

CONGRESSIONAL TESTIMONY

America's Leaders Must Denounce All Political Violence, and Prosecute All Perpetrators

**Testimony before the
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My name is Mike Gonzalez. I am a Senior Fellow in the Douglas and Sarah Allison Center at The Heritage Foundation. The views I express in this testimony are my own and should not be construed as representing any official position of The Heritage Foundation.

I was a foreign correspondent for 15 years, living in and covering some of the globe's most dangerous places. I have been teargassed in South Korea, arrested and expelled from Panama by the police of dictator Manuel Noriega, and traveled with the

Mujahedeen in Afghanistan in the 1980s. I was also born in Cuba, coming to this country at the age of 14 after living on the island of my birth for 12 years, and in Francisco Franco's Spain for an additional two. I still vividly remember the political mobs I saw in the streets of Havana in the 1960s during my early childhood years, and Madrid filled with military police in 1973 after Basque terrorists assassinated Prime Minister Luis Carrero Blanco. I have, in other words, known political strife in my life, up close. I do not recommend it. I believe one of the many,

many good things about our country is that we generally resolve our political differences in peace, not through violence. Or at least we used to.

Yes, we have seen civil violence. We famously fought a civil war, at the cost of 620,000 lives, but it was fought to right a great wrong.¹

We also saw a great deal of political violence in the 1960s, with some 700 riots occurring between 1965 and 1971, which left billions of dollars in damage.² Between 1965 and 1968 alone, 250 African Americans lost their lives, and 8,000 were wounded, as a result of the rioting.³ That violence, too, took place in the context of a long-delayed effort to end government-enforced segregation and legal discrimination, and extend to all Americans, finally, color-blind governance.

After these periods of political instability, we have returned to political normalcy, to resolving our differences through debate, not mayhem in the streets. The periods of violence I have described have been, moreover, exceptions in 245 years of political peace and prosperity, an experiment in self-rule and limited government that has allowed the individual American to enjoy the greatest liberty and material wealth known to man.

Unfortunately, for the past 12 months America has once again lived through moments of violence on its streets, a period of instability instigated by the Black Lives Matter organizations. This violence, has so far led to at least 25 Americans being killed, and, according to the Insurance Information Institute, more than \$1 billion in insured losses.⁴ In fact, the Institute called last year's disturbances, "the costliest civil disorder in U.S. history." Several of our cities

witnessed over 600 riots, according to the U.S. Crisis Monitor;⁵ federal buildings came under attack, other buildings, including police stations, were torched, and businesses were looted.

The period of political instability we are currently experiencing was bolstered by the killing of George Floyd on May 25 last year. The violence associated with BLM, however, was not restricted to just last year. In a new paper published just this month by the Social Science Research Network, University of Massachusetts researcher Travis Campbell tracked more than 1,600 BLM protests nationwide between 2014 and 2019, largely in cities. He found that "civilian homicides increased by 10% following protests."⁶ Vox, by no means a conservative outlet, put the impact this way, "That means that from 2014 to 2019, there were somewhere between 1,000 and 6,000 more homicides than would have been expected if places with protests were on the same trend as places that did not have protests."⁷

Obviously, BLM and Antifa are not the only sources of political violence in America, although they do represent the majority of it. Far from a white supremacist event, Americans of all races and sexes broke the law and entered the U.S. Capitol on January 6. That act was, needless to say, despicable. The Members of this great body sought refuge, and many feared they could be harmed, or worse. It is important to condemn this act. The people who participated in violence and property destruction in the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021, deserve prosecution. And, unlike, the vast majority of those who participated in BLM riots over the past summer, they *are* being prosecuted. Once again, the message

¹ History Net, "Civil War Casualties," <https://www.historynet.com/civil-war-casualties> (accessed May 21, 2021).

² Hugh Davis Graham, *Collision Course: The Strange Convergence of Affirmative Action and Immigration Policy in America* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 31.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁴ Insurance Information Institute, "Facts + Statistics: Civil Disorder," <https://www.iii.org/fact-statistic/facts-statistics-civil-disorders> (accessed May 21, 2021); Noah Manskar, "Riots Following George Floyd's Death May Cost Insurance Companies Up to \$2B," *New York Post*, September 16, 2020, <https://nypost.com/2020/09/16/riots-following-george-floyds-death-could-cost-up-to-2b/> (accessed May 21, 2021); and Jemima McEvoy, "Fourteen Days of

Protests, 19 Dead," *Forbes*, June 8, 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jemimamcevoy/2020/06/08/14-days-of-protests-19-dead/?sh=7bad05ac4de4> (accessed May 21, 2021).

