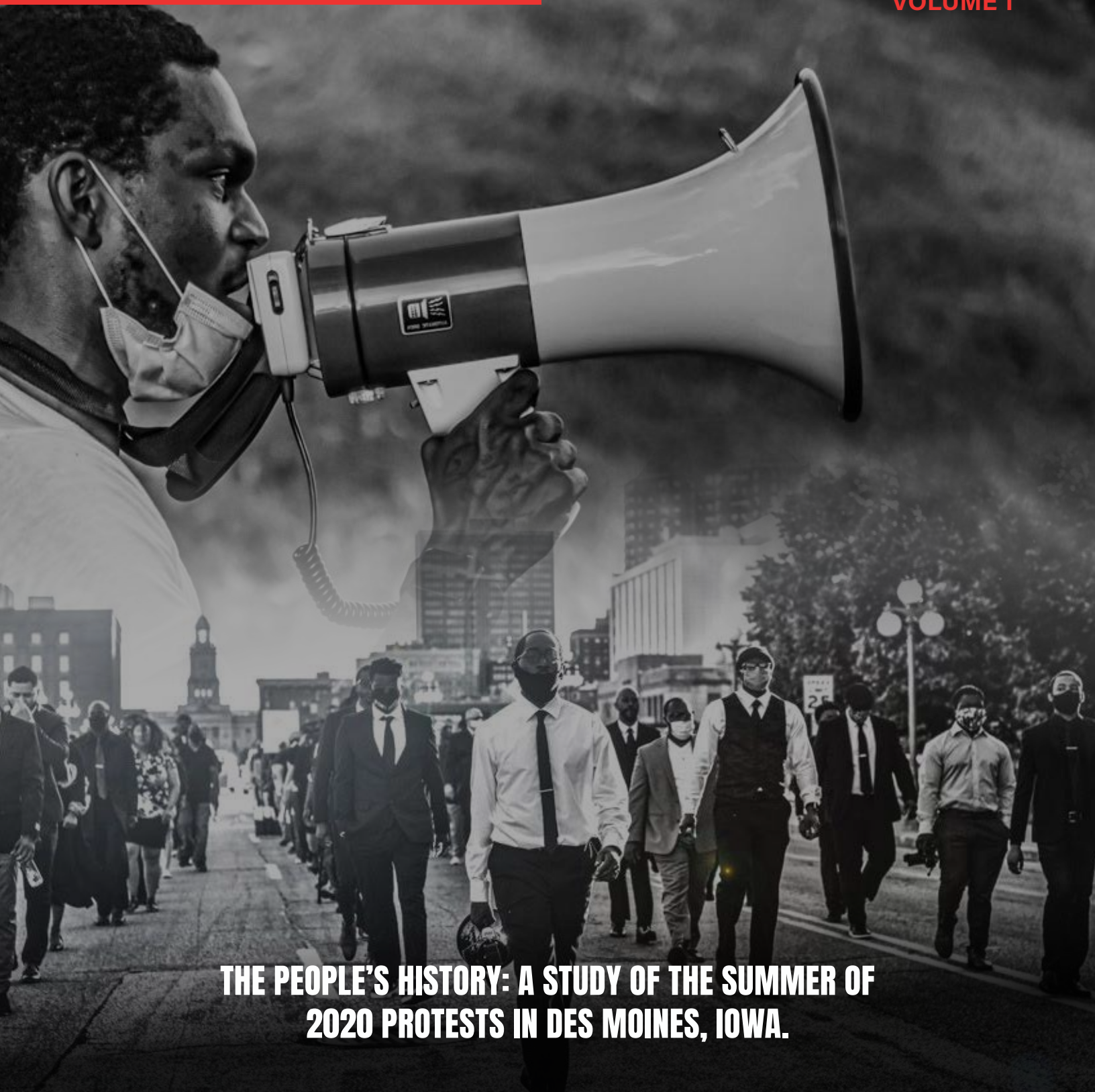


# 2020

# PROTESTS

VOLUME 1



**THE PEOPLE'S HISTORY: A STUDY OF THE SUMMER OF  
2020 PROTESTS IN DES MOINES, IOWA.**

## BEFORE YOU BEGIN READING

This is a collection of previously released and published essays for Just Voices research. We extend a special thank you to Dana James, editor and owner of Black Iowa News. She graciously agreed to publish most of the essays in this collection on Black Iowa News.com from 2022 and throughout 2023. Her generosity provided a platform for us to share these stories with the community as soon as possible. We can't thank her enough for her guidance and journalistic brilliance.

This collection is called Volume 1 because more is to come. You'll find the original date of online publication at the top of each essay. Obviously, due to the passage of time, we've had to adapt a few essays to put them in present "tense" but changes have been minimal.

## BEFORE YOU BEGIN READING

In this publication, we examine mainly the protests of 2020 in Des Moines but we're also sharing key information related to modern day best policing practices from respected and recognized national organizations. So, watch for this symbol.



## LINKS TO RELATED & SUPPORTIVE CONTENT

Our essays were originally published online by Black Iowa News and many included links to related online content. As you are reading this printed version of our study, and if you'd like to go online and find any information that is linked, simply scan our QR code. You'll be taken to our website where all links are listed, per essay title.



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## HOW DID WE GET HERE?

There was Eric Garner who died of an illegal chokehold at the hands of the NYPD. Then Trayvon Martin's death at the hands of neighborhood watchman, George Zimmerman, spurred the creation of the Black Lives Matter movement. In 2014, Michael Brown was gunned down by police with his hands up in Ferguson, Missouri. And many others in between and to this day.

But when technology allowed the murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police officers to be recorded and shared on social media, we saw with our own eyes, and in living color, the brutality of policing. It stabbed us in our hearts and pierced our souls. We were forever changed. There was no denying what we witnessed, up close and personal.

Police killing of Black men in America isn't new, it was something that had become all too common. But this time was different! Something about seeing a man slowly killed for 9 minutes and 46 seconds while he pleaded for his life and called out to his dead mother was the epitome of hate and evil. Like a volcano erupting, gushes of anger, tears of sadness, and cries for justice sprang up. America once again called for real police reform and most of all, we demanded justice for George Floyd.

What followed was an uprising in defense of Black lives in the summer of 2020. That summer shifted the landscape for racial justice in the United States. Led by Black communities in response to the unjust and heartbreaking police murder of George Floyd, the movement brought millions of Americans into the streets. Creating the largest social movement since the Civil Rights era of the 1960s.

Here in Iowa, our hearts were also broken and we mobilized to express our grief and call for better. Over 40 protests happened in Des Moines that hot summer. People of all ages, races, and genders could not sit silently by. Des Moines residents participated in our nation's long history of speaking truth to power and raising our voices not only in protest of what's wrong, but to uplift our demands for what we the people need to thrive and live freely.

That summer, protestors exercising their constitutional rights to freedom of speech, assembly, and protest were met with police aggression and force. The Des Moines Police Department (DMPD) came down hard on our community members, from young to old and Black to white. Police acted as if they were at war with the very people they are sworn to protect and serve. Using tanks, shields, tear gas, rubber bullets and other military weaponry, did they overreact?



SPEAKING TRUTH. SEEKING JUSTICE.





# INTRODUCTION

## THE PEOPLE'S HISTORY: A COMMUNITY-DRIVEN AFTER- ACTION REVIEW

In late 2021, we learned that many progressive police departments took the time to conduct an "After Action Review" to study and evaluate their response, identify lessons learned, etc. Cities like Dallas, Seattle, Chicago, even Iowa City, sought to examine their performance and learn from their mistakes. We wondered if our Des Moines Police Department would do the same.

Even the International Association of Chiefs of Police view AARs as vital, saying, "The development of after action reports is critical to the continuous growth and promotion of promising practices within the law enforcement field."

The COPS Office, or Community Oriented Policing Services, U.S. Department of Justice, describes an After-Action Review (AAR) as an "effective organizational learning tool and powerful community policing strategy."

Seeing that our police department had no desire or plan to do an AAR, Just Voices decided to do our own version of one: The **People's History, Volume 1**. This research was important and necessary. We felt compelled to find and document answers to questions like:

- Was DMPD response proportionate to the incidents?
- Was DMPD response consistent with best police practices?
- How was force used on protestors?

- What was the outcome of the hundreds of arrests?
- Were arrests of Black and Brown residents disproportionate per our city's racial makeup and that of protesters?
- Was the use-of-force in line with national standards and best practices?
- What did protesters experience?

## WHY THIS RESEARCH NOW?

While Just Voices has been working to reshape policing and public safety in Des Moines and across the state for many years, we made it a priority to study the summer of 2020. Why? Because the militarized response of the police must never be allowed to happen again. So rather than give in to injustice, we chose to use our voice as storytellers and apply our research tools to shine a spotlight on what happened that summer.

We believe it is more important than ever to publish these accounts of what our communities experienced, as local and state elected officials continue critical policy conversations about changes needed to the DMPD. Coming on the heels of a vibrant 2023 municipal election, and heading into a pivotal national election year, the time is now to share our findings, and to speak truth.

## WHAT YOU'LL LEARN FROM THE STORIES & RESEARCH

The essays and information we share in this collection offer a glimpse of what it looks like to love your community and stand up for justice. Our work shows as well as what happens when what residents demand goes against the interests of

law enforcement, who view protestors as threats instead of community members exercising their constitutional rights. At Just Voices, we believe documentation and research are critically important and have brought this collection together as part of archiving our histories as well as uplifting what a more just world can become.

We collected these stories to give voice to those traumatized and transformed by protesting. Some were injured in the process. Their stories bear witness to what truly happened and we hope sharing helps them in their healing journey.

We heard from journalists, local leaders, activists, LGBTQ+ folks, and young people from all walks of life. For some it was their first protest, for others it was one of many. And for at least one person who shared their story, they were simply covering a demonstration as a journalist doing their job. Each person who spoke to us told us about the violence as well as the lingering trauma. But they also talked about why they protested and showed up for their communities, and their hopeful visions for our shared future.

## OUR VISION FOR DES MOINES, IOWA, AND BEYOND

The People's History project was designed to commemorate history and showcase injustice, along with the hope that next time, our city will do better. We are Iowans committed to a safer, more just state, where the idea of safety is not upheld by repression and the denial of human rights, but instead where police departments, law enforcement, and public officials come together with residents and communities to really listen to our needs and implement measures of safety and accountability that have been shown to work, here and elsewhere.

At the end of 2023, 21CP Solutions (21CP) [published a report](#) assessing the Des Moines Police Department. The need for improved data collection on all police stops, officer use of force, as well as the need for increased transparency and community engagement were among key findings by 21CP.

But the 21CP report also admonished the DMPD for not doing a complete AAR and sharing it with the public. *"As with any major event or critical incident that DMPD encounters, the 2020 protests should be viewed as an opportunity for the Department to engage in critical self-analysis and to prepare for the next high-profile police incident or other event requiring that DMPD support First Amendment rights while protecting protesters and ensuring public safety."*

The 21CP Study goes on to say, *"while officers and leadership described after-action activities undertaken by the Department to learn from DMPD's performance during the protests, these lessons were not broadly or publicly shared in a manner that could improve overall improvements. The City properly notes that two General Order sections (Chapter 30 [Crowd Management] and Chapter 30.1 [Dispersal Order Guide and Recommendations]), were updated specifically based on lessons learned from the protests."*

Just Voices hopes that The People's History project will be part of creating an impetus for change at the Des Moines Police Department. These stories act as detailed eyewitness accounts of everyday people's encounters with policing in our city. We believe these firsthand accounts are critical evidence that can be used to improve policing and public safety.

We are calling on the city and DMPD to work with us and the community at large to move forward together and build trust between neighbors and the police. Certainly, community engagement will go a long way towards better policing. But first, we must take a deep and honest look at what happened during the Summer of 2020.

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SEEKING JUSTICE.

## ESSAYISTS & VOLUNTEERS



**HARVEY HARRISON**  
FOUNDER & DIRECTOR



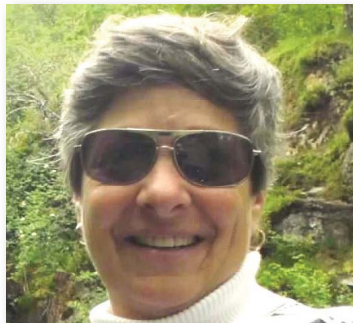
**LORI YOUNG**  
COMMS & OPERATIONS



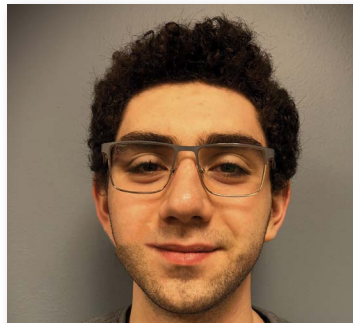
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**SUSAN BARNES**



**LINDA COHEN**



**MICHAEL DANOS**



**KAREN DOWNING**



**LORA FRARACCI**



**KATHY FERGUSON**



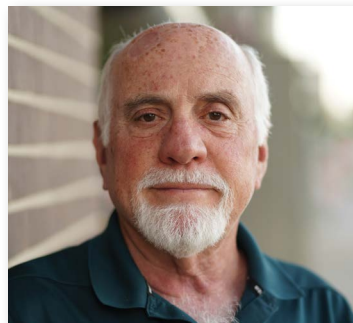
**LYNN LAWS**



**ROBIN MADISON**



**GINA MESSAMER**



**BRIAN O'DONNELL**



**TOM RENDON**



**BRAD TITUS**

# THE SUMMER OF 2020 PROTESTS IN DES MOINES: BY THE NUMBERS



**40**  
**PROTESTS**



**208**  
**PEOPLE**  
**ARRESTED**



**281**  
**CHARGES**  
**LEVIED**

## PROTESTOR PROFILES

### RACE



■ 58.4% White  
■ 38% Black  
■ 3.6% Asian

### GENDER

**28% Female**  
**72% Male**

### AVERAGE AGE

**27 years old**

## TOP 4 CHARGES FILED



**94** FAILURE TO DISPERSE  
**61** CRIMINAL MISCHIEF (1ST - 5TH DEGREE)  
**47** RIOTING  
**35** DISORDERLY CONDUCT



# THE PEOPLE'S HISTORY: WHAT HAPPENED DURING THE 2020 PROTESTS IN DES MOINES

By Just Voices - Published Sept. 9 2022

*Lori Young, Communications Director for Just Voices, remembers where she was the day she saw the video of George Floyd. Just like 9/11, you might even remember where you were and when you first saw the video of George Floyd's murder by Minneapolis police officer, Derek Chauvin. Young said, "For me, it was the morning of May 26, 2020. My cousin Cassie, who lives in Cedar Rapids, knows I'm a racial justice activist. She sent me the link to an article and video of Floyd's horrific murder. I couldn't even finish watching it. I still haven't to this day."*

But like 9/11, when foreign terrorists flew planes into the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and Pennsylvania, the battle cry became "Never Forget." Since that summer, it seems that America's sudden urge for police reform and a racial reckoning has gone from a boil to a slow simmer.

Have we forgotten so soon about Floyd? Where has all the energy and outrage gone? The urgency to do something has waned. But just like 9/11, the Holocaust, and slavery, we must never forget the Summer of 2020.



GEORGE FLOYD SQUARE IN MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA. PHOTO BY BLACK IOWA NEWS



## AMERICA AND IOWA RISE UP IN PROTEST

In the Summer of 2020, more than 7,750 demonstrations against police violence and racial bias took place in the U.S., nearly 95% of which were nonviolent. Fewer than 220 locations reported any form of “violent demonstrations,” defined as involving any acts of vandalism such as graffiti or toppling of statues, property destruction, or violence of any kind against individuals, according to [The U.S. Crisis Monitor](#).

### 2020 PROTEST IN DES MOINES, IOWA WHAT WE KNOW

**40+ PROTESTS  
208 ARRESTED & CHARGED**

#### TOP 3 CHARGES:

- FAILURE TO DISPERSE
- CRIMINAL MISCHIEF
- RIOTING

**8 ACTIVE LAWSUITS REPRESENTING  
23 PEOPLE IN PROGRESS STILL**

\*BASED ON RESEARCH DONE BY JUST VOICES

In Des Moines, we know that over 40 identifiable demonstrations occurred in and around our city, according to a review of the data by Just Voices. By the end of September 2020, 208 people had been charged with 281 separate protest-related offenses, Just Voices found. What’s striking is the majority of those charges have since been dismissed, and most people accused who did go to trial were found not guilty by jury or judge. According to our research, multiple lawsuits have been filed against the City of Des Moines about police misconduct during the protests.

Just Voices has obtained video footage, audio records and testimony that give witness to the actions of the Des Moines Police Department. We intend to share that with you as a part of this series.



PICTURE: GEORGE FLOYD RALLY ON MAY 30, 2020, IN DES MOINES. PHOTO BY BLACK IOWA NEWS.

## DES MOINES POLICE REFUSE TO LOOK BACK

Many cities across the country have already completed reviews of police conduct following the wave of protests in 2020. Some larger cities had the benefit of an existing independent body to conduct the review, such as a Citizen's Review Board or an Inspector General. Other cities have hired third party experts. In some cities, a variety of community stakeholders were involved in the review.

We're talking to the people who protested, some of whom were arrested or injured. We've filed Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests to get the data, booking records, and use-of-force reports from authorities from that volatile summer of protest.

Because this research is extensive, we've found volunteers to help. But we can use more help from people just like you. Rather than waiting until we have all the research completed, we are going to share the information and the stories as we get them.

We shared our findings exclusively with Black Iowa News readers first over the coming months. And rather than waiting until we've got all the research compiled in a nice pretty package, we are going to share what we know so far with you—now. We call it "The People's History."

## WHY DOCUMENT THE PEOPLE'S HISTORY ON THE 2020 PROTESTS?

Ever heard the saying by Winston Churchill that goes: "Those who fail to learn from history are condemned to repeat it"? How did our local police force respond and how much force and chemical weapons were used? These questions deserve answers, so we can learn from it or be doomed to repeat it. God forbid another unjust murder as gruesome as Floyd's happens again in our country.

