

What Mayors Are Saying About the George Floyd Protests

As demonstrations over the killing of George Floyd spread across the U.S., city leaders offered a range of responses to the unrest.

CityLab Staff

June 1, 2020, 3:24 PM PDT



Mayor Muriel Bowser of Washington, D.C., speaks to reporters in front of St. John's Church, which was damaged after a weekend of demonstrations against police violence. *Daniel Slim/AFP via Getty Images*

What did the weekend of terrifying civil unrest that has seized America's cities look like from City Hall? For the mayors of major U.S. cities, what began as protests over police violence triggered by the killing of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police on May 25 has intensified into something else – a national uprising that's also a complex, fast-changing threat to

public safety, driven by forces and actors not yet fully understood and threaded with the unseen menace of a still-active pandemic.

One week after Floyd's death, this convergence of urban crises is shaping up to be an unprecedented test of municipal governance, one that's putting city leaders in a global spotlight. Here's a sample of what they have been saying in recent days as events unfolded.

Minneapolis



Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey delivers an update to reporters at City Hall. *Elizabeth Flores/Star Tribune via Getty Images*

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At about 1:30 a.m on May 29, an exhausted-looking Mayor Jacob Frey of Minneapolis held a news conference to explain why police had abandoned the city's Third Precinct building as crowds of protesters gathered around the facility throughout the evening.

It became clear that there were imminent threats to both officers and public. And the danger became necessary. And I made the decision to evacuate the Third Precinct. The symbolism of a building cannot outweigh the importance of life, of our officers, or the public. We could not risk serious injury to anyone, and we will continue to patrol the Third Precinct, entirely. We will continue to do our jobs in that area. Brick and mortar is not as important as life.

The decision that I made was for the safety of our officers, and the safety of the public. It's a decision that I did not take lightly. I understand the importance of a precinct, but we are able to regroup and continue providing the same service to the Third Precinct, as a geography. ... The resources that we offer to the people of the Third Precinct will continue, period. The building is just bricks and mortar.

Atlanta



A protester faces a line of police in Atlanta on May 29. John Amis/AFP via Getty Images

Atlanta Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms spoke at a press conference at City Hall on the evening of May 29. A day of largely peaceful demonstrations had turned destructive after sunset; the city's CNN Center became a focus of vandalism, and several police vehicles were set ablaze. Bottoms appeared with two other speakers, the Atlanta hip-hop stars T.I. and Killer Mike, to appeal for calm.

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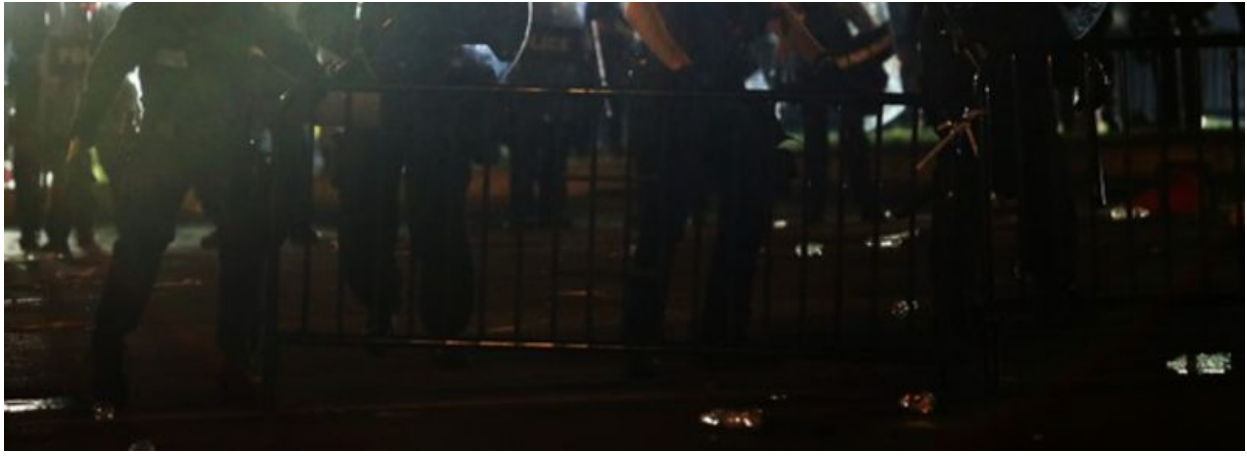
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Above everything else, I am a mother. I am a mother to four black children in America, one of whom is 18 years old. And when I saw the murder of George Floyd, I hurt like a mother would hurt. And yesterday, when I heard there were rumors about violent protests in Atlanta, I did what a mother would do. I called my son and I said, "Where are you?" I said, "I cannot protect you, and black boys shouldn't be out today."

