

# Chapter 8: Anti-racism Protests

## After the Death of George Floyd

On May 25, 2020, George Floyd, an unarmed Black American, was killed in Minneapolis, Minnesota, while being arrested for allegedly using a counterfeit \$20 bill. Derek Chauvin, a white police officer, killed him by kneeling on his throat for eight minutes and 48 seconds in front of other officers and passersby. Videos of the incident, captured on smartphones by some of these shocked bystanders, sparked perhaps the [most widespread civil rights protests in US history](#). These protests were closely associated with the Black Lives Matter movement, which began in July 2013 when activists took to social



*Photo by Mike Von on Unsplash*

University sociology professor Michael Eric Dyson noted, “This is a global, if you will, acknowledgment to match the global pandemic. It’s a global explosion of consciousness and that is attributable to our young, brilliant black people who have led the way.”

media using the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter to protest a jury acquitting George Zimmerman for shooting and killing an African-American teen, Trayvon Martin.

The focus of the protests were police brutality and the systemic racism of policing and the criminal justice system. They also contributed to a broader conversation that long predated Floyd’s death about the epidemic of racism in America.

In their immediate aftermath, the protests seemed to have had a remarkable impact on public attitudes towards structural racism in the US. [Polls](#) released in the weeks after the protest found that over 65% of Americans agreed that “racial and ethnic discrimination is a big problem in the United States,” nearly 60% expressed dissatisfaction at race relations, and 60% called race relations “generally bad.”

Another remarkable aspect of the protests was their global scale. [Four thousand cities](#) worldwide held protests in solidarity with the cause from May to July 2020, including cities in all ten provinces and three territories of Canada. People from Belgium, the UK, Brazil, and other countries [protested](#) not just Floyd’s murder but also the racism they saw in their own nations, communities, and histories. Georgetown

## As you read the chapter, consider the following questions:

- This chapter includes a description of W.E.B. Du Bois, a pioneering Black sociologist in the United States. Over a century ago, Du Bois began asking newspapers and other publications to use a capital letter “N” when writing “Negro.” He wrote “The use of a small letter for the name of twelve million Americans and two hundred million human beings was a personal insult.” In 2020, in response to the protests following Floyd’s deaths, newspapers and other media decided to capitalize “Black” when referring to Black people. In a memo from The Times, the executive editor and associate managing editor wrote “We believe this style best conveys elements of shared history and identity, and reflects our goal to be respectful of all the people and communities we cover.” The national editor said “It seems like such a minor change, black versus Black. But for many people the capitalization of that one letter is the difference between a color and a culture.” Why do you think the capital “B” might be an improvement when describing a “race” or a cultural group? Why might it be a problem?
- The video of George Floyd’s death was circulated during the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on what you’ve learned about the inequitable impact the disease had on Black and other racialized communities, do you think the pandemic affected the size and scope of the protests? Why and how?
- In the wake of the global protests and citing the Black Lives Matter movement, Jenny Slate [resigned her role](#) as the voice actor for her character Missy Foreman-Greenwald, a young Black girl on the Netflix cartoon series *Big Mouth*. In the announcement made on her Instagram account, Slate, who is white, said she believed “Black characters on an animated show should be played by Black actors.” Slate credits Black Lives Matter for her newfound awareness about “the ways that I”—a voice actor for a cartoon character—“am part of the problem.” Engaging with the concepts of white privilege and systemic racism discussed in this chapter, explain why a white actor voicing a cartoon character of a different race makes that actor, who may not be racist themselves, part of the problem of racism.



## Additional online resources

Here are some of the changes activists say will help address systemic racism and racist policing practices in Canada.

- Armstrong, L., & Lorinc, J. (2020, June 19). [Black Lives Matter Toronto issues 27 demands for reform in major anti-police protest](#). Toronto Star.

Learn more about the movement on their website.

- [Black Lives Matters](#) [Website].

This article includes photos of the global protests. Did you participate in a protest?

- Liubchenkova, N. (2020, June 16). [In pictures: Black Lives Matter protests taking on the world](#). Euronews.

This article gives some history and context for the Black Lives Matter movement.

- Smith, J. (2020, June 16). [The power of Black Lives Matter](#). Rolling Stone