Our focus in this project is to gather the data related to the most volatile and larger protests. We'll also collect the stories of the individuals who were there. Our goal is to share what we find and to provide our findings to city officials and the police department.



# THE PEOPLE'S HISTORY: THE FIRST WEEKEND OF PROTESTS: FROM CALM TO CHAOS

By Harvey Harrison & Susan Barnes - Published Oct. 23, 2023

On May 25, 2020, George Floyd, a 46-year-old African-American man, was murdered by police officers in Minneapolis, Minnesota. A clerk at a convenience store had called 911, claiming that Floyd had purchased cigarettes with a counterfeit \$20 bill. Police arrived and, after a struggle, forced Floyd to the ground. Officer Derek Chauvin pressed his knee into Floyd's neck for more than nine minutes, killing him.

The immediate aftermath of Floyd's murder was eerily quiet in Des Moines. While there was a great deal of chatter on social media, no organized response occurred until May 29. The first weekend of protests in Des Moines started out calm, but ended in unnecessary chaos. The first recorded

protest started at 6 p.m. at the Des Moines Police Station along the Des Moines River. Mike Turner was reported to have organized this gathering. It was estimated that more than 1,000 people attended. They listened to a series of speakers that included b.well, Movement 515, and U.S. Senate Candidate (D) Kimberly Graham, among others. The rally peacefully ended, and Turner asked attendees to disperse peacefully. Most did.

A striking aspect about this gathering is the absence of a visible police presence. The photographic and video records of this event clearly record the anger that Floyd's murder brought to the surface. The event was nonviolent. But what followed was not.



SUMMER 2020 PROTESTS IN DES MOINES. PHOTO COURTESY OF JUST VOICES AND HKH PHOTOGRAPHY.

Allan Tunks, the assistant police chief, made this statement in a legal deposition:

*"...Friday was a unique event for us. It started off with a peaceful protest in front of the police station, and then the — I think it was a Roosevelt student maybe that organized that, and he spoke to us, somebody within our building, and said, "This is my plan, and at a certain time I'm going to shut it down, and then everybody will leave." Well, some people left, and some people chose to stay, and the people that chose to stay are the ones that attacked the police officer that was at the Second and Court location."*



This was the beginning of the violence and vandalism. Over the course of the weekend, multiple protests broke out across the city. Most were non-violent. The events included:

- The Mothers March Against Violence – May 30, 1 p.m.
- The Polk County Courthouse – May 30, 10:30 p.m.
- The Des Moines Police Department – May 30, 6 p.m.
- The East Village – May 30, 7:30 p.m.
- Merle Hay and Douglas Avenue – May 31, 11 p.m.
- Water St., – May 31, 12:20 a.m.
- Court Avenue, – May 31, 2:30 a.m.
- Merle Hay Mall – May 31, 7 p.m.
- The Des Moines Police Department – May 31, 9 p.m.

## CHARGES FILED

The records for the period from May 29 through midnight on May 31 show that 71 individuals were arrested and charged with 118 individual offenses. The charges that were filed included:

- Disorderly Assembly
- Criminal Mischief
- Disorderly Conduct
- Failure to Disperse
- Unlawful Assembly
- Participation in a Riot

## RESULTS OF CHARGES FILED

The results of the charges were:

- 45 were summarily dismissed by the Court with no trial;
- 24 people entered a voluntary plea of guilty to some charge;
- 44 of the arrest records showed nothing beyond the initial filing of a charge;
- 2 cases are unaccounted for;
- 2 cases went to trial before the Court and were dismissed;
- One case was presented to a Jury and dismissed by the Jury;
- Derek Tyree Fuller was charged with Assault, tried his case to the Judge, and was found Guilty.

## WHY MOST CHARGES FAILED IN PROCEEDINGS

The reason for the summary dismissal of 45 charges and the expungement of 46 more was straightforward: The arrest records were not properly prepared. The actual arresting officer reported on the complaint form was, in most cases, not the actual officer making the arrest. On June 10, an email from Jeff Noble of the County Attorney's office described it this way:

*"As you probably know, all of the protest-related arrests were put under a single case number (20-14678), so deciphering what was originally provided to us as a 273-page file for this particular night has been a challenge, but a name search does not reveal any report specifically documenting what these defendants did."*





When the initial protest at the police station disbanded, an estimated 200 people remained around the police station. The first reported incidence of property damage occurred during this evening. Arrests began during the nighttime hours as the protests continued into the evening and night.

SUMMER 2020 PROTESTS IN DES MOINES. PHOTO COURTESY OF JUST VOICES AND HKH PHOTOGRAPHY.

## THE FIRST RECORDED BOOKING THAT WEEKEND



The first recorded booking occurred on May 30 at 1:06 a.m., when James Lee Vivian IV was booked for Disorderly Assembly. The case was filed as a violation of Des Moines Municipal Code Section 70-31. The complaint that was filed with the Court stated that the full extent of Vivian's crime was that he "Assembled downtown Des Moines during a riot." The charge was a simple misdemeanor.

According to Just Voices, James Vivian IV was the first recorded person booked during the summer of 2020 protests in Des Moines. Photo from Polk County Sherriff's Office.

Vivian was arrested at 11 p.m. on the 29th and taken

to the Polk County Jail. After being booked at 1:06 a.m. the next morning, he appeared before District Associate Court Judge Gregory D. Brandt, a little after 10 a.m. that morning. Vivian agreed to proceed without an attorney and pleaded guilty to the charges. The Court accepted his plea and entered the following ruling:

*On inquiry, no legal cause has been shown to prevent sentencing on this date. Defendant was given an opportunity to speak in mitigation of the sentence. The following sentence is based on all of the available SENTENCING CONSIDERATIONS set out in Iowa Code section 907.5. The court finds the following factors the most significant in determining this particular sentence:*

- *Nature and circumstances of the crime.*
- *Defendant's criminal history*

*Defendant is adjudged guilty of the above charges and is sentenced as follows: Defendant shall pay a fine of \$500 and applicable surcharges. (The total came to \$735.)*

Vivian's history showed that he was a 33-year old Black male who had been arrested and charged 10 times before the evening of May 29, 2020. All

of the arrests and charges against Vivian were low-level misdemeanors, such as driving a vehicle while barred from doing so and low-level marijuana possession.

## ANOTHER BOOKING THAT WEEKEND

Another person arrested during the first weekend was Sean Michael Robinson. Robinson is a Black male, then age 29. The original complaint filed on June 1, 2020, stated the following about the charges against Robinson:

*On or about the above-stated date and time (5/31/2020 – 3 a.m.) the defendant did willingly join in or remain a part of an unlawful assembly, by assembling with multiple other persons in a violent manner, with the intent that they or any of them will commit a public offense, knowing or having reasonable grounds to believe it to be such.*

Robinson took his case to trial before Judge David M. Erickson, Magistrate. On April 22 of 2021, Judge Erickson issued an Order stating the following:

*The State has failed to prove that the Defendant has committed a crime under Iowa Code section 723.2 and 723.3, beyond a reasonable doubt. The court finds the Defendant Not Guilty on both counts. Costs are assessed to the State. In entering this ruling, Judge Erickson made the following findings about the evidence that had been presented to the court:*

*The State has failed to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that there was a riot or unlawful assembly at the Iowa State Capitol or that the command to disperse was given. The video offered into evidence by the State also indicates that the command to disperse was not audible. Proof that the Defendant heard the command was not proven beyond a reasonable doubt. The evidence presented to the court by the State did not prove that the Defendant*

*did not leave the area in a reasonable amount of time.*

*The evidence presented by the State does not prove the defendant acted in a violent manner or joined an unlawful assembly, knowing that it was an unlawful assembly. The video and photos indicate the Defendant was in the area of an unlawful assembly but the Defendant was not acting in a violent manner. There is no evidence that the Defendant knew there was an unlawful assembly."*

In other words, the Prosecution's evidence failed to demonstrate any crime having been committed by Robinson. The utilization of mass arrests coupled with inadequate recordkeeping led to summary dismissals (45 cases), a failure to successfully prosecute (2 cases); and the expungement of 45 cases. Upon our review, we found only one case that went to trial and ended with a guilty verdict.

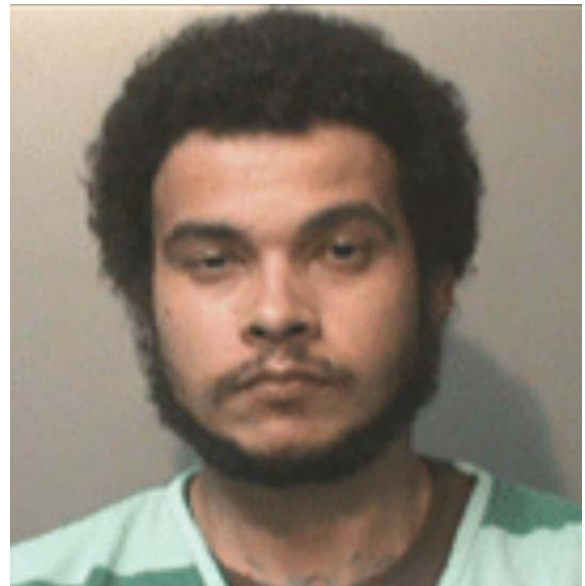


PHOTO FROM POLK COUNTY  
SHERIFF'S OFFICE

**Just**   
**Voices**

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# CENTER FOR POLICING EQUITY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Center for Policing Equity has created a list of 27 guidelines that represent best practices for crowd management.

*"In light of recent mass demonstrations in cities and towns across the nation following the killing of George Floyd, the Center for Policing Equity produced the following guidelines to assist law-enforcement agencies in aligning their policies with best practices around partnering with the community, de-escalation, and use of force in crowd management events."*

## HERE ARE 5 GUIDELINES THE DES MOINES POLICE FAILED TO FOLLOW:

### #6

**Expressly affirm de-escalation as a core principle of crowd management.** Brief and retrain all officers in de-escalation principles and practices for crowd management events.

### #15

**Prohibit deploying kinetic impact projectiles into a crowd for any purpose, and prohibit the use of less lethal weapons** (such as tear gas, smoke bombs, flash-bangs, pepper balls, mace, and other chemical agents) to control peaceful crowds and individuals who are not posing any immediate threat of serious harm.

### #7

**Prohibit the routine use of SWAT teams, riot gear, and other civil disturbance clothing or gear** in response to a crowd management event, except where the Incident Commander (or other office in charge of crowd management response) deems it absolutely necessary to prevent loss of life or grievous bodily harm.

### #16

**Prohibit any practice in which demonstrators are boxed in** or guided to an area from which all avenues of egress are blocked (sometimes referred to as "kettling.")

### #12

**Do not arrest demonstrators unless reasonable and probable grounds exist** to charge them with serious criminal offenses. Mass arrests should not be used for crowd management.







# LIKE PULLING TEETH: NONPROFIT GROUP FACES RESISTANCE FROM DES MOINES TO PROVIDE POLICE 'USE OF FORCE' DATA FROM 2020 PROTESTS

By Harvey Harrison & Lori A. Young

*NOTE: This essay was first published online in Black Iowa News on Oct 22, 2022. Since that date many developments have taken place. Therefore, the original essay was adapted to give a full account of what has transpired since that time.*

Without any cooperation from the Des Moines Police, Just Voices has had to find data, information and stories independently. We have done this through research and FOIA (freedom of information act) requests. We know there were at least 40 different protests in Des Moines following the horrendous murder of George Floyd at the hands of the Minneapolis police officers. And, we know that over 90% of protests in Des Moines (and across the nation) were peaceful and non-violent.

But there is so much more to discover. We've talked to protesters who experienced violence from the Des Moines police, who were victims of excessive force and were placed under bogus arrests. We have obtained videos of police brutality that include pepper spraying a man just walking down the street, kicking a man lying on the ground and throwing a gas canister at people fleeing. Another video shows police knocking a pedestrian down to the ground and confiscating his cell phone.

Tracking data and relevant details on the use of force is a recommended best practice for all police departments. 21CP Solutions states this on page 31 of its November 2023 report to Des Moines city leadership:

"Use of force, like search and seizure, is an issue of fundamental concern to most residents. Whether it be unlawful arrests or issues that lead to the physical harm or death of residents, force is both a quotidian and fundamental concern."

21CP solutions goes on to report that the Des Moines police department does use an electronic database system called blue team to track and report on use of force by its officers. Their report goes on to say:

"While DMPD does a substantially better job of tracking data regarding use of force as compared to stop, search, or seizure data, the effort is not entirely ideal. Individual officers and teams may receive updates on how to improve performance, but this data is not widely shared with the public nor used to create a feedback loop department-wide to improve operational excellence.

While state law limits how much officer specific complaint and discipline information can be publicly released, sharing general data about the number and nature of complaints received and overall outcomes, along with details about how DMPD investigates and addresses misconduct, including misuse of force, is vital for improved accountability and transparency. (p.32)

The DMPD produced a summary of use of force incidents for all of 2020. The report stated that there were 282 personal contacts which involved the use of force and 387 use of force reports. When Just Voices asked for the individual record on each incident, like the ones in the videos linked

E-FILED 2022 OCT 12 2:32 PM POLK - CLERK OF DISTRICT COURT

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IN THE IOWA DISTRICT COURT IN AND FOR POLK COUNTY

<p>HARVEY HARRISON,</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Plaintiff,</p> <p>vs.</p> <p>LISA MICKEY in her official capacity as Public Information Officer for the Des Moines, Iowa Police Department; and CITY OF DES MOINES, IOWA,</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Defendants.</p>	<p>CASE NO. _____</p> <p>PETITION FOR WRIT OF MANDAMUS</p>
---	--

above, the city refused to provide those reports. In the face of that refusal, we filed request for the following information regarding use of force by the Des Moines Police for the 2020 calendar year:

- A copy of any and all reports made by all officers (whether employed by Des Moines or other law enforcement agencies) on use of force that followed the murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, up to and including July 4, 2020.

We defined use of force to include the use of any and all of the following:

- Handcuff/leg restraint, bodily force (arm, foot or leg), come-alongs, unholstering a weapon, swarm, twist locks/wrist blocks, chemical agents, flash bomb, batons, flashlights, dog attacks or bites, electrical devices, rubber bullets, civilians shot at but not hit, any other impact devices, neck restraints, unconsciousness rendering holds, vehicle ramming, civilians shot and killed, civilians shot and wounded but not killed.

When the city refused to provide the requested information, we filed a lawsuit on October 12, 2022, demanding the release of the requested records. The city resisted this lawsuit.

## JUDGE RULES ON LAWSUIT

On February 14th, 2024, District Court Judge, Coleman McAllister issued a ruling that requires the City to provide the Plaintiff (Harrison) with:

"...a copy of all 387 use of force reports authored by its police officers in calendar year 2020..." In its' effort to resist the demand for the release of the records, the city raised three defenses:

1. That the records being requested are a part of the personnel file of each individual officer and therefore protected under the Iowa code;
2. That the use of force records are confidential as a matter of law and therefore exempt from an open records request;
3. That the use of force records are protected by a provision of the Iowa code that protects the release of a police officer report "in those unusual circumstances where disclosure would plainly and seriously jeopardize an investigation or pose a clear and present danger to the safety of an individual."

In his 25 page opinion, Judge McAllister analyzed and rejected each of these claims.

## CITY OF DES MOINES DECIDES TO APPEAL JUDGE'S DECISION

Rather than comply with Judge McAllister's order, as of March 2024, the Des Moines has elected to appeal the decision to the Iowa Supreme Court. We will respond to the appeal and continue in our efforts to obtain the reports and share the information with the public.



# THE PASCHA MORGAN STORY: WRONGLY ARRESTED AFTER 2020 GEORGE FLOYD PROTEST

*By Lora Farracci - Published June 15, 2023*

## DAY 3 OF DES MOINES PROTESTS

On May 30, 2020, a large protest occurred at the Iowa State Capitol, which flowed into downtown Des Moines. Hundreds of people protested police abuse and the lack of accountability. By most eyewitness accounts, the protest started out peacefully. Then Des Moines police showed up with military gear and became aggressive, said Morgan, a husband, father, community activist and Army veteran.

Protesters wore summer clothes — by contrast, the police were “overwhelmingly dressed for full-out war,” said the self-described military brat who “literally grew up all over the United States and all over the world.”

According to Morgan, who was an activist in Texas before he moved to Des Moines five years ago, the SWAT team started “kettling” the protesters, by surrounding them on all sides, making escape difficult. Tear gas hung in the air, and people grimaced in pain and anger. Many of the protesters fled the Capitol steps due to the tear gas. Morgan walked through the tear gas with his hands up and got hit with a tear gas canister in his lower stomach, he said.

An estimated 500 people headed over the bridge into downtown. By the time Morgan and his wife made it to the Court Avenue district, most of the protesters had dispersed. “We were all just kind of meandering. There’s about 60 people. We’re walking. We’re not together. There’s someone behind me and they are having a whole conversation. Some guy in the middle of the bridge

is talking on his cell phone,” he said. “There were a couple of girls across the way. Me and my wife are holding hands. We’re heading back to the car.”

## TRYING TO GET TO HIS CAR AND GO HOME

As Morgan and his wife head to their car parked on the east side of the Court Avenue bridge, they see a line of police with a huge tear gas launcher. As the officers start running towards them, Morgan tries to shield his wife, huddling on the bridge over the edge to avoid more tear gas. When the police run by them, it seems like they are “in the clear.” However, one officer stops close to them and appears to be “closing in on the group that was walking behind them.”

“Now, by this time I’m turning this way so I can kind of see him in my periphery. So, he decides they are his target, they are his play. So, he has this big thing of tear gas, and he grabs one of their hoodies and tries to spray it directly in their faces, right? But the guy slips out of his jacket and takes off. But by then [the officer] had sprayed so much tear gas, he slips in it and falls on his back, boom! His helmet goes flying off, and he’s in the air like a beetle,” Morgan remembers.

“So, I look at my wife, Beth, and I say, ‘We got to go’ because at this point we’re the only ones left,” he said. While they’re struggling to get away, one of them drops a cell phone, leaving just enough time for this officer to approach them. In those few seconds, several thoughts ran through Morgan’s mind: The officer is going to be mad and embarrassed. Morgan knew the officer would be “looking to take his anger out on someone,” and it



turned out to be him. Morgan told his wife to run so she wouldn't be attacked or arrested. Morgan recalls that moment feeling like it happened in slow motion.

