"We're sick of it": Anger over police killings shatters U.S.
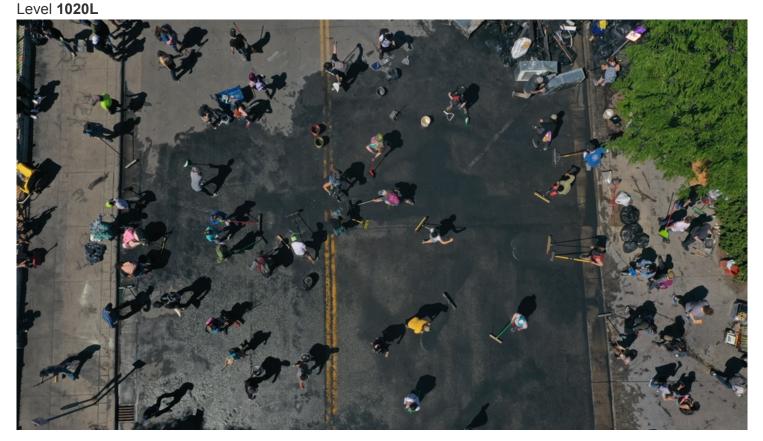
By Associated Press, adapted by Newsela staff on 06.01.20

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An aerial view of volunteers cleaning trash and debris in Minneapolis, Minnesota, May 30, 2020, after riots over the death of George Floyd, an unarmed black man, at the hands of police. Photo by: Lokman Vural Elibol/Anadolu Agency via Getty Images

Over the weekend, tens of thousands of people marched peacefully to protest the death of George Floyd. He was an unarmed black man who died on May 25 after a white Minneapolis, Minnesota, police officer pressed his knee on his neck until the man stopped breathing.

However, many demonstrations turned chaotic as night fell. Some cars and businesses near the protests were torched. The words "I can't breathe" were spray-painted all over buildings. The damaged buildings included many near the White House in Washington, D.C.

Protests Spread, Fueled By Rage

The protests extended to nearly every part of the country and unfolded on the night of May 30. The protests were fueled by rage over the mistreatment of African Americans at the hands of police. Some police forces responded to the unrest with tear gas and rubber bullets.

The protests seemed to rival the historic demonstrations of the civil rights movement and Vietnam war era. Large-scale protests were a fundamental part of the civil rights movement. They were also part of the anti-war movement during the Vietnam war, which ended in 1975.

By the morning of May 31, the protests had spread to Europe. Thousands gathered in Trafalgar Square in London, England. Despite government rules barring crowds because of the COVID-19 pandemic, London demonstrators clapped and waved placards as they offered support to U.S. demonstrators.

"We're sick of it. The cops are out of control," protester Olga Hall said in Washington, D.C. "They're wild. There's just been too many dead boys."

Politicians React To Protests, Violence

Rioters set fire to squad cars, threw bottles at officers and busted windows of storefronts. They carried away TVs and other items even as some protesters urged them to stop.

The protests after the death of Floyd began in Minneapolis. There, local police, state troopers and the National Guard moved in soon after an 8 p.m. curfew on May 30 took effect to break up the demonstrations.

President Donald Trump appeared to cheer on the tougher tactics on the night of May 30. He commended the National Guard deployment in Minneapolis, declaring "No games!" He also added that police in New York City "must be allowed to do their job!"

Joe Biden is the presumed Democratic presidential nominee. He will likely be running for president against Republican Trump in November. He condemned the violence as he continued to express common cause with those demonstrating after Floyd's death.

"The act of protesting should never be allowed to overshadow the reason we protest," Biden said on May 30.

Volunteers Clean Up After Protests

On May 31, maintenance crews near the White House worked to replace windows that had been completely shattered with large pieces of wood. Buildings for blocks were marked with graffiti. They included curses about Trump and anti-police sentiments. Shattered glass still covered the sidewalks. The damaged buildings included the Department of Veterans Affairs, directly across the street from the White House.

Cleanup soon began in cities across the country. In Madison, Wisconsin, hundreds of volunteers gathered to pick up after the violence that included stealing from businesses and breaking the windows at dozens of stores and an art museum.

Curfews Set As Protests Get Heated

Overnight curfews were imposed in more than a dozen major cities nationwide including Atlanta, Georgia; Denver, Colorado; Los Angeles and San Francisco, California; Seattle, Washington; and Minneapolis.

At least 13 police officers were injured in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and at least four police vehicles were set on fire. In New York City, dangerous confrontations flared repeatedly as officers

made arrests and cleared streets. A video showed two NYPD cruisers lurching into a crowd of demonstrators who were pushing a barricade against one of them and pelting it with objects. Several people were knocked to the ground. It was unclear if anyone was hurt.

"The mistakes that are happening are not mistakes. They're repeated violent terrorist offenses, and people need to stop killing black people," said protester Meryl Makielski of Brooklyn, New York.

Military Called In

Brian Kemp is the governor of Georgia. Kemp authorized the deployment of military reserve troops to cities where more demonstrations had been planned for May 31.

"The protesters need to know we're going to support their efforts in a peaceful, nonviolent protest," the Republican governor said on May 30. "The agitators need to know that we'll be there ... to take them to jail if they're destroying lives and property."

In Virginia's capital city, graffiti invoking Floyd or directing slurs at the police dotted downtown. This included many of Richmond's prominent Confederate monuments.

In 2014, 18-year-old Michael Brown Jr. was shot and killed by a white police officer in Ferguson, Missouri, sparking a wave of protests throughout the country. In Ferguson over the weekend, six officers were hurt after being hit with rocks and fireworks.

Police had arrested nearly 1,700 people in 22 cities since May 28, according to a tally by The Associated Press as of the morning of May 31. Nearly one-third of those arrests came in Los Angeles. There, the governor declared a state of emergency and ordered the National Guard to back up the city's 10,000 police.

Some Protests Stayed Peaceful

But not all protests were marred by violence. In Juneau, Alaska, local police joined protesters at a rally in front of a giant whale sculpture on the city's waterfront.

"We don't tolerate excessive use of force," Juneau Police Chief Ed Mercer told a gathering where most people wore masks and some sang Alaska Native songs.

The show of force in Minneapolis came after three days in which police largely avoided engaging the protesters, and after the state poured more than 4,000 National Guard troops into Minneapolis. Authorities said that number would soon rise to nearly 11,000.

"The situation in Minneapolis is no longer in any way about the murder of George Floyd," said Governor Tim Walz. "It is about attacking civil society, instilling fear and disrupting our great cities."

Some residents were glad to see the police break up the rioting.

"l live here. I haven't been able to sleep," said Iman Muhammad, whose neighborhood saw multiple fires set on the night of May 29. Muhammad said she sympathized with peaceful protests over Floyd's death but disagreed with the violence: "Wrong doesn't answer wrong."