house the entire impoverished population of the country. First, they would restore or rebuild, and then they would use those facilities to produce sustainable products or services that

would earn them a living wage. There are many more empty housing units than there are homeless people in the country right now.

Why is all that land sitting idle when it could provide jobs and housing for our impoverished populations? The short answer is private property in land. The long answer starts with the fact that the owners of idle land consider it more profitable to leave it idle or underused. Empty buildings are often obsolete; the land has a potential for bigger and better buildings; they will be torn down when the land is resold and redeveloped. But, as long as the price that's being offered for land increases faster than the return from the stock market or other assets, holding idle land can be a better investment.

Income and sales taxes are paid out of what would otherwise go to the owners of land and other monopolies; they diminish the rental value and the selling price of land. But, because of the way they are levied, if there are no sales or income, there is no tax. Only the real-estate tax must be paid on the value of idle land. Real-estate tax becomes so low it levies minimal discouragement for non-use and underuse of land — which is the root cause of unemployment and the shortage of housing.

### **Wages**

We know from observation and long experience, as well as principle, that under the free market and the present circumstances, wages of the least skilled and educated workers tend to a bare subsistence (food, clothing, shelter), no matter how much they produce. Wages of the least productive workers tend to an amount, below which, productivity would fall even more than wages. That is why we have a Legal Minimum Wage. The wages of higher skilled workers are no more than enough for the supply of each kind and level of skill and knowledge to meet the demands of the market.

Because of the non-use and underuse of land, no amount of invention and new machinery or an increase in the general level of education and training will increase the proportion of the population that is working; nor will it raise the general level of wages, or reduce the cost of housing and the level of poverty.

### **The remedy**

To end poverty and racism, make the title to land conditional upon a payment of its rental value. By doing that, land would become a common opportunity. By collecting the rental value of land for social purpose, all socially-created wealth would be available for social programs. Abolish all other taxes - they are a confiscation of property. In collecting the potential rent of land, its holders would have to use it fully or give it to someone who would because the rent would be collected whether the land was used or not, whether there was an income or not. The full use of land brings about full employment.

As people migrate toward cities, and urban land is fully utilized, much of the previously used rural land will be left behind, worthless. It could then be used by anyone without payment, and would establish an alternative opportunity for workers negotiating wages. As technologies advance and increase, the productive potential of the free rural land, wages and the return to buildings and machinery would go up everywhere.

As cities and urban areas increase in population, the infrastructure and public services increase, and, because population is dense, invention and innovation will increase productivity more. Therefore, the potential of the land would increase, and so would its rent. Each landholder would have to hire the

labor and amass the capital necessary to put his land to its full potential — in order to pay the land rent (tax) and continue to make a profit. Because of this, the free land opportunity would not be overwhelmed. Much of what landholders lose in land rents, they will gain from a higher return on their investments in buildings, machinery, and inventories. Urban centers would yield far more land rent as public revenue than was needed for their own infrastructure and public services. Each city and suburban region would generate large sums to contribute to social programs like national healthcare and Social Security.

In addition to collecting land rent for revenue, Government must take on businesses in which there cannot reasonably be competition (roads, railroad tracks, pipes along them), and abolish other government-granted monopolies. This program will eliminate poverty and the impetus to the racism and racial injustice that has evolved - from the exploitation of chattel slavery to the racial exclusion from employment and housing that has been an intractable dilemma for generations.