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# Protests ‘like the world’s never seen.’ What comes next in Seattle?

Local leaders call the current demonstrations a new era for civil rights.

by [David Kroman](#) & [Lilly Fowler](#) / June 12, 2020

Photos by [Dorothy Edwards](#)

Video by [Sarah Hoffman](#)



Left: TraeAnna Holiday is a community organizer with Africatown Community Land Trust. “I’m excited for this collective awakening, and I want people to know that we have to take this momentum and move it forward. Now it’s all about policy creation. It’s about throwing this system out that is inherently built to be racist. We can not just only stop with the protest. We have to actually move it into policy. And that requires all of us,” she says. Right: Quanshie Maxwell is a relative of Shaun Fuhr, who was killed by Seattle Police on April 29. “His name was Shaun Fuhr. And he was shot by a sniper, holding his 1-year-old daughter. They didn’t have compassion for his daughter and they didn’t have compassion for his life. Despite the situation, they didn’t give a fuck. I’m not gonna stop. We want justice for him. We want justice for every other police brutality.... I’m terrified for my sons. All three of my sons and my daughter. I’m an angry mom, a scared mom. It’s not gonna stop. So we are gonna march. We are gonna protest until we get justice,” she says. (Dorothy Edwards/Crosscut)

Black leaders, politicians and social justice advocates are already drawing comparisons to the civil rights era: a protest movement so swift and large that a once-aspirational overhaul of American policing is suddenly within view.

In Seattle and elsewhere, calls for defunding the police and redistributing those funds to communities and social services are now a priority in the halls of power. It seems as if Black communities and their allies everywhere have been waiting for just this moment — an opportunity to abandon the call for



Recent



police reforms and instead insist on the change they were unable to achieve six years ago after the death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri.

George Floyd's death pushed the boulder down the hill.

"This is a movement that's unstoppable. This is a movement like the world's never seen before. This is bigger than the civil rights movement. And the civil rights movement was the biggest thing we've ever seen," said Dominique Davis, CEO of Community Passageways, a nonprofit that strives for zero youth incarceration. "Every race, creed, color, ethnicity, everybody's coming out. Kids, old people. I don't care what religion you are. I don't care what sexual preference."



*Ajab Mubarak is a 38-year-old medical assistant and mother of two. She is protesting with her son because she's afraid he could go out to play and not come home again because of police violence. (Dorothy Edwards/Crosscut)*

In addition to dramatic reductions in funding for police, protesters are calling [for charges to be dropped against](#) protesters. The [local Black Lives Matter organization](#) [has demanded](#) that the city permanently stop sweeping

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homeless encampments. Black Lives Matter leaders have asked that Seattle police establish a de-escalation team. Some want to take uniformed police officers out of public schools.

The website [King County Equity Now](#) describes a variety of other protester demands, including that Mayor Jenny Durkan accept current proposals from Black-led organizations to maximize underutilized public land for community purposes.

Others have laid out a much more wide ranging and ambitious — some say unrealistic — set of goals, including reparations for police brutality, a retrial for all people of color in prison after being convicted of violent crimes, rent control in Seattle, [and other demands](#).

Within the demonstrations, there are occasional tensions surrounding focus and message.

Seattle City Councilmember Kshama Sawant was lightly chastised for using the momentum of the protests to talk about socialist goals. Citizen journalist Omari Salisbury, who has been documenting the protests on Capitol Hill, [has written about](#) white protesters not always being in line with what Black protesters want, and Black organizations not communicating directly with those in the streets.

But at their core, the masses of people who meet every night on the city's streets, in their City Hall and within requisitioned blocks of Capitol Hill have sought to focus their energy on the most dramatic reimagining of public safety in the country's history.

Nationally, over the past four decades, [the cost of policing in the U.S. has almost tripled](#), from \$42.3 billion in 1977 to \$114.5 billion in 2017, according to an analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data conducted by the Urban Institute.

“I think that whatever number is proposed for the police being defunded it needs to be something that folks feel will have a huge impact on our community,” said Mattie Mooney, one of the founders of Seattle-based Trans Women of Color Solidarity Network.

It's already having an impact.

