

We the people

WE THE PEOPLE

We the people of the united states

WHY

DO

THEY

RIOT?

WE THE PEOPLE

We the
fucking
people

WE THE
PEOPLE

WE THE PEOPLE

WE THE PEOPLE

WE THE PEOPLE RESIST

WE THE PEOPLE

We the people

INTRODUCTION

Hello, it's a pleasure to meet you!

We don't really get to talk much as a community, especially with a whole pandemic going on. But recent events really had me thinking about protests, and rioting, and why it's come to this, and honestly its probably a safe bet you have been too right? It's kinda hard not to, no matter what your perspective is.

So I decided to do some research and answer the questions we (at least I lol) was afraid to ask. As I'm a graduate student I had the advantage of using my University's database, and added citations to everything I reference, if you wanna check things out for yourself. The whole thing is only 16 pages (you might have to flip it inside out) but I'd honored if you'd take a look at any of it.

Either way, hang in there <3



THE BASICS

What are riots? Riots are a form of civil disobedience lashing out in a public disturbance against an authority, property, or people. (1)

Examples include:

- The Boston Tea Party
- MLK Assassination Riots
- Stonewall Riots
- 2015 French Riots
- The Boston Massacre
- BLM + Police Brutality Riots
- 2011 English Riots

Rioting is violent, but usually directed against property rather than people. (2) For example:

- Graffiti
- Looting/Stealing
- Destruction of Property



Are targeted at State or the elite's property, rather than small businesses or homes. (2)

WHO RIOTS...

Riots usually consist of individuals or unorganized groups without any practical leader. (1) Most often riots are performed by people an oppressed demographic. (3)

An exception are police riots which have a governing body and are characterized by unjustified force, often against peaceful protests. (6)

Ex. Police with School desegregation



AND WHY?

Criminologist David Waddington developed the widely accepted Multivariant Model for explaining the psychology of riots. (2)

Waddington shows that riots are often a response of a disadvantaged group to shared experiences of “subjective deprivation, social exclusion, political powerlessness and moral outrage”

THE COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS

RIOTS ARE CAUSED BY MOB MENTALITY

An older theory by 19th century academics.

But research shows crowds:

- only tend to respond to suggestions or actual behavior that are consistent with their collective norms + values (5)
- are often not anonymous to each other (3)
- The work of Stephen Reicher even shows numerous examples of protesters intervening to stop aggression (5)



RIOTING IS CRIMINALS TAKING ADVANTAGE OF PROTESTS FOR "FUN AND PROFIT"

- Not much anonymity or mob mentality, so most rioters would have to be routine criminals
- But research shows:
 - "rioters were better integrated than non-rioters into the community, socially and politically; and rioters were not recent immigrants to the city" (4)
 - protests usually turn into riots when provoked by police/military aggression (18)

This is very important because since demonizing collective action as crime and greed is a political tactic that diminishes attention from real issues and vilifies the cause. (2)

RIOTING IS MINDLESS DESTRUCTION

Gary Marx (no not the communist, but read him too) divides riots into 2 categories

- Issueless riots: out of euphoria,
 - ex. Eagles wins Superbowl, fans riot
- Issue Riots: stem from an underlying grievance.
 - ex. Marx gave: American 'ghetto riots' (5):

"undoubtedly related to such prominent community concerns as police harassment, lack of jobs and poor housing, and were highly focused in terms of who or what was singled out to be attacked, vandalised or looted."



ALL ASPECTS OF RIOTS HAVE PURPOSE

Graffiti *Rioters, usually poor and minorities, have no voice. Graffiti is a way to communicate, advocate and spread messages to the community and its adversaries (2)*

Looting *Again those who riot tend to be poor, and in need. Looting is a way to reclaim fiscal power to survive, just like in food riots (8)*

Fighting *Protests become riots when police show aggression. Much of the documented violence is protesters resisting arrests (18)*

Waddington's work showed that those who are driven to rioting are often the most vulnerable and powerless members of society. This led to a new and better understanding of rioting, especially those stemming from societal inequality, as a form of "defensive harm", defined as:

"Harm that is inflicted by an agent in order to avert an attack on them or others" (2)

This is basically self defense, but for a group instead of an individual. When a collective knows they are being attacked/further attack is imminent, and they act to intercept that attack, that's defensive harm! Historians agree:

"RIOTS GENERALLY OCCUR WHEN GROUPS HAVE A SENSE OF ILLEGITIMACY ABOUT HOW THEY ARE TREATED BY OTHERS AND WHERE THEY SEE COLLECTIVE CONFRONTATION AS THE ONLY MEANS OF REDRESSING THE SITUATION.

