

United States: Hundreds of thousands march, rally for Justice; activists demand defund, dismantle, reimagine policing

Thursday 11 June 2020, by [MIAH Malik](#) (Date first published: 10 June 2020).

CALIFORNIA—On June 9 in Houston, Texas, the body of George Perry Floyd was laid to rest. Thousands came to the celebration. Big Perry was greatly loved. The message sent in the eulogies was clear: No Justice, No Peace.

Two weeks earlier on May 25 in Minneapolis Floyd was killed by four cops with one kneeling on his neck until he went limp and died. That video led to mass demonstrations in 50 states and some 20 countries on six continents.

Mass uprising

Mass anger against the police and its existence is spreading. The central leaders come from the Black Lives Matters Movement and youth of all races who have taken steps forward.

Most demonstrators came out spontaneously and made signs and banners. Two high school women (one Black, one white) put out a leaflet calling on protesters to take the famous Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco. The demonstrators took over the bridge and kneeled 8 minutes and 46 seconds. Many drivers in stopped cars joined in.

In Washington, DC, the mayor and local activists painted a huge Black Lives Matter sign on 16th Street (now “Black Lives Matter Plaza”) in front of the White House where President Trump was hiding out in his “bunker.” He had his Attorney General mobilize unidentified police/army units to attack peaceful demonstrators. He then built a “fence wall” around the White House. The protests grew larger each day after Trump’s threat to “dominate” the streets with the military. Bridges were taken over in many cities.

While elected Republicans stand with Trump, the public is becoming more critical. The uprising has moved so fast in two weeks the unthinkable is being discussed: defund and reimagine the police force as it exists. Many calls are for abolishment.

Shift in public sentiments

In a new poll issued June 9, 74 percent of Americans say they support the protests.

The demonstrations have growing bipartisan appeal, with 87 percent of Democrats saying they support them, along with 76 percent of independents. Among Republicans, the majority — 53 percent — also back the protests.

President Trump’s disrespectful response to Floyd’s death is condemned by a 61 percent majority, with 47 percent vehemently opposed.

Among those who said protests have been largely peaceful, 91 percent support them. These numbers reflect a historic shift in attitude especially among whites.

The Washington Post began monitoring police shooting and deaths in 2015. By the end of 2015, cops had fatally shot nearly 1,000 people, twice as many as ever documented in one year by the federal government.

“Since The Post began tracking the shootings, Black people have been shot and killed by police at disproportionate rates — both in terms of overall shootings and the shootings of unarmed Americans. The number of Black and unarmed people fatally shot by police has declined since 2015, but whether armed or not, Black people are still shot and killed at a disproportionately higher rate than white people.” (June 8, The Washington Post)

There is a social and political crisis that both Republicans and Democrats are trying to figure out. Can the expanding protests be contained? Can the more radical democratic demand of defund and dismantle be shut down?

Defund and dismantle

A major city in an important Midwest state, Minnesota, did the unexpected. Nine members of the Minneapolis City Council — a veto-proof majority — pledged on June 7 to dismantle the Police Department, promising to create a new system of public safety in a city where law enforcement has long been accused of extreme racism. The police union head, Bob Kroll, called George Floyd a “violent criminal” and the protesters as part of a “terrorist movement.”

“It is clear that our system of policing is not keeping our communities safe,” council President Lisa Bender said. “Our efforts at incremental reform have failed, period.”

The decision, presented as a year-long process, opens the door to reimagining policing —something considered impossible even as a discussion topic two weeks ago before the murder of George Floyd.

Many Minneapolis institutions had already decided to end contracts using police in public schools and universities. If these steps are taken, less money for policing will be needed. The funds can be shifted to other functions such as for the homeless and mental health.

The City Council’s decision to dismantle came after these decisions. It correctly recognized that reform could not end the corruption and violence of its police department.

In fact, the Minneapolis department had pushed through many reforms, but it did not change culture. African Americans are less than 20 percent of the population but suffer 60 percent of cop brutality and violence. According to the local Black Vision Collective, the community was fed up with this “reform” record. It is why many community leaders called for defunding and abolition long before it became more popular.

In addition, the defund/dismantle demand is tied to calls to end mass incarceration. The criminal justice system is a complete failure. The US has more prisoners than any country in the world.

Democrats in the US Senate and Congress on June 8 in response to mass protests adopted a legislative package to improve policing. They did not, however, endorse a sweeping transformation of the police. Top Democrats, including its presidential nominee Joe Biden, oppose defunding and dismantling police departments that refuse to reform and prosecute “bad” cops.

