

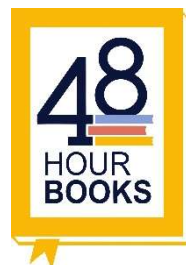
Memphis Reads 2023

The CBU Change-Maker Series



By Abigail “Abby” Orendorff, Paxton Abeles, and Makyah Malone

Sponsored by the CBU Center for Community Engagement



A message from CBU Director for the Center for Community Engagement, Justin Brooks...

"Our hearts are overflowing with joy as we celebrate Memphis Reads and CBU Reads successfully uniting communities in Memphis and Shelby County once more! By gathering around one book, we have created meaningful bonds that have made a significant impact. We are excited to keep this momentum going and witness the positive effects ripple through every corner of our community. We deeply appreciate your continued support, which has helped make all of this possible.

This year, we had the immense pleasure of hosting authors Robert Samuels and Toluse Olorunnipa for their Pulitzer Prize-winning work of literature and reporting in "His Name is George Floyd." Not only are they the youngest two authors to ever receive this distinction, but because of their time, efforts, and dedication to the truth and the art of storytelling, their work continues to inspire millions around the globe, especially the students, staff, faculty, and community members who were able to experience them during their visit here in Memphis, TN. **For this and many more positive memories, Memphis Reads, CBU, and others throughout the #901 would like to extend our heartfelt thanks!**

To our award-winning essayists in Abigail, Paxton, and Makyah, thank you for your creativity, stories, and insight as you worked to take the concepts discussed from "His Name is George Floyd" in CBU 101 and expound them into three moving essays!

**May this be only one of many steps in your continued success within CBU and beyond!
We are proud to be a home and learning community for extraordinary #Buccaneers like you three!**

To Kirbi Tucker, Dr. Emily Holmes, Dr. Jacob Goessling, CBU Faculty and Staff, Novel, Rhodes College, Barth House Episcopal Center, Brown Missionary Baptist Church, National Civil Rights Museum, and so many other community partners, thank you for continuing to collaborate and organize events like this every year so that we can build community through conversation, creativity, and literacy!

Finally, thank you to all our wonderful sponsors in International Paper, Follett Corporation, the National Endowment for the Arts, TN Arts Commission, First Book, and Penguin Random House for your ongoing support in creating the capacity for something as unique as this every year!

As I end this message, I want to use my final sentences to do two things. The first is encouraging everyone reading this short book's essays to 'be the change you want to see'! No story is too small, and no dream is too big for it not to be told and seen through to the end!

Secondly, and finally, remember the importance of life. Every day, we lose individuals of all ages, ethnic backgrounds, etc., to unnecessary deaths, such as police brutality, lack of access to healthcare, or environmental pollution. May we use the writings of Mr. Samuels and Mr. Olorunnipa, as well as our CBU students, to reminisce on this daily: that every being deserves 'a chance to breathe.' "

Call to action: We urge you to volunteer, donate, or connect with organizations such as *Advance Memphis, New Memphis Institute, OUTMemphis, We Care TN, Memphis Interfaith Coalition for Action and Hope (MICA), Community Legal Center, Just City, The Faith Leaders of Color Coalition(FLOCC), Mid-South Peace & Justice Center, Memphis Grassroots Organizations Coalition, Memphis United, Center for Transforming Communities, Choose 901, Juice Orange Mound, Memphis Artists for Change, and NAACP - Memphis Branch.* Join the movement by collaborating with organizations focusing on activism and social justice work!

Rest in Power, George Floyd

Table of Contents

The Essay Prompt

Page 3

“Racism and Cruelty in Modern Policing” by Abigail “Abby” Orendorff

Page 4

**“George Floyd: A Deeper Look into the Murder of an Innocent Man”
by Paxton Abeles**

Page 8

“She Won’t Start with Two Strikes” by Makyah Malone

Page 11

References

Page 16

The Essay Prompt

In addition to reading the book before you navigate CBU, first-time freshmen will be required to complete an essay for their CBU 101 course, an assignment due the week of September 19th, 2023.

The Top Three Essays will then be recognized on the night of October 25th, and the authors of those essays will receive a prize and their essays published in recognition of their efforts!

