

It's a big deal that the outrage expressed over George Floyd's death was massive and multiracial

August H. Nimitz, Jr.

"We should be outraged but not surprised." The death of George Floyd is the latest instantiation of this almost now commonplace expression.

Different this time, however, was Tuesday's early evening protest. I'm referring to the thousands, maybe five, in Minnesota's largest city who gathered peacefully but determined to vent their anger at the latest outrage on the part of the Minneapolis police force. Though the mainstream media, not surprisingly, focused on the violent acts of anger at the end of the mass mobilization — and since then — the important story is what happened three hours earlier.

The mobilization was one of the largest protests against police brutality since the 1992 Rodney King demonstration in the city. For an African-American of my generation, I still marvel at the racially diverse composition of anti-police brutality protests today, virtually absent in the 1960s. Tuesday's action, like 1992, was in its majority Caucasian.

A different context: the pandemic

Indisputable is the very different context, one in which state and local authorities feel they have power to command citizens to stay home — the pandemic. Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey, in fact, said earlier in the day that if masked and "socially distanced" protesters could exercise First Amendment rights — as if we needed his permission.

So striking about the protest was how inconspicuous the mayor's police force was. He clearly had them on a short leash. The masses marshaled themselves — many masks but not a lot of "social distancing." George Floyd's death would have made any kind of intervention of the police to enforce the mayor's latest executive order an even more explosive scenario.

What mobilized so many was exactly what happened in 1992: the inhumane behavior of the ruling class's police — and all captured on camera.

All so [chillingly on display this time](#) was Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin with his knee wedged in Floyd's neck. Picture the unforgiving jaws of a cheetah gripping the neck of a just captured gazelle. Treated like an animal by a 19-year veteran of the Minneapolis police force is how George Floyd's life ended.

The almost life-ending treatment of Rodney King provoked mass protests, some of them violent, throughout the country. Some of us knew the same could happen here. We organized to make sure the protest in Minneapolis would be militant but peaceful. Not

because we fetishized peace. But because we wanted the largest number of people in the streets — the means by which real change has ever occurred in history.

No incentive to act differently

The only immediate solution to such heinous acts by officer Chauvin and his cohorts is to jail police who act like him. As long as municipal authorities are willing to settle such outrages with payments to families of the victims, there is no incentive for the Chauvins and their enablers in district attorney offices and on the police forces to act differently.

As for the only long-term solution, consider what former Minneapolis police chief Tony Bouza said in his book “Police Unbound.” The “heart of the problem of both crime and police abuse in America is our tacitly accepted class structure separating the privileged from the poor, and along with it the systemic racism that society as a whole is not yet willing to face.” Bouza, a diehard defender of the institution he criticized but served — what the police department motto “To Protect and Serve” really means — was at least honest. Only with the dismantling of class society and its inevitable inequalities is a real solution possible. Pie in the sky? Consider — a topic for another discussion — the Cuban example that too, like the United States, has long roots in racial slavery and all its consequences, but not its inevitabilities.

A week ago, I happily attended, along with 200 other protesters, the Minnesota Nurses Association action outside the Minnesota Capitol to demand more protection for their members. The early evening protest on Tuesday in south Minneapolis was qualitatively different. Thousands who had hunkered down for more than two months came up for air, many disobediently — the biggest progressive action so far anywhere in the United States under the state-sanctioned pandemic lockdown. Having participated in more than four decades of anti-police brutality marches, Tuesday, I argue, was a big deal.

Mass protests in the midst of the 1918-1919 influenza scourge, including here in Minnesota, teach that the class struggle doesn’t go away in a pandemic. Minneapolis, May 26, 2020, confirms that truth.

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