A democratic demand

The democratic demand of defunding along with demilitarizing of the police, targets the enormous police budget (in many cases amounting to 30-50% of city’s general budget). The demand is to redirect that money to the social programs that have been cut, including affordable housing,

education/recreation, jobs, and health care.

The police get the latest military hardware—including tanks, drones, helicopters, and now facial recognition technology—while everything else is cut to the bone. Police departments can purchase hardware that the military no longer needs.

The movement and demands are more than a response to Floyd's and other murders. It is rooted in 400 years of national oppression of Blacks. From slave patrols to Black codes and Ku Klux Klan infiltration of police departments after the defeat of the Reconstruction Era in 1877. (An unwritten deal named the "Great Compromise" between Republicans and Democrats kept the presidency in Republican hands and removed all federal army troops from the South, thus betraying Black Republicans.)

The white terror that followed removed nearly every gain won by freed slaves after the Civil War in 1865, including the right to hold office and vote. Police departments were a tool of that terror and criminal violence.

Most of the hand wringing about defunding police is concern of how whites react to it; not the fact that police are already seen as a major "problem" in Black and Brown communities.

Myth of unconscious bias

As this debate unfolds, it is necessary to also challenge the myth of unconscious bias. There is anti-Black bias among cops like in society. That bias leads to racial profiling and deadly incidents against unarmed Black men for simply being Black.

Many liberals are aghast about defund and abolition demands of Black militants because whites rarely suffer at the hands of cops for simply having white skin. They support the current police system with some reforms. They ask "What if there is a burglary or a traffic stop? Who do we call "?

It seems simple but it is not. Blacks who make that call hope they walk away and are not brutalized, locked up or killed.

But there is no such thing as "unconscious bias." There is ingrained bias toward Black men and boys in all whites, and many Blacks. That bias is well known whenever a Black person applies for a home loan, a job and seeks justice. The reason Martin Luther King Jr and civil rights leaders in the 1960s demanded enforceable affirmative action programs, including use of quotas, after legal rights were restored to most Blacks, was only to ensure highly qualified African Americans could get positions that they previously denied.

Racial bias can only be combated by laws and regulations. Few of these programs and laws of the 1970s have survived, which is why many positive changes have been reversed. Blacks today with a college degree on average make less income than whites with a high school diploma.

But the battle against the "Blue Wall" can inspire a broader civil rights movement against anti-Black bias.

An alternative democratic vision

The defunding, dismantling of the standing police is the first step to create a safety force that is under community control, with the ability to prosecute those "bad" cops and those who rarely are thrown in prison.

An alternative democratic vision is crucial to build new safety forces in Minneapolis and all communities. These forces must live in and serve the communities. Whatever names they take, petty criminals will be arrested, other crimes taken care of and any rogue safety elements prosecuted. None of that happens under the current system where police see Black and Brown people as threats for simply walking and breathing.

Socialists have argued for this democratic approach for decades. After the 1960s rebellions, socialists called for community control of police. The democratic right to be safe cannot happen with the police system that currently exists.

The fight for this democratic demand can lead to higher awareness and social and political consciousness, especially among the youth, concerning racism, capitalism and why a new system is needed.

It is not a surprise that the Democratic Party opposes these demands since they backed and supported the fundamental role of police in society. The reforms they now propose is to gain votes in the presidential election. Yet the mass actions is why even those reforms such as ending choke holds are already being adopted by many cities and police departments.

The Democrats, however, will never back abolition, defunding, demilitarization because it co-partnered with Republicans in creating the multi-trillion-dollar military industrial complex and massive prison system where some 600,000 Blacks annually leave incarceration and generally are unable to find stable employment.

Democrats also fear the inevitable white backlash from racists and neo-fascists against the mass anti-police movement. The smear of protesters by Trump and the far right as 'Antifa' is part of that strategy to deflect attention from police violence.

The mass demonstrations must deepen and expand to win full equality with whites and stop police violence. The demands for defund, dismantle and demilitarize the police go hand in hand with No Justice, No Peace.

Rev. Al Sharpton at George Perry Floyd's celebration in Houston and Minneapolis said a March on Washington, on August 28 will take place. It will be led by the families of murdered Black men and women by cops and white vigilantes. It will be the 57th anniversary of Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech for "equality and justice," and against national oppression of African Americans.

There is every indication the protest movement can continue through the August national march on Washington even with the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

Malik Miah

P.S.

- Article written for Green Left Weekly (Australia).