EP THOMPSON, THE PRE-EMINENT HISTORIAN OF CROWDS, ARGUED THAT IN A WORLD WHERE THE POWERLESS ARE GENERALLY INVISIBLE, THE RIOT IS A FORM OF "COLLECTIVE BARGAINING". AT THE VERY LEAST THE RIOTERS' PROBLEMS HAVE BECOME A PROBLEM FOR THE POWERFUL AND HENCE THE POWERFUL HAVE BEEN FORCED TO TAKE NOTE OF ISSUES THEY HAD PREVIOUSLY IGNORED." (3)

The concept of defensive harm is most often applied in the study of war, but it can also apply to riots, even in democratic societies, where there is a threat to people in a society (ex. famine, authoritarian threats, misrepresentation, extreme poverty) that is not or cannot be fixed via the appropriate channels (voting, representation, peaceful protesting). Or in better words:

Thousands of people do not take to the streets for no good reason. That was true during the American Revolution, and it is true today. Riots are often the desperate response of people who feel they have no other recourse. We can reduce rioting by providing better access to justice for everyone.

DR. SHERRY HAMBY

Unlike protesters, rioters break the social contract, to obey the law. But they do this when the state breaks the social contract first and in a way that risks citizens lives, ex. food riots, riots against tyranny (2).

THERE'S A CATCH

There are 3 conditions in which defensive harm is viewed as a moral act (2). Interestingly, the common objections towards riots align with these rules perfectly.

The Necessity Constraint

Defensive harm requires the harm done not to exceed the minimum to deter the threat, aka, no excessive force/tactics

01



There Must be a Better Way

Many believe there can't be a need for riots, because America is a democracy, and so there's always another way to change things

The Success Constraint

Next, the action taken has to have a chance at changing things, no risking life or liberty for futile causes

02



Riots Prove Them Right

Some condemn riots saying they turn off potential allies, prove detractors right, and don't cause good change

The Proportionality Constraint

Finally, the damage done from defensive harm can't exceed, or is proportionate to the harm its trying to stop

03



More Harm than Good

Others say riots affect innocent parties like small business owners or rioter's own communities more than the aggressor's

SO HOW CAN RIOTING BE DEFENSIVE HARM?

We have to test it against the three criteria:

- Is rioting ever necessary?
 - Note: not "is rioting the best solution" but "were there ways tried before riots, and were they enough to end the problem?"
- Is rioting effective?
 - Or, does rioting ever create good change, aligned with the movement's goal?
- Is rioting worth it?
 - Was meaningful change to prevent future harm gained, and at what cost?



1. *Is Rioting Ever Necessary?*

BOSTON: TEA PARTY + MASSACRE RIOTS

- Petitions to reduce taxation or provide representation went unheard
- colonists suffered increasing poverty + risk (9)

MLK ASSASSINATION RIOTS

- Officials noted cities were crippled by unemployment and racial inequality in policing, education and housing and predicted it leading to riots, but did nothing to rectify it, MLK's murder was the breaking point.
- Convinced no amount of peaceful pleading would gain equality, Americans took to the streets across the nation.
- Even pro-peace, black Congressional Leader McKissick saw MLK's murder, and the patronizing response of government + police as a fatal betrayal: (10)

"Nonviolence is a dead philosophy and it was not the black people that killed it... It was the white people that killed nonviolence and white racists at that."

STONEWALL RIOTS

- For LGBTQ+ people, activities from existence to drinking in public were crimes, necessitating secret bars like Stonewall
- Despite bribes from owners, these establishments were routinely raided + trashed (police riots), patrons beaten, arrested, violated, and jailed, often for no real reason (11)

BLM + POLICE BRUTALITY RIOTS

Like MLK, the murder of black Americans, now by police lead to or coincided with chaos, a pandemic and high unemployment. (12)

Breonna Taylor	Freddie Gray	Gabriella Nevarez	Michelle Cusseaux
Elijah McClain	Alton Sterling	Philando Castile	Tanisha Anderson
George Floyd	Aura Rosser	Stephon Clark	Michael Brown
Eric Garner	Akai Gurley	Botham Jean	Pamala Turner

WELL WHY DONT THEY JUST:

VOTE

Requires: ID, permanent residence, time off work, transportation, no felonies

SUPPORT CANDIDATES

Requires: disposable income, time to volunteer, ability to vote

RUN FOR OFFICE

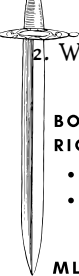
Requires: Excess disposable income, no record, higher education, political experience

ADVOCATE

Have been. BLM started in 2013, working towards the same goals they are now, along with hundreds of similar organizations (24)

The requirements are all things minorities + poor ppl are less likely to have due to systemic injustice. Even then, protesting one of the fastest and most accessible routes of change.

