

<https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article6694>



USA anti-racist rebellion

# Make Black Lives Matter

- IV Online magazine - 2020 - IV545 - June 2020 -

Publication date: Sunday 28 June 2020

---

**Copyright © International Viewpoint - online socialist magazine - All rights reserved**

---

**In the middle of a pandemic, with the global economy crashing and a US Presidential election in the offing, George Floyd's murder by police sparked protests across the globe. The movement is led by Black Americans and unites in solidarity people of many ethnicities, colours, and religions who have had enough of police brutality, and police murders of Black Americans.**

The breadth and intensity of the events has spread from city to city, state to state and country to country as anger over systemic racism explodes. Discussion of other similar murders for which there has been no justice come forward together with debate about more fundamental change.

Given the long history of institutional and blatant racism in the treatment of Black people by the 'justice' system in the US, why was it this case that became such a catalyst?

Was it the video itself showing Derek Chauvin (who had 17 complaints against him in almost 20 years) choking George Floyd for 8 minutes and 46 seconds despite pleas of witnesses that he couldn't breathe and the 3 other police involved refusing to intervene? [1] Was it that charges were not immediately brought against Chauvin and the other officers and that Chauvin was initially charged only with third degree murder?

Almost every interview on CNN begins by asking what set this movement off ... the obvious answer is that it has been built for over years by Black Lives Matter in the United States following the Ferguson uprising. [2]

In a country built upon slavery and genocide, whose effects are still a part of the daily lives of Black Americans and all Americans of colour, these protests are about more than police accountability. They address an unjust criminal justice system, the continual oppression of people of colour and the general inequality between the lives of black Americans and white Americans.

The history of the penitentiary system in the US (see e.g., Robert Perkinson's [Texas Tough](#)) is an horrific one. A primary role of incarceration and prisons in Texas were to ensure the use of forced labour of Black people after the end of slavery. Laws didn't apply to Black people before that as they were considered property not human beings. The use of forced labour in prisons is one of the few exceptions to Human Rights laws prohibiting forced labour.

In a report from the Equal Justice Initiative in 2015, it was found that in the Jim Crow south in the period of 1877-1950 over 4000 black men, women, and children were lynched by white southerners; far more than had been previously known. [3] Directly confronting this legacy of racial terrorism has yet to be done, as is the case with so much of U.S. history and racism against people of colour.

Discrimination in housing and employment (the type of employment and pay differentials for the same work) exist throughout the country, not only in the Southern states. Unemployment for Black Americans is twice that of white Americans. While it is no longer legal to deny housing to a family of colour in a majority white area that does not mean that it doesn't happen.

Systemic racism and white supremacy have created deep income and wealth inequalities in the US (entrapment in "low skilled" jobs with low wages impacts the ability to save money or purchase homes. Since healthcare is tied to employment many lack access to basic preventative medicine.

This systemic racism impacts the everyday lives of black Americans not only through policing but the incredibly unjust criminal justice system in which black American men are disproportionately criminalised and imprisoned. The point has again been reached where people have had enough of what is considered "normal" and are demanding radical change.

The current system of criminalisation and incarceration do nothing to reduce crime or to address the social and economic problems that lead to crime or address justice and injustice. We need to move beyond reform. Listening and hearing the protestors demands is essential. We must support the campaign for defunding the police and support the movement that is arguing for a transition towards a more just society.

## Trump's role

What is the role of the current US President? Racism has been central to his political career from the Central Park killing to demanding to see Obama's birth certificate. [4] His partisanship is clear. When the armed white far right were on the streets with violent and antisemitic posters to demand the lifting of the lockdown he called them "good people, just angry". [5] But when peaceful demonstrators of all protest George Floyd's murder, Trump calls them "terrorists" - and "violent outside groups and infiltrators." [6]

It's an old fascist meme calling protestors "terrorists" rather than people defending their communities and fighting for a better future for all. They are scapegoated for state repression which is apparently the fault of "outsiders" rather than those committing the violence, i.e. the state.

Trump will base his re-election campaign on a racist "law and order" platform; especially given the state of the US economy and his disastrous handling of the coronavirus crisis. "Law and order" is the only thing that has been consistent throughout his political career which is why he is unwilling to allow any reform of the system.

This has opened up a chasm between him and key military figures over questions like changing the names of US military bases bearing the names of Confederate generals who fought against the US) and his constant threats to unilaterally send in the armed forces against peaceful marches. [7] Such action against the will of State Governors and Legislatures could only be taken if constitutional rights were being violated (see the Posse Comitatus Act)

There may be attempts to hold protestors in the USA and elsewhere responsible for the inevitable rise in Covid19. But many US states refused to impose lockdowns and have rapidly opened up in fear of economic collapses. Trump himself argued for opening up the economy without PPE and protection for workers. The refusal of Trump, his cronies and his supporters to wear masks led to the spread of Covid-19.