- **After reading His Name is George Floyd, write a short essay of at least 600 words discussing why George Floyd's death caused a global response.** What are three specific events/factors that these authors present to help readers to understand the situation/culture surrounding Floyd's death? Explain how these relate to our current racial crisis in Memphis (for example, with respect to Tyre Nichols), the United States, and the world. Finally, and most importantly, what actions, however big or small, are you willing and interested in taking in response to reading this book?
- Put a title at the top of your essay (something more interesting than CBU Reads Essay). Make sure to use specific quotes from at least three different chapters/parts from the book to support your points. Use parenthetical citations with the page number to cite your source. In your header, include your name, your instructor, and your CBU 101 Section.
- Submit your essay as an MS Word document (.doc or .docx only) to your CBU 101 Canvas classroom by September 26. This essay will be graded and is required to pass CBU 101 (a general education orientation course required for graduation from Christian Brothers University). Your essay will also be entered into the Top Three CBU Reads essay contest for 2023. Winners will be announced during the mandatory CBU Reads event with the book's authors on October 25th at 7:00 pm in the CBU University Theater.



“Racism and Cruelty in Modern Policing” by Abigail “Abby” Orendorff

In the book “His Name Is George Floyd”, written by Robert Samuels and Toluse Olorunnipa, the institutionalized structures of modern-day racism are explored and analyzed in the context of American history. The book includes examples of the racist systems that affected George Floyd throughout his life and leading up to his death. As well as considering the obvious racial motivations behind much police violence, the authors’ analysis draws attention to other underlying flaws in the social structures that allow that violence, specifically following the evolution of blatantly racist practices in American history to more subtle racist structures in the modern day.

Through the specific experiences of George Floyd, as collected in their biographical examination of his life, Robert Samuels and Toluse Olorunnipa explore the broad, low-profile branches of racist ideologies of the past. By specifically tracing the oppressive structures of slavery and Jim Crow eras as they evolved into the systems of modern-day America, the authors

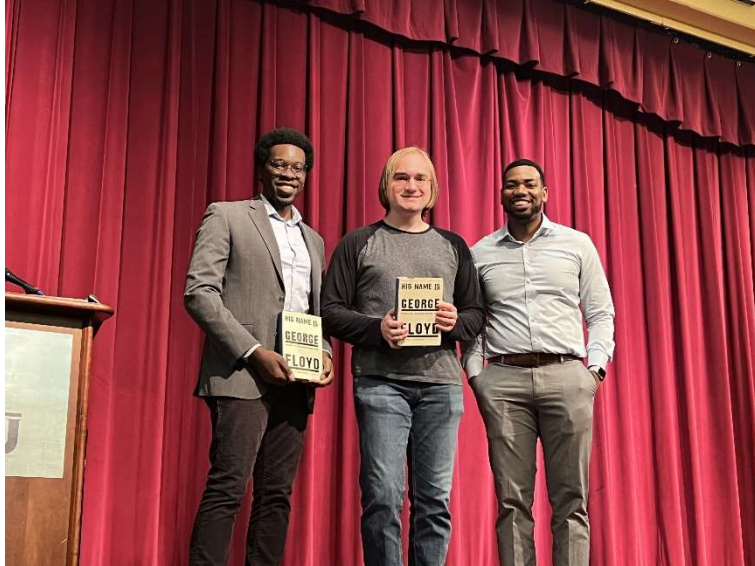
are able to point out the racism inherent in some more hidden structures today. For example, the second and third chapters point out the deliberate continuation of segregation by the Texas government in the city where George Floyd was raised. Samuels and Olorunnipa explore the use of government housing and placement of state-funded institutes like hospitals and schools to concentrate African American residents into specific areas of the city without explicitly enforcing segregation. Additionally, the same chapters discuss the forced reliance of African American families on white farmers for survival in the antebellum south. The intentional lack of social mobility after the civil war was built on several structures, of which two of the most important were sharecropping and voting restrictions. Sharecropping, practiced by white farmers after the civil war, consisted of renting land and food to freed African American families in exchange for their work on farms. While this technically differed from the binding structure of slavery, the wages paid by sharecroppers were little enough that the families that depended on them were unable to build up the reserves necessary for significant social change. Voting restrictions similarly enforced the rigid social structure, but they worked more as a preventative measure than the direct effects of sharecropping did. Targeted reading tests and grandfather clauses took advantage of prewar literacy bans for enslaved people to prevent African Americans from voting for better government, protecting the social powers that arranged the oppressive measures of sharecropping and voter restriction in the first place. These structures are also traced through history in the book, connecting the forced reliance of sharecropping to the difficulty in social mobility for black men, and voting restriction to poor schooling and academic discrimination against black students in the current day. Additionally, later in the book, Samuels and Olorunnipa discuss the evolution of slave patrols - groups responsible for

brutally finding and crushing any defiance in enslaved people - into the institution of the modern police. This exploration of the explicitly racist history behind many of the factors reflected in the biography of George Floyd helps to confront the reality of how deeply ingrained systemic racism is in society and institutions today.

