BLACK LIVES MATTER
L.A. FIGHTS FOR BLACK LIVES

Thousands of Angelenos take to the streets and call for police reforms as city reckons with protests and unrest

BY ISAI ROCHA AND AVERY BISSETT

On Memorial Day, George Floyd died while being detained by police in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Fifteen hundred miles away, Angelenos took to the streets to protest and voice their anger at police brutality and the killing of people of color.

Converging on Los Angeles’ civic center on Wednesday, May 27, hundreds gathered in front of the Metropolitan Detention Center, chanting “Black Lives Matter!” Camera crews captured a protester falling to the ground from the hood of a CHP cruiser as protesters hurled debris at it.

Demonstrations grew by the day, and by the weekend thousands protested across the city, as did citizens across the country.

“We really need the media to step up for black people and for justice. We took to the streets with masks on amidst a pandemic to show up for George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery and so many other black people whose lives have been cut short by the anti-black racism that exists in this country,” Black Lives Matter (BLM-LA) co-founder Patrisse Cullors told L.A. Weekly in a written statement. “We are in pain and we are demanding this country defund the police, to invest in the critical social services that so many of us need during this pandemic moment. This week is our Week Of Action in defense of black lives, where we outline our five demands. We urge Los Angeles to join us and find ways to take action.”

We’ve all seen the video footage of Floyd’s death, showing him on the ground as police officer Derek Chauvin kneels on his neck, Floyd repeatedly saying “I can’t breathe” and pleading for relief. Officers involved in the incident have since been fired, and Chauvin was charged with third-degree murder.

Hundreds of protesters made their way to downtown Los Angeles on Friday, as the LAPD attempted to break up the crowd after declaring the rally an unlawful assembly.

Around 6 p.m., the protesters made several attempts to march toward freeways, but were blocked by cordons of LAPD officers. A smaller group did split from the crowd and stop traffic on the 110 South Freeway, where they sat and even gathered around the few LAPD officers on the scene. The officers drew their weapons as the group guided them toward the freeway’s center divider, but ultimately it did not escalate at that moment.

On city streets, a larger group of the protesters were more vocal. A few got in front of officers and yelled, while non-confrontational citizens attempted to intervene and pull away the more vocal ones.

With local news choppers capturing the scene, a line of officers attempted to guide the marchers away from the freeway on-ramp. Some of the marchers smashed police cruiser windows, and an LAPD officer and a protester wrestled each other to the ground as demonstrators and the LAPD looked on. The officer was then ushered away from the scene.

Though L.A. has seen a week of nonviolent...
protests — some even popped up in relatively removed suburbs such as Irvine and Santa Clarita — it was perhaps Saturday’s events that still proved to be an inflection point. Thousands converged in the Fairfax District for a march organized by BLM-LA. Unlike in 1992, during the protests and riots after the Rodney King acquittals, the seminal moments would occur in a markedly different setting.

“I thought it was important geographically the neighborhood we were meeting up in,” said Celia, a black teaching artist who attended the march. “Because that neighborhood is predominantly white, and it’s important for white Angelenos and huge businesses, successful businesses, in that area to recognize that it’s an Angeleno and American issue.”

Protesters painted a scene of community, with a largely positive, nonviolent atmosphere.

“I left before things seemed to have gotten really intense, but while I was there it was very emotional and overwhelming to see thousands of people stand in solidarity,” protester Britnee Sweat told L.A. Weekly. “It was a great feeling to have that reassurance that there are so many people who truly believe that black lives do matter.”

“It was incredible, there were so many people and people with care and love and solidarity in their hearts,” recalled Celia. “People were handing out masks, water, snacks — it was very hot, especially with the masks, and we were walking 12 miles.”

Events, however, would take a turn, just as they did earlier in the week when demonstrations took over freeways, trash cans burned, and there was scattered looting of businesses, such as the Target on 7th and Figueroa.

“There were moments of tenseness... The police presence was very powerful and they initiated contact very early on,” said Celia. “We left from Pan Pacific Park and stopped momentarily at 3rd and Fairfax, and they were already shooting rubber bullets at that location.”

Another attendee, Richard, recounted the moment he saw the LAPD advancing, aggressively yelling, as he watched friends get shot with rubber bullets.

By mid-afternoon, police cars had been torched, businesses were looted and altercations with police broke out. At least five officers would be injured that day and hundreds of protesters arrested, according to the LAPD.

