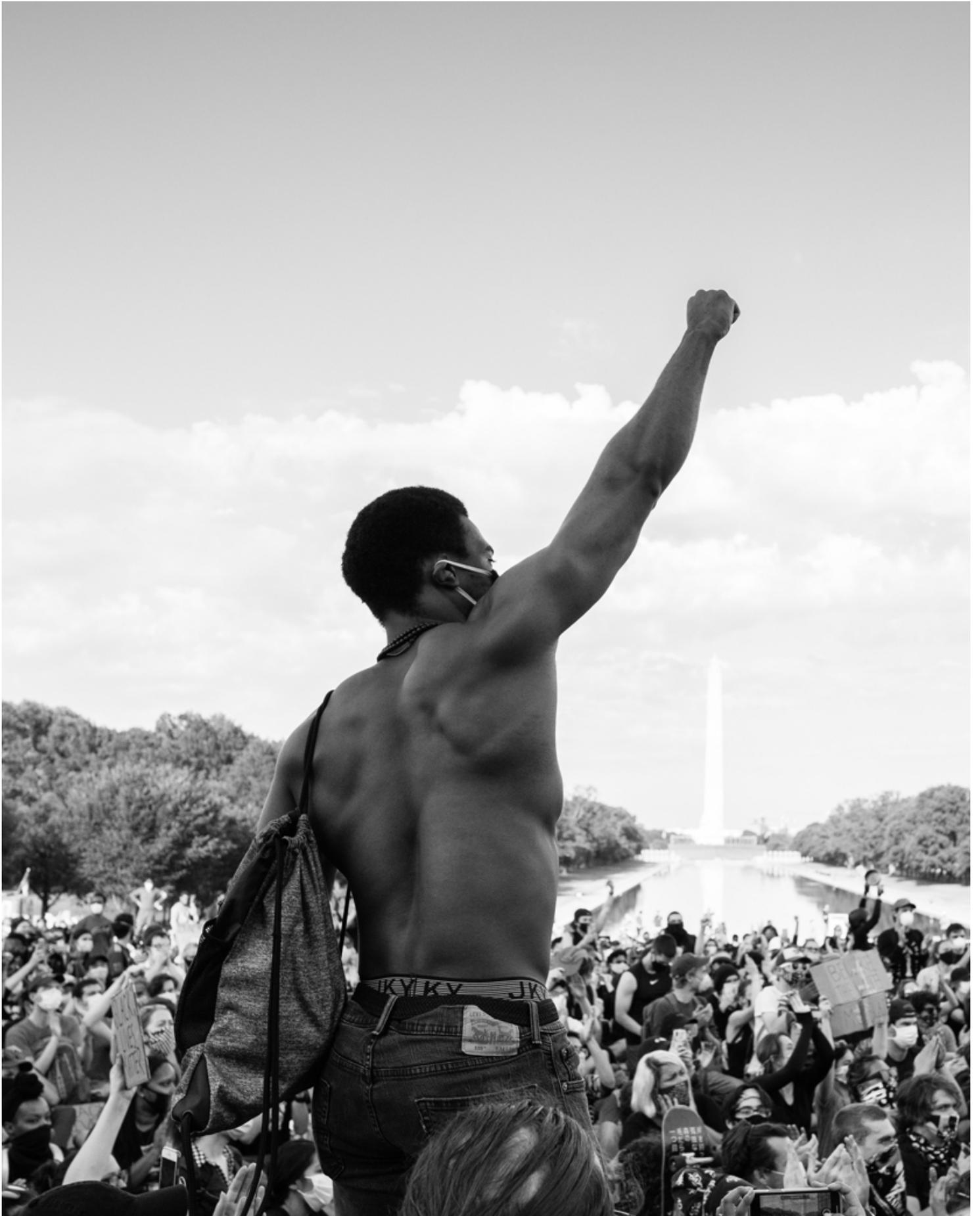




# The Endless Call

Demands for racial equity and justice have always been part of the American story. While the images here span the past two weeks, the words paired with them span the past 100 years.