In the case of Tyre Nichols, I consider the underlying racism in the police force and the targeting of an innocent Black man, but I also argue that the problem of police brutality goes further than race in the way that it attracts brutal people. As with the murder of George Floyd, the murder of Tyre Nichols was the result of the deliberate targeting of a Black man by police for undue violence. However, where Floyd's murder was committed by a white man, Nichols was killed by five other Black men. This difference indicates the systemic issue with the police force even past race as a current factor. On the surface, the murder of Tyre Nichols seems not to be racially motivated. However, by more closely examining the power dynamic of those involved, it can be concluded that the racial origins of the police system enable and encourage violence against African American citizens, as well as attracting violent individuals. The institution of the police, as it arose from slave patrols in the pre-war south, is inherently biased against Black citizens. However, the power and freedom for violence afforded to police officers under those racist ideals attracts people willing to commit and excuse that violence, not only in the United States, but worldwide. This violence includes, but is not limited to brutality against Black citizens. For example, over 40 percent of families of police experience report abuse. Making "police officer" the profession most likely to perpetrate domestic abuse. Because of the violent structures of policing, law enforcement positions attract people that want to be violent

over all else. Since the police system targets Black men as the easiest to brutalize and get away with, those violence-seeking officers deliberately harm mostly Black men, regardless of personal bias.

While reading His Name Is George Floyd, I became aware of many of the specific terms for racial phenomenons in the United States. Though I am able to support large scale movements like Black Lives Matter through monetary, protest, and petition participation, I also intend to keep learning and updating my knowledge of the racist structures that surround me. Individually, as well, I intentionally address and dismantle the personal impact that systemic racism has on my own ideologies. In my active learning and intentional inversion of racial imbalances, I will continue to do what I can to counteract racism in my personal life, and to do my part combatting the racial structure in America as a whole.



“George Floyd: A Deeper Look into the Murder of an Innocent Man” by Paxton Abeles

George Perry Floyd Jr. was a man who once could breathe just like everyone else. Just like you and me, George Floyd had friends who supported him and a family who loved him. But one simple thing set George Floyd apart from many other Americans. He was black. As an African American, he lived in a different America than a majority of the country. He lived in an America where there was a deliberate disadvantage towards people like him specifically for the color of his skin. He lived in an America where finding a job was harder, access to good housing was more challenging, and moving up in the world was nearly hopeless. And yet all Floyd had was hope. He had hope that he could grow above the world that seemed to be against him, and above his own drug addictions.

The authors of His Name Is George Floyd explain one important factor that affected Floyd and millions of others: the pandemic of COVID-19. “COVID-19 pandemic was raging,

killing thousands of Americans each day, shutting down scores of businesses, and leaving millions of people out of work” (Samuels and Olorunnipa viii). On top of all his other difficulties, Floyd had to struggle with a COVID-19 diagnosis and the inability to find a job to support himself and his family. COVID-19 was and still is a disaster that affected people here in Memphis, the entire United States, and the world. Here in the States, however, systemic racism makes it nearly impossible for many African Americans to acquire one of the few jobs left after the pandemic.

The authors also make reference to the American war on drugs. The war on drugs was a political and legal movement that began during the Nixon administration in the 1970’s. The intention of the movement was to prevent the rising epidemic of substance abuse, but instead “the drug war was launched in part to target, vilify, and disrupt Black communities” (Samuels and Olorunnipa 104). Today, the war on drugs is slowly fading into history with the legalization of certain safe drugs, but the devastating effects of the war on black communities lives on. The movement caused the black community to be stereotyped as drug abusers and addicts and allowed police officers to deliberately be more violent towards African Americans. These stereotypes still live on today all across America. It is a major factor in the racial tension experienced here in Memphis and Floyd’s case is just another unfortunate byproduct. Here in Memphis, the situation is only worse. Memphis is a major city in the southern United States, a region where racial tension is infamously and historical high. This is one of the factors of why Memphis is one of the most criminally violent cities in America.

Perhaps the deepest root into the racial tension surrounding the death of George Floyd are the lasting effects of Jim Crow. The authors of *His Name is George Floyd* make note of his historic period. “North Carolina and other Southern states were free to enforce restrictive Jim Crow laws that criminalized a range of behaviors by Black residents, from intermarriage to sitting in Whites-only train cars” (Samuels and Olorunnipa 38). These laws allowed states to segregate different races of people in every aspect of daily life. Although these laws have long since been abolished, their effects are nearly irreversible. Even today there are still thousands of underfunded neighborhoods consisting of mostly African Americans, and where substance abuse is prominent. That environment is the kind of place where Floyd was forced to live for most of his life. The aftermath of Jim Crow is still widely prominent throughout the United States.

