

New ideas are unpopular until they aren't

The Bethlehem Gadfly George Floyd killing, Police June 9, 2020

 Latest in a series of posts on the George Floyd killing 

Gray Simpson moved to Bethlehem from Atlanta in 2018 to begin a career in horticulture. Gray is a member of the Unitarian Universalist Church of the Lehigh Valley and a member of the Bethlehem City Democratic Committee.

Gadfly:

On June 7, nine Minneapolis City Council members told a crowd that they have pledged to “begin the process of ending the Minneapolis Police Department.”

Wow. Protests and direct action don't work, until they do.

The mayor isn't quite on board yet, but nine city council votes would constitute a veto-proof majority. New York City and Los Angeles officials recently announced steps to divert small percentages of funding from their police departments.

“We recognize that we don't have all the answers about what a police-free future looks like, but our community does,” they said. “We're committed to engaging with every willing community member in the City of Minneapolis over the next year to identify what safety looks like for you.”

A “police-free future” is not a new idea. I remember hearing calls to “defund the police” and “abolish the police” a couple of years ago, in the wake of another high-profile killing. Was it Philando? Tamir? Michael? Trayvon? Freddie? Walter? Eric?

I ignored the idea at the time. It sounded almost stupid. Blunt, certainly. Over-reactionary. Dangerous. Fringe. And besides, wasn't such an extreme message counter-productive when there were many other things to do about police violence?

Does any of that ring a bell?

“Abolishing slavery” must have sounded pretty unsettling to my white ancestors. (I can’t begin to imagine the range of thoughts enslaved and free Black people had on the topic.)

Two very different movements, of course. While slavery has no place in this world, there is a place for law enforcement. But the laws must be just and the enforcement fair. Body cameras and bias training don’t cut it. We need systemic change.

Essays are not my strong suit, and I have no expertise in any of this, so don’t listen to me.

Listen to people of color. If you can’t hear yet, try harder. Seek out their voices. Listen intently.

Listen to yourself. How do the words “abolish the police” make you feel? Why might that be? What were you taught about the police as a child?

Have an uncomfortable conversation with yourself. With a white friend or family member or activist. With a person of color, if it feels right.

If you want to learn more about the movement to begin de-funding the prison-industrial complex while funding alternative solutions to prevent and address the root causes of crime, <http://criticalresistance.org/> isn’t a bad place to start.

Vox has a good explanation of the basics: <https://www.vox.com/culture/2020/6/8/21281069/abolish-the-police-black-lives-matter-george-floyd-protests-minneapolis-new-york>

And this article is for folks that want to see some numbers:

<https://labornotes.org/2020/06/its-way-past-time-redistribute-obscene-police-budgets-schools-hospitals-and-buses>

Be safe, be brave, be kind. Remember that all lives can’t matter until Black lives matter.

Gray