In Los Angeles, Mayor Eric Garcetti has said he will slash as much as \$150 million from the police budget, a striking reversal of the 7% increase he had proposed in April. In New York, [a councilman has insisted on a \\$1 billion divestment](#) from the police department. Most radically, a majority of council members in Minneapolis have expressed support for dismantling the police department altogether.





*Annie Guo, 29, works at Microsoft and says she believes what protesters want amounts to "basic human rights." "I know my family has ours, but I recognize the deep history of Black oppressions is a different experience," she says. (Dorothy Edwards/Crosscut)*

Here in Seattle, some council members have already pitched a 50% reduction in the city's \$400 million police budget.

But cutting a police budget isn't that simple. The questions political leaders are actively discussing in Seattle and elsewhere include: what will be the resulting structural change, how will the money be reallocated to other purposes, will some functions of the police become the work of other departments, how will the resulting smaller force be trained and employed.

In other words: How do you tear down policing in America while keeping communities healthy and safe?

### Giving up on reform

Over the past eight years, Seattle has spent [north of \\$100 million](#) to reform its police department under the eye of a federal judge. It launched new technologies to flag problematic cops and keep better data; it retrained officers on using force and crisis intervention; it established new civilian oversight. In a recent court filing, city officials called the Seattle Police Department a "transformed organization."



*Dominique Davis is the CEO and founder of Community Passageways, a nonprofit that strives for zero youth incarceration. “I'm saying if we do [get rid of police], it would be a rollout to where if community safety patrol works over a matter of the next 10 years or 15 years and the need for police officers slowly dissipates, that means we're living in a safe, loving, peaceful community, and you won't need as many police officers. That should be the goal, a slow rollout, not ‘tomorrow get rid of all the police,’ ” he says. (Dorothy Edwards/Crosscut)*

Before this spring, Seattle City Council President Lorena González thought the effort was worth it.

“I've always believed that this is a model that we could work with, that we could somehow fix, that we didn't necessarily need to throw the baby out with the bath water,” she said of the police department.

But the second-term council member no longer believes that to be true. Now, with a majority of her colleagues, she supports something closer to a teardown of the entire system.

For González, a former civil rights attorney who spent her pre-political career suing cops and her first years in office carrying the water for police accountability, it's a dramatic change of heart, spurred by recent protests and the underlying disparities still contained within the Seattle Police Department's own data.



“If you don't read the footnotes, you miss the fact that the glowing reviews are glowing for everybody except for Black and brown people,” she said.

Even as the police department reports out positive news — use of force is down, particularly against people in crisis — outcomes indeed continue to be worse for Black people.

Black people in Seattle [continue to report less faith](#) in the department's ability to police all races equally. A majority believes the department still uses excessive force. “On every specific measure we asked about, African Americans were still less likely than whites to report a positive interaction with the police,” said analyst Anzalone Liszt Grove in the 2019 report.



Although Black people make up less than 7% of the city's population, 32% of all uses of force and 27% of instances of drawn firearms by Seattle Police were directed toward Black people, according to a [December 2019 report](#) from the federally appointed monitor tasked with auditing Seattle Police.

While some of this is explained in the report as the culmination of broader systemic racism in society, the data also suggests that Black people were more likely to be stopped by an officer without good reason. Thirty percent of the department's stops were of Black people, but weapons were found just 15% of the time. By comparison, when police stopped white people, they found weapons 25% of the time.

The data suggests police are more likely to assume a Black person is “out of place” in a given neighborhood. “The more ‘out of place’ the subject is, the more likely he or she is to be stopped and frisked,” the report says.

“They still have a whole way of doing things. They really haven't changed that much,” said Andre Taylor, the founder of Not This Time, an advocacy organization that began after Taylor's brother Che' Andre Taylor was killed by Seattle Police in 2016.





*“[We are here] to let people of color know there are allies out here, and we are here to support and make space for them and provide extra voices for them and to take a stance against the Seattle Police Department. How can we have so much funding for these tactical uses against civilians? I’d rather see that funding go elsewhere,” says Erica Sanchez, right. “Across the entire country, the way things are happening isn’t right. The way the government has responded to these protests has shown where we are at as a country,” says Star Willey, left. (Dorothy Edwards/Crosscut)*

## Tied to history

The call to defund police departments, or to abolish them, is tied to the idea that policing is inherently racist, with its earliest forms rooted in slavery and slave catchers.

