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## Contextualizing Resistance in Minneapolis Post-George Floyd: Race, Class, and the Paradox of 'Nice'

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# Contextualizing Resistance in Minneapolis Post-George Floyd

*Race, Class, and the Paradox of 'Nice'*

Muriel Ambrus

## Statement of Purpose

As a Black Minnesotan, I feel stuck between the binary of hope and despair after the killing of George Floyd and the subsequent protests during the summer of 2020. I had never seen as much vocal support for Black lives. However, reflecting two years later makes me fear the support was simply appeasement and empty promises. While Derek Chauvin was convicted of killing George Floyd, there have been several Black men murdered by Twin Cities police in the two years since his death including, Dolal Idd, Daunte Wright, Winston Smith, and more. Poor Black people in the Twin Cities are still relegated to living in areas of concentrated poverty and subjected to unrelenting police surveillance and community violence. I was raised in a middle class Minneapolis suburb by a Black father and white mother. My family moved to the city at the beginning of my freshman year where I gained confidence in my identity as a Black woman from the Black teachers and classmates at my new high school. In this paper I seek to highlight the experiences of working class Black people in Minneapolis; that is not and has never been my identity or life experience. As a lighter-skinned Black person who benefits from systems of capitalism and colorism, my priority in the wake of the summer 2020 uprising is to call attention to the anti-Black violence embedded in Minnesota that particularly impacts working class Black Minnesotans.

**Keywords:** violence, looting, capitalism, white supremacy

## I: Introduction

As I began my research on the uprising of 2020, I focused on the economic disparities in Minnesota and the right to self-defense. Many middle and upper-class residents of the Twin Cities of all races voiced their support for peaceful protests, but were quick to condemn the violent acts of looting and rioting. Who is deciding what is violent when Black people have endured more than 400 years of genocidal enslavement, discrimination, sexual violence, mass incarceration, and persistent wealth inequities? Who is deciding what is violent in the face of ongoing settler colonialism and desecration of Indigenous lands? There have been no concrete steps towards reconciling these injustices and abolishing the systems that still perpetuate them. The message to poor Black Minnesotans is clear: you are allowed to protest your oppression but only in ways that do not disrupt systemic inequities.

Minnesota and Minneapolis are both consistently ranked high as some of the best places to live while being one of the worst places for poor Black people, Professor Samuel Myers from the University of Minnesota named this phenomenon the “Minnesota Paradox” (Myers). Minneapolis is often celebrated as a multicultural city, one that is welcoming of all people and is progressive in its politics. For white Minnesotans the state is excellent: affordable housing, excellent public schools, strong corporate and non-profit job sectors, and a large arts community (Myers). However, beneath all of the success in the city and state, including having the most Fortune 500 companies per capita, intense disparities exist between poor and wealthy communities across racial groups (Eligon & Bosman). Minnesota is consistently ranked one of the worst places for poor Black Americans to live; this ranking includes gaps in jobs, home ownership, incarceration rates, test scores, and more quality of life measures (Myers).

Still, the city is touted as being welcoming and accepting of all people even when history says otherwise. Robert Lilligren, a former Minneapolis City Council member commented on the likelihood for change to occur, “Do something superficial and feel like you did something big. Create a civil rights commission, create a civilian review board for the police, but don't give them the authority to change the policies and change the system” (Eligon & Bosman). Minneapolis maintains white supremacist and capitalist

structures by appeasing poor and non-white communities through insignificant gestures that do not address systemic problems.

Paired with the “Minnesota Paradox,” the concept ‘Minnesota Nice’ prevents people from calling out or disrupting racist behaviors and economic systems which help protect and perpetuate intense disparities between communities. Within a frame of “niceness,” “oppressive actions are not actually oppressive, they are just hurtful” (Castagno 6). The expectation of niceness is what maintains intense disparities in Minnesota. It is not “polite ” to disrupt systems of white supremacy and capitalism. ‘Minnesota Nice’ frames racism and systemic issues like housing, poverty, and violence as resulting from individual actions; which simultaneously blames poor communities of color for the disparities they experience and forces them to adapt to these systems, rather than eliminating the root of the problem (Castagno 14). ‘Minnesota Nice’ allows those with power, wealth, and privileges to turn their heads away from systemic issues impacting poor white and non-white communities, as the disruption of these systems would threaten their power and privilege. Instead, these communities are appeased with small changes that do not stop these disparities from existing.

## **II: North Minneapolis and Racialized Poverty**

My research during the summer of 2021 examined the extreme differences in quality of life for poor Black people in Minneapolis versus middle and upper-class Minneapolis residents of all races, and how these differences impacted responses to George Floyd’s murder. I was most interested in looking at North Minneapolis in comparison with more affluent areas; North Minneapolis is around 60% Black (Minneapolis’ Neighborhood Data). Around half of North Minneapolis residents make less than \$35,000 per year, and 35% of residents live below the poverty line (Minneapolis’ Neighborhood Data). This means North Minneapolis is a racially segregated area of concentrated poverty. In regards to the Minneapolis Police Department, the residents who live there describe feeling “over-policed and under-protected” (Phelps). North Minneapolis is also classified as a food desert, a geographic area where residents have limited or no access to grocery stores, and a food swamp, a geographic area that is saturated with sources of unhealthy food, such as fast food franchises (Horowitz). Residents who live in North Minneapolis face systemic issues

relating to their poor and Black status, including lack of access to resources, high levels of community violence, police surveillance, and poorly funded schools.