Multiple marchers told L.A. Weekly that people unaffiliated with the nonviolent protest were responsible for the mayhem. Both Mayor Eric Garcetti and Governor Gavin Newsom said they believed out-of-town agitators were sent into the city to disrupt protests, with Garcetti going as far as calling them “organized criminals” and Newsom refusing to give any specific group public acknowledgment.

Within hours, Garcetti ordered a curfew of downtown L.A., which by nightfall became citywide. The governor declared a state of emergency as 1,000 National Guard members were deployed to assist law enforcement.

“...At one point, you’ve got to take the temperature of the crowd, and eventually it starts getting ugly, we’ve got hundreds in this area ready to go in,” Garcetti said later. He also declared, “This is no longer a protest, this is destruction. Looting, stealing or vandalizing have nothing to do with the protest.”

The one-night, citywide curfew would be followed, at the time of this writing, by three consecutive nights of countywide curfews, from evening to early morning. In some localities, curfews began as early as 1 p.m.

Meanwhile, on Monday President Donald Trump controversially threatened to dispatch active-duty military units across the country to “stop the rioting, looting, vandalism, as-
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“MELINA ABDULLAH,
A CO-FOUNDER OF BLACK LIVES MATTER LOS ANGELES

saults and destruction of property.”

At least 3,000 arrests have been made in L.A. County since protests began — the vast majority for offenses unrelated to looting or rioting.

DeShawn Brown drove from the Valley on Sunday to attend his first protest. Marching from Santa Monica to Venice in a demonstration that was “95 percent peaceful,” he, like many residents, received the official alert for a 6 p.m. curfew at 5:18 p.m. He immediately started walking with a group back to his car, only to be delayed by a labyrinth of street closures and police blockades.

Less than half an hour after curfew and still on Olympic, multiple police cars arrived. Officers leapt out, weapons drawn, yelling “Don’t move!” and “Get on the ground!”

Brown and the group were zip-tied and held on the curb until a bus arrived to transport them to an unhygienic detention center at the Santa Monica Airport. He was finally released with a citation around 2:30 a.m. and returned home at 4:30 a.m.

Brown was one of more than 400 people arrested in Santa Monica on Sunday night. The very next day, LAPD’s Hollywood division reported a daily record — nearly 600 arrests, mostly for curfew violations.

Recalling that night, Brown said he wasn’t scared. “I was doing the right thing for my family members, for my friends, for myself.”

Where Los Angeles goes from this historic, at times combative week remains to be seen. Protests across the nation show no sign of abating in the midst of a global pandemic during which people have been advised to wear face coverings and avoid large gatherings for more than two months.

“I could put together another task force. I could promise and promote a few pieces of legislation, but program passing is not problem solving,” Newsom said Monday. “You got to change hearts, you got to change culture, not just laws.”

A six-plus-hour Zoom meeting for the Los Angeles Board of Police Commissioners — its first since the protests began — saw Angeleno after Angeleno call in for two-minute public comment periods while more than 16,000 watched streams online. At times emotional, comments were overwhelmingly critical, even scathing, of the LAPD and the commission’s oversight of the police force.

Many called for Chief Michel Moore to be fired, particularly in light of his quickly retracted and widely panned statement Monday assigning blame to protesters for the death of George Floyd. Others accused local law enforcement of hypocrisy and paying lip service to Floyd, given police killings of Angelenos.

“This is about #GeorgeFloyd and about so much more than him...It’s about the thousands of folks who are killed by police every year, including #KennethRossJr, #WakieshaWilson, #GrecharioMack, #RyanTwyman and LeeJefferson, whose families were all at the protest,” Melina Abdullah, a co-founder of Black Lives Matter Los Angeles, wrote in a statement to the Weekly. “This is also about a system of policing that puts targets on the backs of black people and eats up public funds which could be used for resources and services, like permanent housing, healthcare, youth programs, parks and libraries.”

Protests continued Tuesday, as hundreds marched the streets of L.A. County, from downtown L.A. and Hollywood to Manhattan Beach, Pasadena and even Windsor Square, where Mayor Garcetti resides.

Some made their way to City Hall, where they met without incident both LAPD and National Guard members. At several points, protesters knelted for eight-minute tributes. Garcetti at one point joined in.

Hundreds that gathered in front of the mayor’s home stayed past the curfew, continuing to chant, although it did not appear that the mayor was there.

Addressing Angelenos from City Hall, Garcetti said that he did not plan on implementing a weekend curfew, but would take things day-to-day. Earlier that evening, L.A. County Sheriff Alex Villanueva insisted in an interview with KTLA 5 that curfews would continue “until organized protests are gone.” Critics such as the ACLU have labeled them unconstitutional and counterproductive.

