

Black protesters reflect on white allies

By GILLIAN FLACCUS
Associated Press



Gillian Flaccus/AP Photo

Sam Thompson, founder of Black Men and Women United, speaks to members of the Black community during a weekly meeting as his 3-year-old son, Jet, plays behind him in Portland.

'WE LIVE IN A STATE THAT WAS DESIGNED TO BE A WHITE UTOPIA, AND IT IS TRULY SOMETHING REMARKABLE FOR PORTLAND CURRENTLY TO BE AT THE CENTER OF THE NATION'S ATTENTION FOR BLACK LIVES MATTER.'

Cameron Whitten | founder of the Black Resilience Fund

PORTLAND — More than two months of intense protests in Portland — one of America's whitest major cities — have captured the world's attention and put a place that's less than 6% Black at the heart of the conversation about police brutality and systemic racism.

Since May, nightly demonstrations in Oregon's largest city have featured overwhelmingly white crowds — from middle-aged mothers marching arm in arm to the mayor getting tear-gassed by federal agents to teenagers dressed in black smashing police precinct windows and tossing fireworks at authorities.

The weeks of often-chaotic protests have transformed Portland into a microcosm of the national debate on race and police brutality. It's also prompted introspection in the liberal city's small Black community about the role of white demonstrators in the Black Lives Matter movement and what it means to be a white ally in this transformational moment.

The violence and vandalism that have marked the protests, often done by white people, have divided the Black community, along with a debate over what's next. Some want to keep marching, while others want to use the momentum to work with elected officials on cementing long-term change.

"It's a perfect storm with everything that's been happening, and add to that the attention of the world being on Portland, Oregon, right now — we have a unique space," said Sam Thompson, who founded the group Black Men and Women United last month to push the movement toward long-term Black resilience.

"If those people weren't

there and they weren't protesting to the level they are now, we wouldn't be having this conversation 2 1/2 months later," he said. As white people see the protests, "when the person that looks like you is breaking the windows and starting the fires, you deal with that a lot differently than when it's someone who doesn't look like you."

Portland's movement has carried a current of tension as the Black community and white protesters navigate a complex racial calculus: In such a white city, how can white residents support Black rights without making themselves the story?

That's a delicate question in a progressive city with a deeply racist past. Portland,

a focal point of the Black Lives Matter movement in part because of its bastion of white supporters, is so lacking in diversity because of centuries of laws that excluded and marginalized Black people.

Early "exclusion laws" prohibited Black people from settling in Oregon, and by the 1920s, Portland was known as one of the most segregated cities north of the Mason-Dixon line and a hotbed for the Ku Klux Klan. Later, real estate laws and city planning effectively crammed Black families in a few pockets of Portland. Today's soaring real estate prices have scattered those Black homeowners to the fringes of the city and beyond.

"We do not have an area

that's ours, and that was intentional," Thompson said. "These are the things we're trying to work through."

Because of that history, some Black people have felt a cognitive dissonance when they see the crowds of white supporters, many of them arriving from homes in neighborhoods that were once Black havens.

"We live in a state that was designed to be a white utopia, and it is truly something remarkable for Portland currently to be at the center of the nation's attention for Black Lives Matter," said Cameron Whitten, founder of the Black Resilience Fund, which has raised \$1.5 million this summer to invest in the Black community. "I could disagree with

how they're doing it, but in the end, they're putting their bodies on the line to protect me — and that is huge compared to what we're used to."

While many Black residents have embraced that enthusiasm, the white crowds make retaining ownership of the movement critical. That's led to disagreements in the Black community about what it means to be a white ally.

Some, including the former leader of the Black United Front and the head of the local NAACP chapter, have criticized white protesters who vandalize police precincts amid their call to defund police. Some Black leaders also held a news conference with Mayor Ted Wheeler — the wealthy white scion of a timber family — to say violence is distracting from the Black Lives Matter message.

Those appeals from "gatekeepers" in the Black community have angered some Black activists, who say that level of protest is necessary to keep the pressure on elected officials and pales in comparison to the violence white people have done to Black people.

"Why would I give a (expletive) about property when we're talking about people that are losing their lives?" said Teressa Raiford, who experienced racism growing up in Portland and founded Don't Shoot PDX, an organization pushing to defund police.

"That is outrageous, and it's happening in 2020. That's incredible that that would happen, and the world would view that and talk about the damage on the sidewalk or on a building," she said.

Raiford was among those who grew alarmed when the telegenic Wall of Moms, a group of middle-aged, mostly white women, rocketed to national attention as they marched arm in arm at the nightly protests. Media flocked to their story, but the group imploded within days over accusations that their white founder wanted to monetize the group and weaponize it against President Donald Trump.

A smaller number of the self-described moms still protest, joining Black mothers under the group Moms United for Black Lives. They are led each night by Demetria Hester, a Black activist who was attacked three years ago by a white supremacist, which some believe set the stage for the city's current racial reckoning.

