



It was a tumultuous year around the world, in the United States, and of course right here in Iowa. There were positives in the state, along with the negatives. Black Lives Matter started from the ground up in various communities around the state, kept the pressure on our elected officials from the get-go, and still does today. Marches, sit-ins, protests, rallies all took place. Mutual aid was set up, community gardens planted, organized activists making their voices heard in city council meetings, donation campaigns, free food for communities, doing the work our own government refuses to do. All done by strangers coming together to help their neighbors; alliances were built, coalitions formed, grassroots groups came into fruition, direct action and community engagement became the standard. This was the case around the nation, all of this spurred by the murder - really a modern-day lynching - of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota, by four Minneapolis police officers. The video of his execution spread around the world online.

This sadly wasn't the first time such an occurrence has happened. It was just the latest, which caused the water to finally boil over, and out into the streets. Millions upon millions of everyday citizens marched for months, all amid a once in a century pandemic, to voice their anger over the constant unjust killings of Black and brown people by the hands of law enforcement. Breonna Taylor's murder during what was essentially a home invasion perpetrated by cops, Jacob Blake's shooting by police which left him partially paralyzed, as well as with Ahmaud Aubrey's lynching by alleged white supremacists in trucks, only added more fuel to the already raging inferno of pain and anger at the lack of responsibility ever taken against career criminal cops, and white citizens murder of people of color.

This year was an awakening for many in terms of just how much of a city's budget is thrown at an overinflated police budget. As well as how militarized police departments and sheriff departments have become across the nation, all with next to zero training in those areas.

Current and former military members have often spoken out against how unsafe it is for civilian members of the police to have these weapons of war, and just how eager these untrained people are to use them.

In Iowa City, Ames, and Des Moines, each had their own Black Lives Matter organizations take shape. Direct action was the focus, and in these three major cities in the state of Iowa there were marches in the streets each listing their own demands to be heard by their respective representatives. Most notably in Des Moines, a push to reinstate the voting rights of felons across the state was made. For nearly two months Governor Kim Reynolds stalled after promising to sign an executive order to make this happen, after dozens of activists held protests inside the capitol building and speaking with the Governor. At least 60,000 people with felony convictions were not permitted to vote under Iowa law. It is because of the Black Lives Matter chapter, as well as the work of various other civil and equal rights organizations that this executive order was finally signed.

Ironically during this time multiple protesters, organizers, and activists were banned from stepping foot on the capitol grounds under threat of being arrested. The Iowa State Patrol violently arrested activists during their protests on the capitol grounds, regardless of how peaceful and nonviolent the protests were. This was the state's response to multiple rallies, protests, and calls to defund the Des Moines Police Department, as well as to restore voting rights to former felons in Iowa. The ACLU of Iowa has filed a lawsuit against the state for its unconstitutional response to non-violent protesters being barred from taxpayer funded grounds.

Des Moines had constant and multiple protests held, but that was not the only action taken in the community. The Des Moines Black Lives Matter chapter has continued on in the legacy of the Black Panther Party's actions some 60 years ago, starting free educational

programs for citizens, free food programs, organizing write in campaigns to elected officials, as well as ensuring there are multiple voices from the Black and brown community represented in city council meetings. A city council that is run almost entirely by white people. The Des Moines city council has responded with disrespect and outright dismissal of nearly all concerns coming from their own community. Most notably from city councilman Joe Gatto, who has used his office to personally benefit his restaurant, Barratta's, on the south side. Gatto also does not live in the area he represents; he uses a vacant house that he owns in the district to run as its councilmember while actually living in councilmember Josh Mandelbaum's district. Conveniently in the same area of his restaurant - where he pushed for and ultimately got the city to repave the road his restaurant happens to be on - as well as getting the city to place signs around the community pointing drivers towards his business. Gatto has been one of the most vocal over his dissent for the Black Lives Matter movement, and how he views his constituents of color.

After the Derecho storm tore through the state in early August, thousands were left without shelter and power for weeks. Urban Dreams along with other activists and organizations set up supply drives to help out people most affected and struggling from the storms after effects. School supply drives, winter weather drives, and other essential items were donated in droves by the community to be handed out to families in most need of these goods.

Constant arrests have been made against many of the local leaders of the movement for Black lives, in retaliation for standing up to the Des Moines police department. A department that arrests Black and brown citizens at multiple times higher rates than its white citizens. The Iowa prison population comprises a much larger share of Black and brown people than white people, in correlation to the state's overall population. Black and brown Iowans face much harsher sentencing and are about 7 times more likely to be arrested for possession of marijuana than white people; despite there being no difference in usage or possession in terms of race.