Many protestors are wearing masks to protect each other and their families. They do not bear responsibility for the continued spread of the pandemic. What drove them onto the street was being fed up with extreme injustice. The blame for that lies in the economic, political and social oppression that is an essential part of the system. These protests would not have happened otherwise; so the blame lies with those that maintain the oppression and repression of Blacks and people of colour not those fighting against it.

And trying to force people to stay silent in the face of these grotesque situations is a denial of the right of freedom of speech and protest - fighting oppression and repression clearly takes precedence.

# Evolving demands

The slogans chanted or written on placards have developed from focusing on justice for George Floyd and others murdered by the police to demands for demilitarising, defunding, dismantling and disbanding the police.

In 2014, police in NYC killed Eric Garner with a choke hold restraint while arresting him for selling single cigarettes; Ben Okri explains why Floyd's murder has so many parallels with the earlier killing. [\[8\]](#)

This March, Emergency Medical Technician Breonna Taylor was shot by police in Louisville Kentucky. [\[9\]](#) They erroneously entered her home looking for someone on drug charges that was already in custody using a no-knock warrant; meaning they did not identify themselves as police when they did so. [\[10\]](#) Jogging while black describes the racist murder of Ahmaud Arbery on February 23. [\[11\]](#) No arrests were made even though a video existed showing the murder until 74 days later. A black trans man, Tony McDade was killed by a white policeman in Tallahassee Florida on 27 May, the third person killed by police there in two months and the 11th reported trans and/or GNC death of 2020; 7 black trans women have been murdered in Florida in the past two years. [\[12\]](#)

These are some of the many cases that protestors refer to when protestors chant: 'Say their names'.

In the middle of angry protests, we see bodycam evidence of the police in Midland, Texas on May 29 where they chased and arrested a 21 year old Black man, Tye Andrews, who they accused of a traffic offence. [\[13\]](#) He pulled over in front of his grandmother's house and lay down on the ground offering no resistance to police who approached him with guns - he was clearly terrified. His 90 year old grandmother came out of her home to lie across him to protect him from police.

As protests against police brutality continued we see a rise in that brutality. The use of tear gas (or pepper spray), rubber bullets and flash bang grenades against peaceful protestors happened in many cities. Tear gas can have long term health consequences and impact people living in the area or walking nearby. In the middle of a respiratory virus epidemic it can worsen the coronavirus which is already having a disproportionate impact on people of colour for a range of economic and political reasons. [\[14\]](#)

The imposition of curfews in various places also led to an increase in police brutality (and further arrests for breaking curfews). [\[15\]](#) Curfews were broken by deliberate civil disobedience by protestors in Washington DC, Philadelphia, L.A., and elsewhere. [\[16\]](#) This led to an important victory as curfews were cancelled and the national guard were sent home.

Testifying before Congress the day after his brother's funeral, the younger brother of George Floyd, Philonise, asked: "He didn't deserve to die over \$20. [\[17\]](#) I am asking you, is that what a black man's life is worth?." Weeks of anti-racist protests seem to not have impacted on the behaviour of police; on June 12, Rayshard Brooks was fatally shot by police in Atlanta after falling asleep in his car at a Wendy's drive-through. [\[18\]](#)

Having been called by Wendy's, the police arrived woke Brooks and administered a sobriety test. A sobriety test does not require a police officer to use a Taser, fleeing arrest for DWI clearly is not a threat to the police and hence no justification for a fatal shooting; this is the case irrespective of their having the cop's Taser.

During this period of protest, Atlanta police have often reacted with extreme violence. [\[19\]](#) Protests against Brooks' killing have erupted in Atlanta, the Wendy's has been burned down by protestors, and police have responded violently in one case breaking the window of a car and tasing two black students inside. [\[20\]](#) The Atlanta police

chief has resigned and while several police officers were sacked and placed on administrative leave, no charges have been brought against them.

## Demilitarisation

Demilitarisation of police is a needed reform. Many police forces are trained by the Israeli military in crowd control - and this is being increasingly questioned. [21] They also have access to surplus used military grade hardware; often for free.

A federal programme, the Law Enforcement Support Office (LESO) which transfers excess military equipment to civilian law enforcement agencies, came under scrutiny after the police shooting of Michael Brown in August 2014. [22] The Ferguson police used military hardware against the ensuing protests including smoke bombs, flash grenades, tear gas, and rubber bullets. These together with the use of racial profiling and curfews became an important part of the discussion of the way policing is used against black Americans as well as those facing a mental health crisis. [23]

"As of 2020, 8,200 local law enforcement agencies participated in the program that has transferred \$5.1 billion in military material from the [Department of Defense](#) to law enforcement agencies since 1997.[3] According to the DLA, material worth \$449 million was transferred in 2013 alone. Some of the most commonly requested items include ammunition, cold weather clothing, sand bags, medical supplies, sleeping bags, flashlights and electrical wiring. Small arms and vehicles such as aircraft, watercraft and armored vehicles have also been obtained [\(LESO\)](#)."