"When he started to come across the bridge towards me, he took a pause as if deciding what to do. I told him we were heading back to the car," he said. "But it didn't matter, despite having time to think about it, the cop decided to make me the target of his anger."

## PASCHA GETS ARRESTED

It is clear that these cops were on a mission that night, he said. After repeatedly telling the police he is heading back to his car, more officers appear. Morgan thought "two cops" were on him but would find out later it was closer to five. Pressed against the bridge railing, it is clear he is going to be detained, he thought. Morgan said he was shoved to the ground and handcuffed. A Latino officer helped him up and asked the others what was going on. Morgan remembers telling him: "Well, I was heading back to my car. My wife is over there, and we were heading back to our car." A different officer orders the Latino officer to take Morgan to the "paddy wagon." Morgan is handcuffed, taken and told to sit down on the ground.



"So, then they take us over to the paddy wagon, and then like they normally do, because their whole deal is power and authority, they tried to make me sit on the ground. I tell them I'm not sitting there. 'Well, I'm going to need you to,' says the cop. I told him, 'Well, I'm an old vet so I'm not going to.'" Once in the police van, Morgan estimates they were held behind the police station for two hours, just sitting. At some point, the police bring a young man to the van who is bleeding profusely from his head.

"They had to drag him in the van. He was barely conscious. Like he was literally barely conscious. We kept singing songs and making him sing with us. The people on the side of him kept nudging him to keep him awake on the ride to Polk County. Yeah, they dragged him into the paddy wagon and he was limp, and his eyes were barely open. Oh, and interestingly enough, there were 11 people in that paddy wagon. The protest was about 500 people in Des Moines, Iowa. So I'm pretty sure you understand that means, it was overwhelmingly white people. But of the 27 that were arrested that night, I think maybe only two of them were white," he said.

## AFTER A WEEKEND IN JAIL, THE COMMUNITY SHOWS UP FOR PASCHA

The police charged him with inciting a riot and failure to disperse before they released him three days later on a \$2,000 bond. Morgan was arrested on a Saturday evening and released on Monday afternoon. "Yeah, they got us all out. Not only that, when we walked out to the parking lot, there were snacks and new clothes if people needed them. There were cigarettes, there was Tylenol if you needed it. There were people offering rides. There were people just to hug you and say it was going to be OK if you didn't have any family that was going to show up for you. It was awesome. Our community is awesome. We take care of our people."

After experiencing “violence from the DMPD,” protesters had to prepare differently for future protests, he said. “We realized they were at war, so we changed things up. We got street medics. We started finding out what we needed for defensive weapons. We realized that milk was a good agent for tear gas, so we started making sure there were gallons of milk. We started making sure people used handkerchiefs and covered up any identifying scars or tattoos. And we made sure we had baseball helmets to save our heads from tear gas containers and whatnot. We warned people that this was probably not a place for children.”

Did the violence and chaos surprise him? “No, not at all, because I’m in the community. The movement is the movement, and it’s a movement no matter where. It’s not a Des Moines movement. And the reaction here was the same as the reaction of people in Texas. It’s the same as the

reaction of people in Atlanta. It was the same as the reaction of people in Virginia. It was the same.

He continued, “The community is a community of love and justice, and so that’s how they reacted. So, no, that was no surprise. It was no surprise when the cops reacted the way they react. That’s how cops act. The movement is taking care of itself, we’re taking care of people and we’re loving and enveloping people. That is how the movement is, and that’s how it is everywhere, and that’s how the people are. So that was no surprise. It’s a positive note, but it wasn’t surprising.”

All charges filed against Morgan were subsequently dropped and there was no formal court action against him.

*Editor’s Note: Morgan knows the name of the officer who arrested him, but that officer’s name is missing from official police documents and another officer’s name is listed, which concerns Just Voices.*



“

**We realized they were at war, so we changed things up. We got street medics. We started finding out what we needed for defensive weapons. We realized that milk was a good agent for tear gas, so we started making sure there were gallons of milk.**

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## EXPERT REPORT SPOTLIGHTS FLAWS IN POLICE RESPONSE NATIONALLY

In February 2022, the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) published a report titled “Rethinking the Police Response to Mass Demonstrations: 9 Recommendations.” This 53-page [report](#) serves as an excellent mirror to reflect on the “failures” of the Des Moines Police Department during and after the protests of 2020, in the opinion of [Just Voices Iowa](#). The report affirms the conclusions of The People’s History essays that the Des Moines Police Department was not prepared for what happened after the murder of George Floyd. It challenges the utilization of less-than-lethal force as it was used by the Des Moines Police Department. It stresses the need for police departments to build a wide range of relationships with community leadership in new and more encompassing ways. And, it describes the events of that summer in the following manner: “The demonstrations of 2020 are a wake-up call for American police agencies”





# THE PEOPLE'S HISTORY: IN THE MIDST OF ASSAULT & TRAUMA, PROTESTER DENVER FOOTE HELPS OTHERS

*By Lynn Laws - Published Sept. 6, 2023*

(NOTE: Foote uses the pronouns they/them/their.)

Denver Foote was trying to leave a protest against racial injustice when they said they were violently attacked by Des Moines police wearing riot gear, lobbing cans of tear gas, and swinging batons. Police had kettled Foote and several others in an alley.

There was no way out. It was May 25, 2020. Just one year prior to the 2020 protests against racial injustice, Foote, age 24, moved from Clear Lake, Iowa, to Des Moines. Because of severe poverty, racial discrimination, alcoholic parents, and racial profiling that they witnessed growing up, moving to Des Moines to live with their aunt and attend beauty school felt reminiscent of their grandparents, who had immigrated from Mexico and the Philippines. "They were looking for something better. And I had a lot of high hopes moving to Des Moines," said Foote.

## GROWING UP POOR AND RACIALLY DIFFERENT IN A SMALL TOWN IN IOWA

"Our family was part of a handful of families of color [in Clear Lake]," said Foote. "My house was, like, probably one of the worst houses in the town. The ceilings were falling in. I definitely grew up in a working-poor family. I grew up witnessing my father be stopped by police for pretextual [reasons]. So, I kind of already grew up with the thought that public safety that's in America isn't actually keeping people safe."

While growing up, Foote worked as a waitress and a gas station attendant. The racism Foote



faced included, but was not limited to, customers "refusing to let me serve them or touch their money." By the age of 18, Foote was on their own. It was the year 2014 and their mother had died of sclerosis of the liver due to chronic alcohol use; their father had moved to Virginia.

"I had to figure everything out on my own. I had to juggle multiple jobs. I had to stay in this conservative white community where I didn't feel like I belonged, because I couldn't afford to leave it," Foote said. Then, in 2019, their aunt purchased a house in Des Moines and invited Foote to stay in a spare bedroom, rent free, until they completed beauty school—a life-long dream of Foote's.

"It's only because of my aunt that I got out of that cycle of just being, working and living and trying to deal [alone] with the racism that I was facing in Clear Lake."



## AFTER MOVING TO DES MOINES

Foote knew they would not get entirely away from racism when they moved to Des Moines, but they knew Des Moines to be more diverse and have more employment and social opportunities. Once living in Des Moines, and when not going to school, Foote got involved with groups that were working for social equity.

Foote said: "I was very involved with Bernie Sanders' [presidential] campaign, I'd finished beauty school, and I was ready to go back to work full time and start my dream career." They had been looking for a full-time position for only one month when "everything shut down" due to COVID-19.

Two months later, on May 25, along with most of the country, Foote watched George Floyd, an African American, be murdered by Minneapolis police. The televised footage came from the smartphones of public witnesses who had pleaded with police to stop. While the world watched Minneapolis take to the streets in protest, Iowans also began protests in their communities. People who had experienced racial injustices and knew of other deaths at the hands of the police could no longer just watch alone in their homes. They needed community.

When asked why they had joined demonstrations in Des Moines, Foote said, "When George Floyd was murdered by the police, and I saw the movement and people taking to the streets in Minnesota, I felt, like, just like a wave come over me, like my experiences were not singular." They no longer felt alone with their experiences of racism and wanted to grieve together with their community.

## JOINING THE MOVEMENT IN DES MOINES

"So, I went to the first big protest that happened. I think it was in front of City Hall or maybe the Des Moines Police Department, and there were people who were speaking and sharing their stories. And that, like, that moved me. That was when I really found out that your personal stories are strength, and you can find power in those," Foote said. "They made me feel like I was not alone. I felt like I was a part of something bigger than myself."

The second action in which Foote participated was a march held on May 31, 2020. It was prior to the formation of the Des Moines Black Liberation Movement, "It was just people getting together and kind of like grieving together," Foote said. When Foote and their friends arrived, the march was underway, and the Capitol was blocked off by barricade and police in riot gear.

"We were marching through the East Village and going to the Capitol, and we would run into lines of police officers. And I remember witnessing, like, these vans pulling up and cops just coming out and rushing at people that were behind the march, like trailing. But there were a lot of people there. So, we ended up at the Capitol, and we had already witnessed a police officer trying to drive through the march. So, people were grieving, and they were mad," said Foote.

Once at the Capitol, Foote and their friends decided to join the majority of the marchers who were turning back at the blockade and marching back through the East Village. "At that point, I was extremely scared, and I was telling my partner that I wanted to leave," said Foote. When the March got to where their car was parked, Foote and their boyfriend separated from friends and drove home.

## THE ASSAULT

But once home, Foote and their boyfriend, Jake Grobe, became concerned for a friend they left behind, Foote said. "So my friend that I went with was still there and she wasn't answering her phone. I couldn't get a hold of her. I saw the lies happening on Facebook, and I was terrified, honestly, and I didn't want her to get hurt or injured. So, we ended up going back to find her."

Once back in the East Village, Foote parked near the police station and the Court Avenue Bridge. Shortly, after walking west on Court Avenue, they found their friend, Miranda. Foote wanted to head back to their car immediately, but Miranda and Jake wanted to stay with the other protesters.

Said Foote, "And then everyone started moving down Court Avenue, and she and my boyfriend were like—We got to stick with people, and I remember them being, like, we need to see what happens. And I was like—No, I want to leave. And, mind you, I'm with two white people, so they don't have the experiences or the history that I have."

Foote didn't want to walk back to the car alone, so they briefly continued west with their friends. But soon, a few protesters began breaking windows at businesses along

Court Avenue, and Foote knew they had to leave. Foote told their friends, "Y'all can stay here. I'm going to leave. Like, I'm gonna risk it and just walk; go to my car by myself and go home. Like, if you want to stick around, that's your thing. I was worried, and I made sure you're safe."

Foote walked approximately five yards east on Court Avenue and turned south down an alley when police began kettling people walking into the alley. From both ends of the alley, police were pushing the crowd with their large shields, toward the middle of the alleyway. Foote feared for their life. Said Foote, "I just saw a line of riot police just coming down. And I remember running into the mix that they pushed me into. It was like fight or flight. I decided flight. I got into a nook, and then I was like—this isn't a way out, this isn't safe; I shouldn't be here. Like they're gonna see me and be like—this person's just gonna jump out and get me or something. So, I took a step out, and that's when I was maced the first time by a police officer."

Foote, in extreme pain and temporarily blinded by mace, stood frozen and resigned to being arrested. Additional officers approached them. One pushed them back into the nook with his shield, Foote said. "I remember yelling, 'Stop!' to, like, draw attention to myself, to draw attention to what was

happening," Foote said. But the officers pushed them again and again, macing them two more times. As the officers began shouting something about not being able to handle Foote and that Foote was fighting them, the 4'11" and 98 lb. Foote began crying and chanting, "I'm not resisting! I'm not resisting!" Foote said, "They ended up hitting me with their batons on my leg, on my hip, and on my arm. It was through the baton hittings that I fell to the ground. My glasses fell off. Then he knelt into my back, and they broke—they shattered my glasses. It's kind of like I remember that stuff happening, but most of the time I was just bawling and terrified."

After being cuffed and taken to a paddy wagon, Foote tried to reason with police. "I remember I was crying, and I told them, 'I'm just here because I'm grieving and, like, my community's grieving.'"

But the officers just dismissed Foote, saying something to the



effect of “Well, if you didn’t want to get beaten you shouldn’t have come out here protesting.”

## HELPING OTHERS WHILE JAILED

Foote spent the rest of that night—two more nights and three days—in Polk County jail with mace in their clothing and hair, and no glasses. Grobe accepted and paid for calls from Foote and worked on raising their bail. In the meantime, Foote focused on the pain of others. Foote worked to bail out those who had been arrested at the protest that night and at a protest the evening before.

Foote said, “Even though I went through this immense trauma, I tried to help protect the other people that were there and were crying.” Foote listened to their stories and, from a phone in their holding cell, began organizing bail for the others. “I just remember calling my boyfriend. I’m like, ‘There’s some here that think they’re gonna be here until their trial because they can’t afford a \$50 bail.’” Using their Venmo debit card, they provided bail funds for ten people.

Foote noted that Des Moines Mutual Aid provided a lot of support for her and others after the protests. “They would stay outside [the jail] and like help people as they were being released.”

## THE TRAUMA AFTERWARDS

“It wasn’t until I went into lockdown and was in my own cell that I kind of started breaking down,” Foote said.

Eventually, Foote was charged with two felonies and released awaiting pretrial. They had to report to a probation officer once a week and were on house arrest for three months, until, thanks to their lawyer, all charges, including the felonies, were dismissed by court order.

“But, it really didn’t matter, because when I was released, it was all starting to, like, hit me. And I remember the day after I got released, I was just sitting on the couch, and I started breaking down crying,” said Foote. “My boyfriend was like, ‘Are you OK?’ And I’m like, ‘No. What they did to me wasn’t OK.’ And that’s like when it kind of hit me. So I didn’t even really want to leave my house anyway.”

Through Iowa CCI, Citizens for Community Improvement, Foote was connected to a counselor. However, Foote continues to suffer from PTSD and is careful about where they go in public and how they get there. Foote fears they will come across police when out in public. When they see the police, Foote has panic attacks. They once had an anxiety attack while driving as a

result of seeing a police car. And then there is the physical damage. “I have permanent nerve damage from them hitting me. So like my right thigh is still very tender, and my leg, if I use it too much, like it hurts all day, you know. And sometimes, it just flares up... And I just think about the police officers that did this to me, who feel no remorse.” Foote read the incident reports filed by the police. “They said they were defending themselves. They said that they couldn’t control me. They blamed it on me wearing all black,” said Foote.

## FINDING HEALING IN COMMUNITY

After a year of focusing on recovery and despite continued mental and physical pain, Foote again became an active volunteer for nonprofits that help people who are poor and people of color.

Des Moines Mutual Aid provided support after their release from jail, and Foote returned the favor by becoming a volunteer for them. Foote met a lot of people while volunteering and was able to start up a grassroots organization with their new friends.

The organization is called Des Moines People’s Town Hall. It provides a newsletter and resources to assist people who want to communicate their



concerns and opinions with city officials and/or who want to obtain city documents through the Freedom of Information Act. The People's Town Hall provided support that helped pass the 24/7 Carbon-free Resolution at a City Council Meeting. And, the organization is a co-sponsor of the petition to rename George Flagg Parkway. Flagg was a long-time member of the Des Moines City Council known for his racist decisions. Early in 2023, Foote announced their run for Mayor of Des Moines.

"It wasn't really until the statewide election and Republicans taking control [of the Iowa Legislature] that I knew

that we had to do something to protect ourselves locally. We needed to create a safe haven within Des Moines for our most oppressed people. Because there are things that we can do locally. And a lot of people are like—Well, why mayor? Why not a smaller seat? And I feel a huge urgency to help people. I feel we cannot wait another four years. The catastrophe is already happening. The police force already [receives] 40% of the [city] budget, and our houseless community continues to grow every day," said Foote. On February 7, 2023, as a part of a series of mayoral candidate interviews by Iowa Local 5 News, Foote was interviewed.

When asked about their assault by police, they said, "After being attacked by two police officers, with their batons, I went through a lot of emotional distress. It was really hard for me to get through that. I needed to find something within my experience that would give me strength and not allow the experience to [cripple] me..." "Some people are not able to speak up. But I have found power in the stories of others that show me that my experiences are not singular. Hearing the stories of others has empowered me to speak up for those who cannot."

WHAT  
IS  
INSIDE  
TEAR  
GAS?



- ☐ CHARCOAL
- ☐ POTASSIUM CHLORATE
- ☐ SUCROSE
- ☐ NITROCELLULOSE
- ☐ POTASSIUM NITRATE
- ☐ SILICON
- ☐ MAGNESIUM CARBONATE
- ☐ LACHRYMATOR
- ☐ UNKNOWN



# DES MOINES POLICE USED TEAR GAS ON PEACEFUL PROTESTERS IN 2020—KERWIN DOBBINS WAS THERE

*By Lori A. Young - Published Jan. 19, 2024*

When Kerwin Dobbins served in the Army and Navy from 1987 – to 1993, he trained for combat including how to survive chemicals of war like CN and CS gas, commonly called tear gas. Soldiers like Dobbins had to know how to endure it and function under its crippling effects. Little did he know that nearly 30 years later, that training would come in handy on the steps of the Iowa State Capitol grounds when the Des Moines Police Department (DMPD) showed up to square off with peaceful protesters during the Summer of 2020.

He reflects on his military training:

“Digging into that kind of combat training mentality is where, you know, I first discovered the wonderful world of CN and CS gas. They used those gases on us during basic training, and later in the field, because that’s what we had a possibility of encountering in, you know, real combat situations.”

But this wasn’t combat, this was a protest on Saturday, May 30, 2020, at the Iowa State Capitol grounds with 300 people who felt compelled to gather after seeing the videotaped murder of George Floyd by a Minneapolis cop.

Dobbins is a graduate of Hoover High School, a father, ex-military, and a caring, soft-spoken Black man who loves helping others and making his own batches of home-brewed beer. He participated in a weekend of protests that summer and he was also prepared to assist with ground movement by protesters.