Minneapolis' abandonment of the Northside is a result of class and race hierarchies. Minneapolis can ignore the systemic problems plaguing poor Black people by isolating them in one area of the city. The poor access to food, wealth, and other resources in North Minneapolis has health implications as well. A color-coded map on neighborhood risks of coronavirus painted North Minneapolis as deep red, meaning "residents had an average of three to seven underlying risk factors, ranging from asthma to diabetes to heart disease" (Foy). The Southwest area of Minneapolis, parts of South Minneapolis, and Macalester-Groveland in St. Paul, all more affluent areas, were pale blue, indicating the average resident had few to no risk factors (Foy). Quite literally, living in North Minneapolis means residents there face higher chances of serious health problems and even death in comparison to wealthier areas in the Twin Cities. Sondra Samuels, a resident of North Minneapolis and founder of Northside Achievement Zone (NAZ), a nonprofit organization that works to increase the number of college graduates from North Minneapolis, said that, "North Minneapolis had been isolated on purpose, had been given inferior resources on purpose, a lack of transportation on purpose, failing schools on purpose" (Foy). Resident Sondra Samuels rightfully recognized that poor Black residents were abandoned, relegated to one area of the city, and living in poor conditions with few amenities. City officials and residents of more affluent areas prefer this; segregation ignores the voices of Northside residents and keeps them isolated from Minneapolis' residents with wealth and power.

### **III: Whiteness and Urban Access**

In contrast, Uptown, an area in Southwest Minneapolis, is much wealthier and has far more resources in comparison to the Northside. Uptown is also segregated; around 80% of its residents are white and only 4% of residents live below the poverty level (Minneapolis' Neighborhood Data). A hub for restaurants, parks, lakes, and shopping, Uptown is not a food desert by any means. The city of Minneapolis boasts of Uptown's accessible transportation, cute shops, rooftop restaurants, and breathtaking nature on their website (Minneapolis' Neighborhoods). The page for North Minneapolis is noticeably shorter and filled with fewer attractions. How does one justify the

differences in quality of life evident between a mostly Black and poor area like North Minneapolis versus Uptown? It is clear the city has invested far more money and resources into making Uptown a desirable place to live. Residents of North Minneapolis struggle with access to basic resources, while Uptown is abundant with amenities and attractions.

In part, the inequity between these two areas can be traced to the history of racial covenants which segregated neighborhoods and historically allowed only middle and upper-class white people to live in the areas deemed most desirable. A common practice during the twentieth century, racial covenants restricted middle and upper class Black residents to certain areas of Minneapolis, mostly the North and Southeast part of the city (Kaul). The federal government supported racial covenants; neighborhoods with racial restrictions received the best credit ratings while non-white neighborhoods received the worst (Kaul). By 1953, Minnesota made it illegal to use racial covenants; however, their legacy still persists (Kaul). Neighborhoods that historically used racial covenants are still around 80% white today, with houses valued at much higher prices compared to neighborhoods with more people of color (Kaul). These practices impact intergenerational wealth as well. Affluent white families in desirable neighborhoods were able to increase the value of their homes, building wealth and being able to pass it down. Black families, historically shut out from these neighborhoods, did not have the same opportunities. This racial wealth gap still exists today.

#### **IV: George Floyd and Police Brutality**

How does the racist and classist construction of Minneapolis' neighborhoods connect to the murder of George Floyd and other acts of police brutality? While the uprising from Minnesota started in reaction to the killing of George Floyd, underlying factors of abuse by Minnesota police, persistent systemic inequality, and feelings of rage motivated thousands to protest. Many fires were set and over \$500 million worth of property was destroyed or looted (Ellis). Middle and upper class Minnesotans of all races were quick to condemn these acts; and my research seeks to understand why. Many cried that rioters were burning down their own neighborhoods, businesses, and communities (Ellis). Minneapolis is not a home or community for poor Black people when they are systematically excluded from nice areas, they do not own the businesses

in their neighborhoods, and they face unrelenting community violence, racism, and police abuse (Osterweil & Gustavo). Were Black Minnesotans burning down their communities, or places they saw as symbols of oppressions?

### **V: Why Loot?**

Rules of property and ownership, both stemming from capitalism and white supremacy, were threatened through rioting. As Vicky Osterweil explains in her book *In Defense of Looting*, modern notions of capitalism, property, and wealth relate directly to white supremacy. Ownership of land and our relationship to property evolved from the ongoing genocide of Indigenous peoples and enslavement of Africans (Osterweil 23). The ideal commodity was the “enslaved African who provided free labor and wealth, and the ideal property was Indigenous lands which could be exploited and profited from without concern for its historical and social role” (Osterweil 16). Thus, the basis of ownership and property stems from anti-Black violence and settler colonial extraction. Therefore, the destroying and looting of property directly threatens structures of white supremacy and capitalism in this country. Capitalism and white supremacy work together to keep Black people, especially poor Black people, from building wealth and power. Looting broke this rule; it directly put the power into the hands of poor Black people, giving them access to goods they otherwise would not have.

In understanding that property relates directly to white supremacy and attainment of power and wealth, it becomes clear that policing, created to protect property and the interests of the wealthy, works to uphold white supremacy and capitalism. As Osterweil tells us, slave patrols were formed to ensure property (enslaved Black people) did not escape their enslavers (Osterweil 28). Slave patrols evolved into police departments, whose main goal is still to prevent Black and poor people from threatening the capital and property of white people, as this is a direct attack on their power. Osterweil shares that the New York Police Department has its organizational roots from slave patrols in the South, and one of the department's “first major responsibilities was enforcing the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850” (Osterweil 78). Policing has its relational roots with Black people in viewing them as property and a commodity for wealth.