Still, protests nationwide were largely peaceful, until police escalated situations (police riots) using tear gas, rubber bullets, and driving into/over crowds. (13)



2. *What has Rioting Ever Accomplished?*

BOSTON: TEA PARTY + MASSACRE RIOTS

- Both changed public opinion on the Monarchy
- Instrumental in causing the Revolutionary War (9)

MLK ASSASSINATION RIOTS

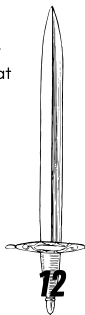
- revived legislation + forced federal government to pass controversial the Civil Rights Act 1968
- emboldened a new generation of activists (10)

STONEWALL RIOTS

- Origin of the LGBTQ+ Rights Movement
- Participants, ex. Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera, went on to form queer activist groups, used experience to end the raids
- American acknowledges existence of LGBTQ+ people, + a discourse on equality was born that continues to this day (11,15)

BLM + POLICE BRUTALITY RIOTS

The largest civil rights movement in history; international support, massive changes, esp. in places with riots. These are only a few (16,17):





Defunding Police:

- Minneapolis
- California
- New York.

Police Reform

- Minnesota
- D.C.
- Nevada
- California
- Texas
- Kentucky
- Federal gov.

Symbolic

- Removal of confederate statues and monuments
- Pledges from major corporations to prioritize anti racism

Proposed Legislation

- Ban of no knock warrants
- Ban of chokeholds
- Data collection
- DA's no longer allowed to accept money from police unions

3. But at What Cost?

BOSTON: TEA PARTY + MASSACRE RIOTS

- Boston Tea Party: destroyed over \$1,700,000 dollars worth of property in todays currency
- Boston Massacre: both sides injured, 5 colonists dead (9)

MLK ASSASSINATION RIOTS

- Nationwide response became known as the Holy Week of Uprisings
- In total: 43 deaths, many injuries, thousands of arrests, and extensive property damage (10)

STONEWALL RIOTS

- definitely property damage, arrests, and minor injuries to police and protesters,
- no one died during these riots
- Stonewall Inn itself was the only business shut down (11)

BLM + POLICE BRUTALITY RIOTS

- From protester and police riots there's been
 - hundreds of thousands of dollars of property damage,
 - thousands of injuries, at least 23 deaths (13)
- Research shows the more aggressive the tactics towards protesters, the more likely the protest will become a riot. (18) So far there have been:
 - over 200 documented instances of excessive/unprovoked force from the police (13)
 - 150 instances of violence against press from police
 - Destruction of medical supplies by police
 - 15% of citizens shot sustained permanent injury (13)
 - Police commit human rights violations (21)



Change is happening but people are suffering. Risking their lives protesting, amidst federal forces and a pandemic. And still we hear "Be patient. Rioting is uncivilized, unnecessary." But when did you pay attention? During the peaceful protests of systemic oppression? Or when the world caught on fire? Why praise past revolutions but condemn present ones? (22) The social contract has been broken. It was not the people who broke it. And It is no longer their duty to uphold it.

"In Baltimore, they've been saying for generations how bad the Baltimore Police Department was, but nobody listened... then Freddie Gray got killed, and nobody listened. And then they started protesting; nobody listened. But as soon as the CVS burned in Baltimore, the whole world watched." (8)

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- 2 Pasternak, A. (2018). Political Rioting: A Moral Assessment. *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 46(4), 384-418. doi:10.1111/papa.12132
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- 4 Allen, Vernon L. 1970. 'Towards Understanding Riots: Some Perspectives.' *Journal of Social Issues* 26: 1-18.
- 5 David Waddington, "The Madness of the Mob? Explaining the 'Irrationality' and Destructiveness of Crowd Violence," *Sociology Compass* 2 (2008): 681.
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- 14 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King_assassination_riots#Political
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- 23 <http://www.jstor.com/stable/2095975>
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