In order to combat this systemic racism, what I believe is best for everyone to do on a personal level is to simply treat others with respect. I will treat everyone I meet with due respect, regardless of their appearance or their background. I want everyone, regardless of their skin color, or their nation of origin, or their sexual identity, or their beliefs to have a fair and equal chance as a human being.



“She Won’t Start with Two Strikes” by Makyah Malone

As I walked out the door for the first time to drive alone, my mom began to yell at me. I was confused. She had just given me her keys to go to the grocery store down the street. It was a new freedom that most people feel once in a lifetime. However, my new independence came with constraints. She told me I could not drive with my hoodie on. I was again confused. I wore hoodies all the time, just as most people do. And we already had the "driving while black" conversations. The words that came out of my mom's mouth made living in America a gut-wrenching reality for me. She explained to me how many odds were stacked against me. I am a black female with darker skin, locs, and tall stature. On top of that, I was driving in one of the most historically dangerous parts of the city for a black person to get pulled over. In the case that I did get pulled over, my mom always told me that no matter what, she just wanted me to make it home safely. We both knew of men and women who did not return home to their

parents because of encounters with the police. She prayed that day and every day that God would help me return home to her safely.

Each night, millions of black parents pray that their child makes it home safely; this was Larcenia Floyd's prayer for her son, George Floyd. Larcenia Floyd, better known as Miss Cissy, explained to Floyd from a young age that he already had two strikes while living in America, and his job was to do everything in his power not to get a third (Samuels and Olorunnipa 31). Two strikes indicated that people, specifically law enforcement, see his black skin as a threat. For Floyd to not get this third strike, he was told to stay out of trouble and to respect the police.

Sadly, people of color still do not understand how their skin color can be more of a threat than anything else. It has been skin color over a bag of Skittles, skin color over being repeatedly told that a man could not breathe, and skin color over countless questions that police officers should have asked. It is saddening for black parents to say to their kids that they will be targeted disproportionately more than others because of their skin color.

Floyd is what many people would call a gentle giant. Although he played football, he did not enjoy hitting other people. In elementary school, a few of Floyd's friends began to pick on someone on the opposing basketball team, and instead of joining them, Floyd interceded so the outsider would not get beat up (Samuels and Olorunnipa 25). Additionally, Floyd knew the danger he and his brothers were in. Because of this, he taught his brother how to walk into a

room, which did not exempt Floyd from running into trouble with the law. After Floyd dropped out of college, he began selling drugs to make extra money. He was eventually caught and served his first of seven sentences in jail in 1997 (Samuels and Olorunnipa 99). Floyd still cared about many things, but the odds were against him. In one instance, Floyd saw his brother about to be arrested and told the officer to arrest him instead. The officer said that their fate of being arrested was being decided on a coin flip (Samuels and Olorunnipa 114). This is how law enforcement and the justice system would continually treat Floyd.

After reading about Chauvin's previous history of excessive force, I question police officers nationwide. Chauvin had used the neck restraint eight times before someone died; multiple of these times, eyewitnesses believed it was unnecessary. I think that things like this happen far too often and go unnoticed (Samuels and Olorunnipa 153). Before George Floyd's death, most police departments around the country were training their officers on knee-in-neck restraints, which is how Floyd died. And officers around the country are not being held accountable. No person should account for three percent of neck restraints in one department, which Chauvin did.

Floyd is just one of thousands of black lives that should not have died; black lives that matter is an understatement. Although I do not think defunding the police is necessary, allocating funds to the right place in police departments is essential and should be the focus. I

also think mental health services for people of color must be accessible. Floyd did not feel like he could speak up and be heard about his mental health; when he did speak up, he was ignored. I think of people like Pervis Payne who have been affected by not being heard or seen. Payne, a distant relative, was convicted in 1987 for a crime he did not commit and was sentenced to death row. Payne is intellectually disabled and knew that even though he was helping at a crime scene, he fled because he was unsure how the police would react to a black man being at the crime scene of a white woman's murder. Payne was not heard repeatedly; therefore, he spent thirty-three years on death row.

Black people start with two strikes because of years and years of disproportionate inequality. There is a big difference between equality and equity. There needs to be better equity for people of color. Something I'm committed to is speaking up for those whose voices feel suppressed. I remember June 3, 2020, when I wrote and sent an open letter to my high school about standing with their black students. I remember December 7, 2021, when I lost one of my friends to suicide. In both situations, people did not know that a problem needed to be addressed, issues that Black people feel and deal with daily.