After examining the historical relationship Black people have with property and policing, it is clear why looting was widely condemned in the aftermath of the murder of

George Floyd. The reality is that people “loot” everyday. However, the circumstances of the looting that occurred during the summer of 2020 has connotations of class and race attached to it. From my view, looting is a redistribution of goods and amenities that many poor Black people have never had access to. This is why looting is so taboo; “The police exist to prevent Black people and poor people from threatening rich white people’s property rights: abolishing property is a direct attack on their power” (Osterweil 17). Looting breaks the rules in regards to who is allowed to have wealth. Large corporations also loot, but without the connotations of class and race, when they steal from their employees by under paying them and denying healthcare. Corporations withhold services, adequate salaries, and goods from their employees who work hard jobs with long hours; yet, they do not receive any comparable condemnation to poor Black people who loot and gain access to goods they may need to survive. This is because the looting done by poor Black people threatens the basis of power and white supremacy and notions of who is deserving of wealth.

The looting, rioting, and destruction from the protests in response to the murder of George Floyd disrupted the rules of white supremacy, ownership, and wealth. White Minnesotans sought to explain the mass destruction by labeling those who participated as “outside agitators” (Osterweil 6). This narrative painted those who looted and rioted as people who were not a part of the Minneapolis community, but rather as people who did not belong and came to the city to cause mass destruction and chaos. Vicky Osterweil and Professor Samuel Myers both explain this concept. Osterweil shows this further alienates Black people from communities they are already not accepted in (Osterweil 6). Professor Myers examines the urge by white Minnesotans to blame white anarchists and nationalists for the property destruction (Myers). In doing this, white Minnesotans “exacerbate the chaos and undermine the legitimacy of the protest in the court of white public opinion” (Myers). Uncomfortable with the reality that Black people would loot and riot, some white Minnesotans explained away the conflict by blaming the damage on white outside agitators. Instead of confronting the truth that some Black people were so angry that they burned down buildings, rioted, and looted, white Minnesotans hid behind the shields of anarchy and chaos to explain away the rage of Black Minnesotans (Myers). White Minnesotans are allowed to dismiss the rage of

Black Minnesotans and absolve themselves of any responsibility they may have played in contributing to that rage when they blame the property destruction, rioting, and looting as being orchestrated by white nationalists and anarchists.

### **VI: The Hostility of ‘Minnesota Nice’**

Niceness will always work to preserve the feelings of those in power and hide the truth as it is rude to cause a disruption (Castagno 5). Author Angelina Castagno tells us, “White people have an active investment in white supremacy; they uphold systems of racial hierarchy because it benefits them,” (Castagno 26). Tied with other systems of power, a hierarchy is created: wealthy white people benefit the most, while middle and upper class non-white people as well as poor white people still benefit but less. Niceness allows white people and others in power to condemn individual racist and oppressive actions, but not systems, as they have an active investment in the privileges afforded from racial hierarchies and capitalism.

Not everyone with wealth and status may have racist or classist beliefs, but they still uphold white supremacy and capitalism when they fail to disrupt the white supremacist and capitalist systems they benefit from. This is what is happening in Minnesota. Minnesota is touted as a democratic stronghold and an increasingly progressive state (Eligon & Bosman). Yet at the same time intense disparities exist for Black Minnesotans (Myers). The system of niceness encourages white Minnesotans and ruling class Minnesotans of color to profess their commitments to racial justice and their support for George Floyd; while at the same time they fail to recognize and disrupt the systems that perpetuate racism and capitalism.

Furthermore, when Black Minnesotans do disrupt systems of white supremacy and capitalism, their actions are condemned. Mayor of Minneapolis, Jacob Frey, said this in reaction to the uprising: “What we have seen over the past several hours and the past couple of nights in terms of looting is unacceptable. Our communities cannot and will not tolerate it. These are businesses, these are community institutions that we need” (Stimson). Instead of focusing on the root of the uprising, the murder of George Floyd, Mayor Frey chose to focus on property destruction. Residents of Minneapolis and even other cities were quick in their condemnation of those who looted and rioted.

Minneapolis resident and artist Regina said this of the protests: “This is not the way I

would choose to protest, destroy my own backyard and my front yard and the things that we use to keep us alive: our arts and our bars and our youth centers and our police stations” (Collins). Her statement reflects a lack of understanding; as I explained earlier, Black people are not welcomed into or part of these neighborhoods or communities, even if they do happen to live in them. Another woman interviewed by reporter Jon Collins expressed her thoughts, “There’s a lot of anger building among the people who call Minneapolis home. We do pay taxes and we have a hierarchy. Why is nothing being done? Why are they letting us get all run over?” in regards to property destruction (Collins). This woman’s statement reflected no regard for the justified anger of Black people who were grieving yet another murder of a Black man by state violence and only acknowledged white anger in relation to property destruction. In doing this, she placed more value on capital than human life. The reactions of white and non-white middle to upper class Minneapolis residents in the days following the murder of George Floyd were more focused on the property destruction that happened instead of the loss of human life.