In 2015 Obama passed Executive Order 13688 limiting the type of military goods that could be transferred to civilian police. In 2017, Trump rolled this back.

## Abolition

In an interview in *The American Prospect*, Alex Vitale the author of *The End of Policing* discusses how today's protests are fuelling support for abolitionism. [24] He notes that after the Ferguson Uprising the movement against police violence did not fade but prepared for the next inevitable case of police violence. What we are seeing today is the culmination of years of hard work.

Policies for defunding, disbanding and dismantling the police derive from the abolition movement which calls for radical transformations in the criminal justice system which works to replace the current punitive system with one which addresses the causes of crime; the deep economic, social and political divisions that characterise our societies. It challenges the school to prison pipeline that characterises the lives of so many black men in the US.

In a brilliant op-ed in the *New York Times*, Mariame Kaba argues:

"We need to change our demands. The surest way of reducing police violence is to reduce the power of the police, by cutting budgets and the number of officers.

But don't get me wrong. We are not abandoning our communities to violence. We don't want to just close police departments. We want to make them obsolete.

We should redirect the billions that now go to police departments toward providing health care, housing, education and good jobs. If we did this, there would be less need for the police in the first place.

We can build other ways of responding to harms in our society. Trained "community care workers" could do mental-health checks if someone needs help. Towns could use restorative-justice models instead of throwing people in prison."

[25]

Funding investment in communities offers new ways to address issues of criminality and violence. Community members work together to provide support for each other, ensure that support like social workers, mental health support, after-school programmes, alternative environments for children to grow up enable the shift towards addressing poverty and shifting towards models of restorative Justice rather than punitive justice.

[Restorative justice](#) is one of the [13 Guiding Principles](#) of Black Lives Matter. It enables community involvement by bringing together victims and perpetrators rather than policies geared towards the punishment of criminals which only perpetuate the maintenance of inequality, injustice and racism. Restorative Justice, [decarceration of prisoners](#), and [prison abolition](#) share the aim of radically changing how law, crime and criminality are addressed; moving away from punitive justice and the incarceration of offenders towards an idea of social responsibility and respect.

## Atlanta

In an interview on Democracy Now, Vitale argues that police violence will not be ended by reforms; this requires defunding. Society must address what the role of the police has been; that criminalisation to deal with fundamental inequalities of a social, economic, and political nature is itself a problem.

According to Vitale:

"We're also talking about a story of the last 50 years, about neoliberal austerity and the way in which it has concentrated inequality in the United States, producing problems like mass homelessness and mass untreated mental illness and mass involvement in black markets because of economic precarity, and then using police to manage those problems. So we've seen this incredible explosion of the scope of policing.

And what the defund movement is talking about [...] is about rethinking not just what are police doing, but why are we using police to paper over problems of economic exploitation. And the defund movement, which was occurring in dozens of cities before the events in Minneapolis, is about concretely identifying police spending that could be shifted into specific, targeted community interventions that will actually produce public safety without coercion, violence and racism."

## The Democratic Party establishment

It was entirely predictable that the leadership of the Democratic Party and its presumptive candidate Joe Biden would immediately reject the idea of defunding. Biden after all was the author of the 1994 Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act which has directly led to an increase in mass incarceration which has impacted disproportionately on people of colour especially Black men. The Party's response to the protests is set out in the Justice in Policing Act of 2020.

The bill came out of the House Judiciary Committee and was endorsed by some members of the Senate. Its framework is very limited reforms. It would establish a Department of Justice taskforce to coordinate the investigation, prosecution and enforcement efforts for cases relating to law enforcement misconduct at all levels. It would prevent former police officers with a history of problematic behaviour to move to another jurisdiction. It would

ban the use of racial, religious and discriminatory profiling. It prohibits the use of choke-holds, carotid holds and no-knock warrants at Federal level (they do not have jurisdiction for state and local government but a number of states have already adopted these prohibitions). It would limit the transfer of military grade hardware to local and state law enforcement and mandates the use of dashboard and body cameras for federal officers. These should be funded for local and state police out of existing federal fund. It requires the creation of law enforcement accreditation and reforms qualified immunity protections that shield government officials from personal liability for their actions working for the government. It provides grant funding for community based organisations to develop "local commissions and task forces to help communities to re-imagine and develop concrete, just and equitable public safety approaches."