So you're not going to out-concern me and out-care me about where we are in America. I wear this each and every day, and I pray over my children each and every day. What I see happening on the streets of Atlanta is not Atlanta. This is not a protest. This is not in the spirit of Martin Luther King, Jr. This is chaos. A protest has purpose. When Dr. King was assassinated, we didn't do this to our city. So if you love this city – this city that has had a legacy of black mayors and black police chiefs and people who care about this city, where more than 50 percent of the business owners in metro Atlanta are minority business owners – if you care about this city, then go home.

Washington, D.C.





D.C. police officers are deployed in front of the White House during May 31 protests. *Alex Wong/Getty Images*

On Saturday, May 30, Washington, D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser responded to tweets from President Donald Trump alleging, falsely, that she wouldn't let D.C.'s police get involved in Friday night's protests.

People are tired, sad, angry, and desperate for change. And we need leaders who recognize this pain and in times of great turmoil and despair, can provide us a sense of calm and a sense of hope.

Instead what we've got in the last two days from the White House is the glorification of violence against American citizens. What used to be heard in dog whistles, we now hear from a bullhorn.

So to everyone hurting and doing our part to move this country forward, we will look to ourselves and our own communities for this leadership and this hope. Our power, we know, is in peace, in our voices, and ultimately at the ballot box.

Pittsburgh

Wearing a yellow Steelers cap. Pittsburgh Mayor Bill Peduto spoke to reporters after a day of peaceful marches against police violence turned violent when at least one police car was destroyed and dozens of businesses were attacked.

It's been an interesting day for Pittsburgh. It started out as a peaceful demonstration, a march for justice organized by young leaders through Pittsburgh's African-American community, that had a mission – to be able to have a voice heard, in order to call for changes necessary throughout our country. We mourn together the tragedy that occurred in Minneapolis, and

today we came together as Pittsburghers and supported a First Amendment right to gather and say more must be done.

And then it was hijacked. It was hijacked by a group that put its own self interests above the interests of the movement, who took away from those organizers and those who wanted to have a voice about social justice and the demands that are needed in order to see real change happen. It not only jeopardized that movement and that mission, but at the same time put the lives of the individuals in jeopardy. The individuals who they marched with two hours before hand and said they were a part of being able to see something better occur.

Pittsburgh is not new to protests, far from it, and we've had protests over incidents that have occurred right here in our own backyard. And never in that time did Pittsburghers turn it into an opportunity for vandalism and violence. Pittsburghers have always stood up calling for social justice, calling for peace, and doing so in a way that brought us together, instead of ripped us apart.

New York City



Police face protesters in Brooklyn on Saturday night. *Spencer Platt/Getty Images*

On Sunday morning, New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio held a press conference with NYPD Commissioner Dermot Shea to discuss rioting in Brooklyn that they said was caused by a small group of outsiders.

The underlying issues are profound and meaningful, again expressed by those who are peacefully protesting and seeking change. The X-factor here [is] a small set of ... people who came to do violence in a systematic, organized fashion. That is a different reality we need to grapple with. We did not see that in 2014 and 2015. We are seeing something new, and not just here in New York City but all over the country, and we have to recognize it and we have to address it.

I'm going to keep saying to anyone who is protesting for change, do not take your anger out at the individual officer in front of you, that man or woman who is simply trying to keep the peace. Work for change in our society, hold the elected officials accountable, vote – do all the things that can actually lead to change. But don't take your frustration out on a working man or woman in front of you who did not make the policies that you disagree with.