### **VII: Black Elite**

In the wake of nationwide protests against George Floyd’s murder, Black protestors who looted and rioted were also criticized by middle and upper-class Black residents, whose class and power interests take precedence over the commonality of race. Identity is used as a tool; in the name of representation we assume someone with black skin must have the best interests in mind for all Black people, even if they hold loyalty to wealth and power first. The conflict between the Black elite class and poor Black people was evident in the aftermath of George Floyd protests. Atlanta mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms is an example of this. Mayor Bottoms used her identity as a Black woman to legitimize her patronizing critique of protestors: “If you care about this city, then go home and pray that somebody like Reverend Beasley will come and talk to you and give you some instructions on what a protest should look like. You’re not honoring the legacy of Martin Luther King Jr. and the Civil Rights movement” (McClendon). Through invoking the Civil Rights movement, Mayor Bottoms whitewashes and co-opts 1960s protesting while demanding working class Black

communities respond to continued abuse and violence in an orderly, polite, and respectable way.

In fact, respectability politics is a defining tenet of Black elitism that differentiates the Black elite from poor Black people who are 'deserving' of the scorn they face from society. Through respectability politics, "Blackness becomes a tool through which individual exceptionalism is deployed as a justification for racialized policing practices. Success within this framework requires the performance of symbolic blackness through diversity and inclusion hiring practices. Such practices promote a select few African Americans to middle-class status while simultaneously weaponizing their employment to continue oppressive practices in low-income African American communities under the guise of post-civil rights, 'colorblind' policing strategies" (Mangurenje). Simply put, respectability politics shames the mass of Black people suffering under racialized generational trauma by saying, "Look, others did it. Why can't you?", and invokes the identity of Black as 'proof' there are no barriers to wealth or power. While the Black elite weaponize their shared experience of being Black, they fail to acknowledge the experience is not a monolith—some Black people suffer considerably more than others. By no means am I implying that the Black elite does not also suffer from systems of white supremacy, capitalism, or generational trauma, only that Black people can carry varying degrees of privileges dependent on class status, skin color, gender, sexuality, and other identity markers that shields them from being completely shut out of power in regards to white supremacy and capitalism.

Wealthy and powerful Black people often co-opt grass-roots movements and radical thoughts from poor, disabled, and queer Black people. Journalist Kandist Mallett writes, "Whenever there is Black unrest, we often see an effort by the Black elite to condemn any insurrectionist energy" (Mallett). Through representation politics a select Black elite (highly educated, wealthy, often lighter-skinned Black people) become the face and voice of all Black people, pushing interests that benefit capitalism. Mallett goes on to share a snippet of a former president Barack Obama interview where he invokes respectability politics: "Let's not excuse violence, or rationalize it, or participate in it. If we want our criminal justice system, and American society at large, to operate on a higher ethical code, then we have to model that code ourselves" (Mallett). Through his

statement former President Obama victim-blames Black people for police and state violence by asserting that if they (poor, disenfranchised Black people) behave better like the Black elite then America will become more equal. Black elitism pushes the class interests of the wealthy and powerful, ignoring the problems of oppressed and isolated Black people with intersectional identities. When poor Black people's demands do receive attention, their protests and movements are overtaken by the Black elite, who cannot risk structures of white supremacy and capitalism falling, as they benefit from them.

### **VIII: Police Abolition**

I will now be examining police abolition and Minneapolis' response to the concept through the lens of class and race. Police abolition is far from a new concept, it has been advocated for decades by Black activists like Angela Davis or Ruth Wilmore Gilson and also has roots in the historical movement to abolish slavery (Arrieta-Kenna). However, the concept did not gain mainstream recognition until the murder of George Floyd. I will first define what abolition means; interpretation of the term varies, but for the purpose of this paper it will be defined as this: the end to the institutions of policing and prisons, not a reimagining or reinventing. This definition can also be expanded to the deconstruction of all institutions that perpetuate settler-colonial violence and anti-Blackness, allowing for the conditions that cause Black people to experience violence, incarceration, poverty and racism because of their identity. Minneapolis has become the epicenter of the abolition movement in the United States in response to the murder of George Floyd and other high-profile killings of Black men here (Arrieta-Kenna). Police abolition is not a new political ideology but received national attention after the murder of George Floyd, highlighting the need for a change in policing.

Abolition is a commitment to a radically different idea of accountability in relation to harm and violence. It insists we must fight the urge to believe policing and prisons are necessary and that we can call for accountability when someone has harmed others without in turn harming them (Samudzi). Simply put, abolition seeks to break the cycles of violence the prison industrial complex perpetuates. Mariame Kaba, an abolitionist, describes the breaking of violent cycles as restorative justice, "It means that people that were harmed are centered in terms of their harm being seen and valued and addressed.

It means that bystanders are called to be part of encircling that person and it means that the person who has harmed is also called in to take accountability for what they've done" (Samudzi). Therefore, abolition not only addresses the deeply systemic flaws of prisons that disproportionately police Black and Brown people, but it also centers the needs of those who have been harmed, something modern day policing is incapable of doing. By this I mean, the current system of policing locks up people who have committed harm, shutting them away from society and preventing accountability and reconciliation towards victims. Abolition addresses harm differently, centering the needs of those harmed and calling for responsibility without punitively enacting violence on those who caused harm.