I have watched a lot of CNN and liked many posts on Instagram about making a difference. But if no one around me speaks up, it will just be another retweet. Part of the problem is that everyone needs to be made aware of these problems. Change is not possible when people ignore kids in low-income neighborhoods in seeing the importance of their

education. I want young Black girls to have a role model that is not just the stereotypical Black job. I want someone's Black daughter to know she does not have to be just one thing. She can be a youth pastor, a lawyer, a supreme court justice or anything else she wants to be. That she can stand up for social justice, be the life of the party, go to therapy, and love the people around her. My goal is to let a little Black girl know that she will not have two strikes one day.

As I sat down to watch the news reports in 2020 that continued to come in about the murder of innocent Black people, I asked myself a few questions. One of those questions I asked myself led to me asking my mom if we could go to the protest in Downtown Memphis in the coming days. I was scared and nervous, but I knew that I could not sit and cry anymore. I knew that sitting and crying was okay, but I also knew that I had a part to play. I wanted my voice to be heard, loud and clear. I wanted to be a part of the change, a part of something historical. It was precisely that, and today, I am reminded of why I went to the protest in the first place.

References

Samuels, R., & Olorunnipa, T. (2023). *His Name Is George Floyd: One Man's Life and the Struggle for Racial Justice*. PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE PUBLISHING.

"Essential for our times." —Ibram X. Kendi, author of *How to Be an Antiracist*

HIS NAME IS

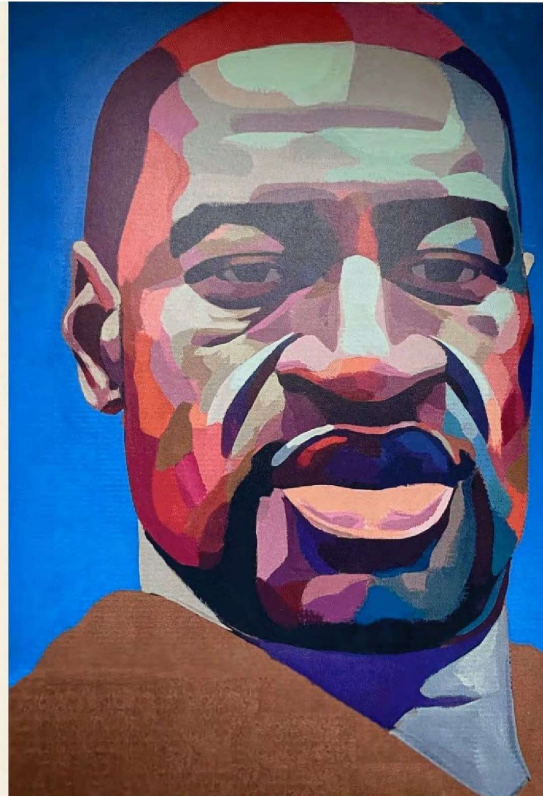
GEORGE

ONE MAN'S LIFE
and
THE STRUGGLE FOR RACIAL JUSTICE



FLOYD

ROBERT SAMUELS and TOLUSE OLORUNNIPA of *The Washington Post*



ROBERT SAMUELS



TOLUSE OLORUNNIPA

CBU WRITER'S TALK

Wednesday, October 25 | 7:00 pm

Christian Brothers University

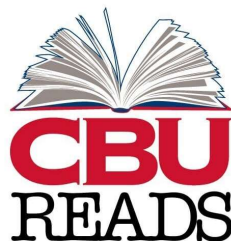
University Theater

RHODES COLLEGE: COMMUNITIES IN CONVERSATION

Thursday, October 26 | 6:00 pm

Rhodes College • McNeill Concert Hall

CBU.EDU/CBU-READS



2023
Sponsors



INTERNATIONAL PAPER



Penguin
Random
House

About Memphis Reads and CBU Reads

Memphis Reads is a community partnership between Christian Brothers University, Rhodes College, The University of Memphis, City Leadership, Literacy Mid-South, Memphis Public Libraries, City of Memphis, NOVEL Bookstore, Memphis-Shelby County Schools, Respect the Haven CDC, Memphis Museum of Science and History, Barth House Episcopal Center, Carpenter Art Garden, Brown Missionary Baptist Church, Junior League of Memphis, National Civil Rights Museum, Uplift Westwood CDC, and many others.



CBU Reads (originally Fresh Reads) is CBU's first-year summer reading program and is the basis for the Memphis community common reading program, Memphis Reads. The program gives new students a common academic experience and connects them with the campus community, as well as the Memphis community. First-year students, upper class students, and faculty members read the same book and have numerous opportunities to discuss it throughout the school year at various First Year Experience events.

