

Eight Minutes, Forty-six Seconds ... Remembering George Floyd

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Eight minutes, forty-six seconds is a long time: a long time when you are meditating; a long time while waiting for a protest march to pass; a long time with your finger on the video button of your phone following a scene of terror; an unimaginable time when you are being slowly crushed by human weights on your neck, perhaps detecting some mildly agitated bystanders through the haze of your dying brain.

I realized how very, very long 8:46 minutes can be when participating by video in George Floyd's memorial service in Minneapolis Thursday evening. I activate the PBS video link to the celebration and eulogy, then without knowing how it will end, I find myself compelled to follow the entire recording.

At 1:32:25, following Rev. Al Sharpton's rousing and resolute eulogy, this indefatigable American activist invites us to join their 8 minutes and 46 seconds of silent tribute to George Floyd.

Sharpton does not end his summons here. He challenges me in the next 8:46 minutes, to 'feel' what this space-in-time meant to George Floyd, namely the extinguishing of the person George Floyd, pinned under three American policemen, crushed to death, with the man's final three lifeless minutes held there by their combined contempt.

In the past, I have bowed in prayer for 1 minute, even for 2 minutes in tribute to I-cannot-recall-what. I've kept abreast of news reports of Black Americans murdered and brutalized by police. I know the names and some details of the most notorious cases—twelve or fifteen in recent years. I've viewed historical footage of public lynchings of our Black Americans. I review videos of U.S. police terrorizing citizens, of guards brutalizing prisoners, of U.S. troops wantonly humiliating Arab and Asian captives.

I claim I can share the anger of Black colleagues, the fears of parents of Black children, the conviction of their prayers and abiding faith. I've listened attentively to African American civil rights orators. I post quotes by Martin Luther King Jr., invoke the simple counsel of Jesse Jackson, reference Professor Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, celebrate Colin Kaepernick's 'taking the knee', scrutinize essays by Ta-Nehisi Coates, and repeat Maya Angelou's pithy wisdoms. Yet, I'd never directed my compassion for eight minutes and 46 seconds—neither during an anthem, nor Barack Obama intoning *Amazing Grace*, nor a Qur'anic ayah or Arab nasheed, nor any Christian psalm - on the concept of an individual's martyrdom in a finite incident of Black American life.



Source: the author

This 8 minutes and 46 seconds is inimitable.

The almost two hour pre-recorded ceremony ends in 15 minutes. Here in my home it's approaching midnight; I could fast-forward this segment or watch just one minute of the 8:46 minutes. I could simply close my computer.

No. I cannot disengage from this call to prayer.

My concentration breaks after a few seconds, distracted by camera shots scanning the room of weeping, embracing mourners. I resume my meditation, taking up Sharpton's invitation to enter the body of George Floyd lying on the street for 8 minutes and 46 seconds. I concentrate for a further minute as I gaze at that gleaming copper coffin cradling Floyd's body. My meditation breaks again. I refocus: feel Floyd's weakening heart beats; listen to the murderers' mocking; then hear George Floyd's final call: "Mama".

"America?"

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