Some of these arrests were done in the form of raids on people's homes, sometimes on charges for simply being at protests where police instigated and clashed with protesters.

One act that came of notice during the first wave of protests back in early June was when the police (while in full riot gear) took a knee in front of camera crews, to pretend they were on the side of the protesters. Just hours later their PR stunt, those same police officers tear gassed, and brutally pushed back the nonviolent demonstrators at the capitol building in Des Moines, some evening using their riot shields as weapons to shove people in the crowd away. This was done once night fell and most reporters and cameras were no longer there. But evidence was filmed by those still at the gathering showing their "good faith" optical stunt of taking a knee - something police across the nation did as well - was nothing more than a tactic to quell the crowd.

The police also responded by often showing up in riot gear, with armored vehicles, firing tear gas into crowds, employing the use of kettling tactics; the city also imposed a curfew, and journalists covering the events were also arrested. A reporter with the Des Moines Register, Andrea May Sahouri, was arrested near Merle Hay Mall while covering the protests when the police deployed tear gas into the crowd. Charges were demanded to be dropped by Columbia University.

The response by the cops is proof of how the police view any act of dissent by the people they're meant to serve, as a threat, and that the police fear losing any power, that they wield like barbarians. Des Moines police have also surveyed various leaders of the movement and made arrests on these leaders numerous times. Most notably Matthew Bruce, one of the most outspoken of the injustices Black and brown lowans face at the hands of police and the

racist systems they uphold. This has not deterred Matthew, as he has remained a fierce proponent for systemic changes that need to take place.

Over the past decade or so, Des Moines has ranked among the worst cities in the nation in terms of racial discrimination at the hands of its authorities; while also making taxpayers pay out a total of hundreds of thousands of dollars in settlements for racial abuse and profiling done by police. A lot of these officers are either still on the job as law enforcement or were allowed to get away with next to no real repercussions.

Various community groups and grassroots organizations that were formed by, run and organized Black, brown, and indigenous people during the summer of 2020 were of course the Black Lives Matter chapters in Des Moines and Ames, the Iowa Freedom Riders in Iowa City, Food for Our Fighters, Des Moines Mutual Aid, The Supply Hive. As well as the help of groups like Urban Dreams, Movement 515, Iowa CCI, Great Plains Action Society, just to name a few. The ACLU of Iowa has also been active within the community and protests that have taken place.

While much work is still to be done, this year was proof that communities can band together to fight injustices faced by the most marginalized of society, no matter the size of the city. 2020 was a resurgence in activism for the state of Iowa, and with 2021 just around the corner, it is almost certain that work and efforts will continue in the future. More people than ever came out during one of the darker years of American history, and there is no reason, or excuse to not continue going forward. Luckily, the people have made it clear they have no intention of letting up the pressure, so the hope of a better tomorrow will only shine brighter as time moves forward.

## Community Resources -

If you would like to get involved in the movements that have unfolded this year, please check the links below for various resources on how to volunteer, donate, events to attend, or just to stay in the loop:

- [https://www.facebook.com/desmoinesblm/?hc\\_ref=ARTIb6ZrBEdxqrBTUtdpWUGMN5X6oyHIqMphImiwt-iVUqrcxfDrJEuolPso5wVvRiA&fref=nf&\\_\\_tn\\_\\_=kC-R](https://www.facebook.com/desmoinesblm/?hc_ref=ARTIb6ZrBEdxqrBTUtdpWUGMN5X6oyHIqMphImiwt-iVUqrcxfDrJEuolPso5wVvRiA&fref=nf&__tn__=kC-R)
- <https://www.thesupplyhivedsm.org/>
- <https://linktr.ee/greatplainsaction>
- <http://iowacci.org/>
- <https://urbandreams.org/>
- <https://www.aclu-ia.org/>
- <https://linktr.ee/AmesBLM>
- <https://linktr.ee/BIPOCiowa>
- <https://communitybondproject.networkforgood.com/projects/101939-free-our-protesters>
- <https://www.instagram.com/foodforourfighters/>
- <https://www.iowaharmreductioncoalition.org/volunteer/>
- <https://www.facebook.com/goodvibesmovementdsm/?fref=tag>
- <https://www.facebook.com/Movement-515-206799426074245/?fref=tag>

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