



AHIONI WILSON/FREELANCE PHOTOGRAPHER

People from all walks gather at City Hall in Newark, New Jersey, May 30 to protest issues of racial injustice and police brutality African Americans face after the wrongful death of George Floyd by police May 25 in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

A PEACEFUL PROTEST PREVAILS

Newark's 1967 riots spark a grim reminder of past struggles and fresh call to challenge for work to be done

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NEWARK, N.J. – Nearly 53 years ago during the 1967 Newark riots, residents protested violently in response to the community's mistreatment by those who were sworn to protect them—the police.

Contrary to the initiative the community is taking to end police brutality today, residents from all over New Jersey rallied together May 30 in Newark, New Jersey's largest city, to protest peacefully and bring awareness to racial injustice and police brutality following the death of George Floyd on May 25 in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

After a weekend without any violence or

arrests being made, New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy praised the city of Newark for its civil approach during the city's protest, considering its reputation of being one of the most dangerous cities in New Jersey.

Eighty-eight-year-old Newark resident Geraldine Little recalled the restless week in July 1967, describing it as a civil war between the Newark police and Newark residents.

"I was around the age of 35 at the time and I remember being terrified about what was happening in our community," Little said. "The riots began after a taxi driver was pulled over and beaten by a Newark police officer and at the time the Newark Police Department didn't have black officers."

Today 34% of Newark's police force is African American.

Little recalled the Newark riots as Newark's way of expressing their frustrations in the community.

"I am proud of this generation of leaders.

See PEACEFUL/Page 2

PEACEFUL

Continued from 1

They wanted to make a change and they did it peacefully,” Little said, commending protesters who participated in last weekend’s peaceful protest. “Newark has come a long way since the 1967 riots, but there is still work to be done.”

Many students from local New Jersey universities and New Jersey natives wanted their voices to be heard during last weekend’s protest—which would turn out to be a different outcome than the 1967 riots. Ahjoni Wilson, a Newark resident and Rutgers University student, savored the lifetime experience, capturing the mass gathering through her camera lens.

“There was a feeling of unity in the air, a feeling that is very familiar to me when I’m surrounded by people that look like me,” Wilson said, in describing her euphoric experience. “Being from Newark means that people hear and assume the worst, but the fact that Newark conducted a peaceful protest made me a proud Newark native.”

The death of George Floyd has brought people from different backgrounds and ethnicities together to bring an end to the injustice that people of color have endured.

Twenty-two-year-old Isaiah Rosado, a Latino Newark resident, said that being Latino and having a friend-group that is majority African American, he felt like it was his obligation to come and support his friends.

Notably, African Americans make up 13% of New Jersey’s demographic, while white Americans comprise the vast majority of New

Jersey’s population at 59%.

“Marching along with 12,000 other protesters I felt empowered; I was proud to be a part of something that is a part of our history,” Rosado said. “All lives won’t matter until black lives do.”

And it’s because of that sentiment residents like longtime Newark resident Benjamin Saah, who is the caretaker for his father, said he felt compelled and obligated to share different ways to support the movement. While Saah wanted to participate physically in the protests, he could not because of his caretaker role and responsibilities.

“My father is older in age and we have to keep in mind that we are still fighting a pandemic (COVID-19) that has taken the lives of many African Americans,” Saah said. “I am all for protesting, but I have to look after my father, so instead I spread the word through social media to get others to protest.”

He said that concerned civic-minded people need to understand that “being part of the movement is to reach out to your community leaders to express your concerns.”

Major U.S. cities across the country and the world continue to protest—some peacefully, and some destructively.

Newark continues to promote peaceful protest as it advocates the fight for social equality and justice for all, said activist and protester Duran Childs.

“Protesting is our way of expressing our frustrations. By us protesting we are allowing our voices to be heard,” Childs said, in sharing his thoughts and personal perspective on the importance of protesting. “I hope that one day we are all able to come together, peacefully, as one.”

Gov. Murphy spoke candidly about the changes that would be made in efforts to fight the inequality that African Americans face in America. He further expressed his support by participating in other rallies and protests around New Jersey later that week to help spread awareness on police brutality and racial injustice.

“We will not accept systemic racism and bias; we will continue to fight against racism,” Murphy said. Color is not a crime; black lives matter.”



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Gov. Phil Murphy speaks at a June 7 Westfield, New Jersey, rally with other local officials and leaders advocating for social and racial equality.