Friday, May 29, was the first day of protests that Dobbins participated in. This protest was held during the day in front of the Des Moines police station. He recalls his surprise at the large turnout:

“And my goodness, there was tons of people there, I couldn’t even put a count on it, but there was enough to fill the entire street in front of the Des Moines Police Department, and the stairs, and then with some people in the little grassy knoll across the street and on the bridge. And there were a bunch of speakers from different organizations and different groups. And it was remarkably well-organized. I was very surprised, I mean, how well organized it was, how fast they pulled that together.”

He remembers something else that surprised him: “There was no police presence, not at all.”

Dobbins and a few friends heard about another protest happening on the Capitol grounds the next night, Saturday, May 30, and they made plans to attend. “So, we had heard about, I think we saw on television from the previous night, that there were people downtown and they were doing [destructive] things, and so we found out they were gonna do the same things. So, you know, I was nervous, as this one was at the Capitol.

“Dobbins remembers getting ready for the protest at the Capitol. “We got dressed in our black clothes; we had goggles and facemasks, head coverings. I think my friend, Pete, brought out a bucket so that we could put it over any (launched) tear gas. The crowd was large again.

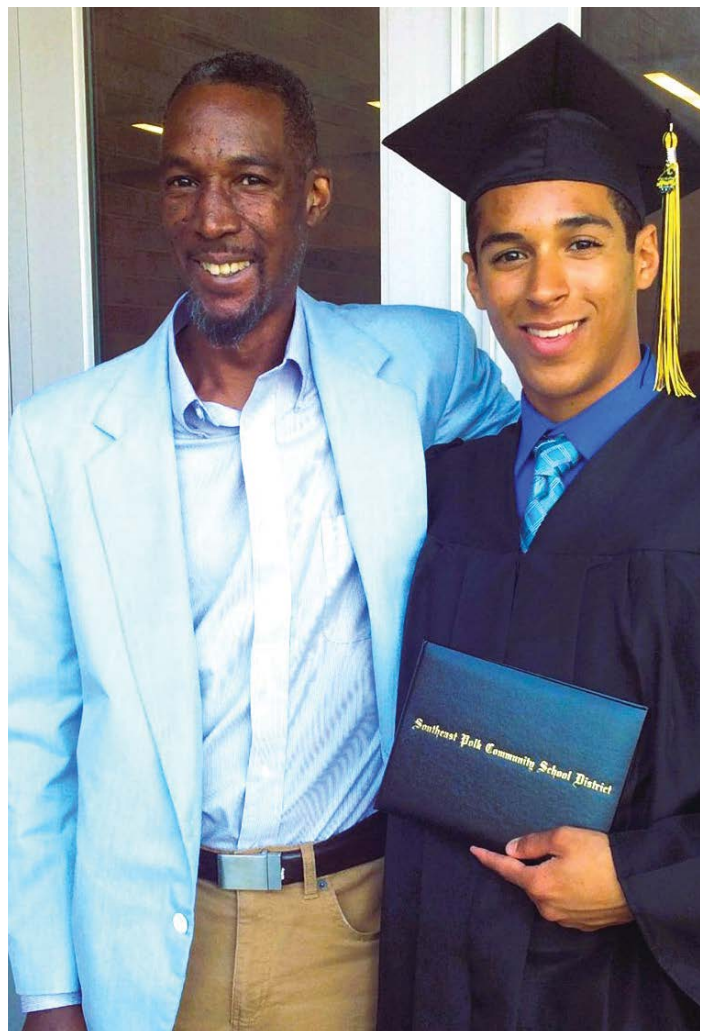
"It was pretty big, I would say at least 250 people, strung out as far as you could go without really running into the police, all the way back down to the street. There were people there with milk, and water with sodium bicarbonate in it; I mean that was the extent, and there were a couple people that were acting in a medic capacity. So, you could see there was more organization, and [the movement that summer] just built from there."

## PROTESTERS AND LAW ENFORCEMENT ENGAGE

The police were prepared and perhaps over prepared. Des Moines police had not dealt with demonstrations of this size very often. Just Voices recently learned that the DMPD Crowd Control Policy had not been updated for 30 years, in fact. But DMPD, State Troopers, and other law enforcement were ready to defend the state capitol. Dobbins remembers the moments after he arrived.

"Some people had brought water, and I remember one guy had come up out of the crowd and just chucked this water bottle up at the police line. And about thirty seconds later, they took a united step forward. Which spooked a lot of people and angered a lot more. So, we took a step forward. And then they took another step forward. And then we took like two or three steps forward. And you know, you I just hear somebody saying "Hold the line, here it comes." And they just, they dropped the tear gas right on top of us. And that just caused, just chaos! And people tried to—some people tried to run, you know. Some people that had gloves on threw the tear gas back. Law enforcement had their masks deployed, obviously, and they had their riot shields, so they weren't too scared."

"So, imagine that flash bang going off. It's like standing next to a live firework you'd see at a fireworks show. It's a flash bang, and then, boom,



and then gas. And it's enough to really, really spook most people."

The DMPD and other law enforcement reacted to the crowd's determination by responding with tear gas to force dispersal, and it worked. Dobbins recalls:

"It wasn't pleasant. I was used to it, because—both Pete and I were used to it. We both got hit with CS and CN during our military trainings. But that first volley spooked a lot of people—it's supposed to disperse people and it worked. For a while. People ran back down the stairs to the street. There weren't that many medics there but I remember nobody got trampled in the retreat. Yet some people tripped and fell trying to get away. And I remember this girl was bleeding, she had skinned her knees up pretty well . . . She had these shorts on with flip-flops." The event affected him.



"You come across that kind of force, I mean—for me it was triggering, a little bit. The booms. Especially and it being at night. And just all you could see for blocks around was tear gas. And I think somebody, a couple people, got shot that night too, with rubber bullets, as they tried to flank the police; maybe for a distraction."

[View video coverage of protest by KCCI-TV \(Des Moines\)](#)

## PROTESTERS FLEE TEAR GAS BUT REGROUP LATER

Law enforcement had accomplished their goal of forcing the protesters to flee. People ran in every direction, but some folks regrouped as they headed west, away from the Capitol grounds. According to Dobbins, "Some people regathered other places. So yeah, there was a group that, we tried to stay together, just for safety in numbers. And we were going, I forget what street, maybe it was Court Avenue that we were marching down. So, I started, I led a chant going down Court Avenue. It was one of the ones that we ended up using a lot during the BLM protests. Hey, hey, ho, ho, these crooked cops have got to go. Hands up, don't shoot."

The small group Dobbins became part of, he remembers as, "probably about 50 people. We picked up stragglers along the way. But the Des Moines Police Department was coming down the street as well."

This "cat and mouse" chase continued with the DMPD doggedly pursuing this small pod of protesters who were fleeing the Capitol grounds.

"We had turned and went back up, come back up, like Walnut Street—either Walnut or Locust. And they had met us, I believe at the top or at the end of the bridge. They were standing there. And so, we were at one end of the bridge and they were at the other. And I remember they had the street blocked off with their cars. And then they were—I don't know, there was probably about twenty of them. I remember we went toward them just to see what they would do, and they didn't do anything. It was just like before at the Capitol. And

then they started, like marching fast. And then they deployed tear gas at us again. So, we just ran again. And I remember half of us kept going, like all the way back down. It must have been Locust."

## KERWIN LOOKS BACK ON THAT PROTEST MOMENT

Looking back on that warm summer night, and what he endured, Dobbins looks at his experience from a bigger perspective, reflecting on the plight of Blacks in America historically. He initially had violent thoughts of retribution in his mind, but he didn't give in to them.

"I have to be honest with you, when we were at the Capitol, I was feeling pretty, like violent. And part of me wanted to [expletive deleted] up the Capitol. And I guess in hindsight I think I may have had like a regret about that if it were to have happened. I mean, because yes, it would have sent a message. But, I mean, they're just gonna fix any damage. You know? And it's gonna cost taxpayer money to do it. So, I mean, what were we out to accomplish outside of letting people know how upset we were? And just basically venting."

He continues. "We've gone through 400 years of police oppression starting with the people that rounded up the slaves, then that evolved into what I think of as our Sheriff's Department today. And then just an all-around, through the course of time, just disproportionately affecting people of color. And so, because [white people] don't have that experience, there's no way they could understand. The only thing that we want from them is empathy."

## THE BOTTOM LINE FOR KERWIN

"So, I guess for me, it's that I'm tired of being tired. And I think that's what, the rest of the people there felt, too. And, you know, some people were just being good allies. But some people were just being straight mischievous. Personally, I didn't want to hurt anybody's private property."

After that intense summer, Dobbins became more

committed to helping marginalized communities through his volunteer work with mutual aid. "Mutual aid is . . . well, it's not a handout, it's not charity. It's just helping people just get by in their day-to-day lives. You know, on issues like hunger and houselessness, definitely criminal justice, and criminal justice reform. I remember how happy I was when the bail fund was set up. You know, getting people home to their families, or just home so that they could get set up for their court appearances without having to meet with their attorney in jail," he said.

## KERWIN SHARES HIS THOUGHTS ON TRUE POLICE REFORM

"Well, people talk about 'bad apples.' And I think it's really, really true. I mean the analogy is there for a reason. A bad apple will spoil the whole bunch. This is gonna sound out there, but I think it's gonna take a complete dismantlement of the criminal justice system as we know it. I mean from the local police department up to the U.S. Justice Department. You've got white supremacists in positions of power, and those need to be rooted out. Absolutely and without prejudice," he said.





# THE PEOPLE'S HISTORY: THE ANDREA SAHOURI STORY—FORMER DES MOINES JOURNALIST ARRESTED AT 2020 PROTEST

By Robin Madison - Published Aug. 14, 2023

On Sunday, May 31, 2020, Andrea Sahouri was simply doing her job as a reporter for the Des Moines Register. As her boss Carol Hunter, executive editor, described in trial testimony in March 2021, reporters are the “eyes and ears” of the community. At a protest at Merle Hay Mall in Des Moines, Iowa, that’s exactly what Andrea was trying to do. She was live-tweeting photos, videos and text to keep the community informed about what she was seeing and hearing at the scene.

[\(See Andrea’s Twitter feed from the protest.\)](#)

Andrea grew up in Flint, Michigan. She graduated from the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor in April 2018 and then obtained a master’s degree in science and journalism from Columbia University in May 2019.

She was one of two interns hired by the Register in August 2019 to help cover the lead-up to the Iowa caucuses. She was hired full-time in April 2020 as a breaking news reporter, covering car crashes and crime scenes and interviewing police officers, victims and their families and witnesses. That included covering the protests in May 2020 following the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis at the hands of police officers.

## TEAR GASSED AND ARRESTED WHILE DOING HER JOB

On the evening of May 31, Andrea was accompanied by her boyfriend, Spenser Robnett, who was visiting from Michigan. Out of concern for Andrea’s safety, Spenser followed her as she worked, keeping an eye out for any danger but allowing her space to do her work. Arriving on the scene at about 6:30 pm, the two eventually met another Register reporter on the scene, Katie Akin, and observed as protestors clashed with police and some began to damage property around the mall.



Summer 2020 protests in Des Moines.  
Photo courtesy of Andrea Sahouri.

In trial testimony, all three spoke of trying to remain out of the way of police and keep a safe distance from any violence that was occurring. They also testified that they never heard police ordering the crowd to disperse but that they did try to leave the scene for their own safety when the chaos intensified.

That’s about the time that Des Moines Police Officer Luke Wilson arrived on the scene, just before 8 p.m. He had been with the DMPD for 17 years. His regular assignment was with the bomb squad as a technician and K-9 handler, as well as a firearms instructor. For the past seven years, he had worked primarily at the Des Moines Airport with his explosives detection dog.

## DMPD S.T.A.R. UNIT ARRIVES

On May 31, 2020, he was assigned to the Metro Special Tactics and Response (STAR) Unit to assist in riot control at the mall. In trial testimony,



he agreed that the assignment was a significant change from his usual work at the airport. Officer Wilson testified at trial that his team parked across Douglas Avenue from the mall and were deployed to help clear the area and stop property damage. They walked east along Douglas Avenue toward Merle Hay Road and rounded the corner of the Verizon store.

Meanwhile, sometime around 7:45 pm, as the clashes between police and protestors became more heated, Andrea, Spenser, and Katie decided it was time to move much further away. As they crossed Douglas Avenue, Spenser was hit in the leg by something, perhaps a tear gas canister. His injury slowed their progress as they continued to move south, away from the scene, with Katie in the lead, followed by Spenser and Andrea, each about 5-10 feet apart.

In front of the Verizon store, Andrea turned briefly to see what was happening with the crowds behind her. That's when she saw Officer Wilson coming at her quickly and with obvious intent. She held up her hands and called out, "I'm press, I'm press, I'm press." According to Andrea's trial testimony, Officer Wilson grabbed her arm, sprayed her face with teargas, and said, "That's not what I asked."

Both Katie and Spenser heard something and turned in time to see Officer Wilson holding Andrea's arm and spraying her with tear gas. Spenser tried to move closer to Andrea and Officer Wilson so he could explain that she was a reporter. Officer Wilson sprayed him with teargas and Spenser dropped to the ground.

At the same time, Katie was shouting that she and Andrea were members of the press. She tried to show nearby officers her Register ID badge. One of those officers testified that he did not detain Katie because she had her hands up and wasn't disobeying—"She just looked scared." Officer Wilson's response to Andrea, who also had her hands up and was not disobeying, was extreme by comparison.

## DMPD OFFICER TESTIMONY FAILS TO JUSTIFY ARREST

Officer Wilson testified at trial that both Andrea and Spenser were charged with interference with official acts because Andrea tried to get away from him, and Spenser had tried to pull her out of his grasp. Under cross-examination by Andrea's attorney, Officer Wilson admitted that it was possible she was trying to free her arm to wipe the tear gas away from her eyes, and he acknowledged that she was in distress from the tear gas. Officer Wilson admitted that his written report of the incident didn't mention Andrea trying to pull away from him. The video that Spenser recorded with his phone after he was sprayed and fell to the ground shows that he was not near enough to have grabbed Andrea's arm.

After her arrest, Andrea continued reporting from the back of a police van, including a video she recorded that was published by the Des Moines Register at 10 p.m. that night.

## ONLY REPORTER IN AMERICA TO FACE TRIAL FOR COVERING A 2020 PROTEST

It's rare for journalists to be arrested while covering events like the mall protest. And it's even rarer for prosecutors to take journalists to trial in such a circumstance. Andrea was one of 116 journalists to be arrested in relation to the protests around the country after Floyd's murder and the only one taken to trial.

When the case finally came to trial in Polk County District Court in March 2021, the jury deliberated for less than two hours and acquitted Andrea and Spenser of all charges. Andrea is now living in Detroit, Michigan, and reporting for the Detroit Free Press.

## REFLECTING BACK ON A CHAOTIC WEEKEND IN DES MOINES

There were multiple rallies and protests related to the Floyd murder during the weekend of May 29 to May 31 in Des Moines. Some remained peaceful, while others became heated and intense. The initial overall response of the DMPD reflected restraint but quickly became more aggressive, with officers dressed in battle gear using tear gas and armored vehicles. It also appears that officers did not use their body cameras to record significant activity during the protests, a violation of the department's policies.

## POV FROM JUST VOICES

It seems that the DMPD was unprepared for the intensity of the civil unrest. To manage the large crowds, department leadership pulled in officers who had little experience with crowd control. Many seemed to lack the training necessary to responsibly use their authority and weaponry in dealing with citizens who were legally exercising their free-speech rights under the U.S. Constitution.

The behavior of some officers, including higher-ranking officials, portrayed personal scorn and hostility toward the protesters. For other officers, their behavior may simply have been a result of being thrust into an intense situation for which they were unprepared.



Offender/Name ID: 1259555

Name: ANDREA MAY SAHOURI

Book Date: 5/31/2020 10:03:19 PM

City: DES MOINES, IA

“  
So early in  
life, I had  
learned  
that if  
you want  
something,  
you had  
better  
make some  
noise.

”

- Malcom X

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# WHEN DOING RIGHT RESULTS IN BEING WRONGED: THE BLAZING SADDLE ARRESTS

By Karen Downing - Published July 13, 2023

## WHEN GEORGE FLOYD PROTESTS SWEEPED THROUGH DES MOINES, EVEN PEOPLE WHO HELPED PROTESTERS FOUND THEMSELVES JAILED BY THE DES MOINES POLICE

Five hours into a peaceful protest, the June temperatures were still warm as evening darkness fell. Two hundred people gathered on the steps of the State Capitol in Des Moines. Songs and chants carried into the night sky. "Hands up! Don't shoot!" The street lights glowed in the distance, lining Locust Street and Grand Avenue, the light pointing toward downtown. Police with riot gear—gas masks, helmets, and shields—descended upon the gathering, and protesters didn't fight back or hurl insults. Instead, they asked the police to take off their tactical gear and join them.

On June 1, 2020, Des Moines saw the fourth night of protests in response to the police brutality connected to George Floyd's murder in Minneapolis. Thousands of people took to the streets and parks across the country to speak out against Floyd's murder by ex-police officer Derek Chauvin, who knelt on Floyd's neck for almost nine minutes in the course of an arrest.

In Des Moines, police ordered protesters to disperse five times before using flash bangs and tear gas on the crowd of 200 at the Capitol. SWAT team officers stood in line as clouds of tear gas filled the night air. A countywide curfew was in effect, and the incident at the Capitol occurred around midnight, three hours after the curfew.

The event, according to eyewitness accounts, security footage, a review of court documents, and media reports, started in the evening on Monday with a peaceful "Together We Can Make A Change: A Call To Action" rally that was



attended by at least 1,000 people. By evening's end, chaos ensued. Arrests were made, and protesters would feel further resentment and mistrust toward the police. A peaceful protest devolved into a war scene with weapons and tear gas to combat raised fists and raised voices. The idea of "together we can make a change" felt like an empty idea.

## A CLOSE LOOK AT THREE PARTICIPANTS

Three men—Matthew Raper, Thuan Luong and Logan Villhauer—returning from giving first aid to the protesters were arrested outside The Blazing Saddle bar in Des Moines' East Village. Four men who had been inside the bar went outside when they noticed the police and protesters approaching along East 5th Street and Locust Avenue. They witnessed the arrests.

