

An Open Letter From RYA & The Events of May 30th

The protest on May 30th was a non-violent disruption in the spirit of the desegregation sit-ins or the freedom rides of the 1960s. There were people from all walks of life attending in solidarity. Organizers were very clear from the start that tactical non-violence was our orientation.

Organizers are longtime Rockford residents who work within the community and they are very well aware of what the city and the police have done to silence or co-opt voices for justice in the past. We believe that there is a need for disruption of the normal state of things if social change is to occur in this city and across the country. We aren't going to parade and go home.

Although the demonstration was in solidarity specifically with George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, it is clear from the mood Saturday that people understood that police terrorism is a Rockford issue, too. Many of the speakers in the rally at Haskell shared their stories of police harassment and brutality.

In the press conference, Chief O'shea suggested that the main agitators for incidents that happen at RPD District 1 were mostly outsiders; we do not believe this 100% true. We believe that this statement was made to downplay the justified anger towards police violence that has been growing in the city due to deaths by police, brutality, corruption, and misconduct. Many of the people causing the disruption were people from the very neighborhood of the precinct. It was clear, from the peaceful protest at the start of the day to the less peaceful protest at the end of the day that People in the city of Rockford are upset with the city and the RPD.

Despite understanding all of this, organizers tried to de-escalate situations (some of us getting hit by rocks) at the police station to keep people safe from the police brutality. Despite our best efforts, the police response to the protestors showed who the real force of violence in the community was. The use of batons and various other types of weaponry such as tear gas or pepper spray not only against those causing the disruption but even those that were peaceful created more anger within the crowd. There is video and testimonies of these acts.

While many condemned the protestors for their actions no city politician or community leader is making a statement chastising police for the brutal arrests or the peppering of the peaceful protestors.

City officials and community leaders should recognize that as Martin Luther King said "A riot is the language of the unheard."

The formation of (RCAPB) Regional Coalition Against Police Brutality

Rockford Youth Activism has united with other concerned community members and organizations to start a coalition against Police Brutality. This is a multigenerational Black lead coalition to empower underserved communities in non traditional ways so that their voices will be heard. Instead of condemning the actions of the youth we want to give them a voice and work with them. If you want to work with us or endorse this statement, email us at coalitionrcabp@gmail.com.

To move forward, the city has to move beyond rhetoric about hearing the “voices of protestors' ” and start investigating and taking action on the racialized economic system that lead to the need for a non-violent direct action and the uprising that happened subsequent to it.

As things are moving fast across the country we have created a short list of actionable items that need to be addressed immediately.

- Firstly, We called for police Chief Dan O’shea to rescind his insensitive language he used during recent press conferences. We believe this language not only ignores a bigger socioeconomic problem but also places a target on the backs of black youth.

May 18, 2020

Reporter:

A Lot of these cases involve, either juvenile or younger adults you know I know education and prevention is something that you're really passionate about and school is obviously not in right now is there anything in the works to kinda amp that up.

Chief Dan O’shea:

Yeah you know junvies the kids, the 16,17 year olds running around shooting each other we’re not wasting our time trying to save them they are lost were trying to focus on 4 or 5 year olds all the way up to 12 or 13 where we have a chance at saving them changing their lives and changing the direction they are going in it.

And we're only a part of it. They need family, they need relatives, you know friends that will keep them on that path as well.

17 year olds that go around committing murders and shooting at people...yeah well, sorry off to prison you go I got nothing for you, your family failed you up until this point and there is nothing that we can do for you.

- We call on the Mayor and city leadership to make body cams a number one priority and provide local funding for equipment and software, and until said equipment is obtained and in use we call for the Mayor and city leadership to reign in/cease and desist the Rockford Police Department that began aggressively violating the human rights and racial profiling African Americans by pulling them over & searching them. One incident has been caught on tape.
- We want an investigation into the violence at the hands of RPD during the protests near RPD District 1 on May 30th, 2020. There is a YouTube video in which an officer repeatedly kicked someone while the person was already detained. That must be investigated and the officers responsible should be fired.
- We want the Federal Bureau of Investigation to re-examine the murders of Demetrius Bennet, Logan Bell, Kerry Blake, and Micheal Sago Jr.
- The city must begin an initiative to demilitarize the police, by liquidating such assets, and diverting resources to areas that have been economically divested from. The police at this point from the photos on Saturday May 30th looked more like an occupying army than a group of people meant to keep people safe. That must change immediately.
- Organizations and Community Leaders need to start having more serious conversations about moving beyond police as the only source of safety in our communities and try to imagine what community based forms of safety would look like. The basis of policing within this country has always been to maintain social control of black people.

We are looking to build this coalition, if you would like to help us achieve these actionable steps please email us.

coalitionrcabp@gmail.com