



It has been little over a month since our country was made aware of the fatal 8 minutes and 46 seconds in which Minneapolis police officers stood guard as one of their own weaponized his knee to not only strip George Floyd of his liberty, but also of his life. And though protests have seemed to subside and calls for defunding the police have been drowned out by the resurgence of safety precautions amidst the pandemic, seemingly little has changed in the way police officers choose to enforce the law.

Last week, a video surfaced that appears to show yet another officer, this time one of Baton Rouge's own, with a knee on the neck of a young man. It should be noted that the angle of the video has called into question whether or not the officer's knee is in fact on the young man's neck, and if it is, the firmness with which the knee is placed can be debated. The young man does not seem to be resisting or in any excruciating pain. In fact, the video I saw does not provide much context at all; furthermore, Baton Rouge Police has released a photo that contradicts the knee on the neck narrative and continues to investigate the incident to learn the full story. Without being there, and without being one of the people directly involved in the incident, it is impossible to know what has happened. But that almost doesn't really matter. What does matter is that in a time that is already fraught with tension between police officers and communities of color, the video and the content it appears to depict, is at the absolute very least, problematic, especially for a city with a history and a present such as ours.

Baton Rouge is no stranger to police violence. It has not been two weeks yet since the city mourned the anniversary of the death of Alton Sterling at the hands of Baton Rouge city police. The incident, which resulted in no charges being filed, would have torn our city apart had it not already been fragmented by severe racial and economic disparities, but it still sparked a summer of protests, arrests and police killings, a firestorm of racial and community tension that wouldn't even be extinguished by the waters from a once in century flood and a heartfelt apology from a newly instated police chief.

The apology was welcomed and it went a long way to validate the humanity of those who look like me and my nieces and nephew, but as someone who has lived and worked in the Baton Rouge zip codes most often associated with heavy police presence and with the folks who are seemingly most often involved with this police presence for nearly 20 years, I can assure you that seeing this video does little to ensure the citizens of communities most heavily policed and thus affected by police violence that they are safe or valued, or human. Our consistent exposure to rough policing and depictions of police violence has left us raw. Regardless of the story, of the facts, even, seeing this video only serves to confirm the belief that Black men and women are subjected to completely dehumanizing conditions and practices, not just at the hands of law enforcement, but certainly most apparently, and in some cases, fatally. While we are aware that the young man, a minor, has been released into the custody of his mother, we cannot know the mental harm that this incident will have had on the young man and his family. Yet, we are all too familiar with the impact of these incidents on the mental- well being of our communities.

If Baton Rouge has any hope of being a vibrant, thriving city, it cannot continue to subject half of its citizens to adverse experiences with those who exist to serve them and call it justice. It cannot continue to allow dehumanizing practices to be proper protocol and it cannot withhold accountability from those who have been given the authority to act on our behalf. This is yet another dreadful moment that is overflowing with possibility. What happens as a result of this video will set the tone for our community for years to come. Chief Murphy and Mayor Broome have promised complete transparency throughout this latest incident, and while I have no doubt that they will do all that they can to not diminish the trust of the the community, I also know that their positions only allow for so much. Baton Rouge citizens must demand change in the form of systemic shifts, embody change through personal pivots and sustain change by honoring the humanity of each and every person in our city. There has never been a better time than this. Let's rid our city of antiquated and dehumanizing policies and practices and build a community that is truly worthy of the refrain BR Proud.