Raper, Luong, and Villhauer stopped to help a protester who had been sprayed with a chemical irritant. As they walked back to the bar, security footage showed a white pickup truck arriving on the scene. Several officers in riot gear exited the vehicle and ordered the men to the pavement. Raper, Luong and Villhauer stuck up their hands and dropped to the ground without resisting arrest. Raper, Long and Villhauer were charged with Failure to Disperse, a misdemeanor.

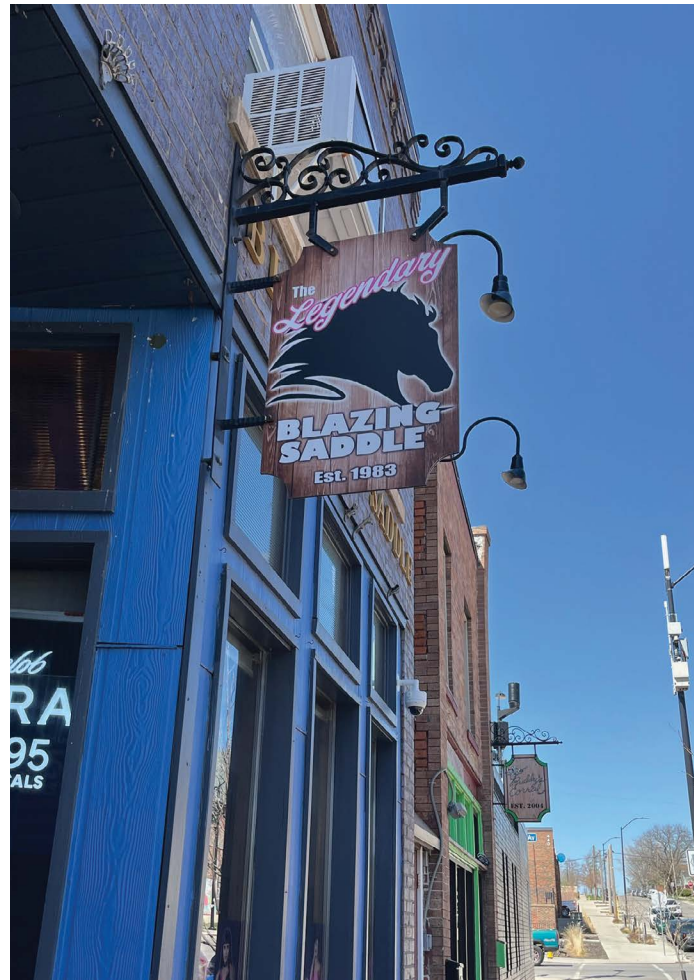
These men, who had been at the protest to provide first aid, now faced criminal charges. The police believed the men heard the order to disperse and disobeyed. The men believed they were, in fact, leaving the scene in a peaceful way, doing just what the officers had asked of them.

Villhauer said, "I was terrified for not just myself. If you look at the video, there's a number of people that ran. We were the only ones that got on the ground. We were complying, but when you're in a situation when you have guns pointed at you, and you are told to disperse, and that is immediately followed up with no more than five, 10 seconds, with 'Get on the ground,' which order are you supposed to follow?"

The [video footage](#) presents surreal moments of a swarm of SWAT team officers descending upon three men in front of the bar, officers in full armor with guns drawn.

The men comply with the requests of the officers, from dropping to the ground to sitting on the bench outside the bar when handcuffed. What

isn't clear is what the men did wrong, other than being outside a bar on the night of a protest gone wrong.



## A CLOSER LOOK AT THE BLAZING SADDLE

The Blazing Saddle, located at 416 E. 5th Street in Des Moines, is the oldest gay bar in Des Moines, opening in 1983 in the historic East Village that had yet to see much in the way of urban renewal. The motto of The Blazing Saddle is "We accept everyone as long as they accept and respect us." A "Black Lives Matter" sign occupies space in the front window.

To live up to this motto, the bar is open 365 days a year so the LGBTQ community has a place to go. The Blazing Saddle strives to make the community safe and healthy by working with the



Polk County Health Department and The Project of Primary Health Care by offering Free HIV & STI testing regularly, along with [Mpox](#) vaccinations and COVID vaccinations.

Due to legislation and current shifts in culture and politics, The Blazing Saddle is busier than ever as people in the LGBTQ community look for safe spaces to be in community with others. Security has been increased at the bar to protect the patrons.

## THE BLAZING SADDLE: JUNE 1, 2020

On June 1, 2020, the staff at The Blazing Saddle decided to offer medical assistance to anyone harmed on the fourth night of the Black Lives Matter protests. The bar owner said, "Three of our people were prepared with a backpack full of first aid supplies and went outside in case anyone would need assistance, post-protest. We also had bottles of water and towels available for use if needed," they added, noting that protesters trickled down Locust and East 5th streets as police trailed behind in unmarked pick-up trucks.

In the aftermath of the Capitol protests, the police arrived at the bar and ordered everyone out at gunpoint. When searching the establishment, the police found one showgirl in the basement. She was greeted with the glare of a flashlight and a pointed gun. The officer who found her took her outside and frisked her while her hands were raised, Smith said.

"I understand that times are different right now and that emotions are running pretty high, and I get that whole thing," Bryan Smith, co-owner of The Blazing Saddle, told [WeArelowa, WOI-TV](#). "But nobody asked who we were, nobody asked for any ID or anything like that."

The police—rifles drawn—entered an establishment that according to Smith had a really good relationship with the department. Police spokesman Sgt. Paul Parizek told the [television station](#) that the action used that night was frightening, however, it was done with protecting

the bar in mind. "I think given what we've seen around the nation with business owners being beaten and killed, businesses being looted, we had an obligation to go in there and make sure that everything was OK there at the Saddle," Parizek said. "It was truly in the best interest of the businesses in the village."

Smith was just happy that no one was injured that night. "And luckily nobody was hurt like you've seen in other places. So, they weren't that rough, but it was an eye-opener," he said. But three Saddle patrons were arrested by a SWAT team of at least 10 officers.

## THE COURT DOCUMENT VERSION

In contrast to the bar security video, the court documents describe bar employees Luong and Raper as being in the vicinity of a riot and of unlawful assembly. Documents also say Villhauer, Luong, and Raper were members of a group of "well over three people."

Prosecutors describe the group as "assaultive," "intimidating people" and destroying property. Court documents say of the men, "The destruction was open, extensive and obvious, yet the defendants willfully remained among the group of persons responsible for this conduct." Of Villhauer, court documents say, "Defendant was within hearing distance of the commands to disperse and failed to leave."

## WHAT THE POLICE SAID

In a Register story, Parizek said officers felt at the time of the arrest of Luong, Villhauer and Raper that the three men were purposefully violating the 9 p.m. curfew.

"We don't nit-pick tiny violations of ordinances under regular circumstances, but this is something we had never seen before. In order to get this back on track, we all have to do our part," Parizek told the Des Moines Register. "After speaking with the management at The Blazing Saddle, it sounds like we could have done a better



job communicating in the moment. Fortunately, our relationship with one of the longest-serving businesses in the East Village had been nurtured long before Monday night, and we can have those frank discussions with one another,” he said, in the [Register story](#).

## POLK COUNTY ATTORNEY REVIEW

Jeff Noble, bureau chief of the Intake Division at the Polk County Attorney’s Office, reviewed the arrest of the three defendants charged with Failure to Disperse who made a jury demand.

In emails from Noble, he notes that there is “scant” information surrounding the arrest of Roper, Villhauer and Luong. He notes that The Des Moines Register asked for a request to review the charges and that the security camera footage taken outside The Blazing Saddle bar had been provided.

Additionally, in emails written to Sgt. House, Noble concedes that the officers listed in the report as arresting officers not only didn’t have any actual contact with the three men charged, some of the listed officers weren’t even at the scene.

Equally troubling was the fact that generic

language was used in the affidavits for these cases, language that had been drafted to apply to the Court Avenue arrests the night before. Noble acknowledges in an email to Sgt. House that “We have a bit of egg on our face with regard to charges since the affidavit portion of the complaint appears to be inaccurate for these arrests.”

## THE POLICE RESPONSE TO THE REVIEW

Sgt. House, in an email to Noble reviewed by Just Voices, writes: “There were some issues with the charging process,” and he goes on to detail the police version of the arrest:

“Yes, those were my guys outside The Blazing Saddle. We had just assisted in pushing the rioters off the Capitol grounds and they went west down Locust. We were attempting to parallel them on Grand and turned north on East 6th. As we did so, my driver, Ofc. Escobar, looked over at a group moving quickly on the west sidewalk northbound. He shouted that they had Molotov cocktails and I told him to stop. Running around the truck, I pointed my rifle at them and ordered them on the ground. Three of them ran into The Blazing Saddle, and I ordered my guys after them.

"We secured the three outside, and they admitted coming from the protests. They did have bottles, but one of the offenders said one was milk of magnesia and one was sodium bicarbonate. They had them in aftermarket bottles, and I could see how Escobar took them for something to be thrown. They admitted to being part of the protests, so I told Sgt. Chapman and Officer Cawthorn who weren't part of my group that they should be charged with failure to disperse. I then left with my guys to complete the assignment."

In an email reviewed by Just Voices, House stated ordinarily he wouldn't care about dropping the charge, but he was concerned that if that happened, the three men would file a lawsuit. House said, "These guys are constantly trying to stir media attention now in LGBTQ media." But he didn't provide any examples that showed media coverage of issues with the LGBTQ community and the police.

House concluded his email to Noble with the comment, "...realizing this whole situation is a mess."

## **POLK COUNTY ATTORNEY REVIEW, PART TWO**

Brad Kinkade from the Polk County Attorney's office then picked up the review, and he told House in an email, "I've had some conversations with the D attorney who is hell-bent on dismissal. Nothing will be good enough absent a full apology. I've told him it's my intention to continue with the case."

## **CIVIL RIGHTS LAWSUIT AND CASE OUTCOME**

Raper and Luong filed a civil rights lawsuit against Garth House, Jackson Bruckner and Kaleb Schultz alleging the officers violated their rights under the Fourth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and Article I, section 8 of the Iowa Constitution by arresting them without probable cause.

## **"I DON'T FEEL SAFE HERE ANYMORE"—MATTHEW RAPER'S EXPERIENCE**

Raper spent about 12 hours in jail, but that was after he and others were held in a parking lot where pictures were taken of all those who had been arrested, pictures that were separate from the mugshots taken later. When he went to the Polk County jail, he was placed in a holding tank and not moved to a cell until the final hours of his arrest. "I wasn't able to call anyone until much later when we were moved into a cell. The phone in the holding tank wasn't working, so no one knew where I was beyond the Saddle employees who saw us getting arrested. Having never been to jail before, it was a weird experience."

Someone from The Blazing Saddle posted bail, but Raper, Villhauer and Luang were not allowed to leave for more than seven hours after being bailed out. Raper said, "Being in the jail and having unclear documentation on when we were going to be released was a scary situation to be in. That was more alarming than having automatic weapons pointed at us during the arrest."

Even though the charges against the men were dismissed, Raper said he felt permanently unsettled about the experience. "As a queer person, I have always been leery of the police. But now in Iowa, it's even worse. Law enforcement is not being held accountable."

Raper now lives in California, and he notes that he no longer feels safe in Iowa. "Lots of people I know in the gay community have left. Iowa is not getting better. It's hard to feel safe in Iowa in general, but moving has been hard because all of my friends and family are still back home. It doesn't feel the same when I come home; I watch over my shoulder when I come back," he said.

Even though it's been almost three years since Raper was arrested and jailed, he said he still suffers from intense anxiety and PTSD. "I am working on this with a therapist and psychiatrist. I am working on not freaking out in public if I see the police interacting with people in an



inappropriate way. Because of the color of my skin, this experience could have been a lot different,” he said. “I know I have privilege, but I will carry this with me for a long time. I am here in it, I exist in it.”

## **“I HAVE NO FAITH IN AMERICA ANYMORE”—LOGAN VILLHAUER’S EXPERIENCE**

Villhauer, Raper and Luong didn’t attend the protests. When the police arrived, the three men were outside the Saddle attempting to help those who had been at the protest. They complied with the police. “We were told to get on the ground after being circled by 12 officers with guns. We didn’t resist. We didn’t even really talk. We did nothing wrong.”

Like Raper, Villhauer emphasized how little information the men were given regarding their arrests. “The police questioned us in an outdoor fenced-in area, took our pictures, and held us there without explaining the charges. We didn’t know where we were. I interacted with about three officers and begged them to loosen my cuffs because my circulation was being cut off, but they ignored me.”

“I was not allowed to self-bond myself out, even though I had the money. I needed to take my HIV medication. I asked them hourly about this. When another person in the cell heard me ask for my medication, he started screaming that I would give everyone AIDS. They removed him. I was laughed at by the correction officers when I made the requests for my medication,” he said. “I was lied to as they told me they were going to bring a nurse, then they laughed at me when a nurse didn’t come.”

Villhauer notes that he has always been someone at the forefront of social justice through his involvement in the Queer community. As someone on the spectrum, he said he has a clear sense of morality and justice, but the way their case was handled, from the arrest to the dismissal of

their lawsuit against the arresting officers, has contributed to his mental health decline.

“I can be doing nothing, and violence can be used against me. Before this incident, I understood things on an intellectual and moral level, but to have violence be used against people? That showed me the police lie. I will never trust them,” he said.

Villhauer did leave the state after this incident, but he returned, as moving away from his support system was hard. But he said he plans to move again as this is not the same state where he grew up. “I have no faith in the American government. I have no faith in Americans as a people. I am so afraid of going out and interacting in the community in any capacity. I fear that someone will come in and kill us all. I am honestly scared to leave my apartment some days,” he said.

Despite playing by every single rule put in front of him for success—college, employment—Villhauer says he hasn’t been able to achieve it. “I am a resilient person. I have had to be since I had been masked for many years,” he said. “But the other side of this resilience is exhaustion.”

## **JUST VOICES REVIEW: WHY THIS CASE MATTERS**

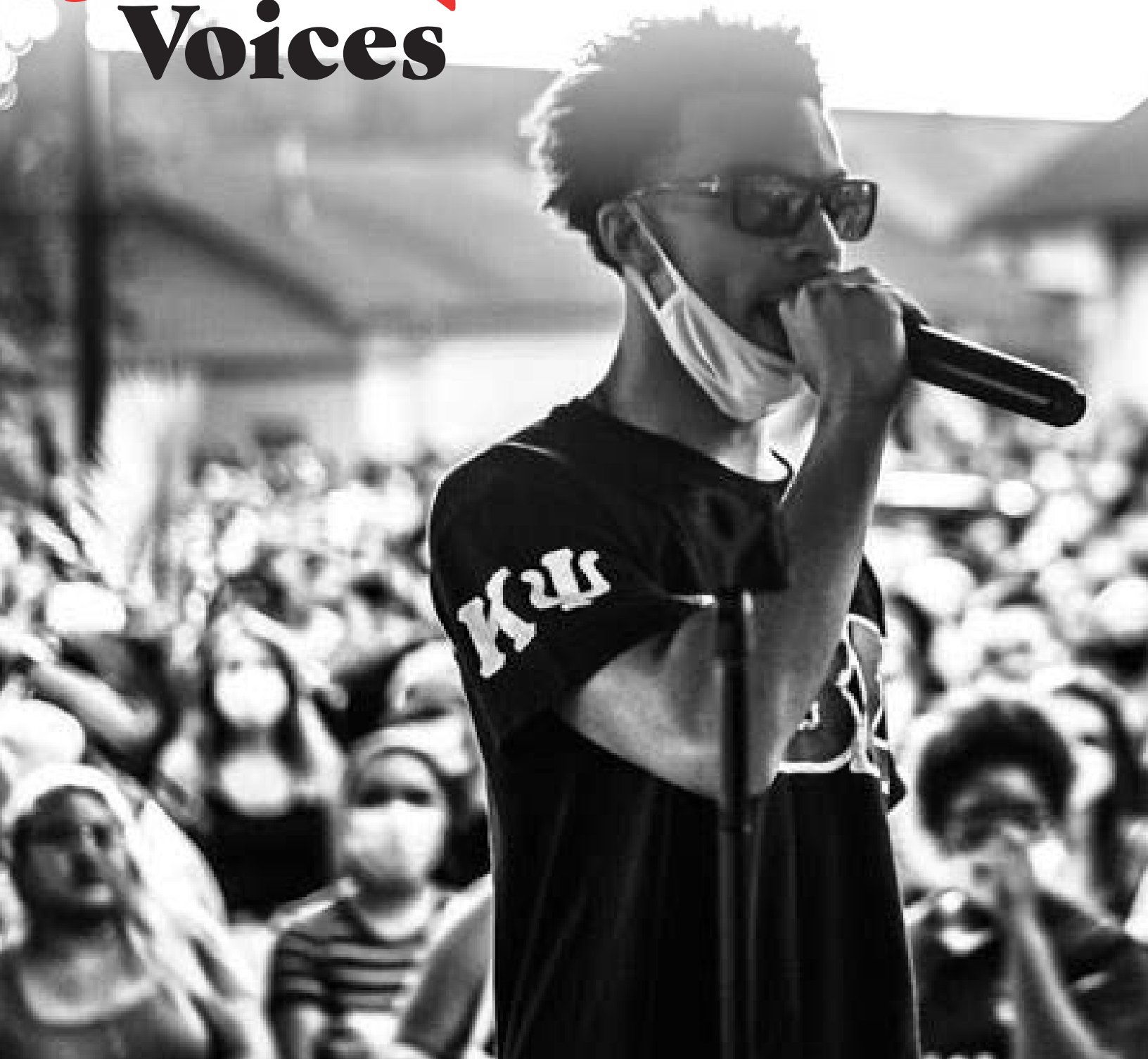
The Blazing Saddle is a gay bar, and Luong, Raper and Villhauer are gay men. Villhauer believes the struggles of LGBTQ communities for civil rights mirror the struggles of the Black community. Marginalized minorities—like gay men and people of color—stick together, according to Smith, the co-owner of the Saddle. The three men were trying to help people and stay out of trouble, yet they were arrested anyway.

