



UNDERGROUND RAILROAD FREE PRESS®

Independent reporting for today's Underground Railroad community

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It's way past time to root out racist cops and their official enablers.

Free Press Editorial by Peter H. Michael, Publisher

While the plague of excessive law enforcement against black and brown Americans is long-standing and systematically racist, a partial cure for it might be closer at hand than most would think. With some exceptions, racist acts by most police and sheriff's departments are committed by a relatively few individuals in their ranks. What has gotten in the way of weeding them out continues to be a pervasive "blue line" mentality that shields racist cops and deputies, allowing them to continue to terrorize minorities unimpeded.

About 20 years ago in Frederick, Maryland, a city of 50,000, the level of complaints by minority drivers being pulled over for no good reason caught the attention of the local weekly newspaper which began an investigation. After a Freedom of Information Act lawsuit pried use-of-force reports out of the city police department, the newspaper's analysis showed that a significant majority of the pull-overs was being committed by only three officers in a police force

of 75. A disproportionate number of those pulled over were African American in a city where only 19 percent of residents are black. All three of the officers were white.

Only because of the newspaper exposé did the city police chief bother to correct the problem and then only to reassign the three racist traffic terrorizers rather than clean up his department by firing them. The department ultimately was reformed when a new chief was hired after the chief at the time used officers to surveil members of the NAACP. Today two of the city council's five aldermen are black.

But the problem remains endemic in the United States: law enforcement turning a blind eye toward racists with badges who cause most of the harm, and to police chiefs and sheriffs who harbor them in a perverse solidarity. Aggravating the situation, the same biases and stonewalling have too often run rampant in police unions and prosecutors' offices nationwide.

Derek Chauvin, the Minneapolis po-



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lice officer who murdered George Floyd on May 25, ran up a horrendous record of 18 complaints resulting in official reprimands, disciplinary actions against him, and his three shootings, one fatal. Nevertheless, Chauvin was allowed to remain on the police force for 19 years. In a side job as a bouncer, the high school dropout's employer said that Chauvin was routinely overaggressive when dealing with black clientele. The unanswered

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Frederick Douglass Statue Put Back Up in Rochester, New York

This article by DeNeen L. Brown originally appeared in *The Washington Post*. Updated and edited for clarity and length. Reprinted with thanks.

A statue of famous abolitionist and orator Frederick Douglass was torn from its pedestal in Rochester, N.Y., on Sunday, July 5, the 168th anniversary of his famous speech "What, to the American slave, is your Fourth of July?"

According to Rochester police, the seven-foot-high statue was ripped from its base and dragged from Maplewood Park, which is a site along the Underground Railroad in Kelsey's Landing, where Douglass and abolitionist Harriet Tubman helped enslaved people to freedom.

Rochester police said the statue, a reproduction made of plastic and finished to look like bronze, had been removed from its base and was found 50 feet away on the banks of the Genesee River.

The Frederick Douglass statue that was torn down is one of more than a dozen replicas installed in locations throughout Rochester to celebrate the 200th anniversary of Douglass' birth.

Police said the investigation into who is responsible is continuing. No arrests have been made, said Investigator Jacqueline Shuman, public information officer for the Rochester Police Department.

Carvin Eison, project director of the Re-energize the Legacy of Frederick Douglass Committee in Rochester, said the city will replace the monument quickly with another replica from storage. "I've always said if one goes down ten more go back up," said Eison, who helped lead Rochester's celebration of the 200th anniversary of Douglass's birth.

The attack on the Douglass statue comes at a time

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Before and After



Hopeful Reprieve for Long-Embattled New York City Safe-house

The inaugural issue of *Underground Railroad Free Press* in July, 2006, featured an article entitled "New York City Site Threatened by Urban Redevelopment." The article reported efforts of residents of Duffield Street in New York City's Brooklyn Borough to contest the City's decision to approve a developer's plan to raze several homes dating from the 1800s that had been used as Underground Railroad safe-houses. The developer, Forest City Ratner, intended to erect a garage for luxury condominiums on the site.

