

## The Long Fight for Justice: A Freedom Narrative from the Louisville Protests

John Randolph



**Photo:** John Randolph in the Men's March June 6, 2020, Louisville, KY.

The unseasonably hot spring day sapped our energy as we marched and protested through Downtown Louisville. This particular protest called for the sole participation of the black men from the neighborhoods and community. It was a show of force. Many of us wore our Sunday best, in recognition of our ancestors' proud civil rights lineage, or perhaps, to play the game of respectability politics for the news cameras, onlookers, and police. The caution of social distancing, due to the threatening pandemic, was ever-present, but the injustice stemming from police brutality permeated our psyche even more. There was no way we could stay home and shelter ourselves from the dangerous Coronavirus when a more dangerous adversary remained at our doorstep. There was a fight going on.

Once again, black people's fight for justice was the central topic of dispute. It was more important than even the fight against a deadly virus or sickness. On that hot spring morning, we were there for George Floyd, the man who lay helpless as a Minneapolis officer knelt on his neck until his life departed from his body. We were there for Breonna Taylor, the woman who was slaughtered in her own home by Louisville Metro Police in the middle of the night. We were there for David McAtee, the Louisville man recently killed by the Kentucky National Guard - who were activated after multi-night protests - acting as a hyper-menacing militarized police power. We walked through Louisville KY, in silence.

The power of our presence spoke louder than any chant or slogan. At the end of the march, we knelt in the street for eight minutes and forty-six seconds, the length of time George Floyd's executioner tortured and snuffed out his life. The burning asphalt ripped through my thin dress pants. The sweat seeped through my dress shirt and suit jacket. The kneeling position slowly became uncomfortable. It was not as uncomfortable, though, as the suffering of black people who somehow survived for 400 years in racist America. The sun was brutal and unyielding on our bodies. Yet, it was not as unyielding as the fight against racism and white supremacy has been.

The men were told to remain silent as we knelt for those eight minutes and forty-six seconds.

Still, out of the silence one man shouted, "I am George Floyd!"

Another man yelled, "I am David McAtee"!

"I am James Taylor"!

"I am Michael Newby"!

You probably do not know those last two names. In 2002, Mr. James Taylor a 50- year old black man shot was killed by Louisville Metro Police Department even though his arms were handcuffed behind his back. In 2004, Mr. Michael Newby, a 19-year old black man was shot in the back and killed by an undercover LMPD officer after a so-called botched drug deal. Nobody has been convicted in either case. The struggle for accountability of police brutality is a long and draining experience for the black citizens of Louisville.

Being a minister, I routinely ponder on all things theological. As I knelt on the blazing asphalt, that day, I mediated on the *Hebrew* scriptures and Jacob's epic wrestling match in the book of *Genesis*. The *Genesis* narrative has been extensively written, preached, commented upon and parsed throughout the generations. I wondered. What does Jacob's age-old struggle have to say to our modern struggle? Undoubtedly, the Old Testament narrative helps scholars understand ancient Hebrew origin beliefs about history and culture. Might the story also give us modern inspiration and understanding about what we are facing today? Jacob wrestles with a supernatural mystery man, and later declares as going toe-to-toe with the Almighty God. The Bible hardly describes the encounter except to mention that the two men wrestled all-night long.

What does it mean to be in such a long fight? It must have been the most physically taxing encounter Jacob had ever experienced. I imagine in that fight Jacob underwent moments of determination and peril. There must have been times when he felt like he was winning and other times when he was losing. There were surely times of hopelessness and times of invigorated faith.

Just like infamous ancient wrestling matches, the fight for freedom is a long enigmatic journey. There may not be a clear winner and loser. If you read carefully, you will see that Jacob emerged from the encounter both “blessed” and debilitated. There is no doubt in my mind that the fight for freedom in America will be won and result in a wonderful new way of living and loving one another. Yet, the Bible tells us that this struggle may also leave us scarred and in need of therapeutic healing methods for the mind, body, and spirit.

One thing is clear: Something must change. It has been 100 days since Sister Breonna Taylor was slaughtered in her home. As of today, only one of Breonna Taylor’s three killers have been fired from their jobs. No one has been charged or arrested. Louisville is still in the fight. We are preparing to march on the state capital of Frankfort to demand justice. Sometimes it doesn’t seem like we are winning, but we fight on. We have been beatdown and tear gassed but we fight on.

Dr. Cornel West said, “You don’t know what it is to be human if you have never wrestled with despair, but never allow that despair to have the last word.”

We will never give up!

After Jacob emerged from the encounter, he was given a new name. He may have looked like the same man, but he was changed. The Bible says when daybreak came, he was named Israel. Black Louisville and Black America have had to fight and struggle for every bit of justice. We fight for Sister Breonna and we will never forget. I heard the choir sing, “it will be all over in the morning”. After fighting in this country for so long, morning is coming, and justice will prevail. Through our blood and tears we will continue to fight.

Joy comes in the morning and joy comes in the mourning.

Originally written 23 June, 2020. The Men's March took place on 6 June, 2020. The March in Frankfort referenced above happened 25 June, 2020.

**John Randolph** was born and raised in Louisville KY. He is a 2nd year MDiv student at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary.

**Related reading:** John Randolph provided the opening prayer at the Louisville Black Lives Matter ‘Healing Ceremony’ event on 31 May, 2020. You can read about it from *The Courier-Journal* website. <https://www.courier-journal.com/story/news/2020/05/31/louisville-protests-black-lives-matter-holds-healing-ceremony-sunday/5302448002/>



This is an information resource in the Anti-racism Digital Library, a protest library of information resources to empower resistance to oppression. You are free to use this material under a Creative Commons 4.0 International license as long you provide proper attribution and share alike (free, no cost). Find trusted content in collections such as *The Intercultural Church, Louisville Seminary*, and visit the Anti-racism Digital Library often to learn, grow your anti-racist voice, and join in the movement to end racism.

endracism.info | [www.lpts.edu](http://www.lpts.edu)