

# Young protesters implore police to acknowledge them and their cause

By Washington Post, adapted by Newsela staff on 06.09.20

Word Count 712

Level 600L



A demonstrator kneels in front of a line of police officers during a protest near the White House in Washington, D.C., June 1, 2020. Protests swept the country after the death of George Floyd, an unarmed black man, by a white police officer in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on May 25. Photo: Evan Vucci/AP Photo

*Editor's Note: Newsela believes this article is best processed through a conversation among readers. We will not be providing a quiz with this article.*

In Washington, D.C., a teenager stood in front of the White House. He spotted the president in the distance. A few yards away there were law enforcement officers. There were also military reserve troops.

The teen was Adam Lenssa. He was part of a protest standing against the mistreatment of black people at the hands of police.

## **Protesters Want Rational Reform**

"Where are you going?" Lenssa shouted as President Donald Trump walked through Lafayette Square. Law enforcement and the military reserve troops had just used rubber bullets and batons

to push back peaceful protesters. "We're not violent. We just want to talk rational reform. Is that too much to ask for?"

Protesters wanted law enforcement to see their outrage. They were angry and hurt after the killing of George Floyd. He was an unarmed black man in Minneapolis, Minnesota. He died after a white police officer pressed a knee to his neck. Protesters also wanted the president to recognize their outrage. Their efforts have resulted in multiple days of protests. The protests have taken place in Washington, D.C. They have also taken place all over the country.

On the night of June 1, the president didn't stop.

Instead, the police suddenly moved forward. They shoved protesters with their shields and swinging their batons.

Lennox turned his attention to the officers, who had stopped their advance.

"One fist," the African American 18-year-old shouted at a black law enforcement officer. He raised his hand and asked the officer to do the same. "Is that too much to ask for? Do you have no heart? One fist! Please, one fist!"

The teen sank to the ground, tears streaming down his face.

"Please, I'm on my knees," he begged. "Please, one fist, bro. Just one."

But the officer didn't move.

### **Showing Understanding**

Across the United States protests have filled parks and squares. The protests have led to curfews. There have also been thousands of arrests. The protests have also reignited debate about systemic racism in America. There are also moments of seeking connection. Young protesters, often people of color, try to connect with the police. They urge officers to lower their shields and show their understanding.

In a country that is more divided than ever, these moments can lead to understanding. These conversations often happen over dividers. This includes police lines and barricades.

Michael Brown Jr., 18 years old, was killed by a white police officer in 2014. It happened in Ferguson, Missouri. The shooting sparked protests across the country. In Ferguson on May 31, officers of color joined protesters. They joined a moment of silence for Floyd. The officers took a knee.

However, most pleas are met with silence.

"We're begging for us to be heard and for us to be seen," said Aly Conyers. She is a 17-year-old who led the march in Washington, D.C. "It's almost like leadership wasn't there and you can't hear us."

### **Different Police Responses**

On June 1, officers across the country reacted differently to the pleas from the demonstrators.

Josh Ronan is a black protester from Alexandria, Virginia. He spotted law enforcement officers holding shields and batons. The 25-year-old approached an African American officer to talk.

"Show a little empathy," Ronan urged.

"I'm just doing my job," the officer replied.

In another area the reaction was different. Chants for police to join the protesters resulted in several officers taking a knee.

As the sun set at 7 p.m. the mayor's curfew took effect. People had to be back home by curfew. Otherwise, they could get arrested. Curfews were put in place in many cities because of looting. Some people who joined the protests were looting. As it got closer to curfew interactions got tense.

About 200 people were arrested.

Two women were watching the police and protesters. A black police sergeant told them to back up. Or they would be arrested too, he said.

"We're people, too," the officer told them. "This uniform doesn't turn you into a different person. It's just hot and uncomfortable."

As he spoke, a woman screamed as officers tackled a black protester in the street behind them.