The purpose of policing is to protect the systems of capitalism and white supremacy, allowing white people and wealthy people of all races to keep their wealth and power. The roots of policing in the United States stem from the system of chattel slavery, which marked Black people as non-human objects that could be commodified: property (Osterweil 34). If Blackness places someone in a position of perpetual inferiority, marking them as non-human, whiteness does the opposite. On the contrary, whiteness becomes synonymous with wealth and power through the accumulation of property, fancy houses, cars, the latest fashion trends, and even historically, people (Osterweil 36). Slavery formed the precedent for Black people as property, and the laws cemented it, "Property law emerges to codify, formalize, and affirm white enslavement of Africans and conquest of the Americas, to protect, project, and strengthen whiteness" (Osterweil 36). Thus, the racial categories of white and Black are created in opposition to each other. Author Vicky Osterweil tells us, "The police exist to prevent Black people and poor people from threatening rich white people's property rights," meaning their purpose is to control (police) Black and poor people (Osterweil 17). This is why today the police protect property, as they are protecting white supremacy and capitalism, two systems that keep poor Black people in their place as property and allow wealthy white people to maintain their power structures.

Furthermore, Black people, especially poor Black people, are over-policed because they are still seen as property, needing control so they do not threaten the existing power structures that protect the wealth and power of white people. The need

to control Black people, especially Black men, can be traced back to the era at the end of slavery. Threatened by the possibility their positions of power would be diminished and needing to justify the policing of Black people after slavery, white people, under the guise of fear, argued “that an angry mass of [B]lack men might rise up and attack them or rape their women,” labeling Black men as aggressive and dangerous (Alexander 28). In response, Black codes were passed in the south, laws that heavily policed Black people; the punishment was forced labor with little to no pay (Alexander 28). Out of these Black codes, vagrancy laws were born, which imprisoned people for “obscene gestures” or “mischief” in which tens of thousands of African Americans were arbitrarily arrested during this period, many of them hit with court costs and fines, which had to be worked off in order to secure their release (Alexander 31). Therefore, the over-policing of Black people, especially Black poor people, has long roots in the struggles of white people to maintain their power and wealth. This history provides context for the stereotypes that plague Black people, especially men, as inherently violent and aggressive criminals.

How does abolition fit into this conversation? Several scholars, activists, organizers, and both current and former incarcerated people believe abolition is the only answer. If the purpose of policing and the prison system is to imprison those who are threats to the white supremacist and capitalist power structures especially, non-white and white poor people, then those groups will always suffer from police abuse, regardless of reform. Advocates of reform argue more training will make policing safer for everyone; however, in his book *End of Policing*, author Alex Vitale points out, “Researchers have found no impact on problems like racial disparities in traffic stops or marijuana arrests; both implicit and explicit bias remain, even after targeted and intensive training” (Vitale 13). Thus, more training in response to police abuse, does not fix the root problems of policing. Similarly, advocates of reform call for hiring more police officers of color. Vitale refutes this proposal, sharing this: “some studies indicate that Black officers are more likely to use force or make arrests, especially of Black civilians” (Vitale 17). If the job of police is to control white and non-white poor people, all police must do this, regardless of their racial identity. Therefore, in framing the conversation around police abuse as a problem that can be fixed through training and diversification,

those who advocate for reform fail to see the purpose of policing will always be to protect inequality and racism.

However, abolition should not be presented as guaranteed liberation from anti-Black racism and police abuse that all Black people support. A study by the Star Tribune, a Minneapolis newspaper, showed police abolition was wildly unpopular amongst Black people in Minneapolis, with a poll showing 75% of Black voters opposed reducing the police force in comparison to 51% of white voters (Smith). This high vote in support of keeping police speaks to wider tensions amongst the Black community in the Twin Cities. Many leaders within the Black community feel “their work has been hijacked” by movements to abolish the police that are “driven by progressive organizations not rooted in the community” (Mahamud). These sentiments echo concerns of Black community members as well, that police abolition will leave poor Black communities already struggling with high levels of community violence even more vulnerable (Mahamud). This is not to say all of these community members are completely anti-abolition or pro-police, but that many feel the process to abolition has been rushed and has not included the voices of those most impacted by police violence and community violence (Mahamud). The movement for police abolition has not included enough voices from poor Black people in Minneapolis, as their concerns of both community and police violence are not included in the abolition conversation.

My goal in this work was to begin widening my understanding of police abolition as a concept and movement within Minneapolis. Advocates of police abolition argue violence and abuse against Black and Brown people is central to the purpose of policing, which is to protect white supremacy and capitalism. Therefore, any attempts at reform will not stop police abuse against Black and Brown people, as reform does not address the root problems of policing.

### **IX: Interviews**

In continuing my investigation into the impacts of race and class in regards to anti-Black state-sanctioned violence, this past summer I interviewed 16 residents who lived in either one of the ten poorest or one of the ten wealthiest neighborhoods in Minneapolis. To conduct these interviews I completed an Institutional Review Board application and received consent from all my interviewees. I use the names of some

interviewees during my analysis; they either chose a pseudonym, or gave me permission to use their real name. The interviewees reflect the racial diversity of the city: six of the interviewees identify as non-white and 10 identify as white. Similarly, those interviewed reflect a range of genders, ages, and class positions as well. I asked each interviewee a series of questions about their life in Minneapolis before, during, and after the murder of George Floyd and the subsequent uprising. The questions I asked are listed below:

*Before George Floyd's murder:*

- How would you describe your neighborhood before the uprising?
- Did you have easy access to grocery stores in your neighborhood?
- Were there other amenities in your neighborhood (bookstores, coffee shops, libraries, restaurants, movie theaters, parks and nature)?
- Did you believe the amenities that existed in your neighborhood were adequate?
- How would you describe the education options in your neighborhood?
- Would you describe your neighborhood as racially and economically diverse?
- Did you feel safe in your neighborhood?
- Prior to the 2020 protests, did you see police frequently in your neighborhood?
  - Prior to 2020, did you believe the police made your neighborhood safe/reduced crime in your area?
- Prior to the 2020 protests, did you believe police abuse towards BIPOC communities was a problem?
  - If yes, what did you believe was the best solution towards the problem? (i.e. police reform)
  - If no, why not? Do you think it is a problem now?
  - Have you ever been harrassed by the police or do you know someone who has?