🔊 Turn music on





Washington, D.C., June 2. (Photo by André Chung)

By **David Montgomery** June 11, 2020



Ninety-nine years ago in Tulsa, white mobs torched the black side of town and killed as many as 300 residents, with the tacit support of some in law enforcement, in one of the worst spasms of racial violence in American history. Last month in Minneapolis, George Floyd died with a white police officer's knee pressed to his neck, just days ahead of the May 31-June 1 anniversary of the Tulsa Race Massacre. Those two episodes bookend nearly a century in which civil rights progress has been fitful, hard-fought and unfinished. Across 10 decades, from Tulsa to today — against a backdrop of lynching and cross burning, more recently replaced by police chokeholds and vigilante gunshots, amid the subtler violence of systemic racism — voices have been raised in protest and defiance.

Words spoken in times of uplift or assault, hope or despair, can crystallize a moment or a movement: *I have a dream. ... Black Power. ... I can't breathe. ... Black Lives Matter.* The voices collected here elaborate and extend the mantras, such as Langston Hughes versifying his insistence that America live up to its myth, and James Baldwin defining protest as a duty.

mentioned in history books. The account of eyewitness D.C. Hankin quoted here surfaced only in 2015. Today it's harder for people and events to be ignored because another phrase from protests past — *The whole world is watching* — has literally come true, thanks to the cameras in every potential witness's pocket. The recent demonstrations were sparked by a bystander's video of George Floyd's death — and they have ended up generating [more evidence](#) of excessive force used by police against demonstrators in Washington, Buffalo, Philadelphia, New York and Atlanta.

The images presented here, photographed in late May and early June, capture the passion, anger and hope of new voices demanding to be heard. The raised fists communicate as directly as the cardboard signs — hand-lettered with yet more indelible words — while the fleeting tears of a young demonstrator and the warm embrace of comrade marchers speak of the vulnerability and pain at the root of any protest.





Paris, June 6. (Photo by Peter Turnley)



Houston, June 2. (Photo by Greg Noire)

The juxtaposition of the historic voices and contemporary images underscores how much work is left to be done. Read in the context of today's clamors for justice, the decades-old diagnoses and laments sound remarkably — and wrenchingly — fresh and relevant. That those dreams remain unfulfilled speaks to an American futility and systemic failure. Seen in that light, the images of today become part of the canon of timeless illustrations documenting the unfinished struggle.

The killing of George Floyd offers yet another tragic opportunity to continue an erratic process of change begun long ago. No one can say if this time will be different. All we can know is that these voices echoing from the past put their faith in the future — and that these demonstrators insist that the future is now.



Minneapolis, May 28. (Photo by Joshua Lott for The Washington Post)

**For fully forty eight hours, the fires raged and burned everything in its path and it left nothing but ashes and burned safes and trunks and the like where once stood beautiful homes and business houses. And so proud, rich, black Tulsa was destroyed by fire – that is its buildings and property; but its spirit was neither killed nor daunted.**

B.C. Franklin, a black lawyer who witnessed a white mob's attack on the black section of Tulsa in 1921



Atlanta, June 7. (Photo by Sheila Pree Bright)

**Let America be America again.  
Let it be the dream it used to be.  
Let it be the pioneer on the plain  
Seeking a home where he himself is free.  
(America never was America to me.)**