As the 6 p.m. curfew went into effect, handfuls of protesters lingered throughout L.A. Some allowed themselves to be arrested; others scattered to avoid police. With Wednesday would come more planned protests.
ART HELPS US UNDERSTAND AND TAKE BETTER CARE OF EACH OTHER
Visual artists of all genres respond to this moment in history

BY SHANA NYS DAMBROT

Art at its best is not always only about the artist's own self-expression, as powerful as that is. Sometimes the power comes from the artist's gift for expressing that self on behalf of the culture, and reflecting us back to ourselves at a higher level of insight. This is a time of collective anger and grief, of volatile, complex emotions and fresh calls to action, and our progress must be rooted in an honest conversation—no matter how uncomfortable—about what is happening and what is at stake.

At moments of profound societal change such as this, a further gift of the artist is to offer us tools to conceive and imagine the terms of badly needed structural change. When powerful issues, histories, fears and hopes are on the move, art can bridge gaps of language, terminology, entrenched positions and unconscious biases and give form to what can be difficult to articulate but is nevertheless deeply felt. Whether serving as education for those who resist change, inspiration for those who persist in the face of violence and oppression, or a document for the future to access the texture of this time in history, artists are among the most valuable voices in a truly just society.

Here is a selection of some of the most compelling work being put out there this week, especially through the IG platform. Honorific commemorative portraits of George Floyd from the saintly to the heroic, clever and eulogistic by Otha “Vakseen” Davis III, Patrick Martinez, Chad Robertson and Carlos Rolón (who has made a high-res download available for distribution and marching with). A new GIF of the 2018 work “Blue Love” by Lorna Simpson expressing the power of the focused, engaged mind. A tribute to the last terrible moments of Floyd’s life made from collaged pages of Luke Cage, Cloak and Black Panther stories, by Isaac Brynjegard-Bialik.

Calida Rawles and Diedrick Brackens have teamed up on a project supported by Various Small Fires to offer limited edition posters of a pair of their works in exchange for proof of donation to progressive activist and protest-support funds. Miles Regis channels the fierce organic energy of the diverse crowds of protesters into a street scene that is both hopeful and fraught, simply titled “America.” And the radiant architect, designer, illustrator, children's book author and 2016 White House Innovators of Color fellow Nikkolas Smith reinterprets an indelible work of photojournalism in his classic, soulful and evocatively painterly style.

Look closely, be inspired, seek out and amplify these and other voices, and take care of each other.
Thieves take advantage of protests to target cannabis stores

BY JIMI DEVINE

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n the midst of the ongoing crime wave that's targeted the legal cannabis industry in California over the last few years, organized criminal groups are now using protests over the murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis Police as a distraction to target pot.

These more organized groups have proven to be a factor, in addition to those dispensaries caught up in wider looting waves hitting a variety of businesses across the state. But many of the locations across the state's biggest cannabis markets in Los Angeles and were well removed from the protests at the time of their robbery. Not all, but enough to be suspicious.

With police resources heavily focused on the ongoing demonstrations across the U.S., nobody is showing up to help when these cannabis locations are getting targeted. Many dispensaries saw multiple waves of looters attempting to scavenge whatever was left or make multiple efforts to breach a facility. One location saw eight attempts to gain entry all fail.

It's not just dispensaries we're talking about, grow, distribution and manufacturers are also targets. One of the things industry insiders pointed to was how accessible the locations of all these facilities had been through the Bureau of Cannabis Control's website prior to their removal, but regardless, the streets talk. Many have questioned the idea of those addresses being so accessible since the earliest days.

The resulting chaos has now left many places closed in lockdown. Parts of the supply chain are essentially halted for dispensaries that survived the demonstrations.

Another looming aspect of the destruction — whatever federal aid comes to help repair America from the weekend will not include the cannabis industry. As with coronavirus, pot businesses will be barred from participating in whatever support structures are created for the many businesses destroyed since Friday night.

Within the darkness, many dispensaries have not let the damage and losses they've sustained impact their view on the message at the root of these protests around George Floyd's murder. Among them is Cookies, who had their shops on Melrose and in Oakland decimated. Berner, Cookies' co-founder and CEO, spoke with L.A. Weekly about the current unrest.

"The world is in pain, without justice how can I expect anything else right now, a statement needed to be made," Berner said. "We were able to re-build and open our store back up today, but that man's life is gone."

