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Policy Memo

Research Question: Is violent resistance necessary against injustices in today's United States?

I. **Executive Summary:** My research shows people tend to criticize violence for a variety of reasons while failing to acknowledge our comfortable lens and the critical impact that violence may have. While we sit in comfort and follow routines, people are still facing struggles. Violence can be a way to disrupt these routines and get us out of our comfort zone. We fail to realize the interrelationship between police and protesters and tend to blame protesters instead of the government's inaction. My research does not conclude that violent resistance is *necessary* to achieve change. Rather, it points out that violent resistance can be used as a leveraging tool for change since violence disrupts habits and people's comfort, Martin Luther King Jr. acknowledges the need for violence in the Civil Rights Movement, and there is an interrelationship between violence and change. We need to care about these issues instead of criticizing the protesters and dissenters. Police departments, and therefore the government, are killing black people. We cannot sit in comfort as people continue to die and must act some way or another.

II. Background:

- On May 25th, 2020, Derek Chauvin, a Minneapolis police white officer, murdered George Floyd, a forty-six-year-old black man. Chauvin kneeled on Floyd's neck for eight minutes and 15 seconds. Floyd's murderer refused to remove his knee from his neck

when Floyd lost consciousness and even remained eighty seconds after paramedics had already arrived. Across the United States, hundreds of thousands rose to the streets, protesting police departments and systematic racism. The increase of Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests in the Summer of 2020 led to widespread criticism regarding the use of violence, looting businesses, and occupations throughout the country. I define violent resistance as violence that is influenced by oppressive outside forces and arises as a form of unity against injustice as discussed in the concept of procedural justice.

- The 2020 BLM protests have parallels to the 2011 Occupy movement which was a class-based movement against economic equality and the 1%. There were protests all over the country, with some of the most influential being in NY, Oakland, and Washington DC. These protests changed the political conversation about socialism, capitalism, and the relationship between socioeconomic status with race not only in the United States but across the world. In an analysis of Occupy protests, I came across the term procedural justice. Procedural justice is a strong predictor for violent attitudes and behaviors, e.g. unjust use of force from police officers (Tyler et al. 2018). Therefore, if protestors encounter sufficient police violence, even if they seek to remain nonviolent at first, they will defy and rebel using violence as a reasonable approach (Tyler et al. 2018).
- There is an interdependence of the relationships between police and protesters. Their attitudes and behaviors have a strong influence on one another. This correlates with research on crowd psychology discussing that people in crowds will be affected by outside forces and unite against danger. Most of the time, protester violence is the result of police violence (Maguire et al 2018). During Occupy NYC, NYPD discouraged benign protestor behavior with their violent crackdown on civil protests, thus ramping up support

for the use of violent resistance (Snipes et al. 2019). The latter points explains that protester violence tends to be in reaction to police, and therefore government, actions.

III. Key Stakeholders

- State and Federal Governments
 - In an interview with TaLisa Carter, Ph.D., Assistant Professor in the Department of Justice, Law & Criminology at American University who focuses her research on the impact of colorism on criminal justice outcomes, she informed me that Los Angeles defunded LAPD and reallocated a portion of their department funding to other social services programs in response to BLM protests.
 - Governors and Mayors also have key leverage in defunding and reallocating resources. Currently, BLM DC is pushing Mayor Bowser to defund DC police departments and reinvest social programs such as rent relief.
 - Governments can also pass laws that prevent police officers from further instigating violence by using excessive force or abusing their powers and rather work towards de-escalating situations. Maya Barak, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor of Criminology and Criminal Justice at the University of Michigan-Dearborn whose research focuses on areas of law, deviance, immigration, and power, utilizing interdisciplinary approaches that span the fields of criminology, law and society, and anthropology, mentions that enclosing protesters, such as when UK police trapped soccer fans protesting, will only ramp up the use of violence and escalate the situations because people feel trapped and frustrated - as explained by procedural justice and crowd psychology.
- Society

- Dr. Barak suggests we should be voting in people whose platforms empower BIPOC and support reinvesting and reimagining police departments.
- Dr. Barak pointed out the power in the democratization of the media and how anyone can now be a reporter with the use of technology, our phones, and social media such as going live on Twitter. People do not necessarily have an agenda as news agencies do, so this is raw information and we can act as watchdogs towards our government and hold them accountable.
- Dr. Carter highlights that we need to come to terms with reimagining the police department. We need to reimagine what we want police departments to do and what they will look like in an effort towards public wellness.
- We can break our habits. Dr. Carter mentions that people are like robots. We fall into habits and routines and lean into comfort. Humans do not want to naturally change but rather stay in their comfort zones. Once we break our habits, we can make political statements to demand change.

IV. Appraisals of Past Solution

- Government
 - Dr. Barak mentions that Obama promoted community policing practice which stressed the importance of not using violence which relieved tensions between police departments and citizens
- Law Enforcement
 - According to Dr. Barak, DC police departments followed aggressive police practice in the 1960s and there were altercations in Columbia Heights, parts of Shaw, and U Street. In the 1890s, DC police shot a Latine man in Mount Pleasant

which led to the violent Mount Pleasant Riots. Police soon bounced back and approached a more community-related approach, became less aggressive, and hired Spanish speakers to break down the language barrier in Mount Pleasant.

- Barak spoke about how NYPD, in comparison to DC police departments, had a worse reputation during the Occupy movements. NYPD used stop and frisk along with other aggressive practices and tactics. NYPD was more violent towards protestors during Occupy which resulted in more protester violence and amping up the use of vandalism in New York, which we did not see among Oakland and DC Occupy protesters (Maguire et al 2018). Per procedural justice, protesters embracing the use of violent resistance is associated with their perceptions of unjust treatment. The more violent the police department, the more violent resistance they will encounter from protesters.

V. Project Plan

- My project seeks to further legitimize the struggle of black people in the U.S and help them in their plight towards justice through one of the most effective and dire forms of aid, financial aid - especially in times of recession, unemployment, and COVID-19. My project aims to support and praise black people for breaking societal habits of comfort. They have reminded society of people's struggles and the need for change in police departments and social programs in the United States. I intend to execute my plan by partnering with AU organizations and individuals to launch a school-wide fundraiser that will go towards BLM DC or bail funds needed across the country.

- According to my research, the more we sustain these protests and disruption, the more likely we are to see change which we direly need as police officers keep killing black people. Providing them financial relief can help sustain the movements in their plight.

VI. Conclusion

- My research shows that we ignore or judge protesters because they disturb our comfortable way of life. They disrupt our habits and encourage change and dissent which we are not susceptible to as human beings. Nevertheless, the use of violence as a way to disrupt our habits causes tremendous change. At times when we most use violent resistance, we see the most change and results. Although my research does not find that we *need* violent resistance to cause change, it is an enormous tool for change. We cannot cherry pick any longer. If we are going to keep celebrating the 4th of July, voter's rights, and some of our most fundamental rights, such as no taxation without representation, we must also acknowledge how violent resistance led to these monumental events. We cannot keep listening to history from the side of the victorious. Instead, we must listen to the ones who are currently facing oppression. In addition, we cannot tell oppressed groups how to behave or react to oppression, especially when we sit in comfort and privilege. We must stop romanticizing Martin Luther King Jr.'s "peacefulness," and understand the complexities of the Civil Rights Movement. Thus, violent resistance can be a tool towards change in a country that has profited off and perpetrated the oppression of black people.

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