

A: Good evening, I'm Jane Good, and in this evening's program I am talking with our Washington Correspondent Harry Lineker. Our discussion is on the impact of the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis. You remember he was held on the ground for nearly 9 minutes with a police officer's knee on his neck, and was heard saying "I can't breathe". Harry, why did this event cause such a huge worldwide protest?

B: Well, Jane, there are several factors. The first is that George Floyd's death was particularly gruesome and obvious. In other situations where black people have died while being arrested, or in police custody, there has often been some debate - the officer says he feared for his life, for example. Police violence could not be proved. But this event was clear and obvious to everybody. The whole world could see that this was an act of appalling injustice by the police.

A: Nowadays videos captured on phones, or sometimes on police body cameras, can show people clearly what happened. But what were some other causes of this "perfect storm" of protest and rebellion?

B: I think there was a convergence of forces. Mr. Floyd's death came in the middle of the coronavirus pandemic, when millions of people had to stay at home. Millions were unemployed, and angry. People were a lot more inside, watching TV, and so were forced to pay attention. They were less able to look away from this kind of event. The media replayed it thousands of times. And on a practical level, the US unemployment level meant that more people than usual could protest without juggling work commitments.

A: But Mr. Floyd's death is part of a whole series of deaths of black people at the hands of the police isn't it? I remember three or four in the early part of the year.

B: That's right. Another factor in the protest was exactly the feeling that this was the last straw. There have been too many deaths like this. Also, in the warm summer weather, people were more willing to go outside to protest. Don't forget too that 2020 is election year in the United States, and politicians are more likely to pay attention and respond. The President and Congress have had to react.

A: Many of the protests were organized by the campaigning group Black Lives Matter. But I have to say that, watching TV news about the protests, there seemed to be a high proportion of supporters who were not African American themselves. Many protesters came with placards to demonstrate that they supported Black Lives Matter even though they had a different ethnic background - white, Asian, Latino and so on. They came out of solidarity with the black community.

B: Yes; one supporter said that "African Americans and minorities have been protesting this racism for years. Our voices do have more power if we have some white voices to support us". A journalist in Colorado wrote about a protest in what she called her "tiny, white town". One of the Republican members of the town council said "I don't think this is a political matter - wrong is wrong".

A: Of course, to all these protests in the United States, we have to add the impact of protests all around the world. The death of George Floyd was the event which started a huge wave of international protest, which expanded to cover all kinds of racial inequalities. One form of protest here in the UK was the pulling down of statues. In Bristol for example, the statue of Edward Colston, a slave trader of the eighteenth century, was pulled down and thrown into the river. OK, final question, Harry; will the protests lead to lasting change in American society?

B: We are seeing change already, Jane, but remember that the Civil Rights movement in America in the 1950s and 60s went on for a whole decade. One of the key questions now is whether there will be significant changes in the nature and structure of policing in the US.

A: Sometimes it just needs one event to trigger a big change. Remember Rosa Parks and the Montgomery bus boycott in 1954? Thank you for your analysis, Harry.

### Summary

This dialogue considers the events which followed the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis in June 2020. Factors which precipitated the protests in the US and around the world included; the particularly gruesome and obvious manner of the death; the event happening during the coronavirus pandemic, when people had more time than usual; and this seeming to be the last straw for the African American community. The ethnically diverse nature of the protest is discussed, along with possible future consequences.

### Questions

1. Have things really changed as a consequence of George Floyd's death?
2. Why do you think the international wave of protests was so strong?
3. How do you change people's way of thinking about racism?
4. Has the response of the US President and Congress been appropriate or insufficient?
5. What is your assessment of the Black Lives Matter campaign?