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MY TURN

■ Dmae Roberts

Support Black Lives



n May 25, 2020, a Minneapolis police officer, Derek Chauvin, kneeled on the neck of George Floyd for nearly nine minutes. Floyd was held face down while hand-cuffed behind his back. I, like many Americans, was horrified to watch the video of a dying man. I also was aghast to see Tou Thao, a Hmong American, stand impassively a few feet away. Floyd was quietly saying, "Sir, I can't breathe," as he gulped for air. Then as he neared death, he whispered, "I can't move. Mama." His mom had passed away two years earlier. Days later, Thao, Chauvin, and two other officers were charged in the case.

Records show that Thao has had more than six complaints filed against him, including the beating of Lamar Ferguson, an African-American man who was handcuffed and prone on the sidewalk. Ferguson was walking with his pregnant girlfriend from his grandmother's house when he was stopped by Thao and another officer. The two officers said there was a warrant out for his arrest. That was not true. Complaints filed by Ferguson were settled by the Minneapolis Police Department for \$25,000.

Sadly, I am not surprised an Asian American could hold anti-Black feelings. But I wanted to believe if someone watching such distress and pain like Floyd experienced for eight minutes and 46 seconds, they would try to do something. Anything.

Too many Black Americans are dying because of interactions with or indifference by law enforcement. On February 23, 2020, Ahmaud Arbery was chased down and killed with a shotgun by two men in their truck while he was jogging in their Georgia neighborhood. Glynn County officials did nothing; the video footage leaked in early May. On March 13, 2020, Breonna Taylor, an emergency medical technician (EMT) was shot eight times in her own home. Plain-clothes detectives had a no-knock warrant that was the result of a botched narcotics raid, On June 12, 2020, Rayshard Brooks was shot in the back at a Wendy's drive-through in Atlanta, Georgia. The police officers were fired and charged with murder and aggravated assault. Days later, Atlanta's police chief resigned.

Demonstrations throughout the country have been mostly peaceful. People who are far braver, much younger, and more physically able than I, are risking themselves to support Black lives. I'm proud to see many Asian Americans live-streaming videos and documenting the protests on social media.

There has been a long history of Black and Asian cooperation dating back to the 18th century, when South Asians were also brought to America as slaves. Writer Anirvan Chatterjee has documented this history online at <www. BlackDesiSecretHistory.org>.

Gay activist Bayard Rustin travelled to India in 1949 to work with former prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru during India's liberation movement against British colonialism. Later he encouraged Martin Luther King Jr. to travel to India in 1959 to learn more about Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolent resistance.

Japanese Americans such as activist Yuri Kochiyama, who survived American incarceration camps during World War II, joined the civil-rights movements of the '60s and '70s and worked with Malcolm X and Black activist organizations. Chinese-American writer Grace Lee Boggs coordinated with Black activists and the Black Power movement throughout her life.

Currently there are many organizations based in the Pacific Northwest — such as the Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon (APANO) and Asians for Black Lives — that work with Black organizations. I want to believe most people would cross racial lines to support Black lives. When it comes to uplifting marginalized communities, it benefits us all to work together.

Since the 1960s, Asian Americans have been urged to become model citizens to benefit from white privilege (referred to as the model minority myth). Often this pitted Asian Americans and African Americans against each other to compete for limited resources and opportunities. I know a lot of our mothers and fathers, grandmothers and grandfathers, have held anti-Black racist viewpoints. But now is the time to stand against those beliefs and to stand for saving Black lives during this crucial moment in our history.

We're still in the midst of a pandemic, so if you are not able to attend protests or demonstrations, please shop at Black-led businesses (many have online options), order take-out from Black restaurants, and donate to Black nonprofit organizations such as Portland NAACP, <www.pdxnaacp.org>, and the Black United Fund, <www.bufor.org>, or intersectional ones like the Coalition of Communities of Color, <www.coalitioncommunitiescolor.org>. And when it's safe to attend live theater again, support Black theater companies such as PassinArt, The Red Door Project, Vanport Mosaic, and World Stage Theatre.

I truly hope the protests help enact positive change to police reform and bring equity and safety to Black Americans. Many people have been risking their lives to make that point. Our country needs to listen. And respond.

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