The Blazing Saddle serves as the center of their community for the three men, and they felt violated when their safe space became unsafe. Raper and Villhauer felt the officers showed contempt toward the protesters, but Villhauer accepted Parizek’s contrition that the officers could have handled the situation more tactfully.

While the police were overwhelmed with the number of protesters on the night of June 1, and were tasked with managing a crowd in defiance of a curfew, Just Voices believes this illustrates an overly vigorous altercation when the police questioned the three men, sloppy police work related to charging the three men and unsubstantiated claims related to the charges filed.

"We've never gone into this with the expectation that we wanted to break the law. It's definitely given me a more focused vision into what we need to do to help people behind the scenes who are being prosecuted," Raper said.

**Just**   
**Voices**



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**SEEKING JUSTICE.**





# "THAT'S WHEN I WAS HIT BY A BATON," TRAUMA LINGERS FOR GEORGE FLOYD PROTESTER

By Lori A. Young - Published March 17, 2023

## PROTESTS AFTER GEORGE FLOYD'S MURDER HAVE CEASED. BUT FOR ONE IOWA PROTESTER WHO HAD VIOLENT INTERACTIONS WITH POLICE, THE TRAUMA LINGERS.

Lenin Cardwell has always cared about social justice. An only child, her parents openly discussed political and social issues with her. "I went to my first protest with them when I was three, so that's simply just been something that's always been a part of my life from when I was really, really young," she said. Whether the issue is women's reproductive rights, police brutality, or LGBTQ rights, Cardwell is not one to sit idly by.

"I'm just someone that when you see things happening, it's really hard for me to just sit back and not do anything—that's kind of always how I've been," she said.

"I definitely think police brutality is of course one of the social issues that matter the most to me. And I mean that ties in to several racial issues as a whole, but police brutality was especially of importance to me. So, for me, during the summer 2020, it was just really important to get out there."

Cardwell had just graduated from Drake University with a double major of sociology and history in May of 2020. She had landed her first professional job.

Cardwell said she learned of various protests during that heated summer of 2020 through social media. The original point of origin for the protest was Skate North, on Meredith Drive, in the Merle Hay area. Protesters gathered at that parking lot, in the early evening. Cardwell didn't know in advance the plan was to march north on Merle Hay Road toward the I-35/80 freeway entrance and shut down access to the freeway. The Des Moines police had a different plan, though.

Cardwell said, "Police had kind of started to block us off as we got closer to the freeway and started to form a barricade there. They were



PICTURED ABOVE: LENIN CARDWELL

## EARLY EVENING JUNE 22, 2020

But on June 22, 2020, Cardwell relied on the help of her fellow protesters, after she said she was attacked by Des Moines police officers while trying to get back to her car, after police had shut down a peaceful protest. She was obeying police orders to disperse along with about 40 other protesters, but when they looked around they were surrounded by police on all sides, she said. It's a tactic known as "kettling."

In an interview with Just Voices, Cardwell said police chased protesters who were simply trying to disperse.

"As we started to leave, cops began to attack protesters from behind, body slamming them onto the ground and arresting them. When I saw a girl being arrested, I attempted to go up to her and help but was met with pepper spray, so I continued to try to get to my car. About 10 minutes later, I was attacked myself, being slammed onto the ground by two cops with their shields," she said.

Cardwell thought for sure she would be arrested at this point.



## WORD OF THE PROTEST SPREAD ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Cardwell said she learned of various protests during that heated summer of 2020 through social media. The original point of origin for the protest was Skate North, on Meredith Drive, in the Merle Hay area. Protesters gathered at that parking lot, in the early evening. Cardwell didn't know in advance the plan was to march north on Merle Hay Road toward the I-35/80 freeway entrance and shut down access to the freeway.

The Des Moines police had a different plan, though.

Cardwell said, "Police had kind of started to block us off as we got closer to the freeway and started to form a barricade there. They were standing there—a barricade with their shields. So, we started to loop back around and kind of went through the neighborhood and then back out and around. And that was when we all kind of reconvened at Skate North."



Their plans had been thwarted and protest leaders had a new idea.

"That's when one of the organizers were basically, 'We're going to move this protest down to the Capitol grounds,'" Cardwell recalls. With that move, the size of the group had diminished because not everyone decided to continue protesting, she said.

The ones who did, about 40 strong, parked near the Capitol but on the north side of freeway, near East High School. They marched across a footbridge and were met by police on all sides. "[W]hile we were walking, the cops really were starting to just kettle us and kind of block us in on all sides. So, when we had gotten to the foot bridge, it was pretty apparent at that point that we were boxed in," Cardwell remembers.

Protesters chanting, "Hands up, don't shoot!" Source: Just Voices provided video Cardwell told them she shot on her cell phone.

Although some protesters hurled foul insults at the police, no protesters touched or threw anything at the police, she said. Speaking through megaphones, the Des Moines police,

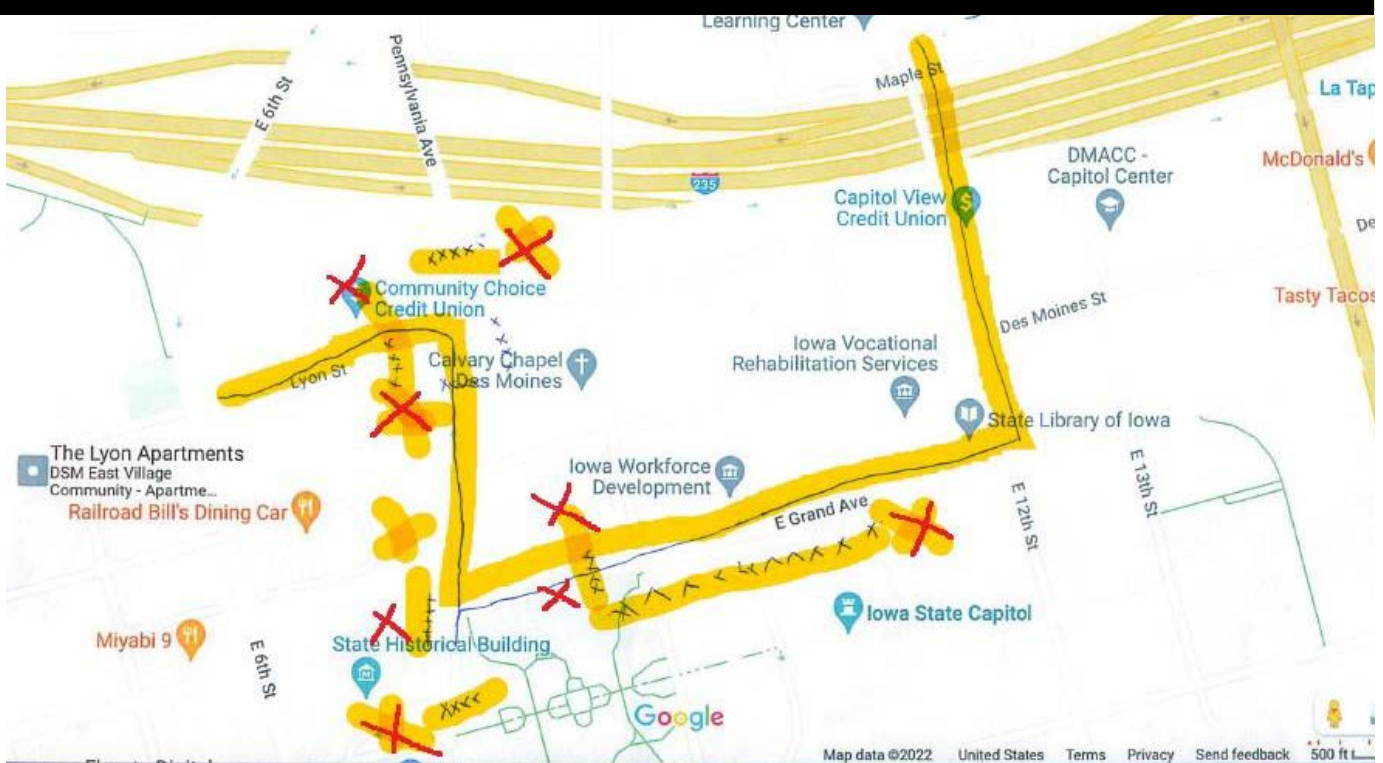
with reinforcements from the Johnston Police department, ordered the protesters to disperse. After a few minutes of back and forth, the protesters, including Cardwell, decided to obey orders and return to their cars. But as they looked around, there was nowhere to go—they were surrounded on all sides.

Cardwell remembers what the police said. "They said, 'You need to disperse. You need to leave. This is a dispersal warning. If people don't leave, we're gonna start arresting people,'" she said. "We were in a kettle, so they just started chasing after us," she said. Imagine the confusion and chaos. The police ordered them to disperse but gave them no clear route to do so, she said, which added to the panic.

"They kind of just started running after us. I remember I was with a group of friends, and pretty much everyone just started running, it was also really just chaotic. And I mean [the police] were, they were tackling people to the ground," she said.

Protesters looked out for each other in the minutes that ensued. Cardwell saw a girl in distress.

SOURCE: JAYLEN CAVIL/JUST VOICES







#### INJURIES LENIN CARDWELL SUFFERED IN A PROTEST.

"I saw a girl—she was with her sister—and the police pretty much tore her from her sister. They had tackled her to the ground, and a few of us ran over there to kind of try and help her. But the police sprayed her and us, they sprayed... I believe it was pepper gel was what they used. They sprayed pepper gel at us, so I got some of that in my eyes then," she said.

"I'm really just trying to leave. I'm really just trying to go home. And excuse my language, but all the cop said to me was to 'Shut the f\*\*k up!'" After that, Cardwell tried to get back to her car. She never expected any of this to happen.

"We were running, and there was this little, kind of hill. And I didn't realize that the hill came back

down—I wasn't thinking properly—so I started to kind of run up it. And unfortunately, when I did that, I kind of fell behind the crowd and then had to get back in. But I was at the back of the line. The cops were really just charging at us and I was pushed to the ground. I thought I was gonna get arrested, but I did not. I was able to get myself up, trying to catch up to the others. And that's when I was hit by a baton. I don't know why." Cardwell said she was alone with the cop who hit her with the baton.

"Yeah, it was kind of just was an interaction between us. I mean there was other people around us, of course, but when I got up, he was the one that was right there and he hit me. And I just kept repeating, 'I'm trying to go home. I'm

trying to go home.' And another cop was nearby and heard me say that, and he said, 'I know, I know.'"

Although she did not get arrested, Cardwell was hurt. The baton strike was very hard and her pinky finger was injured when she was knocked down by police before they left and she got further behind the fleeing protesters.

"I mean once I made it to my car, I don't think I had even processed what had happened fully. I remember I had to go get gas, so I remember I went and got some gas. I called my parents. I told you, they took me to protests, but they didn't love me going out so early that night and protesting. I get it. But, so I called them up, kind of told them what happened, and then I just went home," she said.

## SHAKEN, BUT NOT DETERRED

The next day, and in the days that followed, the bruise from the baton hitting the back of her thigh grew worse. She sought medical attention the next morning.

"I had a giant bruise on my thigh, because he hit me in the back of my back thigh. That's where I was hit. The bruise didn't develop right away, obviously. It was the next day when the bruise had finally shown up. And when I had been pushed, my hand had gotten hurt in the process of that, so I had a pretty big bump on my hand and a little dent in my pinky too," she shared.

Cardwell recalls the excessive force she experienced and witnessed. "I guess, the reason I would describe the police as violent is because they were just really tackling people to the ground. They didn't approach people calmly, 'Hey, turn around. You're being arrested.' It was the police literally running after and knocking people to

## ARREST DATA FORM JUNE 22, 2020 PROTEST

- That night, 19 people, most in their early to mid twenties were arrested
- 11 women and 8 men were arrested. (Of those arrested, 15 were white and 4 were Black women).
- The Charge: Failure to Dispense
- Charges for 14 people were dismissed.
- In 3 cases, protesters pleaded guilty.
- Just Voices could find no records of the case or outcome for individuals.

the ground,” she said. Although Cardwell was traumatized and it gave her pause, she was left with a righteous anger and a determination to protest again.

“I mean by having that firsthand experience, it really did kind of ignite that fire in me and make me angrier and make me want to get things changed even more. But, but at the same time, I did have a new trauma of police that I had never had before,” she said. Only six days later, on a Saturday, Cardwell went to another protest that started at the Pappajohn Sculpture Park. There were police there, too, but it was daylight this time. She felt uneasy, still recovering from her still fresh injuries.

“Yeah, there were cops there, and I do remember it gave me an anxiety I hadn’t felt before. So, getting over that mental block was definitely hard for a while. I think mostly now I don’t have a ton of fear of going to protests anymore. It’s definitely kind of resolved itself now, but for some time that was definitely kind of a block for me to get over,” she said.

Cardwell survived her experience with police brutality and lived to talk about it, but it has had a lasting impact. The trauma created an awakening in her and allowed her to identify with Blacks’ experiences.

Cardwell said, “I definitely come from a place of ignorance as a white person. Obviously, I always knew police were awful—that was why I was out there protesting—but I had never directly experienced anything [negative] myself until then.

“Yeah, this horrible event happened to me, and it really sucks, but this is something that, of course, Black people and other people of color might be afraid of happening anytime, even in regular interactions with the police.”

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# WHEN A KETTLE BECOMES A CRUCIBLE: THE LASTING IMPACT OF DES MOINES POLICE RESPONSE TO THE 2020 PROTESTS

By Tom Rendon - Published Nov. 22, 2022

Suddenly, everything went black. It was as if his eyes stopped working. His ears were fine. He could hear the crowd noises, the commotion, the shouts and grunts of pushing and shoving. When he tried to open his eyes, a piercing pain shot through his brain and all he could see was amorphous blobs.

He couldn't see. And he couldn't think. His brain had shut off. He stumbled forward, catching his foot on a riot shield on the ground. He pitched over and collapsed.

That was it, he told himself, I can't go anywhere. I can't do anything. If the police want me to move, they will have to do it themselves. I'm not resisting. I'm helpless. The forearm a police officer pushed into his neck and the handcuffing that soon followed were completely unnecessary. Zach was arrested, charged with failure to disperse.

How Zach Humble came to be in this situation on the evening of June 22, 2020, in a narrow street two blocks from the Iowa Capitol was not a

random set of circumstances. It was a deliberate set of choices, fueled by a sense that standing up for what is right is the right thing to do.

## ZACH'S UPBRINGING

When Zach was in high school in Estherville, Iowa, a town in the northwest quadrant of the state about 10 miles from the Minnesota border, he knew that more and more brown students from Central America were showing up, and not always receiving an "Iowa Nice" welcome. Latinx students made up around 30% of the student body. When Estherville played other towns in sporting events, the racist comments would start coming out. Zach didn't like that.

Later as a college student at University of Northern Iowa, he majored in history and learned how American imperialism assumed the entire hemisphere was under its control. The U.S. had managed affairs in dozens of Latin American countries, even if meant sending in the marines for a decade or so. Those foreign invasions of



ZACH HUMBLE, AFTER HIS WRONGFUL ARREST ON JUNE 22, 2020.  
HIS CHARGES WOULD LATER BE DISMISSED

the past helped explain why his rural hometown in northwest Iowa changed as immigrants from Honduras, Guatemala, and Costa Rica came to work in the area's egg farms and industrial agriculture facilities. These were kids from families doing whatever they could to have a better life in America, and Zach knew that. He also knew throwing epithets during a football game, and saying they were not welcome, was wrong. And if that was wrong, so was kneeling on the neck of a Black man for 9 minutes until he was dead.

## ZACH ACTS ON HIS BELIEFS

"If those are your real beliefs and values, you'd have to take action when the time comes," Zach said. "Real" beliefs are only those you hold with enough conviction that they impel you to take action. That action, for Zach, was to join the protests in Des Moines in the summer of 2020. He had some friends from college who were participating in the protests. He knew where to go to be part of this mass movement calling out police violence and demanding accountability.

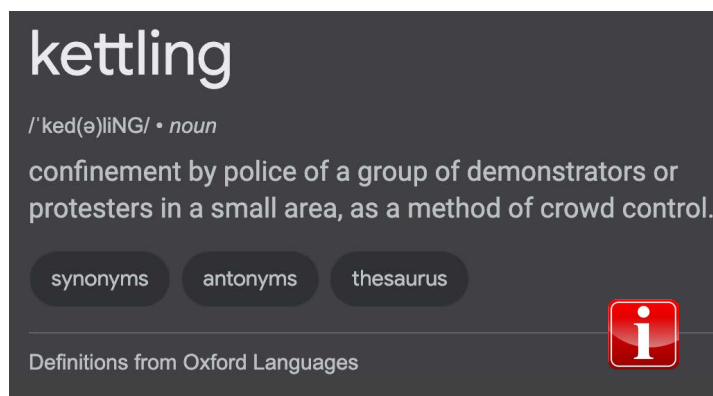
Zach came to Des Moines early in June to be part of the first round of protest. But the one that stays in his mind is what happened on Monday, June 22. Zach met with about a hundred folks at a bowling alley and they first marched around the neighborhood. It was a smaller group than he had seen at the earlier demonstrations. A sense of dread welled up in him as soon as they started marching. Rows of police in full riot gear, along with a military grade Hummer, blocked the way. They marched back to the bowling alley.

As dusk was settling in, the protesters moved to a different location with a plan to march to the state Capitol. Zach drove to the East High School parking lot that served as a staging area. The group crossed a bridge over I-235, the 70-year old highway that cut the Black community in half, and headed up toward the Capitol building. Again, the police were there in full riot gear.

[Watch this video](#) of the stand-off with Des Moines Police and officers from surrounding suburbs and the protestors.

## WHAT IS KETTLING?

Kettling is a controversial crowd control technique. The goal is to confine the group into a defined space and prevent any escape. That way they can be controlled and detained. But it risks compression crowd energy, concentrating and intensifying the situation, almost forcing a crowd versus police physical confrontation. If police kettle protesters, preventing their movement, they also assume responsibility for what happens in this contained space where they hemmed people in.