Led by Joy Chatel, owner of one of the old safe-house homes, residents forced a postponement of the Council's vote on the Downtown Brooklyn Plan after bringing to light inaccuracies in the report of the City's historical consultant.

The developer fought back and won a round only to be further challenged by Chatel and her neighbors who once more prevailed. This back and forth battle, with its innumerable twists and turns, has continued unabated for 14 years ever since.

Chatel's home at 227 Duffield Street, a documented safe-house at the center of the fight, was owned from 1851 to 1863 by prominent New York abolitionists Harriet and Thomas Truesdell. Duffield Street also carries a strong oral tradition of having been a seat of abolitionism. The home is the last known standing historic site in Brooklyn where abolitionists lived and people found freedom through the Underground Railroad.

In the latest round, the group petitioned the city's Landmarks Preservation Commission to issue a decision to protect 227 Duffield Street from demolition and on June 30 the Commission voted unanimously to consider the petition. Said Raul Rothblatt, a petitioner, "We had a huge victory but the final decision has not been made. It's a tectonic shift that the Chair of the Landmarks Preservation Commission supports landmarking."

Mayor Bill de Blasio asked the commission to consider 227 Duffield as an individual landmark. Said the mayor, "We hear you. All options are on the table as we look to acknowledge and preserve the history of the anti-slavery movement at 227 Duffield Street."

Last year, the Commission issued a ruling that gave permanent protection to another of New York City's few remaining Un-



Truesdell House in Brooklyn
Underground Railroad sites, Hopper-Gibbons House on West 29th Street in Manhattan. Prominent journalist and abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison was friends with the Truesdells, Hopper and Gibbons.

On July 14, the Commission held a required public hearing during which it heard testimony from preservationists and the developer. The Commission will vote on the landmarking proposal as early as at its next meeting on July 21.

Afrolumens Stages a Comeback

His interest ignited by chance after coming across a slave list in an old history book, George Nagle in 2007 founded the Afrolumens Project, a rich source documenting Pennsylvania's free Black communities. His extensive research was made available on a website he authored.

After going dark for several years, Mr. Nagle has revamped the website and taken it live again at afrolumens.com. His plan is to continue enriching the site with images and stories of enslaved persons, Underground Railroad activists, political and social reformers, soldiers, and families.

Says Mr. Nagle, "My fondest hope is that the Afrolumens Project can contribute to the much needed national conversation on race relations that the United States is finally having."

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Overdue

question is why Minneapolis Police Chief Medaria Arradondo, who is black, did nothing about Chauvin until George Floyd's murder made Chauvin impossible to ignore and Arradondo finally got around to firing him. The near universal assumption is that law enforcement first takes care of its own, *then* worries about justice.

Preferential treatment became even more racist when Chauvin was booked into the Minnesota County Jail where eight correctional officers of color were not allowed to work in the unit where Chauvin was held, and were replaced by whites who gave Chauvin special treatment including by a white lieutenant allowing him to use her cell phone, that blue line at work again.

While it is important to keep in mind that most law enforcement personnel are not sadistically inclined, how is it that chronic trouble-makers like Derek Chauvin end up in law enforcement in the first place?

A major pathway, which may or may not apply to Chauvin, is psychopathy, a serious, generally intractable mental illness that expresses itself as "extensive callousness and manipulative self-serving behavior with no regard for others, often associated with crime and violence." If you were the school bully, got into trouble growing up, had repeated run-ins with authorities as a young adult, but wanted a career where your behavior wouldn't get you fired or locked up, where are you going to work?

Right, law enforcement, the magnet for the authoritarian personality.

