

NEPC STATEMENT ABOUT POLICE VIOLENCE AND CIVIL UNREST



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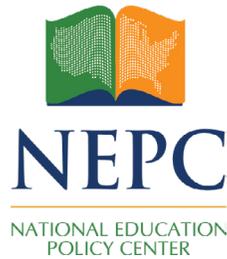
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The nationwide protests following the murder of George Floyd express deep pain, as they should. People are crying to be heard, as they should. The protests are multiracial, as they should be. And they are angry, as they should be. As we should all be.

I don't fear police violence directed against me. I never have. I have little reason to. I'm white.

If I were black, I would have that fear. I would also very likely have a memory of past encounters – driving while black, shopping while black, walking while black, learning while black. It wouldn't matter that I'm a lawyer and a professor. There's no shield from racism in America.

Racism permeates our bodies and souls. It infests the highest reaches of our national leadership. And it afflicts anybody who is more outraged over the destruction of property than about the violence and murder inflicted on African Americans in communities across the United States over centuries.

How could this happen after Eric Garner? And after Sandra Bland, Michael Brown, Philando Castile, Freddie Gray, Tamir Rice, Breonna Taylor and so many more? You'll find the answer if you pay a virtual visit (or, if you can, an in-person visit) to the [National Memorial for Peace and Justice](#) – the “Lynching Memorial” – in Montgomery, Alabama: de-humanization. These thousands and thousands of black lives haven't mattered to their murderers. White residents of the U.S. cannot know that experience. As MSNBC reporter [Trymaine Lee pointed out](#), “We've never known a time when police officers went into white communities and put their knees on the necks of sons and fathers and brothers ... that's routine in black America.”

The racist violence inflicted by police brutality or white self-styled vigilantes is only the most

visible cruelty. American law places only small, token obstacles in front of discrimination by private employers, schools, realtors, lenders, landlords, etc. Courts refused to act when policymakers erect barriers to voting and when they redistrict in ways that limit political power and representation. The result is that a white person like me has access to better housing, schools and jobs, as well as better access to government officials and safer interactions with law enforcement.

Politicians, through neglect and even active malice, injure children day after day when they perpetuate school segregation and deny needed resources to schools serving students of color. They injure children further when they use pushout discipline policies and in-school police to build and maintain a school-to-prison pipeline. And they injure children when they fail to intervene to prevent the ravages of poverty and concentrated poverty. That poverty, of course, is itself the result of centuries of racism and oppression.

The excuses are always the same: “These are private actors. There’s no state action. We can’t prove that this policy really intended to harm black/brown/indigenous people. Maybe it was just intended to harm them because they’re poor, which is perfectly okay in this country.”

But that’s where we are, and what we’re seeing now is nothing new. The racism and violence, the protests, the law-enforcement response – it’s part of the cycle of subjugation. The common chant at protests of “No justice, no peace” can be understood as a call to halt the cycle. Thinking about that cycle, I remembered a must-read policy brief that NEPC published a few years ago titled, *Law and Order in School and Society: How Discipline and Policing Policies Harm Students of Color, and What We Can Do About It*, authored by professors Janelle Scott, Michele Moses, Kara Finnigan, Tina Trujillo, and Darrell Jackson. It’s important for us to understand these linkages. This brief also reminds us that there are steps that every professional sector and every level of government can take to help end the cycle of racism in our country. It is my hope that instead of being paralyzed or shocked, we actually listen to the demands being made by those in racialized, marginalized communities.

On Tuesday, the Minneapolis Public School Board (MPS) will consider a proposal to end the school district’s contract with the Minneapolis Police Department (MPD) to provide so-called School Resource Officers within the district schools. In explaining his proposal, Josh Pauly, the board’s director, wrote, “MPS cannot align itself with MPD and claim to fight institutional racism. We cannot partner with organizations that do not see the humanity in our students. We cannot be neutral in situations of injustice.” Could this be the start of real change?

Because my anger is the distant variety that comes from privilege, I can’t know the anger that boils up from oppression. But, like Mr. Pauly, I can listen and care and work as an ally with others seeking justice.