## 'POLICE ATTACK' ZACH

Then Zach turned around to watch three police officers attacking a street medic. The protesters had volunteers, in clearly dressed attire, who carried first aid supplies and were embedded with the protesters to help out anyone who was injured. The police grabbed the street medic by his backpack and spun him around. Zach, alarmed by the police attack of the street medic, moved in to ask why. That's when it happened. A full direct spray of mace directly into his face. And pain.

"I always thought it would be the kind of pain where you could work through," he explained later. Zach was, after all, a former high school football player, used to jarring blows, picking himself up and getting ready for the next play.

"This was debilitating. My mind shut off. Motor skill and anything else ..." His voice trailed off. He couldn't find the exact words to describe what it was like. That's when he turned around and

tripped over a riot shield. The cuffs that followed were completely unnecessary. Despite orders to disperse, Zach wasn't going anywhere.

## A WRONGFUL ARREST

It was debilitating, but Zach had no idea how debilitating it would be. He was arrested and released the following morning. The charges of "failure to disperse," the same as nearly all charges that came during the protests, were eventually dropped. He still could not see normally. He was miles from his car and without a phone. He had turned that over to a sheriff and never got it back. A friend finally got him back home.

## AFTER ZACH'S RELEASE

He started taking cold showers when he got back to Cedar Falls. That was the advice he received. Cold showers, because hot showers open your pores and the irritant in the mace gets in and the pain spreads. It was a week before he was functional. He could go back to his job working for the UNI football department. Except he couldn't. That's when the panic attacks started.


He tried to go back to the office but couldn't be there for more than an hour. This was a job where he was accustomed to putting in 12-15-hour days. He would be overcome with panic and just couldn't be there. The UNI staff understood and since the fall season had been canceled due to COVID-19, they could be flexible. But eventually he knew he wasn't able to do the job, so he quit. And things got worse.

## ZACH'S LASTING TRAUMA

In November, shortly before Thanksgiving, he found himself staring into a mirror. His mind was one place and his body another. He knew he had a gun and two shells in his truck left over from turkey hunting. "My body took over," he said. "I felt like my body was reacting to being aware of that thought."

He was facing his killer, and the killer was himself. It was so terrifying that he started to cry. Thoughts of suicide kept recurring.

Zach was trying to put his life back together. He lost a job with UNI that would have put him on a pathway to a paid position coaching college

NOBLE 3611463		POLK COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE		11/02/2022 09:59	
		Booking Sheet			
NAME: HUMBLE, ZACHARY PAUL		Booking Number:		Inmate Number: 1297673	
		DOB: DL/ID		AGE: 25	
		RACE: WHITE		GENDER: MALE	
		HEIGHT: 5'10		WEIGHT: 163	
		HAIR: BROWN		EYES: BLUE	
		CURRENT HOUSING:		CLASSIFY:	
		PROPERTY LOCATION:			
SSN : DL/ID		DLN :		ICE # :	
FBI :		DCI :		USMS # :	
FIRST KNOWN NAME: HUMBLE, ZACHARY PAUL					
MONIKER:					
AKA:					
HOME ADDRESS		WORK ADDRESS		EMPLOYER	
				CONTACT	



football. That's what he had always wanted. That wasn't going to happen now. He filled some time Door Dashing, and then moved back to Estherville in spring and worked putting in docks at Okoboji.

He wasn't going anywhere. He was offered and accepted an assistant coach position with his former high school football team in Estherville. It was a job he should have loved. But he didn't. Going nowhere, finding no joy, life seemed desperate. Zach used to pride himself on how efficiently he worked, how productive he could be. Not anymore.

"I couldn't do anything," he said, as if there was no exaggeration in the sentence. "I was moving in the direction of, 'Yeah, I'm going to kill myself.'" But he didn't.

What he told himself at the time was that he didn't want young impressionable high school students having someone in their lives who had killed himself. He quit the high school football job. And that made him feel worse.

## THERAPY HELPS ZACH HEAL

It wasn't until July that his parents finally got him into a psychiatric ward in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. The doctors diagnosed post-traumatic stress disorder. He was prescribed medication.

And he improved.

Now, he says, he feels a million times better. But he is still on medication and still putting his life back together after two years.

His story was not easy for him to tell, and sharing his mental health struggles is not something he could talk to strangers about—except maybe two years after the fact. But he did share them with Just Voices Iowa and now they can become part of the record of the human cost of protesting and a police response levied during the summer of 2020 in Des Moines. He has no criminal record, and yet he paid a steep penalty for whatever it was he did.

No part of it feels like justice or public safety.

ZACH WITH HIS PARENTS AFTER HIS HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION



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# A MAGA HAT, A BROKEN WINDOW, AND PEOPLE VS. PROPERTY

By Brad Titus

*Just Voices volunteer Brad Titus spent some time listening to a protestor who chose to remain anonymous. He shares his story of one of the earliest protests and the part the police played in escalating things. Brad described his interview subject as "a middle-aged black male teacher, military brat, and a rule maker, not a rule-breaker."*

In his own words: We had this giant protest... Late Friday afternoon that was at the bridge... and then that's when this guy came, some guy in a MAGA hat. Well... he decided he was gonna, obviously, he was gonna be standing up for his guy.

"That's when me, Mate and Jaylen, I want to say. But the thing is, I didn't know neither one of them at the time, but it was like four of us that got him out of that crowd. Like for his own sake, of course we had to for his own safety. I even went back and got the man's hat. We weren't about... and that's what the whole thing is. It was not all about this, oh, this violent, violent, violent, but it really was anger and frustration. He tried to stoke the fire—we didn't let that happen and moved back, gave him his hat, sent him across the street, told him to go home. The man is gone, because that's all he was... You know, he was just trying to stoke the fire. And things went back to concentrating on what we were there for, what we were talking about. "Most the group left around 7 maybe, and then, then there was a core group that stayed there. That's what happened.

That's when the police got mad that we were still there, they were still there, pushing them back. That's when they started kind of manhandling us and things. That's why windows got broke. No damage had been done. You know, everybody tries to act like it's so important that this property damage happened... compared to somebody actually dying... people dying. But whatever. There was nothing done until of course the police did what police do because they don't know anything else. So their thing was just to stamp it

out, regardless of the fact that it was your right, regardless of the fact that it had been going on for 400 years. It was, oh, they're talking about us, basically. We're mad because they're calling us names. It was very kindergarten! We're mad because they're calling us names.... because they're talking about us... and we've been built up like heroes... so now our ego's in the way... and we're pissed. And that's exactly how they reacted. And so, and of course if you push somebody, you're gonna get... Oh, you care about property more than people? Then it's your property that we'll damage.

"And yeah, every... like, yeah, there was more than one person that got damaged, because they just kept walking through us. Like it's so hilarious and it's so ridiculously and ironically hilarious maybe, because America runs around they do this whole thing where they show these video clips of these, these cops marching through the streets of these supposed third world army-dominated... And that's exactly what it looked like, like they were literally walking through us. They had shields and wide shields and blah-blah-blah for people who were in shorts. And that's what I said the whole time. I'm like the whole time of 2020... when everybody kept... when a lot of people kept trying to equate this to a violent thing ... well, it was a peaceful protest, it wasn't violent. But first of all, we're all peaceful protesting. Nobody started violence except for cops. Nobody went... and I said, "And if you have any doubt about anything, look at who, how we're dressed." Some of us came dressed for war, and the other ones came dressed in T-shirts and shorts and baseball caps.

"They pushed us north that way... then once we got to that street that runs parallel to Hilltop, the Hilltop Tires, whatever tires that is right there, the one that they say the protest actually broke a window...but in fact it was actually a tear gas container that the police shot that actually broke the first window. I know, because I was... maybe

others got broke later... I wasn't there then... but I literally watched it...

...I watched it. Anyway, they chased us around, pushed us back, and then still we were standing on that street right beside Hilltop. That's when they had a... There was a guy in a wheelchair there, which if you could find him, that'd be a great person to talk to, because he was actually a guy. He was a guy... He was a disabled guy. He was in a wheelchair. He joined us when he saw us, and at some point they picked him up in his wheelchair and tossed him out to the ground. I don't even know what happened to him after that. But, we were... they chased us around there.

Then they brought in the whole truck. And mind you this is just early on. We hadn't even gone to the Capitol yet. They... then they brought in **the truck**, and it was because of some of this stuff ... the reason... the amount of people was so big at the Capitol protest Saturday night ...because of what they had done Friday night. So they chased us all the way around the street, and they bring in the truck, and then all of a sudden they start, you start hearing..., and they start, **"Go, disperse, disperse."** But it's at the exact same time! **"You have been given orders to disperse!"** I mean it's all at that same time... you hear the tear gas getting shot... and everybody starts running."

## HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT

"We had to develop some street medics for the second night because we had too many injuries after the first day, because the first day we started getting beat up. And then, then they lied and did the whole Hilltop, and that's how they kind of twisted the narrative. Because, okay, so when they were coming down the street like the armed force they are... I am a veteran and different things can set me off. That being said, though, my wife and I were there, and everybody started taking off down the street, which would be the case. I, however, took her, and there's this big, like I think it's probably an air conditioning unit or something. But there was this giant step that leads, and it goes down a couple steps and sits in there, so I

actually, that's what I did. I actually took her and me in there to hide... and that's how I saw the Hilltop thing.

"That's how I know that it wasn't the protesters that they claimed it was, because when they... everybody started running, I grabbed her and we went down there... and I just watched it all happen.... with a tear gas grenade. So, I literally watch them march down the street. I was watching them blow the things. And I watched them break the freaking window, and then I watched them lie and say it was the protesters who did it...

"Now, so who was dressed for war? Us with our t-shirts, handkerchiefs and baseball caps? Or the people who came with full body shields, tear gas, percussion grenades, helmets, batons, guns, rubber bullets. Like who exactly was at war? Who came for violence, and who came looking like if we took our handkerchiefs out... we could have set down and had a picnic?"

## A FALSE NARRATIVE THAT STUCK

"It's not the first time I told that story, but nobody seems to care, because now... the other the story has stuck... that everybody started boarding up the windows... and then it was the narrative of these unruly and violent protesters. It doesn't mention the fact that I actually... and I don't know if I actually saved the video... when it came up on my timeline... I thought I screen recorded it, but I may not have... but I actually went live. We were in that stairwell only for a few minutes... just 'til they went past... and when they went past... we went the other way and went through the alley and met up with everybody. We went through the alley and came out the other side. Once we came out the other side, we ended up over there by Zombie Burger.

"And that's when apparently, they had called in the SWAT units from outside of Des Moines. So, at this point, at that point there was probably a three different... three or four different SWAT units



running around all the streets... chasing people around with their little SWAT teams. It was the most ridiculous and unreal sight that you would ever see in your life. Because like... okay... we're over by the plasma center... because we ran through the parking lot... and Zombie Burger... and now we're in the smaller groups now... they've broken us up... in smaller groups of maybe 20... 10 to 20... and we're like winding through... and meeting up... we're meeting up and grouping back together. It's kind of like an organism, right? So we're breaking apart in these small groups, and then we convene back up in these major centers and back together. So we're all kind of trickling in, into this group around the plasma center

"Then this white, this white freaking truck, it's not a SWAT vehicle, but it's white. It looks like a SWAT van, but it's white. And it pulls up out of the street, and the doors bust open, and freakin' like 20 SWAT guys jump out, in full gear running at us... like... like crazy monsters. It's the most ridiculous sight ever, because again it's 9 o'clock at this point, about 9... 9:30. We are walking, and we are protesting on public streets, which is all well within our constitutional rights.

"There is no reason to bother us. We've done nothing wrong. Nothing has happened. They've broken their own window, blamed it on the protesters. And now apparently, they're gonna chase 200 people, based on one broken window. So this is what happened all night until... it happened all night."



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# REFLECTIONS ON THE 2020 PROTESTS IN WEST DES MOINES

By Michael Danos

*Michael Danos became a volunteer intern with the “The People’s History Project” as a part of an Honors Program while he was a senior at West Des Moines Valley High school. What follows is an edited version of an interview Just Voices did with Michael, where he introduces himself and talks about his experience with the Project.*

I’m Michael F. Francis Danos. I’m a senior at Valley High School. I’m 18 years old. I’ve been working on a project for the Honors Program at my school involving racial justice, the inequities that exist within the West Des Moines community, as well as the greater Des Moines community as a whole. Just Voices has been helping me try and achieve my goal of learning more about these racial inequities, particularly in policing.

they thought Just Voices would be a great fit for a project like that.

I have been interested in racial justice since I was about seven years old. After I left eighth grade, going into Valley High School, I learned that there was so much more work to be done in a community that was racially diverse. So when I moved on to Valley and was opened up to a place where the demographics actually match the nation’s demographics—Valley’s about 60% white, and all the other subgroups fit with what the United States demographics look like—so, seeing a community like that, I was like, wow! Right, like this is something completely new!

## WANTING TO LEARN & GROW

[I wondered] why are there inequities in, you know, private schools and things like that? And that led to a bunch of other questions and a bunch of other communities. So, I joined an organization called ‘CORE.’ I attended a couple of SURJ meetings, too. Core stands for Community of Racial Equity and SURJ means Showing Up for Racial Justice. I also joined the World Cultures Club at Valley, because I wanted to be educated—right, like what are these different cultures, what have I not experienced, and what have they experienced that’s so different from what I have? So that’s, that’s where I started.

My initial goal: I want to live in a community that is understanding. So, I wanted people to be educated, and I wanted myself to be educated on what was really happening. I kept up with the 2020 protests when they were happening. My sibling went to protests, and that got me interested. That took me into, ‘how did West Des Moines do things?’ I wanted to get at the bottom of that.

In addition, I wanted to determine if there was room for change, and confirm that change could be done at least in part through my work



Miss Petra Lange and Miss Karen Downing suggested that I consider working with Just Voices, because they both knew that I was really interested in racial justice and equity work as a whole. So,



## RESEARCHING THE 2020 PROTESTS IN WEST DES MOINES

Throughout the summer of 2022, I painstakingly filed through all of the news articles that were written about the West Des Moines protests. Then I categorized all of them, and I had an Excel sheet.

Then I created an Excel sheet with each of the four protests that have been in West Des Moines and then all the news articles that were written about them. I wanted to go into them with just a factual basis of when these protests were, where, etc. I also wanted to examine the media perception of what was happening there and to some extent what the police presence looked like, arrest reports, quantity of protestors, things like that.

## WHO ORGANIZED THE 2020 PROTESTS IN WEST DES MOINES?

I believe that the Black Liberation Movement organized one protest. The other three protests were kind of grassroots in the West Des Moines community. From what I saw, those attending were mostly just community members who really cared about the, the idea of policing and equitable policing. And I think in West Des Moines, as a community, there are generally less people who had experience with inequitable policing in their own life but rather people who were advocating for those who did.

The organizers and participants in these events included: Bill Proctor, who is a community member who is really active in racial equity; State Legislator Ako Abdul-Samad; Renee Hardman, a city council member, was there and spoke; and Mr. Hudson, who is a teacher of mine and also a city council member.

Like there was visible top-down support at least in the presence of community members of power in

West Des Moines. Nobody came in and disrupted these protests, they went smoothly, the police stood back, and the people who organized them were able to achieve their goals. And that seemed, seemed like a very healthy protest.

## RACIAL INEQUITIES IN POLICING CONFIRMED

I think that my presumption of racial inequities in policing has been confirmed. I think it's a good thing that that was confirmed, because it was confirmed from the police themselves. I saw and had conversations firsthand that they knew they weren't doing as good of a job as they could be generally and that there is room for improvement in that regard.

And I think that acknowledgement of room for improvement and a direction to go is just as, is more powerful than ignoring it or denying it. I think it's important that we understand the past and move towards the future as opposed to denying the past and accepting that the future is like is happening immediately.

## INTERVIEWING POLICE CHIEF SCOTT & COMMUNITY LEADERS

I had an interview with Chief Scott, and then I was at a board meeting, because I sit on the West Des Moines Community School District's School Board as a student representative right now. But at a school board meeting workshop, the police came in and talked about their SROs. And I think they acknowledge readily that there is room for improvement in equitable policing.

For example, Chief Scott talked about the direction of the West Des Moines Police Department and said they're always trying to learn more about what they can take on, right? He is curious about how, as a police force, they can shift their resources to support the community better.



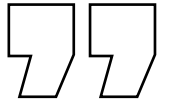
## KEEPING HOPE ALIVE

Finally, I think that the, the conditions of our, of our country are so often very disheartening, but I think it's important that we remember that all around us are people, right? And people form communities, and communities can come together to bring about change.

And I think even despite the terrifying odds of a society built on slavery, racial hierarchy, and oppression, even in a society built like that, there's room and capacity for change. And when we bring people together to achieve that change, really great things can happen. And it's so hard to stay diligent about it when it seems just so bleak, but there's room for change, and there's education that can be brought about.



**“And I think even despite the terrifying odds of a society built on slavery, racial hierarchy and oppression, even in a society built like that, there's room and capacity for change.”**



## WEST DES MOINES POLICE CHIEF SCOTT SHARES HIS VIEWS

*By Michael Danos*

*On August 25, 2022 Michael interviewed, West Des Moines Police Chief Scott. Most of what you read is Chief Scott's own words.*

### WHAT WDM POLICE CHIEF SCOTT SHARED

West Des Moines is my third department. My first department was in Indianola. At the time I was there, it was an 18-person department from bottom to top. I was there for about three and a half years. Then I went to the Des Moines Police Department, the largest department in the state,

so a much different experience there—not a big city but more so for Iowa. And so now I've come here. We are about 90 officers here. The community has been exceptional. My leadership above me has been exceptional as far as their support and our initiatives to keep up with, you know, what the desires and needs are of our community and trying to grow our department to fit all those needs—so, very positive. The culture on the police department is exceptional; it's very professional, very trained, very committed to service. So, very good.

## FOCUS ON OFFICER TRAINING

I think one of the things that sets us apart from other departments is our training. We have a dedicated training unit, and we have a schedule that accommodates... So the state of Iowa requires 12 hours ongoing training. And our folks all get 120 hours per year of ongoing training. Every month we conduct a ten-hour training.

We're evolving, I think we're evolving as a profession...