“This is a time like no other time to shift things like never before,” said Taylor. “We’re not asking you to give us anything. We’re recouping what our ancestors paid for.”

“I think for decades we have tried with the current structure to build and reform. Decades,” said Michelle Merriweather, president and CEO of the Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle. “I’m always willing to try, but the moment that we’re in right now and the cries from communities nationwide and especially here in Seattle, I think the patience of community has worn thin. If we cannot come together and make strong improvements, I think the next step is just rebuilding.”

González has come to the same conclusion. The \$100 million the city has spent on reform should have gone elsewhere, she said, into housing, education and wealth opportunities for Black and Brown people.

“As a civil rights lawyer, I always sort of regretted the idea that I wasn't alive during the civil rights movement because I just found it so inspirational and powerful,” González said. “There's so much power in mass movements. This movement that we are all witnessing and that we all have an opportunity to be a part of, particularly people with positions of power like me — you know, I think this is our civil rights movement.”

“We're on the precipice of transformational change around how we police in America for the first time in the history of this country,” she said.

### Police alternatives

Members of the Black Lives Matter movement believe the defunding of police departments should lead to alternatives to policing.

“What would make the most sense is that we begin to build an alternative while we intentionally tear down the very house that we live in,” said Sean Goode, executive director of the Seattle-based nonprofit Choose 180, referring to the change the group wants in criminal justice. Goode's organization works with youth in an effort to end the school-to-prison pipeline.

Davis believes that alternative should include a fundamental power shift, with communities deciding who patrols the streets. This strategy, Davis envisions, would entail a slow rollout over the next 10 to 15 years to the point that “the need for police officers slowly dissipates.”





*Mattie Mooney is one of the founders of Trans Women of Color Solidarity Network. “I think that when we are having conversations about police violence, we also know that within the Black community, trans folks, Black trans folks and Black trans women specifically are disproportionately affected by police violence,” they say. “So I think it’s really great to use this opportunity to lift those concerns of the trans community and make that something that we push to the forefront.” (Dorothy Edwards/Crosscut)*

Some would go as far as to say they envision a society in the not too distant future with no police officers at all, an idea that some might find frightening at first glance.

“The project of abolition, whether it's police abolition or prison abolition, immigration detention abolition, is to basically make those structures obsolete because the social problems they were designed to address are no longer being siphoned into those harmful racist institutions,” said Angélica Cházaro, an activist and assistant professor at the University of Washington School of Law.

People living in the north end of Seattle already function without the presence of police in their daily lives, unlike neighborhoods in the south end, Cházaro said.

“It's not like we don't already have an example of what being able to have the resources to deal with problems that come up in your life without engaging the police might look like,”



Cházaro said.



*Andres Lozano, 46, is originally from Colombia and has experienced discrimination himself, especially growing up in the American south. "Things need to change," Lozano says. "People are just fed up." (Dorothy Edwards/Crosscut)*

Former mayoral candidate Nikkita Oliver, who is a constant presence at the protests, points to the community that's formed on Capitol Hill as an example of people taking care of their own with no needed outside authority.

"We do have people in our communities who move through the community, helping diffuse, helping connect people to relationships, helping to de-escalate, responding to calls, responding to needs," Oliver said.

"They don't have a mindset of policing," she said. "The mindset of policing is to find someone doing something wrong, or to say someone's doing something wrong, and put them into the criminal punishment system."

Police abolition advocates also point to evidence that shows officers do not necessarily make communities safer. In 2014 and 2015, for example, when New York police officers committed to a "slowdown" in protest of Mayor Bill de Blasio's



apparent support of protests against police brutality [there was a drop in crime](#), not an increase as some may have predicted.



TraeAnna Holiday, a mother of two boys and community organizer with Africatown Community Land Trust, said she hopes the Pacific Northwest will lead the way in this moment in history.

“Washington state can be the example. Jenny Durkan has said it out of her mouth herself. She wants Washington, she wants Seattle to lead. Well, let's take the charge now. Let's lead. Let's throw out the systemic oppression. Let's actually create systems with the people who they're supposed to be for,” Holiday said.

*With reporting by Dorothy Edwards and Sarah Hoffman.*

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