A MANMADE MARTYR

When did it begin. Maybe it began at his birth, because of his melanin-tinged skin. Maybe it began when he moved from Houston or North Carolina. It may have begun when he moved to Minnesota. He would have grown up a witness to the many ways that racial inequality manifests in society, within a community. He would have felt the racial inequities in a deeply personal way. Foremost among these manifestations would have been police brutality and the socially accepted violence that those with melanin-tinged skin are subjected to.

He would have understood in his heart that BLACK LIVES MATTER, but remembering the response to Colin Kaepernick would have told another perspective. His life would have been filled with experiences, memories that proved to him that black lives do not matter to everyone, and not all the time. He would have still held the pain of watching countless women and men being killed by the police. He would have remembered how quickly the police and the media moved to vilify the dead bodies of those black women and men as a means to justify their murders, excuse their murderers. He would have lived in disbelief, and its attendant frustration, as those without melanin-tinged skin accepted the murders, calling it justice. Their lack of outrage would have hurt him.
The world would have seemed bizarre to him during such moments, yet no less real because such moments happen far too often. Such moments happen often enough for justice to resemble injustice, and not only in his eyes. Many in his community feel how he felt. They would have been disgusted when the media did its best to paint Eric Garner as a criminal even as his family made his funeral arrangements. He would not have forgotten that the police and the media tried to excuse the bullets in the back of Walter Scott. His heart would have still been pained by the portrayal of Mike Brown presented by the police and the media as their way to justify an injustice. Police accounts about how Sandra Bland died would have still sounded false. The word of the police would have long sounded false to his ear. He would not have been surprised at the false police reports intended to cover up the murder of Breonna Taylor.

The fear that police have of unarmed black men would have been mirrored by his fear of armed police officers. The murder of Philando Castile would still been an open wound in his community. The murder of Philando Castile would have taught him that nothing can save you from death at the hands of a bad cop. Not compliance or the presence of a wife and child. The murder of Ahmaud Arbery would have reminded him of the murder of Trayvon.
Both murders are testaments to the fact that he could be hunted down in the streets like prey. The murder of Breonna Taylor and too many others would have proved that even at home he could be killed. What would seem far-fetched to others would have been his sad reality. His reality would have reminded him of the past. The perpetual mistreatment by this country of its citizens with melanin-tinted skin would have seemed to never end.

Nevertheless, when the police approached him he set history aside and he mastered his fears. He would have been nervous and fearful because he knew that he had done nothing wrong. Not knowing what he did to warrant the engagement by the police would have made him more fearful. And yet he cooperated with the police officers. As they questioned him and then cuffed him, he cooperated. He would have been experiencing so many powerful emotions during those moments, and still he cooperated. His uncertainty and fear would have been accompanied by feelings of helplessness and a bewilderment bordering on shock.

Mere words are feeble representations of the torrent of emotions, chemicals, energy coursing through his body throughout the engagement. His thoughts would have been racing along with his heart. Through all his conflicting thoughts and feelings he cooperated. When the police started parading him through the streets of Minneapolis he would have felt embarrassed. At some point, embarrassment
would have escalated to shame. He would have felt ashamed of being paraded through the streets in handcuffs. He would have seen people filming him and his shame would have been joined by rage. Still he cooperated.

He would have held onto the thought that the police would discover their mistake. Except the police would not admit or acknowledge their mistake. Because of pride and practice power does not apologize. Instead the police would escalate the situation through the use of antagonizing and unprofessional conduct. The police officers used abusive and denigrating language to attack his character, his very being. All of this caught on camera. As the encounter continued he would have been more bewildered than anyone else. And still he cooperated. Then he found himself on the ground with a police officer's knee on his neck.

In the twent minute, those first seconds, he would have felt all of the emotions mentioned earlier. In the following seconds, minutes, he would have felt more. The weight of the officer on his neck would have taken on added meaning. Death was weighing on him. His own words testify to this truth as he pleaded for his life. Innocence and guilt were forgotten. He pleaded for his very life. He pleaded so that he might see another day. He pleaded so that he could see his kids again. All the while the police abused him in word and action as seconds became minutes, using minutes to conveniently calculate.
the time it took to murder the man who has become more than a man seems insensitive. It seems to obscure the lived experience of his death. You watched for five hundred and twenty-six seconds as life became death. George Floyd experienced those seconds individually, explicitly until life became death. He experienced those hundreds of seconds physically, emotionally, and psychologically. He experienced hundreds of seconds, hundreds of individual moments in which his consciousness was aware of life becoming death. You watched a murder. George Floyd was murdered.

As a witness to his murder, you have a responsibility. You are responsible for how you respond to what you witnessed. Witness is not experience and yet the former informs the latter. You were moved by what you witnessed and your experiences should forever be informed by what you saw. Continue to stand witness. Continue to be moved. Continue to fight so that others might live. Always choose love.

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