

Is There Such a Thing as a 'Righteous Riot?'

News of the death of an African American man in Minneapolis last Monday—while in police custody following apprehension for allegedly trying to pass a counterfeit \$20 bill—spread across the country this past week.

This followed the almost immediate emergence of a grotesque video of a white police officer pinning a handcuffed black man, George Floyd, to the ground by kneeling on his neck for nearly nine minutes. Public outrage over this police brutality spread to multiple metropolitan areas each night, culminating Saturday night with an opportunistic “night of rage” on Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington D.C., as protesters and “professional agitators” clashed with the Secret Service and U.S. Park Police in front of the White House.

Mr. Floyd, 46, was a big man, reported to be 6’3” tall and estimated to weigh over 200 pounds. Once handcuffed, he physically and verbally resisted being put in a police car and struggled with police before being forced to the ground alongside the cruiser. There, two officers held him facedown, while Floyd can be heard on police body-cam and a citizen’s cellphone video to repeatedly say he could not breathe and asked, saying “please,” to be stood up.

One officer suggested they should roll him on his side. However, the lead officer refused for over six minutes, before Floyd lay still and silent. Sadly, the lead officer continued to press his knee into the man’s neck for nearly another three minutes.

Riots of Opportunity

Many African Americans and others felt aggrieved over the death of “yet another black man” and have taken to the streets

to protest, not only in Minneapolis but in cities across the country. But the protests almost inevitably, have turned to civil unrest and plain-vanilla vandalism, looting and arson in these major cities. As the situation escalated, the National Guard personnel in various states were deployed, and the federal government is addressing options to intervene should the crisis grow.

In Minneapolis, businesses and shopkeepers who had nothing to do with Mr. Floyd or his demise had their businesses destroyed and police Precinct Three was evacuated in the middle of the night after the city mayor and police chief determined it was "not safe" for these public "protectors and servants" to stay. As soon as the police fled away en masse with only their cruisers, violent thugs broke windows, vandalized the inside and then set this symbol of police presence and protection aflame.

President Trump called the Floyd video "horrible" and ordered the FBI and DOJ to assist and expedite the investigation by the city and state police and asked the secretary of defense to gather military options if the Minnesota National Guard cannot quell the riots and unrest.

Although the four officers in the brutal video were fired from the Minneapolis police department early in the week, it took four days for the Hennepin County attorney to formally charge Derek Chauvin, the lead officer in the video, with third-degree murder and manslaughter. He was taken into police custody on Friday.

Many of the mainstream media seem to subtly try to justify the looting and rioting in Minneapolis and the other metropolitan areas, as just another form of protest. Of course, they preach these hypocritical rationalizations from the safety of their confines far away from the chaotic mayhem on the ground and are, I believe, contributing to emotional unrest.

A Righteous Riot?

Riots never end well. I remember the L.A./Watts Riots of 1965 and the race riots across our country in 1967. The riots of 1992, following the trial of offending police officers in the Rodney King beating, were a disappointment and a disaster for race relationships for years to come. The only good that came from that was the still-haunting question from Rodney King himself: "Can't we all just get along?"

George Floyd's needless death is terrible and horrific, but the people who say, "Well, I'm angry, too, so I'm going to break things," are also wrong. A carload of protesters in Minneapolis shouted for others to "shoot the white folk." This weekend, a black Los Angeles protester said the rioting is necessary for whites to sense the fear and see the racism they live with every day. Do two wrongs make a right? Is there such a thing as a "righteous riot"?

The apostle Paul told pastor Timothy that "in the last days" perilous times will intensify, with evil individuals characterized as "without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless." (2 Tim. 3:1-4b, NASB). He told the Thessalonians about a "man of lawlessness" (2 Thess. 2:3b) (also called the "lawless one") who will be revealed in the last days before the righteous ones are "gathered together to Him" at the "coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" 2 Thess. 2:2b).

This "lawless" anarchist is the Antichrist of the future, whose "activity is of Satan" and will seek to overthrow human governments (2 Thess. 2:1-12). Evil and unprincipled people throughout the ages have submitted to the spirit of this evil one, who is also called "the son of perdition" (or destruction, *as in looting and arson?*). This spirit also gripped Judas, our Lord's betrayer (John 6:70-71, 17:12).

John recognized that the presence or "spirit" of the antichrist (the lawless one) was present in his day (1 John

2:8) and would continue in licentious and lawless expression until the revelation of the great Antichrist of the future (Rev. 11:7; 13:1-10).

So, while protesting *for* the poor and needy and *against* injustice and abuse can be right and righteous, we must be careful not to be deceived and diverted by the spirit of lawlessness that is present today. This spirit will intensify its efforts toward anarchy and lawlessness as we draw closer to the last days. It will deceive the spiritually gullible, as a deluding influence, and they will “take pleasure in wickedness” (2 Thess. 2:10-12).

In these troubled times, let us find our identity in our relationship with Jesus Christ, our Lord (Eph. 1:3-14), and not with the world, flesh or the devil. Second, let us fulfill our God-purposed destiny by discovering our unique spiritual gifting and serving others (Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Pet. 4:10-11). And, finally, let us learn to have “compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, [and] courteous” (1 Pet. 3:8b, NKJV). Peter goes on in verses 10-12 (MEV) to quote from Psalm 34:

“He who would love life and see good days,

let him keep his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking deceit.

Let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it.

For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers;

But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.” {eo}

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