From the poem "Let America Be America Again" by Langston Hughes, 1936



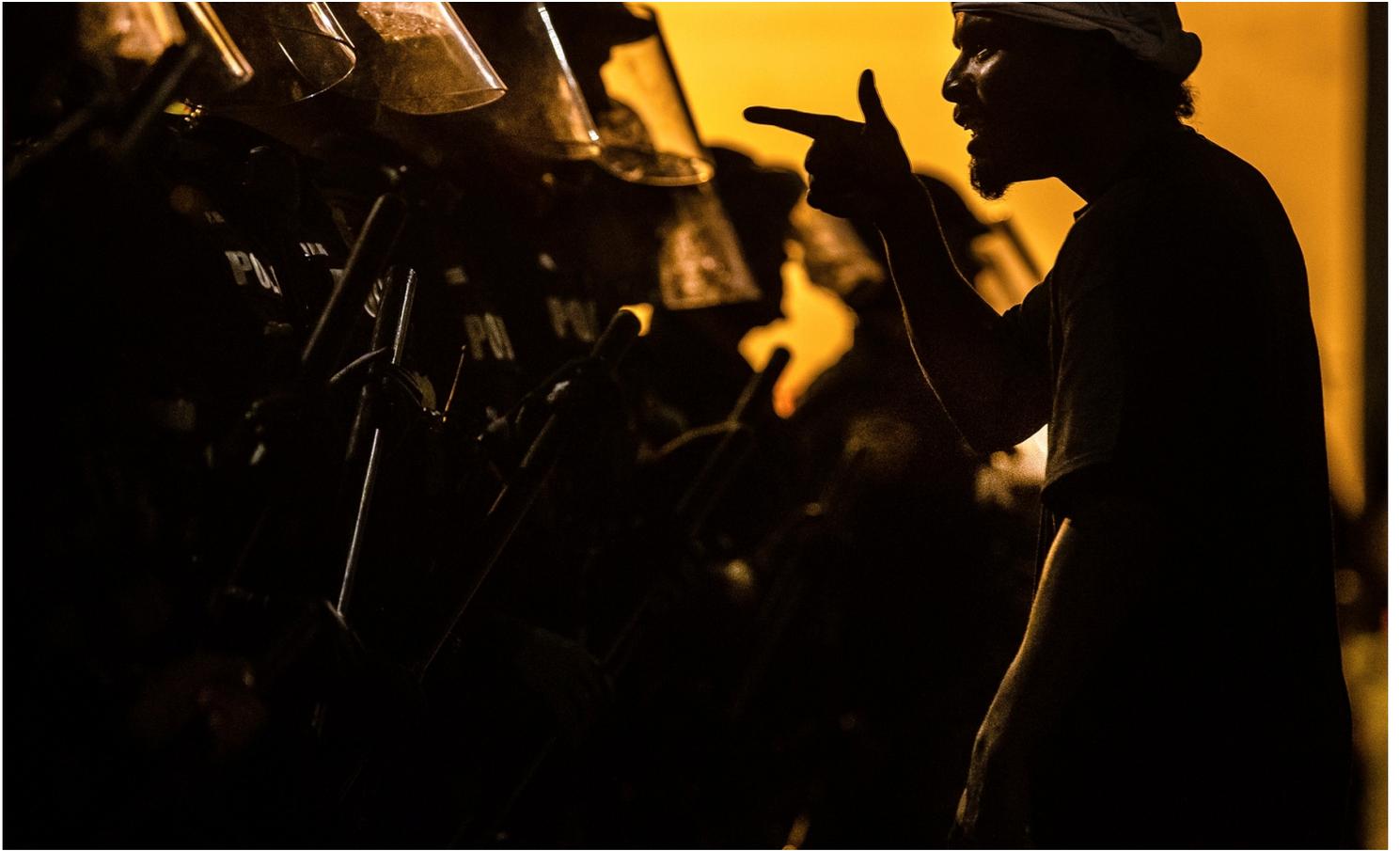
Miami, May 30. (Photos by Jonathan Frydman)



Seattle, June 8. (Photo by David Ryder/Getty Images)

**Though I have found no Negroes who want to see the United Nations lose this war, I have found many who, before the war ends, want to see the stuffing knocked out of white supremacy and of empire over subject peoples. American Negroes, involved as we are in the general issues of the conflict, are confronted not with a choice but with the challenge both to win democracy for ourselves at home and to help win the war for democracy the world over.**

A. Philip Randolph, union leader and civil rights organizer, calling for an end to discrimination in defense jobs and the military, 1942



Tucson, May 30. (Photo by Josh Galemore/Arizona Daily Star/AP)

**I had been pushed around all my life and felt at this moment that I couldn't take it anymore. When I asked the policeman why we had to be pushed around? He said he didn't know. "The law is the law. You are under arrest."**

Rosa Parks, from her handwritten account of refusing to give up her seat on a Montgomery, Ala., bus in 1955



Atlanta, May 31. (Photo by Elijah Nouvelage/Getty Images)