So what is to be done? The typical recourse of wink-and-nod internal investigations resulting in slaps on the wrist and little if any correction of bad behavior has only encouraged the American pandemic of white-on-black incarceration and extrajudicial murder. However, certain reforms now being proposed that would cause tough accountability could go a long way toward correcting the 400 years of systematic racial abuse before and after formal law enforcement came into being in the 19th century. *Free Press* urges the following as a beginning.

- ✚ Enact legislation or executive order that takes police review out of the hands of law enforcement and vests it in local citizen bodies.
- ✚ Enact legislation or executive order requiring psychological screening of

law enforcement employment applicants be conducted by outside professionals whose hire-or-not decisions are required to be followed.

- ✚ Dissolve police and sheriff departments that are intractably unresponsive to public will, and replace them with new, carefully recruited bodies under direct control of municipal and county governments. Make new law enforcement bodies non-union if undue union protection has been a cause for change. (Disclosure: The writer of this editorial is a union member who has no bias for or against unions.)
- ✚ With an eye toward racial equity in particular, make prosecutorial decisions subject to review and final decision authority by local citizen bodies.
- ✚ As with law enforcement recruiting, screen out psychologically harsh prosecutor employment applicants.
- ✚ Evaluate the mental health of arrestees before, not after, trial decisions are made, and channel those with issues to professional assistance as the preferred disposition rather than to trial in the legal system.
- ✚ Demilitarize local law enforcement.

With the spontaneous worldwide moral upheaval sparked by George Floyd's murder, even in the midst of an international pandemic emergency, the long, long night of institutionalized white-on-black subjugation and violence in the United States may finally have reached its turning point. Let us pray so and not let this nation-defining moment slip away.

How? The cure for racism is familiarity. Just say hello to each other. Strike up a conversation. Take it from there.

And enact reforms.

Statue

when anti-racism protesters across the country are demanding the removal of monuments to slave traders, slave owners and Confederate generals and leaders.

On Friday, at the foot of Mount Rushmore, President Trump railed against protesters who pull down or vandalize Confederate statues. Trump signed an executive order aimed at punishing protesters who destroy monuments on federal property and another creating a national garden monument of American heroes, including Douglass and Tubman. On Monday morning, he condemned the attack on the Douglass statue, attributing it to "anarchists."

Cornell Brooks, former president of the NAACP, tweeted Monday that he believed the Douglass statue was torn down in retaliation for Confederate statutes that have been removed by protesters.

On July 5, 1852, Frederick Douglass delivered the keynote address at an Independence Day celebration in Rochester at Corinthian Hall, writes the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture. In the fiery speech, Douglass asked: "What, to the American slave, is your Fourth of July?"

Douglass answered: "A day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim. To him, your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty, an unholy license; your national greatness, swelling vanity; your sounds of rejoicing are empty and heartless; your denunciations of tyrants, brass fronted impudence; your shouts of liberty and equality, hollow mockery; your prayers and hymns, your sermons and thanksgivings, with all your religious parade, and solemnity, are, to him, mere bombast, fraud, deception, impiety, and hypocrisy – a thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages."

Douglass lived in Rochester from 1847 to 1872, where he published his *North Star* and *Frederick Douglass' Paper*.

Douglass "hosted runaway slaves in his own home, gave speeches, supported women's suffrage alongside suffragist Susan B. Anthony and much more before moving to Washington D.C. in 1872," the city said. Douglass was buried in Rochester's Mount Hope Cemetery in 1895.

In 1899, a bronze statue of Douglass was erected in Rochester and stands more than 25 feet high at the intersection of Robinson Drive and South Avenue. Designed by Stanley Edwards, it was one of the first monuments erected in the country to celebrate an African American, Eison said.

In 2018, sculptor Olivia Kim created more than 12 replicas of the original that were placed throughout the city to commemorate the 200th anniversary of Douglass's birth. That same year, one of those replicas was vandalized.

On Monday, Eison called the latest attack on a Douglass replica "disheartening," adding, "I can say no matter what they do, it can never diminish the values Frederick Douglass stood and worked for."