Hester, who was arrested this week while protesting, said the white moms have impressed her with their commitment to "getting woke" — educating themselves about Portland's racist history and the extent of their privilege as white Americans.

"They're working hard to educate themselves and educate other people and help the Black community. Our moms are wonderful for even acknowledging the fact that they have white privilege and the system needs to change," she said after prosecutors dismissed her charges.

"They've been arrested, they've been tear-gassed, they've been hit with rubber bullets," she said of the white moms. "They're going through just like what we're going through — and that opens their eyes to a whole other level of understanding."

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'Back to school' in a pandemic

As I'm writing this, many families still don't know when or if their children will be able to return to school in the fall. While you might decide to put off buying new backpacks, there are some back-to-school preparations you shouldn't neglect.



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KELLY PEEKSTOK, MD, MPH
Pediatrician
CMH Pediatric Clinic

Even years after school ends, many of us still feel a rush of energy and a sense of renewal in the fall. It's a time for learning, growing and reconnecting with friends. Please use this time to help a child you care about be well physically and emotionally.

Health checks

At the CMH Pediatric Clinic, we often see a lot of kids at this time of year for their annual well-child visit. These visits are an important part of protecting your child's long-term health.

Rest assured that we are doing everything we can to keep you and your child safe while in the clinic. We schedule well-child visits at the beginning of the day and have a separate waiting room for people coming in for sick visits. Our medical assistants disinfect the exam rooms after each patient and the entire clinic is thoroughly cleaned nightly.

At your child's well visit, the pediatrician or nurse practitioner will check that your child is growing and reaching developmental milestones, talk with you about any health concerns, and screen for mental health issues. It's also vital that you keep your child up-to-date on vaccines (per CDC and American Academy of Pediatrics guidelines), even if they won't be attending in-person classes at school.

Kids need to socialize

During the pandemic, I've seen many toddler- to school-aged children who are having difficulty reaching their developmental milestones in social skills, such as sharing, making friends, being patient, etc. These are skills that we often learn in school, on sports teams and with friends. It's very important that you child have time to socialize with other children.

Virtual play dates are great, but masked activities outdoors are also considered low-risk. You might try taking a bike ride or playing lawn games. Some families have agreed to create a "COVID circle" of up to 10 people who all agree to practice social distancing with everyone outside the circle.

Schooling at home

It looks like some or all of the 2020-2021 school year will

be done remotely. Families who have adapted well to remote schooling have one thing in common—routine.

Keeping a daily routine will improve your child's emotional well-being, school performance and behavior. Just like a school day, your child should wake up, do their morning hygiene, get dressed, and eat a healthy breakfast. Depending on the age of the child and the routine that works best for your family, you might do school work in the morning, eat lunch, then spend the afternoon doing arts and crafts, chores and playing outside.

I strongly recommend designating an area or room in your home as the "school zone," meaning that only school work is performed in that area. This helps kids stay on-task and provides them with a sense of separation between school and home.

If you have an older child who will be home alone, sit down together to talk about expectations. Hold them accountable, just like you would if they were at school. Consider using a daily checklist together so that they know what they need to accomplish each day, including age-appropriate chores to help them feel like they're contributing to the family.

If your child has special needs such as ADHD or a learning disability, you may be facing some additional challenges as school starts up again. Be proactive about contacting your pediatrician if you think your child's medications or therapies need to be adjusted.

Coping with anxiety and depression

You may notice that your child has been acting out. Talk with the other adults in their life. Be sure that you're consistent with your expectations for behavior and with discipline. Make time to talk with your child. Ask what's on their mind. Answer their questions about the pandemic and current events honestly and at a level they can understand.

The start of a new school year may also trigger feelings of anxiety and depression, especially among teens who feel like they're missing out or who are worried about the future. If your child withdraws from family, friends or activities they enjoy, call your pediatrician for an evaluation.

Our behavioral health consultants offer in-person and virtual visits. Sometimes it helps to have someone outside the family to talk with. Kids are very receptive to a parent's emotional state. They will follow your lead in dealing with difficult emotions, so be sure to seek help when you need someone to talk with.

Dr. Kelly Peekstok is a pediatrician with the CMH Pediatric Clinic. She enjoys hiking, snowboarding, horseback riding, scuba diving and spending time with her dog and two cats.



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- CMH Medical Group-Seaside, 503-738-3002

"Parenting During a Pandemic"

columbiamemorial.org/parenting-during-a-pandemic/
Online learning and mental health resources from the CMH Pediatric Clinic's behavioral health consultant, Misty Bottorff.

HealthyChildren.org

Health information for parents from the American Academy of Pediatrics.

MD 4Kids App

ohsu.edu/doernbecher/md-4kids

App for parents from OHSU's Doernbecher Children's Hospital. Includes a symptom and dosage checker.