

# Former Seattle Police Chief Speaks Out on Misrepresentation of 2020 Protests

When CNN's Chris Cuomo interviewed Seattle Mayor Jenny Durkan about the George Floyd protests in her city during the summer of 2020, she described the Capitol Hill Organized Protest (CHOP) zone as a "block party" atmosphere, not an "armed take over." She predicted that it might even turn into a "summer of love."

Mayor Durkan concluded the TV interview communicating, "We take public safety very seriously. ... We don't have to sacrifice public safety for First Amendment rights. Both can exist, and we'll make sure that both exist in Seattle."

Before the summer of 2020 was over, the six block-occupied protest area evicted the police precinct and quickly devolved into chaos, becoming the site of multiple deadly shootings. The protesters demanded Seattle cut their police budget in half, shift funding to community programs and services in historically Black communities and ensure that protesters would not be charged with their crimes.

Chief Carmen Best, the first African American woman to lead the Seattle Police Department, resigned shortly after the City Council drastically cut the department's budget.

The former police chief recently commented on the *Reducing Crime Podcast with Jerry Ratcliffe*, the media portrayal of the CHOP was intentionally misrepresented to make it appear more peaceful and safe than it actually was.

Chief Best told Ratcliffe, "The other thing that I found very

curious during that time frame was that the destructive behavior, for whatever reason—I'm not sure if there's a political reason or otherwise—did not get the level of publicity or media attention.

"I would read stories about the peaceful protests," she continued. "I go, 'Well, part of it was peaceful.' But I was standing 20 feet away from a hail of rocks. I was looking right at them hail down, feet from me."

The podcast host commented, "And then you read the media and find that they're pretty much gaslighting you."

She described her frustration with the media claiming it was nothing but a "peaceful protest," and the police harshly and unfairly targeted protesters. She admitted the police used tactics that included tear gas and pepper spray on the protesters, but the use of those non-lethal tactics was justified.

Best said, "We were trying to look as non-threatening as possible, maybe not have the riot shields up. But once we know we're going to be getting rocks and bottles thrown at us, I have a responsibility as a chief to make sure people have protecting gear. We can't just leave them out there with soft hat and rocks are being thrown and whatever."

"The Council gave us \$1.6 million to hire the best, brightest and most diverse," she continued. "Now they want me to layoff 100 of those officers. I can't do that."

"I don't want the people who work for me to be impacted by the animus directed toward me. That animus felt personal."

Best explained that her reason for resigning as chief was out of "the disrespect shown to all SPD officers."

She concluded with a warning to monitor how media frames their narrative of events in the world, and encouragement to search

for the whole story. {eo}

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