

PROTEST

Many years ago a song said "Somethin's happenin' here; what it is ain't exactly clear." That song could have been written today.

But leaving it unclear should not be an option. The lack of clarity comes from conflating several different kinds of actions into one "something", when they may be related, but are independent events with different causes, often by different people with different motives.

FIRST, the most important facts to remember are that blatantly unjustified police killings have occurred, and they are very, very wrong. Protesters, whether marching and demonstration in the streets, or expressing themselves online, in print, etc., are right to condemn these killings and to demand justice specifically, and reformed policies that will prevent them from happening yet again.

They happen much too frequently, despite past protests and demands each time in the past. It is frustrating and infuriating that obviously needed change has not happened, and that every rational black person needs to have a justified fear of violence at the hands of police or civilian racists.

The lack of progress toward change informs us that protesting once or twice has not conveyed the message strongly enough. Perhaps the demonstrations need to be louder, longer, more numerous, to get more news coverage, and more attention by politicians and the voters who elect them-- enough attention to result in the changes needed.

SECOND, it has been said too many times that violence, vandalism, and especially looting does not make protest more effective. The attention it gets distracts from the message. It provides an excuse for police and other authorities to act against peaceful protestors, not just the destructive individuals. All organizations, including Black Lives Matter, know this.

Yet such behavior happens, sometimes. The cause is not always the same. There are natural causes, such as justified rage at the murders and the lack of change. Sometimes the police incite the resistance and violence by their actions and attitudes. These things can affect protestors who came intending only peaceful protesting.

Most of this can be prevented or minimized by the right kind of police behavior. Police need to be there to protect the protestors, and the right to peaceful assembly, and they should make it clear to everyone. Their demeanor should not be to separate themselves, or to intimidate or threaten. If they are among the people, they will know who is getting

out of hand, and who isn't, and deal with the problems without disrupting the entire protest. A sheriff in Flint, Michigan took this approach, and it worked very well.

Police behavior is especially important when a police action is the reason for the protest, whether or not it was that city's department that was involved. Interacting as fellow human beings, conveying empathy, can calm potential hostilities.

Vandalism and looting may also have motives only incidentally related to the protest. A number of people who appeared to join it may have intended destruction and looting all along. They may not be committed to the reason for the protest at all, but see it as a cover, an excuse to break things and steal.

They may also be deliberately acting to discredit the protest itself. Right-wing white nationalists, bigoted off-duty cops, any extremist wanting chaos, would and could do that. Anyone caught and arrested for vandalism and looting should be investigated for their real affiliation, if any. The result could be interesting.

Whoever the offenders are, we can be sure that right-wingers and Trumpists will try hard to use them as a distraction.

Trumpists and the white supremacists Trump has incited won't go away when Trump is evicted in January 2021, but perhaps we can begin to see them for what they are, the opposition to the long-held values of equality and freedom that have enabled past progress toward those ideals. That progress is far from complete, and still too slow in coming, but all of us who care will continue to work for it.

-cosmicrat, 2020