A Bay Area native, Berner has seen his fair share of controversial police encounters resulting in a loss of life shake communities to their core. It's been an all too common occurrence in places like Oakland and San Francisco. "We are fed up with the justice system and pray all of the officials involved in George Floyd's murder face criminal charges," he said. "We will be here to continue to spread love through this plant and bringing positive vibes to the city of Los Angeles."

The industry in other states is dealing with the same issues. One letter currently making the rounds across social media in the industry comes from Kris Krane. Krane is co-founder and president of 4Front, one of the industries leading investment and operations firm, but has also been an activist for over 20 years. His 4Front's Mission South Side dispensary in Chicago was hit hard over the weekend. Krane posted his personal take.

"We were one of a number of dispensaries in the Chicago area and nationwide to be targeted, and in this case we were also part of a spate of lootings in our neighborhood," Krane told colleagues in a Facebook post while noting nearly every other business in the neighborhood had been destroyed.

Kranes was overjoyed his staff was able to remove itself from the location unscathed.

"Despite the sadness and destruction, my support for the protests and the underlying goal of ending police brutality, systemic law enforcement reform, and societal recognition of the fundamental humanity of people of color in this country remains undeterred," Krane said.

"I stand with those protesting for human rights and justice, and understand why some feel so disempowered that they have no recourse but rage and violence."

As for the man the group that raided the dispensary, Krane said they were not protesters. They arrived in cars, armed ready to strike the store. "But I urge people not to look at this as anything but a distraction from the cause that started the protests in the first place, and the overwhelming majority of protesters who stand for justice and equality," Krane said.

This is a list of L.A. dispensaries targeted so you can show them support in the weeks to come: Cookies Melrose; MedMen, West Hollywood and downtown; LA Kush; Sweet Flower; Pottery, Cookies Melrose; MedMen, West Hollywood and downtown; LA Kush; Sweet Flower; Pottery.
Danny Trejo tries to do his part in a forgotten community as the city battles a pandemic, poverty and police brutality

BY MICHELE STEUEN

A small ray of light during a turbulent weekend took place at the corner of East 41st Place and Avalon Boulevard in South Los Angeles, when a honking motorcade of graduating kindergartners and parents circling the Kedren Community Health offices came upon a wanning Danny Trejo in the hospital’s parking lot. With help from the Everest Foundation, Trejo’s Tacos set up in the parking lot of the outpatient center for the Department of Psychiatry Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education Residency Training Program of Charles Drew University School of Medicine to hand out 500 free grilled chicken and barbacoa bowls for neighbors and staff.

Kedren has aided the underserved community of South Central Los Angeles for decades and currently is also providing free COVID-19 testing for the area. The Everest Foundation assists medical research in schools of medicine and universities with their Part of the Cure program.

“We’ve been to Cedars and Verdugo Hills, but this one is really important because this is the neighborhood here that everybody talks about, but nobody wants to come here,” Trejo told L.A. Weekly on Friday after he passed bowls to the brim with grilled chicken, Spanish rice, mixed beans, roasted corn, salsa verde and his signature pico de gallo. “We’re talking three generations — they have children going to school who are homeless.”

The giveaway has kept the Trejo empire busy, but business has taken a hit. Pickup and delivery have helped, as well as a deal with Goldbelly. “(This pandemic) has been a real sock in the stomach and in the face for the restaurant community,” says the Echo Park native and Machete film character.

Dr. Bailey says that the pandemic has been a full court press for Kedren. The outpatient hospital is full, with an increase in inpatients and demand on the system for mental health support. While more people are coming in for care, the center is losing clinicians due to the virus. Seven staff workers are doing the work of the usual 20, which includes psychiatrists, psychologists, nurse practitioners and social workers.

So how do we cope?

“You have to find a base or foundation that works for you,” says the doctor, who was a fellow in forensic psychiatry at Yale School of Medicine from 1994-95.

“For some people that’s family, for some it’s religion, exercising or going for a run. Find somebody you can trust and depend on when you’re overwhelmed. Internally, find something that will give you peace — planting a garden, writing your thoughts down. Because you’re at home, don’t feel like you should do something else. This is the new normal, we’re resetting the temperature. And mostly, it’s really important to find somebody you can talk to. It’s valuable to hear how somebody else is grappling with a problem similar to yours. Engage in dialogue — that’s why group therapy has been so important and successful.”

Danny Trejo tries to do his part in a forgotten community as the city battles a pandemic, poverty and police brutality


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