**I love America more than any other country in the world,  
and, exactly for this reason, I insist on the right to criticize  
her perpetually.**

James Baldwin, from "Notes of a Native Son," 1955



Minneapolis, June 3. (Photo by Salwan Georges/The Washington Post)

**No, I'm not an American. I'm one of the 22 million black people who are the victims of Americanism. One of the 22 million black people who are the victims of democracy, nothing but disguised hypocrisy. So, I'm not standing here speaking to you as an American, or a patriot, or a flag saluter, or a flag waver – no, not I. I'm speaking as a victim of this American system. And I see America through the eyes of the victim. I don't see any American Dream; I see an American nightmare.**

Malcolm X, from a speech in Cleveland, 1964



Portland, Ore., June 2. (Photo by Andrew Wallner)

**See, it's time for America to wake up and know that we're not going to tolerate – we're not begging anymore. And I'm not going to say it's not any more of us going to die, because I'm never sure when I leave home whether I'll get back home or not. But if I fall while I'm in Kentucky, I'll fall five feet and four inches forward for freedom, and I'm not backing off it. And nobody will have to cover the ground that I walk on as far as freedom is concerned because I know as well as you should know that no man is an island to himself, and until I'm free in Mississippi, you're not free in no other place.**

Fannie Lou Hamer, from a speech in Kentucky, 1968





New York, June 5. (Photo by Celeste Sloman)

**Let me speak of a recent, a very recent black dream: The waiting for the Messiah, some leader. Now nobody – Martin Luther King did not tell Rosa Parks to stay in her seat. That came first. Then he came. She just didn't move. We didn't used to have to wait for the word. And the history of black people in this country is those people who got up and moved, all over this country.**

Toni Morrison, from a speech in Portland, Ore., 1975



Atlanta, June 2. (Photo by Lynsey Weatherspoon)

**We imagined a more humane future, but we also risked our very lives to defeat racism and U.S. military aggression against Southeast Asia. Now, it is your turn to imagine a more humane future – a future of justice, equality and peace. And if you wish to fulfill your dreams, which remain the dreams of my generation as well, you must also stand up and speak out against war, against joblessness and against racism.**

Angela Davis, from a commencement address to the Berkeley High School graduating class, 1983



Brooklyn, June 2. (Photo by Yunghi Kim/Contact Press Images)

**What happened in Los Angeles in April of 1992 was neither a race riot nor a class rebellion. Rather, this monumental upheaval was a multiracial, trans-class, and largely male display of justified social rage. For all its ugly, xenophobic resentment, its air of adolescent carnival, and its downright barbaric behavior, it signified the sense of powerlessness in American society.**

Cornel West, from "Race Matters," on the reaction to the acquittal of white police officers in the beating of Rodney King, 1993





**This is where we are right now. It's a racial stalemate we've been stuck in for years. ... But I have asserted a firm conviction, a conviction rooted in my faith in God and my faith in the American people, that working together we can move beyond some of our old racial wounds and that, in fact, we have no choice – we have no choice if we are to continue on the path of a more perfect union.**

Barack Obama, from a speech on race during the 2008 presidential campaign



Washington, D.C., June 3. (Photo by Evelyn Hockstein for The Washington Post)

Ibram X. Kendi, from "How to Be an Antiracist," 2019



Minneapolis, June 7. (Photo by Russell Frederick)

**I came to this city in 1955, which was the year that the body of Emmett Till was found in a body of water in Mississippi, same year that Rosa Parks refused to give up the back seat on the bus. ... Since that time, I have seen any number of struggles against racism, and they have all ended up with relatively little outcome. So the question is valid, it's a reasonable question: Is this going to be just like so many other movements, a moment of anger and rage and then back to business as usual? ... [But] his death did not simply**

# And that movement is not going to stop after two weeks, three weeks, a month. That movement is going to change the world.

Rev. William A. Lawson, pastor emeritus of Houston's Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church, from his address at the funeral for George Floyd, Houston, June 9, 2020



## David Montgomery

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### About this story

Design by [Christian Font](#). Photo editing by Dudley M. Brooks. Audio editing by [Linah Mohammad](#).



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