St. Paul



Mayor Melvin Carter and Police Chief Todd Axtell address the media at police headquarters in St. Paul. Nick Ferraro / MediaNews Group / St. Paul Pioneer Press via Getty Images

After a Saturday night of widespread violence in the Twin Cities, St. Paul Mayor Melvin Carter was asked on CBS's Face the Nation about the long history of complaints directed at fired Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin.

Right here, we're totally understanding the anger and the rage that people have. Our call today and moving forward into the future is for peace, but not to be mistaken with patience. We cannot be patient. We cannot sit back and patiently wait while these things change on a slow and incremental basis. We have a lot more work to do on not just how we hire officers, but how we allow chiefs to fire officers. My father is a retired St. Paul police officer; I've heard all of my life how important it is to lift up that badge and to not tarnish its reputation. What we've seen when officers fall far below our expectations – it's happened in St. Paul, it's happened in Minneapolis, it's happened across the country – police chiefs who tried to remove those officers end up being forced to pull them back on the force through arbitration.

Our request for our young folks is to take this energy which has consumed our nation this past week. It's a fire that could destroy us, but could bring us together in a way that we've never been together. Use it not to destroy our neighborhoods, but to tear down those laws, to tear down those legal precedents, to tear down those police union contracts that make it so difficult to hold officers accountable for their actions.

Chicago

An emotional Mayor Lori Lightfoot spoke on Sunday, hours before Chicago endured its second night of unrest, asking Chicagoans to observe a moment of silence at 5 p.m. As the weekend ended, police had made [almost 700 arrests for looting](#).

The decisions that I have had to make in the last 24 hours are not decisions I wish on any leader. None of them were easy; they were all hard. And I know that these are decisions that mayors all across the country have been making, because I have been in contact with many of my peers for the last few days. I know many people are feeling scared and unsettled, but I make no apologies that I'm always going to make the tough but necessary choice if it means protecting the people.

Chicago is strong. This is our home. This is the city that we built with our blood, sweat and tears. This is the city that we must protect so it can provide for us. We know it's not perfect. But if it gets destroyed, we are all left to pick up the pieces. In this city we care for each other, we've seen that over and over again, this is a time for us to unite. We have to turn our pain into purpose in

order to get through this moment together and do the work needed to unite our city and move us forward in a way that is more equitable, inclusive and just.

Philadelphia



Marchers make their way down a Philadelphia street on Sunday. *Mark Makela/Getty Images*

Mayor Jim Kenney issued a statement on Sunday afternoon following damage to Center City the night before.

I toured the damaged blocks of downtown this morning, and despite my deep sadness, what I saw gave me hope. Residents turned out – on their own – to help clean up. They devoted their time and energy on a Sunday morning to restoring their city.

But even when those blocks are cleaned up, when these businesses are restored, I understand that the larger issues that fueled yesterday's events remain. What we saw both in yesterday's peaceful protests and the more violent destruction – not just in Philadelphia but in many other cities – was born of decades of systemic racism and the resulting poverty. Poverty and racism: These are twin factors that work hand-in-hand to fuel anger and hopelessness and violence. And when sparked by the murders of unarmed black people, that anger and hopelessness spilled out into the streets of Philadelphia and in cities across the nation.

So remember that after the damage is cleaned up, we are left with solving the greatest challenge – building a truly just society. For every single person who lives in it.

San Francisco

Mayor London Breed addressed a crowd of protesters assembled in front of San Francisco's City Hall for a peaceful "kneel-in" on Monday, June 1.

Black Lives Matter is nobody's joke. I'm tired of people treating it that way. I'm tired of people masking their racism in black lives matter. It is not a joke. It is born out of pain. It is born out of racism that we are going to fight against. It is born out of our struggle, our blood, sweat and tears, for all that we have struggled through in this country. Don't get it twisted – it is not a joke.

So for those of you who are genuine in this struggle, we thank you and we welcome you. But for those of you who are using this movement as a way to push violence to go after other black people, to tear us down, we will not tolerate that. Don't get it twisted. I am the mayor but I'm a black woman first. I am angry. I am hurt. I am frustrated. I am sick and tired of being sick and tired. I don't want to see one more black man die at the hands of law enforcement. That's what this movement is about. Not one more. Not one more.

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