

Editor's Note

Everything appeared to be the same, and then everything changed when Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin murdered George Floyd, on May 25, 2020. Footage from witnesses' cell phones, security cameras, and police body cameras depicts officers responding to the trafficking of a counterfeit twenty-dollar bill. Officers apprehended the alleged perpetrator, Mr. Floyd; they handcuffed him and, with some difficulty, forced him into the back seat of a police cruiser. Mr. Floyd, who stood six feet four inches tall and weighed more than 220 pounds, felt claustrophobic in the confined space, and he pleaded with the officers to remove him from the car. He feared for his life and sensed his impending death. The officers finally acquiesced; they pulled him from the car and wrestled him face-down onto the street, next to the rear passenger wheel of the vehicle. It was haunting to hear Mr. Floyd's desperate calls for his mother and his repeated cries of, "I can't breathe." All the while, Officer Chauvin's knee pressed on Mr. Floyd's neck for what seemed an eternal nine minutes and twenty-nine seconds. Mr. Floyd went silent, became unresponsive, and died before the paramedics (EMR) arrived.

Officer Chauvin did not act like a police officer trained to keep the peace and help those in need. On the contrary, he displayed a blatant disregard for Mr. Floyd's life. He placed his full weight on Mr. Floyd's neck; then, calmly, with hands in his pockets, Officer Chauvin exhibited the satisfaction of a hunter who had just killed his prey. His actions recall those of officers around the country who murder black folks without conviction. Their actions resemble those of a Klux-Klux-Klan lynching or any other hate crime. One difference between then and now is that these officers do not feel the need to hide their faces, despite the many videos posted on social media and the outrage felt by many who saw for themselves the senseless murder of a restrained black man pleading for his life.

Mr. Floyd's unprovoked murder exposed police harassment. Officers on the scene appeared to be waiting for any excuse or justification to escalate the situation. Mr. Floyd begged for his life, but his cry was also a plea for the lives of countless innocent black men and women who have died and will continue to die in police custody. The officers had handcuffed Mr. Floyd, preventing him from posing any physical threat to them. Still, they ignored his cry of desperation and treated him like an animal.

I found it difficult to watch Mr. Floyd's unprovoked murder, especially when the same videos captured witnesses alerting officers of his deteriorating condition and imminent death. There was a first responder on the scene who police officers prevented from taking Mr. Floyd's pulse. Unfortunately, his assassination is not an isolated incident but a part of a continual pattern of mistreatment of black and brown men and women. Some recent examples include the execution of Breonna Taylor, when officers serving a no-knock warrant mistakenly raided her Louisville, KY, apartment looking for drugs and shot her six times (March 13, 2020); the

killing of Daniel Prude, who asphyxiated when officers placed a spit hood over his head and pressed his head against the pavement in Rochester, NY (March 30, 2020); the slaying of Rayshard Brooks, when two white Atlanta officers detained him for falling asleep in his vehicle, then shot him in the back as he fled (June 12, 2020); and the murder of Jacob Blake, who was shot seven times in the back when returning to his car to be with his three children in Kenosha, WI (August 23, 2020). Miraculously, Blake survived but is paralyzed from the waist down. The killing of these and other black and brown people indicates a historical and cultural pattern of irrational and sickening retribution that some police officers and white supremacists can only satisfy by spilling the blood of black people.

The officers disregard for black lives stands in sharp contrast to their handling of white offenders who shoot and kill blacks or Black Life Matters protestors. Consider the murder of Ahmaud Arbery who, while jogging, was shot by two white men following him in a pickup truck in Georgia (May 10, 2020). According to interviews, Gregory and Travis McMichael accused Arbery of resembling someone they believe was burglarizing homes in the area. Or ponder the killing of two protestors, Joseph Rosenbaum and Anthony M. Huber, and the wounding of another, by seventeen-year-old vigilante Kyle Rittenhouse in Kenosha, Wisconsin, WI (August 26, 2020). Police officers ignored the cries of protestors identifying him as the shooter carrying an assault rifle. As he walked toward them, they allowed him to pass and return to his home in Antioch, IL, without any incident. If the armed shooter had been a black or brown man or woman, the outcome would have been different. In each case, the white criminal was given the benefit of the doubt. Blacks, on the other hand, are pronounced guilty on the spot and executed without a trial.