*During George Floyd protests:*

- Can you recount for me your experiences as a Minneapolis resident in the days following the murder of George Floyd?
- What is your opinion on the protests that happened? Do you think they were too aggressive or could have happened in a more peaceful way?
- Is violence and the destruction of property a justifiable response to police violence?
- What were any immediate changes you felt and saw in your neighborhood immediately following the murder of George Floyd?
- Did you feel safe in your neighborhood?
- Did any property destruction or looting impact your neighborhood drastically?
- Do you believe those that participated in property destruction and looting should be prosecuted?
- At the time, what did you think of the looting and property destruction that was taking place? Has your opinion changed from then to now?
- Do you think looting has anything to do with socioeconomic status?

*After Summer 2020:*

- What were any immediate changes you felt and saw in your neighborhood immediately following the murder of George Floyd?
- Do you feel safe in your neighborhood?
- Do you see police frequently in your neighborhood?
  - Do you feel they provide safety/address safety concerns?
- What differences, if any, do you notice between your neighborhood and other neighborhoods in Minneapolis?
- What do you think of the proposed solutions (police abolition, defunding, police reform)?
- What does police abolition mean to you or what do you imagine it looking like?
- **If they do support police abolition:** Why do you support police abolition or see it as the next step forward?
- **If they do not support police abolition:** Why do you not support police abolition or see it as the next step forward? What do you see as a better option?

- How, if at all, has your neighborhood changed in the two years since George Floyd was killed? Do you see these changes as related to his death in any way?

My questions spoke to access to amenities or wealth in neighborhoods, perceived safety, experiences with police, experiences during the uprising, as well as the interviewees' opinions on the next steps forward. I asked these questions to show how class and race has created a clear divide of quality of life in Minneapolis. I will now analyze some of the responses I received.

### **X: Minneapolis Before 2020**

In this section I will analyze the responses of my interviewees to the set of questions I asked about their lives in Minneapolis before the police murder of George Floyd. In regards to describing their lives before the uprising, several interviewees described being happy in their neighborhoods but from the beginning many noted the class and racial divides present. One interviewee, Georgia, a Black woman who lives in the upper class Lyndhurst neighborhood, noted this, "I moved to Minneapolis because I thought it was a very progressive city. And I was unaware of the systemic racism and the gaps in economic accessibility here" (Georgia).

This economic gap was illustrated clearly when I asked the interviewees to describe the amenities that existed in their neighborhoods. The six people I interviewed who lived in working class neighborhoods each agreed that the existing amenities did not meet the needs of the community. Viviana, a Latina woman who lives in the Near North neighborhood, told me she almost never shopped in her neighborhood, "Cub Foods is on Broadway. Yes. But it's never been like a safe place to go. Between shooting, between all the trash in the parking lot. I just don't see it as a store where people feel safe going, I feel like mostly people go because that's the only option to go" (Viviana). Viviana's car provided her access to more desirable grocery stores giving her an option beyond her neighborhood. Similarly, Audrey, who lives only two blocks from George Floyd Square in the Bryant neighborhood, noted "We almost always had to leave the neighborhood in order to be able to get food" (Audrey). Thus, class entrenched all the working class interviewees into food desert neighborhoods, with few other amenities.

On the opposite end, those I interviewed who lived in the wealthiest neighborhoods described living in walkable areas with plenty of things to do such as retail shopping, several restaurant options, easy access to grocery stores, coffee shops, and more. All ten people who lived in one of the wealthiest neighborhoods felt that the amenities provided met the needs of the neighborhood. This connection to race and class was easy to establish. When asked if their neighborhoods were economically and racially diverse, almost all of the interviewees noted the segregation that existed. Nine of the ten people living in wealthy areas acknowledged the lack of diversity, with many noting they lived in upper middle class white neighborhoods. Likewise, many of those I interviewed who lived in working class neighborhoods described the commonality of class, but noticed more racial diversity. Most of their neighbors were poor and some were white, but the majority existed among a spectrum of marginalized racial identities, like Black, Somali, Hmong, or Latinx. Thus, my interviewees were keenly aware of the segregation by race and class that divided their neighborhoods.

Opinions on safety and police presence in neighborhoods prior to the uprising were indifferent. The majority of the interviewees did not describe noticing frequent police presence in their neighborhoods regardless of the class or racial demographics in their neighborhood. This surprised me, as my hypothesis was that non-white interviewees who lived in concentrated areas of poverty would have noticed a more regular police presence. However, one Black man I interviewed named Sunni Malik, who lived and was raised in the largely Somali and working class area of Cedar-Riverside saw police frequently growing up, and connected their presence to the hospitals and universities near his house, “And so you have these, you know, institutions that have their own sort of surveillance and police and security. They were protecting those properties right? So there was a very hostile volatile relationship with the community” (Sunni Malik). Sunni Malik made the connection between the institutions in his neighborhood and the over-policing he experienced. None of the interviewees described feeling extremely unsafe in their neighborhoods prior to 2020. These responses varied person to person, with some interviewees describing being more cautious than others to prevent crime, like keeping a porch light on at night or installing a security system.