So, since I've been here, the staff and I created a vision for what we look like—short term, mid-term— so at three-year, five-year or ten-year, what do we want to be? And it's already changed, and it's changed because environment changes, needs change, desires change

## DIVERSITY AT THE WEST DES MOINES POLICE DEPT.

We have a diversity officer now—this is new. This is a result of some of the desires of 2020. I don't put diversity issues on the officer. It's our department's responsibility. But it's good to have somebody help, you know, identify here's some needs; here's something we need to address. Or I'll make the contact, but then we need to do something as a department. So that's good.

## MENTAL HEALTH INTERVENTION

Crisis intervention officer—that's one that we're working on now where we'll have somebody deal with mental health. When an officer deals with somebody with a mental health issue, at one o'clock in the morning, well, tomorrow somebody can come in and do a follow-up: Are they getting their meds? Are they seeing their doctor? What's their support team look like? Is there family there? Are they by themselves? We've not been able to do that. I don't have this magic target other than to keep up with the needs of our community.

## "THE MAYOR'S PLEDGE" DESCRIBED

I'll give you another example, and this ties into some stuff that happened in 2020... There were a lot of desires and requests and demands and different groups wanting all these different things. What happened was an issue between African Americans and police. I mean that's where the contention was. So we put a group together, eight African Americans from our community, and we asked them to come to our PD. We sat in a room, ate together and they reviewed everything that we do. There was this thing called the "Mayor's Pledge." And the Mayor's Pledge was for members of the community to come and look at use of force, racial complaints, and those specific things. We did everything. We said—Okay, we're going to start with our recruiting practices, our hiring practices, our training practices, our professional development practices, our policies. We went over everything, and it was very intense...

## POLICE PERSPECTIVE ON 2020 PROTESTS IN WEST DES MOINES

In the summer of 2020, after George Floyd's death, I don't think we expected there to be demonstrations in West Des Moines. It was in Minneapolis, and you could see where that was going. But I don't know that we expected the nationwide response like we did. As that continued to grow, then I guess we weren't surprised when we had one. We were completely prepared for that to happen. In 2013, we had Ferguson, and that spread like wildfire. We've learned a lot. This happened, and I think we were better able to diffuse in some situations—not all—but we tried to handle it best as we could as a community.

West Des Moines had three demonstrations. Our largest was about a thousand people. There were some indirect conversations with the protest organizers: How can we do this? How can we be safe? And at the end of the day we're (police) gonna make sure everybody was safe. You know, it's hard to tell your cops, "Hey, go out there because they're protesting us." And the cops, they understood, and they did very well. There was a lot of strategy to how we were gonna manage those.

In our training we do crowd control. So, we had the gear, we have the training. So, when Des Moines called and said, "We could use some help down here," they got people that had the equipment. We were organized. We worked in a group, and we did it very well.

## PLANNING LEADS TO PREPAREDNESS

We had a strategy for the protests in West Des Moines. At Valley West Mall, I put a low force outside and a high force inside. The goal was—if the protestors penetrate, they're gonna wish they didn't. I wanted to show that if somebody went to the mall and, when the exterior folks grab somebody, we were gonna take them inside. And we were going to make sure everybody who was around saw us. Then they gotta ask themselves—Do we really want to go inside? So that was the strategy there.

## VALLEY JUNCTION PROTEST GOES SMOOTHLY

Here's what we knew about what was going on in the Junction. There was an appearance that the protesters wanted conflict with the police. It appeared as though that was the goal. So, from my perspective, we had a very large group of cops in the Junction. You didn't see them.

For the protest in the Junction, they (organizers) did not reach out to us, but we did reach out to them. We found the organizers, and then I, I personally, when I got down there, I said, "I want to know... I want to see the guy who's doing this." And went to him, introduced myself, told him that we were here. You know, we felt we wanted to keep it safe. And, you know, I'm not sure that we all agreed, but they knew we were there. We knew obviously they were there, and it turned out to be a safe event. we were here. You know, we felt we wanted to keep it safe. And, you know, I'm not sure that we all agreed, but they knew we were there. We knew obviously they were there, and it turned out to be a safe event.

## THE PERSONAL TOUCH

Myself, my assistant chief, a couple of my captains literally went down there to greet people. "Hey, have a safe night. We're here. You know, if anything goes bad..." I went into every business down there in the Junction. My concern was that a Junction business owner might go to extreme methods to protect their property, and now we're dealing with a whole different issue. And I wanted them to feel comfort that we were there and that, if there began to be some destruction... that would have required us to have a stronger response, we were there and prepared to do so.

Once the demonstrations started, we cleared. We had plenty of eyes in the neighborhood. We had a drone. There was plenty of management. But from the people's perspective, our goal was to not create an opportunity for a conflict but be able to respond if something bad happens.

And, you know, the worst thing that happened is we had someone get overloaded by heat. We had to call the ambulance to come in. So, we had some cops that had to go in. And it wasn't too bad. At the end of that first night everything had gone smoothly.

I had to go out, because I was talking to the councilmen about one of the demonstrations. So, I'm now in this parking lot on the backside of the Junction, on my phone, talking to the councilperson. And a protester saw me. And it was an opportunity. And so they ran up to me, and they said all the bad words and accused me of lots of bad things.

And I've been a cop for a long time. I've been accused of lots of things, because it is what it is—right? This guy should have brought a sandwich, because he can do that to me all day long, and you're not gonna get my goat—it's just not gonna happen. So anyways, that was the only conflict that we had that night, and it was like—go ahead. You can yell at me all day long.



# THE MENTAL & FINANCIAL TOLL RESPONSE NATIONALLY

## WEST DES MOINES POLICE CHIEF SCOTT REFLECTS

Finally, I'll throw out some other things that you might consider: Overtime cost, equipment cost, replacement cost from supplies. These came at a huge cost to the taxpayers. ... We had cops on overtime, a lot of cops on overtime for ten days to two weeks. That's a huge cost. The mental health effects. I've got a lot of cops who lost a lot of friends. People pick sides without doing their homework—right? And if you were a cop, there for a period of time you were bad, period. You had nothing to do with anything. People hated you. And all our cops' families were afraid. They were losing friends. They had

family members being critical of them and their profession and what they're doing. So, there's a tremendous emotional side of this.

We have to find a way to emotionally move through this hatred towards cops. And so that's another piece, to see that picture. If you're looking from a police side where all the things that were going on, it's just another side.

I have kids that go to school. My daughter gets threatened because she's got a blue line shirt on as a support. She's not a cop, but these are the types of things that families are struggling with.

## ANOTHER PROTEST THE NEXT DAY

The next day we have the protest that started at the school on Ashworth and Valley West Drive. Again, we didn't have as large of a group response, but we had a good-size group. We tucked everybody away in the fire station out there. Don't be seen, don't be heard. We have eyes. We had people mobile, so they could always tell us what's going on. We had a response team if we needed them—but we didn't. Everything went fine—right?

At the end of that night, my assistant chief, that time, was taking garbage out to the dumpster, and a protester saw him. Same exact deal—came up, berated the assistant chief, accused him of all these things, nasty names and stuff. He'd been in the business a long time—he was like, whatever. So we went about our business. But the next day our... Or was it the next day?

## STILL ANOTHER PROTEST TWO DAYS LATER

Anyways, they had the line, the Lutheran lineup in Jordan Creek Parkway. We didn't have much. They were doing a walk. We really kind of convinced them not to walk in the street, to be honest with you. But we had cops out there who stopped traffic anyways so that no one was gonna get hurt. We don't want anybody to get hurt. And they, they did, they cooperated, for lack of a better... And they end up in the park, and they... I think they had, you know, their protest there and said what they wanted to say. And there was minimal contact

## COMMUNITY THANKS WDM POLICE

But on the other end of it, there was so many people on..., at these protests that would... When they encounter a cop, they would thank us.

"Thanks for being here. Thanks for what you do. We know this is hard for you. This isn't about you." You know, those types of things. We have a very supportive community. It was a very bad situation, but, you know, there is... We handled it in a way that I think created the best possible turnout that we could ask for.

## NO ARRESTS, NO DESTRUCTION

I'm not aware of any destruction here in West Des Moines, as a result of the protests. I don't remember any property damage reported. I don't think we had that. I think that some businesses that went to extreme measures—they put boards up—in some instance said, "We're standing our ground here." And never had any issues. And honestly, it was fine. Some people got mad because we let the protesters take the road without the proper licensing. And it's like, really? That's so minute. When you weigh the balance on stuff, that didn't even move the scale, those types of complaints.

There were no arrests made in West Des Moines during the protests.

## SOME FINAL COMMENTS

The night of the protest outside Des Moines Police Department (Friday, May 29, 2020), I reached out to Chief Wingert. Chief Wingert had plans with his family. He stopped down at the Police Department beforehand, to see how things were going. I think the crowd had gotten pretty big. At that time, it was fine. I think the turning moment was when a squad car had a window broken out of it, and things just really turned up fast. I had just offered, "Okay, if you need help, we have your back, we'll be over." And at some point in time, after the window got broken and it seemed to get a little bit more hostile, we ended up sending about four people—that was it.

## SUBURBAN POLICE FORCES WORKED TOGETHER

West Des Moines participates in a shared emergency response type of structure. West Des Moines, Clive, Urbandale, Waukee, Ankeny, Altoona, Dallas County, Johnston, and Norwalk—that's most of them. We all join forces, because we're not large enough to have our own special response team. A team that comes with specialized training, tactical protection—those types of things. So, we join together so that during the courses of this protest we had members downtown Des Moines and also out on Merle Hay Road that were helping to try to manage those incidents. They were working both with DMPD and their command. They were saying, "Hey, here's where we need help"—and ours was more—"Okay, what do you guys need." And it worked.



WEST DES MOINES POLICE CHIEF SCOTT  
(FILE PHOTO)



## LAWSUITS STEMMING FROM 2020 PROTESTS STILL PENDING

The repercussions and consequences of the 2020 protest are far from being over. In the Assessment and Recommendations for the Des Moines Police Department, filed on November 20, 2023, by 21CP Solutions, the following observation was made:

*Although 21CP was able to review video of the protests, DMPD did not appear to be readily knowledgeable about the number and scope of public complaints that it received related to its performance during protests. Both protestors and the DMPD Office of Professional Standards agreed that, for varying reasons, protestors felt most comfortable filing lawsuits related to the protests rather than filing official complaints with the Department, ...*

*It should also be noted here that, in our discussions with the Office of Professional Standards, little, if any, attempt was made to systematically review the complaints or lawsuits for DMPD improvement. Though there were four sustained use of force complaints, 21CP was not provided any review by DMPD of all protest related complaints, whether sustained*

*or not, and an analysis of ways that they could be related for insights about the larger system of DMPD response to the protests. The 21CP team was especially concerned about this issue after reviewing protest videos that appeared to contain multiple instances of behavior that potentially violated DMPD policies. The City may reasonably be restricted in sharing information on this topic due to ongoing litigation and, if so, it should share these materials once the litigation has concluded. (Page 45)*

A number of lawsuits were filed in the aftermath of the protest by individuals who were injured by the police, arrested wrongfully and deprived of their civil and constitutional rights to protest. Cases filed on behalf of at least 17 individuals are still pending at the time this report is released.

Just Voices will continue to monitor these lawsuits and report on the outcomes. We will review court filings, statements made under oath by police and protestors, and the outcomes of the lawsuits. We will also attempt interview the people involved in the lawsuits and publish their stories.





# LAWSUITS STILL PENDING FROM THE 2020 PROTESTS

## **FEDERAL 4:21-CV-00043**

Denver Foote

## **STATE LACL149668**

Trent Schwab

## **FEDERAL 4:21-CV-00042, STATE LACL149435**

Mark Edward Nieters

## **FEDERAL - 4:21-CV-53**

Cierra Dunn

Emma Timberlake

Verchon Debrossard

Harrison Woods

Michael Klingenberg

Tony Young

Trentae Fugate

Cameron Lard

Sophia Jacobsen

Jivonte Johnson



## CONCLUSION & REFLECTIONS

We are approaching the fourth anniversary of the murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police officers and the summer of protest that followed his murder. In our first report you have witnessed how unprepared the Des Moines Police Department was for the outpouring of grief and anger that occurred during the summer. Of how outdated the procedures and training were for the officers who were sent into the streets with a primary objective of protecting property and not protecting the people who were justifiably protesting. Of how the default response of the department was an unjustified, militarized excessive use of force.

It was the hope of many that Mr. Floyd's murder would finally represent a tipping point leading to the necessary systemic changes in public safety and police culture that would finally end the 400-year history in our country of violence and injustice perpetrated against black and brown people by police.

We were wrong.

21CP Solutions presented their comprehensive report on the Des Moines Police Department to the city in November 2023. Their Report makes the following recommendations about an After-Action Review:

**RECOMMENDATION 22: DMPD should develop an approach to handling critical incidents that includes development of policies, protocols, and training that address pre-event planning, critical incident operational outlines, and timely after-action reviews.**

The 21CP report states (page 44): *"As with any major event or critical incident that DMPD encounters, the 2020 protest should be viewed as an opportunity for the Department to engage in critical self-analysis and to prepare for the next high-profile police incident or other event requiring that the DMPD support First Amendment rights*

*while protecting protesters and ensuring public safety...*

*Additionally, while officers and leadership described after-action activities undertaken by the department to learn from DMPD's performance during the protest, these lessons were not broadly or publicly shared in a manner that could improve overall improvements."*

The report continues on page 46 to say "DMPD will also need to develop related policy and procedures, as well as an operational plan to outline [that it is] able to adapt for use for a specific event and a structure and process for conducting after-action reviews."

## 21CP SOLUTIONS COMMENTARY FROM PAGE 47

**RECOMMENDATION 24: DMPD should formally summarize and disseminate to the Department and community the lessons from an after-action review and policy review of the handling of the 2020 protest surrounding the death of George Floyd.**

*"...While completing a full after-action report might be difficult or inefficient at this time..., formally sharing what DMPD leadership believe were the topline takeaways and, critically, what the Department is doing to address the lessons. We note here that any such effort may be especially difficult given pending litigation arising from the protests; however, we believe a nuanced approach could be undertaken to share areas for improvement without creating liability for the City."*

The authors of this report note in this regard that many cities, like Dallas, TX, Seattle, WA, and even our own Iowa City Police Department produced and published such reports in a timely manner.

## MAPPING POLICE VIOLENCE

The Mapping Police Violence website reports the following:

**In 2021 the police killed 1147 civilians, 305 were black. In 2022 the police killed 1187 civilians, 313 were black. In 2023 the police killed 1346 civilians, 301 were black.**

On December 26, 2022, Des Moines police officers shot and killed Trevontay Jenkins, who was 16 years old at the time of his death. His death occurred 4 minutes and 30 seconds after he was engaged by 4 Des Moines Police officers. His death is now the subject matter of a lawsuit filed by his parents.

The work to create a “People’s History” of the events of the summer of 2020 is not finished.

## WHAT’S NEXT?

We will continue to collect the stories and evaluate the data about what occurred during the summer.

We will continue to follow the pending lawsuits that have been filed against the CITY OF DES MOINES that are claiming police misconduct and excessive use of force during the protests, and we will continue to support the ongoing movement to transform and modernize policing in Des Moines, Iowa and our country.

## 21CP COMMENTARY ON USE OF FORCE

The 21CP report states the following on page 45:

*“Although 21CP was able to review video of the protests, DMPD did not appear to be readily knowledgeable about the number and scope of public complaints that it received related to its performance during protests. Both protestors and the DMPD Office of Professional Standards agreed that, for varying reasons, protestors felt most comfortable filing lawsuits related to the protests rather than filing official complaints with the Department, though eleven (11) complaints of*

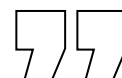
*misuse of force were lodged with DMPD, along with four internal complaints.*

*It should also be noted here that, in our discussions with the Office of Professional Standards, little, if any, attempt was made to systematically review the complaints or lawsuits for DMPD improvement. Though there were four sustained use of force complaints, 21CP was not provided any review by DMPD of all protest related complaints, whether sustained or not, and an analysis of ways that they could be related for insights about the larger system of DMPD response to the protests. The 21CP team was especially concerned about this issue after reviewing protest videos that appeared to contain multiple instances of behavior that potentially violated DMPD policies. The City may reasonably be restricted in sharing information on this topic due to ongoing litigation and, if so, it should share these materials once the litigation has concluded.”*

As Just Voices continues our work, we will try to remember the late Congressman John Lewis, when he said:



**“Do not get lost in a sea of despair. Be hopeful, be optimistic. Our struggle is not the struggle of a day, a week, a month, or a year, it is the struggle of a lifetime. Never, ever be afraid to make some noise and get in good trouble, necessary trouble.”**





## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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**Just**   
**Voices**

# ABOUT JUST VOICES

Just Voices was founded in 2019 and we launched our website in 2020. We received non-profit status in 2021. Our mission is...

**To build a platform that educates, advocates, and collaborates to end racially-biased policing in Des Moines and across Iowa. Our Vision is a society free from racial oppression.**

**We use three main strategies to work towards progressive police reform:**



## 1. DATA COLLECTION



## 2. STORYTELLING



## 3. INTENSIVE RESEARCH & REPORTS

ALSO, check out the Just Voices website [www.justvoicesiowa.org](http://www.justvoicesiowa.org) for more great data and information, plus the first-hand stories of racially-biased policing victims in Des Moines. If you'd like to view our recent annual report of progress, go here. ([www.justvoicesia.org/about/2022-actions-in-review/](http://www.justvoicesia.org/about/2022-actions-in-review/)).

Just Voices will stay engaged in this fight and continue to demand laws at a local and state level that help to ensure the police are held accountable, practice complete and accurate data collection on policing, are transparent with their data, and engage the community. But we need your help and there are various ways you can do that:

- Follow us on social media @justvoicesiowa. We're on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and X
- Share your story of racial profiling, unjust policing, or excessive force with us. By sharing your story, you expose biased and unjust policing
- Volunteer with Just Voices. We have several tasks you can take on that will help us in our efforts.
- Give to Just Voices Iowa. We're a small non-profit who needs private and corporate donations of any size while we also seek and apply for grant opportunities. [Give today please.](#)





**Just**   
**Voices**

# **2020** **PROTESTS**

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