⁵ Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project, "U.S. Crisis Monitor," <https://acleddata.com/special-projects/us-crisis-monitor/> (accessed May 21, 2021).

⁶ Travis Campbell, "Black Lives Matter's Effect on Police Lethal Use-of-Force," Social Science Research Network, last revised May 13, 2021, p. 23, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3767097 (accessed May 21, 2021).

⁷ Jerusalem Demsas, "The Effects of Black Lives Matter Protests," Vox, April 9, 2021, <https://www.vox.com/22360290/black-lives-matter-protest-crime-ferguson-effects-murder> (accessed May 21, 2021).

needs to be sent across the land that *no* political violence will be tolerated.

That distressing act of political violence has to be seen as part of the overall instability the country has been living through. January 6 was provoked by a completely different set of facts, of course, but took place in the context of far too many Americans apparently coming to the conclusion that their grievances will only receive a hearing, and that our political leaders will bend to their demands, if they take to the streets, invade and attack public and private buildings, and intimidate their fellow Americans.

You, our political leaders, have the responsibility of stopping this dangerous notion from spreading, and if you do nothing, the responsibility for continued violence will be yours, too. Article 1, Section 8 of the Constitution assigns you, the Congress, the duty to “suppress insurrections.”⁸ Instead, a Member of this House, Representative Maxine Waters, said at a demonstration last month, before the Derek Chauvin verdict was rendered: “We got to stay on the street. And we’ve got to get more active, we’ve got to get more confrontational. We’ve got to make sure that they know that we mean business.”⁹ While President Trump was impeached by this House for his comments to demonstrators in front of the White House on January 6, Representative Waters was not even reprimanded for her remarks. The judge in the Chauvin trial, Peter Cahill, however found Representative Waters’ remarks “abhorrent” and “disrespectful to the rule of law and the judicial branch,” and he warned that they could be used to overturn the verdict.¹⁰

Whether people are on the left or the right, Republican or Democrat, if they continue to justify and excuse the political violence of those whom they believe to be “on their side,” they are simply condoning these acts and encouraging more, rather than deterring them. In my experience, you get more

⁸ National Archives, “America’s Founding Documents—The Constitution of the United States: A Transcription,” <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution-transcript> (accessed May 21, 2021).

⁹ Chandelis Duster, “Waters Calls for Protesters ‘to Get More Confrontational’ If Not Guilty Verdict Is Reached in Derek Chauvin Trial,” CNN, April 19, 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/2021/04/19/politics/maxine-waters-derek-chauvin-trial/index.html> (accessed May 21, 2021).

of the things that you encourage, and less of those that you deter.

Our media and pundits, having taken a side in our political debates—itsself a dangerous development—do not speak of the BLM violence in the same context of political violence as that on January 6. I believe this to be a mistake, and in covering *for*, rather than just covering, the BLM-induced violence, the media and pundits, too, are encouraging more of it. While they describe the BLM mayhem as a “racial reckoning,” they call what happened on January 6 an “insurrection.” I believe all political violence needs to be denounced and investigated, that those involved ought to be prosecuted, and if found guilty, they must pay their debt to society.

This is not happening, as you well know.

I hope that this hearing and this committee will mark a departure from this trend and take a serious look at violence from both sides. In closing, I would like to quote from my upcoming book on Black Lives Matter, in which I make the point that the groups that are reported to have been involved in the disgraceful January 6 attack

have very little power over our lives. For all the awful symbolism of the attack, those groups do not have a political action committee, bills in Congress, millions of dollars in hand, a curriculum being disseminated to the country’s 14,000 school districts, a sycophantic media that acts as a press agent, or the cultural cachet that lets BLM partner with the musical *Hamilton*. Nor do they have economic and foreign policy views, or an academic discipline that underpins their ideas... BLM has all these things.¹¹

Thank you for very much for your time and attention.

¹⁰ Stephen Groves and Lisa Mascaro, “Judge in Chauvin Trial Calls Waters’ Comments ‘Abhorrent,’” Associated Press, April 19, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/maxine-waters-comments-derek-chauvin-trialc7813707962c9f723c75db54605bad2c> (accessed May 21, 2021).

¹¹ Mike Gonzalez, *Black Lives Matter: The Making of a New Marxist Revolution* (New York: Encounter, 2021), pp. x and xi. To be published in September.

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