My last few questions that I asked about the interviewees lives' prior to the 2020 uprising surrounded their views of police abuse toward communities of color. All the interviewees of color, regardless of class status, expressed to me that they believed police abuse existed toward communities of color. In fact, all of the interviewees of color shared that either they themselves had been harassed by the police personally or had a non-white relative who was. This abuse pervaded class lines. Georgia, a wealthy Black woman I interviewed, shared this story of an experience her son had with the police: "When I was living in California my son was driving to my home. And I lived in a really nice neighborhood and he was driving up to our house and he was stopped by the cops and thrown to the sidewalk. He was 19" (Georgia). Thus, Georgia's class status did not prevent her son from experiencing police abuse. All of the stories the interviewees shared with me were deeply personal and evoked emotions of pain and fear. Sunni Malik shared a story of the first time a gun was pulled on him, "The first person who pulled a gun on me was a Black cop. A Somali cop, you know, to be specific about race and ethnicity. The way that these institutions play on people and communities is to put people that look like you, that share a certain background with you to think somehow that's smoothing things out" (Sunni Malik). Across class lines, the interviewees of color all had negative experiences with the police, and they each were keenly aware this abuse and violence existed before the murder of George Floyd and the uprising.

Every white person I interviewed expressed to me that they knew relations between the police and communities of color were strained prior to 2020. However, many of them did not realize the extent nor the severity of the violence perpetrated by police. Mike, a white man who lives in the upper class Linden Hills neighborhood told me this "I guess I didn't fully grasp the severity of it before George Floyd. And I think that for a lot of people that was kind of a wake up call for what was actually happening" (Mike). Similarly, Jane, a white woman from the Fulton neighborhood noted "Things changed after George Floyd's murder" (Jane). Thus, all the white interviewees were aware police violence towards communities of color existed prior to 2020, but the murder of George Floyd marked a shift in their understanding of how endemic and severe the problem was.

## **XI: Minneapolis During the Uprising**

I will now move on to analyzing responses to my questions about the interviewees' experiences during the uprising that arose after the Minneapolis police murder of George Floyd.

The primary emotions that many interviewees felt in the days and weeks immediately after George Floyd's murder were anger, sadness, and fear. I was particularly struck by the responses from the Black people I interviewed and will highlight them below—our experiences were markedly more extreme. Audrey, a Black woman I interviewed who lives only two blocks away from where George Floyd was murdered in the Bryant neighborhood, reflected on that time period as one of intense fear. She was adamant that this fear was not because of any protests in support of Black Lives Matter, but rather the white supremacist groups who were rumored to be in Minneapolis, "The governor starts coming on TV and saying that they have on good authority that white supremacists are going to be coming into the neighborhood. That time was really the most emotional for me personally in terms of being scared for my baby, being scared for my kids, and being scared for my husband" (Audrey). On top of having to emotionally process the police murder of a Black man in her neighborhood, Audrey also had to fear for the safety of herself and her Black family from the threat of white supremacists. Georgia's response was one of anger and disbelief in regards to the reactions of her white neighbors and friends, "I think to listen to a lot of [white people] talk about how they didn't know. They didn't know that [police violence towards Black people] was happening in these numbers. They just didn't know that this was happening in their beautiful city of Minneapolis" (Georgia). Georgia expressed disappointment and pain at having to hear the white people in her life have a racial awakening. Black people in Minnesota had a markedly different experience than non-Black people in the days and weeks following the murder of George Floyd.

The interviewee's standpoints on violence in protest varied widely and showed the complexity of the issue. Very few interviewees expressed themselves in terms of absolutism; answers were nuanced with many interviewees condemning the violence that happened while also demonstrating some empathy and understanding. When I asked Georgia about her opinion on the looting, violence, and property destruction that

happened she responded, “This isn't a very controversial statement I'm going to make and that is that the dominant culture doesn't respond unless there is an economic cost to them... It was, you know, institutionalized, built up anger. After all, we are human” (Georgia). Georgia did not condone the violence that took place, but her identity as a Black woman allowed her to empathize more with the riots that happened. Rachel, a white person living in North Minneapolis, expressed her support for the violent protests that happened without noting it wasn't without cost, “And so the idea that like this state, inducing violence on a population, and then them responding to that violence with property damage, like equating those two things is just a really poor power analysis... Again, it's complicated. All of those stores were burned down in working class neighborhoods. I didn't have a grocery store, I didn't have a pharmacy, like, I ate McDonald's breakfast every single day for like seven months afterwards. I was off my meds. So it was not that it wasn't a significant impact” (Rachel). Rachel's statement reflects the complexity of the uprising; one can support the violent protesting that happened while recognizing the looting disproportionately impacted working class neighborhoods that already had little resources. The interviews reflect this; all the interviewees who lived in working class areas were impacted by looting or property destruction including grocery store access, gas station access, pharmacy access, and other amenities. However, only one of the interviewees who lived in a wealthier neighborhood, Kat, stated that her life was “significantly impacted by looting” (Kat).