This is a long way from defunding and abolition; more generally these ideas are now in the public domain more widely than ever before thanks to the dynamism of the movement. Putting the genie back in the bottle will not be easy but that's definitely what the Democratic establishment wants. Instead the left must stand with protestors demanding radical change, with those fighting oppression and state repression. In this they are fighting for a better future for all.

15 June 2020

Source [Socialist Resistance](#).

PS:

If you like this article or have found it useful, please consider donating towards the work of International Viewpoint. Simply follow this link: [Donate](#) then enter an amount of your choice. One-off donations are very welcome. But regular donations by standing order are also vital to our continuing functioning. See the last paragraph of [this article](#) for our bank account details and take out a standing order. Thanks.

---

[1] [Buzzfeed News](#), 29 May 2020 "[Minneapolis Officer Derek Chauvin Had 17 Complaints Against Him Before He Was Charged With Murder For George Floyd's Death](#)".

[2] [Wikipedai](#) "[Ferguson unrest](#)".

[3] [Democracy Now](#), 11 February 2015 "[As Study Finds 4,000 Lynchings in Jim Crow South, Will U.S. Address Legacy of Racial Terrorism?](#)".

[4] [New York Times](#), 18 June 2019 "[Trump Will Not Apologize for Calling for Death Penalty Over Central Park Five](#)", [CNN Politics](#), 30 November 2017 "[Report: Trump continues to question Obama's birth certificate](#)".

[5] [Vanity Fair](#), 1 May 2020 "[Of Course Trump Called Armed, Right-Wing Protesters 'Very Good People'](#)".

[6] [CNN Politics](#), 5 June 2020 "[Trump shares letter that calls peaceful protesters 'terrorists'](#)", [Time](#), 6 June 2020 "[As President Trump Condemns 'Antifa,' Protest Records Show Scant Evidence](#)".

[7] [New York Times](#), 10 June 2020 "[The Army Was Open to Replacing Confederate Base Names. Then Trump Said No.](#)", [NPR](#), 10 June 2020 "[Pressure Mounts To Rename Army Bases That Honor Confederate Officers](#)".

[8] [Wikipedia](#) "[Killing of Eric Garner](#)", [The Guardian](#), 8 June 2020 "['I can't breathe': why George Floyd's words reverberate around the world](#)".

[9] [Lailas News Com](#), 13 May 2020 "[Brianna Taylor death: Briana Taylor death update](#)".



## Make Black Lives Matter

---

- [10] Sky News, 7 June 2020 "[Breonna Taylor: Police killed black woman after storming home in hunt for suspect already in custody, lawsuit says](#)".
- [11] Wikipedia "[Shooting of Ahmaud Arbery](#)".
- [12] *Pink News*, 4 June 2020 "[It's been over a week since Tony McDade was killed by police and we still don't know the name of the officer responsible](#)", msn news, 29 May 2020 "[What To Know About Tony McDade, A Black Trans Man Killed By Police In Florida](#)", *Out*, 29 May 2020 "[Tony McDade, Black Trans Man, Killed By Police in Florida](#)".
- [13] *Live*, 29 May 2020 "[Black Activist Group Calls for Midland Police Chief to be Fired](#)".
- [14] *ProPublica*, 4 June 2020 "[Tear Gas Is Way More Dangerous Than Police Let On Especially During the Coronavirus Pandemic](#)".
- [15] *Vox*, 31 May 2020 "[Dozens of cities across the country are imposing curfews. Do they work?](#)".
- [16] npr, 2 June 2020 "[Protests Continue Despite Curfews Across The Country](#)".
- [17] [*National*], 12 June 2020 "[Floyd's death spurs question: What is a black life worth?](#)".
- [18] ADW, 14 June 2020 "[NO JUSTICE! NO PEACE! Atlanta Police killing of Rayshard Brooks sparks more outrage VIDEO](#)".
- [19] *Newsweek*, 1 June 2020 "[Atlanta Police Attempt to Disperse Protesters Backfires as Wind Blows Tear Gas Back Into Their Faces](#)".
- [20] *Los Angeles Times*, 13 June 2020 "[Atlanta police chief resigns, officer fired after fatal shooting of Black man](#)".
- [21] *The Progressive*, 7 October 2019 "[U.S. Police are Being Trained by Israel And Communities of Color Are Paying the Price](#)", *Haaretz*, 19 April 2018 "Durham, North Carolina Becomes First U.S. City to Bar Police From Training in Israel".
- [22] Wikipedia: "[Law Enforcement Support Office](#)".
- [23] *Cal Matter*, 13 October 2019 "[Why we won't call 911: Too often, police officers' response to mental illness is deadly](#)".
- [24] *The American Prospect*, 11 June 2020 "[How Ongoing Resistance Is Fueling the End of Policing](#)".
- [25] *New York Times*, 12 June 2020 "Yes, We Mean Literally Abolish the Police".