Mr. Floyd's death takes place in the midst of a pandemic that affects a disproportionate number of black and brown people. Facing the biggest health crisis of our lifetime, the more than 500,000 deaths seemed inconsequential to the former Trump administration bent on diminishing the severity of a world medical crisis for obvious political reasons. Rather than supporting scientifically supported health recommendations, that administration's leadership propagated misinformation, telling people they should inject themselves with disinfectants or use the malaria drug hydroxychloroquine to treat COVID-19, a treatment the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) did not recommend and medical doctors claimed was ineffective and dangerous. Perplexing declarations that masks deprive citizens of freedom of choice disregard the rights of those who want to live. In some states like California, Florida, New York, and Texas, the high number of Hispanics and Latinx infected and dying of COVID-19 is unacceptable. The emergency rooms and hospitals throughout the country are full of black and brown bodies. Political appointees rejected the science and edited reports from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) officials without their input. Politics became more

important than the lives of US citizens.

The lives of undocumented immigrants were of little value to the former administration. For some time, we have observed the Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) inhumane treatment of immigrants, many of whom live in Central America, but also in other countries in South America and the Caribbean, West Africa, and of course, Mexico. They often flee gang violence or climate change in their countries, and they have no other option but to make the arduous journey north to seek haven in the United States. However, countless are captured and turned back without due process. A significant number of them are placed in detention centers that resemble concentration camps with inadequate basic needs and medical care. Parents are separated from their children, who are also detained in hotels and other facilities run by private contractors, and all are treated as if they were monsters. It is as if the former administration was determined to traumatize children for the rest of their lives, thus preparing the groundwork to incarcerate them when they became adults. Abuses were uncovered on a regular basis. Women detained in an ICE facility in Georgia claimed that they underwent involuntary hysterectomies or other surgeries that jeopardize their ability to reproduce. Practicing eugenics on immigrants indicates that they do not have any rights, not even over their own bodies. The numbers of detained immigrants surpass the tens of thousands, and the frequency of abuses continues to escalate.

The present issue of the *Afro-Hispanic Review* focuses on undocumented immigrants and students, their difficult lives, and their uncertain futures. The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients exist in an indeterminate in-between state. Though the US Supreme Court voted to reinstate DACA to its 2012 form, the Trump administration rejected new applications and scaled back renewed applications from two years to one. And Advance Parole applications for travel outside of the United States are only granted for "exceptional circumstances." Being a student is hard enough, and being a Latinx learner is even harder, especially when you consider that these students have to work and help their families. Paying tuition, supporting family, and becoming a stellar student are monumental feats that cannot go unrecognized. Equally important, I believe that Dreamers and DACA students will help to create a more just, diverse, and equitable society for all.

One final comment about the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and others and the treatment, incarceration, expulsion, and suffering of undocumented immigrants. Their common fear of government authorities provides a common purpose. If black and brown Americans dread police officers who stop them, undocumented immigrants are scared of encountering immigration authorities seeking to detain and deport them across the US-Mexican border or back to a country many of them hardly know because of the time spent in the United States.

William Luis

It does not matter how long they have lived in the United States or whether they are residents caught without documentation when detained and deported. The *Afro-Hispanic Review* is committed to promoting new voices emerging from this unique US experience.

I want to thank guest editors Lorraine López and Stephany Cuevas for compiling the present issue on undocumented immigrants. I am also grateful to Gabby Rivera for providing us with excerpts from her comic series *b.b. free*, with panels by Royal Dunlap, Natacha Bustos, and Brittney Williams which illustrate her latest authorial endeavor. I am also indebted to Diego Javier Luis for providing the images that accompany this note.

William Luis
Editor

