



NAACP

Duluth Branch

Thursday, June 4, 2020

Black lives matter.

While these words weren't used 100 years ago at the founding of the Duluth Branch of the NAACP, the meaning was there. The branch started in the wake of the deaths of Elias Clayton, Elmer Jackson, and Isaac McGhie. These young, unarmed, and innocent Black men were murdered by a mob of White people as Duluth police officers watched. So, addressing police brutality and complicity in the death of Black people has been part of the Duluth NAACP's mission from its inception. Today, responding to George Floyd's murder by a Minneapolis police officer and the ensuing protests, the NAACP has perspectives that our communities need to hear.

Honoring George Floyd requires dismantling systems of White supremacy. We are not speaking of the Ku Klux Klan here. Instead, it is about systems that center Whiteness and don't openly confront anti-Blackness. It is about a police culture that allows an officer to kneel on the neck of an unarmed man while three other officers stand by and do not challenge his breaking police protocol. Our culture has historically and continuously devalues people of African heritage and teaches others to fear Blackness. Because of this, we cannot trust the institutions that are supposed to keep us safe. As individuals and an organization, we have worked with police chiefs and departments to make changes. Still, far too many people, particularly Black people, have the legitimate fear that any encounter with the police could go terribly wrong and their name might be added to far too long a list of those who have died at the hands of police.

Addressing police brutality has been an issue at the heart of the NAACP's mission. It is our duty to protest injustice. To be clear, the NAACP supports people in the protest of this injustice in ways that also strive to limit the transmission of COVID-19. While the NAACP advocates peaceful protest, we recognize that Black lives have more value than property that can be replaced. In addition, we need to challenge the simplistic narrative that people in Minneapolis are burning their own communities down. While it is hard to get confirmed information, there have been many reports of young white men dressed in all Black coming in to break windows and start fires. Much of the actual physical destruction of property might be instigated by White people who are not actually aligned with the protests for stopping police brutality. While we don't know what their motives are, we do know that they are not listening to the leaders in the local communities who are asking to keep the focus on holding police accountable and transforming other oppressive systems. The Minneapolis NAACP created the Minnesota Freedom Riders program to provide rides for people to protests, help spread accurate information, and to protect Black cultural heritage sites.

While led by people of African heritage, the NAACP values alliances and relationships. Our membership is diverse. For people of all backgrounds who want to lend their support, we welcome you. Also consider donating to the Minneapolis NAACP. They can use all possible support as they bring resources and support to the communities who have been most affected by events of the past week. For White people, we encourage you to join [SURJ](#) - a collection of White people who are learning and working to be allies with communities of color. This is a great space to come in and learn how to do this important, challenging, and rewarding work.

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*"fighting to eliminate
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In this time of turmoil, we need to turn our passion into action. The national NAACP is calling for a variety of actions including sweeping police reform and for the United Nations to classify the mistreatment of Black people in the U.S. by police as a human rights violation. The Minneapolis branch is calling for reforms with that city's policing, as well as how cases of police brutality are investigated. You can support their policy initiatives as well with emails and phone calls and their on-the-ground support with money. (Check duluthnaacp.org/news for more details.)

We know that this work requires a long-term investment. The Duluth Branch has been at it for a century. We ask you to stay committed to working for change in the weeks, and months, and years to come. It matters if people are paying attention when city councils consider new policies. It matters if people are paying attention when officers are charged and when the location of the trial is decided. A clear case of police brutality in Duluth resulted in a not guilty verdict after the trial was moved to Pine County. Our outrage now isn't enough. We need to have the staying power to be in this struggle for the long-term to lead to real change - and not just let this be another cycle in which a Black person dies, the community protests, and things go back to the way they were.

Black lives matter. We shouldn't need to say this, but we still do. Please join us in the fight to transform our community and state so that the value of Black life is evident everywhere - making the phrase no longer necessary.

The Executive Committee *Duluth Branch of the NAACP*

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