I feel it is important to mention that I am a Black woman. Because of my identity, I feel that some of the non-Black interviewees held back in their responses, especially in regards to their opinions on looting, rioting, and violence. I felt this most strongly when I was asking interviewees about their opinions on prosecuting those who looted as well as if the protests were too aggressive or could have been more peaceful. Several of the interviewees were visibly uncomfortable when I asked these questions and seemed to hesitate when answering me. For these reasons I do not believe that all of the interviewees were completely honest with me in regards to their opinions on violence.

## **XII: Minneapolis Post 2020**

Finally, I will analyze responses in regards to the interviewees' experiences living in Minneapolis following 2020 and the uprising. In regards to safety, more interviewees mentioned feeling less safe in their neighborhoods in the after 2020 period: what I found particularly interesting was the connection in concern about community violence. Seven of the people I interviewed mentioned being concerned about a rise in community and gun violence in Minneapolis. Specifically, several interviewees mentioned the three Black children who were shot in North Minneapolis in spring 2021. In fact, one of the interviewees, Rachel, mentioned gun violence as a catalyst for why she believes in police abolition, "The police don't do anything to intervene with that kind of stuff. For example, we had that woman was murdered in the Merwin's parking lot last summer by her boyfriend. I'm like, police live in that parking lot" (Rachel). Rachel described police as showing up to a crime after, but did not believe their presence prevented it.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, several of the people I interviewed also cited concerns about rising community violence, but believed police abolition would make gun violence worse and that police were necessary. Josh, a Southeast Asian American man I interviewed who lives in Southwest Minneapolis said this in response to his feelings regarding safety and next steps forward, "Especially when there's so much carjackings happening at that time, why would you defund the police when we can't even feel safe around the neighborhood?" (Josh). Josh cited rising community violence as his reason for believing now was not the time to consider defunding or abolishing the police. Stu, an interviewee from the Tangletown neighborhood expressed a similar sentiment, "And I just feel like, we need to sort of get this gun situation under control. Yeah. And then let's talk about and maybe simultaneously, we need to talk about how we do crime and punishment. But I think if you kill someone, I'm sorry, you have to go to jail" (Stu). These interviewees were apprehensive about the promises from activists and organizers that defunding or abolishing the police would lower crime and help with larger social problems like poverty. Thus, while both groups were concerned with rising community violence, the interviewees did not reach a clear consensus on what the next steps forward should be.

This conflict came to a head when I asked the interviewees what they envisioned for the future in regards to solutions. Five of the 16 interviewees supported police abolition, five interviewees supported defunding the police, and six people supported reform. There was not a clear division by race or class, rather the interviewees' visions of the future were divided by their concerns for the city and future and what they saw as the best steps forward. Jane, a white woman who supported police reform, stated she believed in police reform because "I think that Gandhi and MLK, they're just I think that their approach is just better. I mean, I just think that violence begets violence" (Jane). Jane saw police abolition as the chaotic option, one that would bring destruction, while police reform would maintain order. Many others who supported police reform and were against police abolition reflected this sentiment. Viviana, who lives in North Minneapolis said this in regards to proposed solutions in Minneapolis: "I mean, the first two are definitely not even an option in my mind. Like I said, people feel like they want to help. But they don't realize that the people more endangered are the people that are trying to help. Like right now. I mean, yes, crime is all over the city. And some part of me is like, you get to see what I have to live with every day. And now because you're living with it, it's not okay" (Viviana). Viviana is speaking to the abandonment she feels from the Minneapolis government and wealthier and often white residents who do not live in North Minneapolis. Her statement reflects sentiments of other residents of color in North Minneapolis that I have highlighted earlier in this paper—that police abolition would bring more violence and problems to a population already living in an area of concentrated racialized poverty (Mahamud). Viviana views crime as existing beyond just North Minneapolis in recent years; the unspoken truth she points to is that the Minneapolis government chooses only to highlight the urgency towards combating community violence when wealthy residents are impacted. The message is then that crime is normal and belongs in North Minneapolis, especially as a place with concentrated racialized poverty.

### **XIII: Conclusion**

My interviews with Minneapolis residents as well as analysis of the uprising and how it was perceived reflect the complexity and urgency regarding the aftermath of Derek Chauvin's killing of George Floyd. In many ways, it feels as if the movement has

lost traction, and the enthusiasm and investment non-Black community members had for dismantling a system that continuously kills Black people has faded. This systematic killing of Black people is sometimes immediate, such as through police violence, but also happens through the intense disparities in poverty, education, housing, employment. These disparities make life extremely difficult and vastly different for the Black working class in Minneapolis. Race and class are intimately tied to inequality in Minneapolis, for that reason I wanted to interview Minneapolis residents with different backgrounds to better understand how inequality and racialized violence and neglect are perceived. Though those I interviewed did not reach a clear consensus on the best path forward, they all recognized policing as a violent system that needs to change. While I cannot definitively say the best path forward in the wake of all that has happened, I believe the answer is grounded in, at the very least, a beginning of acknowledgement and reconciliation in the centuries of genocidal anti-Black violence embedded in the United States. This will not come from diversity initiatives for a seat at a table that still perpetuates systems of white supremacy and capitalism. A truthful start is rooted in acknowledging the deep generational traumas Black Americans hold and the deep generational violence white Americans have perpetuated and continue to uphold. It comes in not just acknowledging your privilege but actively giving it up. Paying reparations, giving to mutual aid, and actively examining how you contribute to racial and class segregation are some of the many ways to acknowledge privilege beyond just naming it. What good does your acknowledgement do if you do nothing to destroy the system that gave you the privilege in the first place?

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