Protests are not pretty or polite

Protests are only supposed to be peaceful until your football team loses, then violence is free game. Protests are only allowed to be violent and chaotic until people of color have something to protest. Marginalized groups are given far less leeway for protests than their white neighbors.

Only a minor part of institutionalized racism influences every aspect of black and brown life. In other words, it’s not just the criminal justice system and prisons, where the effects are most obvious, but in the media, education, economy and political system. It’s the invisible elephant in every room across the country.

To put guns into the hands of peaceful Dakota Pipeline protesters would raise the risk of police intervention from rubber bullets to real ones. Peaceful protesters already face dogs, pepper spray and tear gas. People in their ranks have been shot, bitten and abused enough. To insinuate that peaceful protest is the pinnacle of social change reveals the privilege you have been afforded and which they have not.

White people can take up arms with no fear of being assaulted unfairly by the police, unlike the peaceful people protesting the North Dakota Pipeline, or protesters in Flint or any people of color all around the country. Taking up guns would do nothing for these people except give the police an excuse to shoot first, ask questions later. The police can barely handle one black man without bullets flying. There would be outright war on communities of color involved.

Respect shouldn't take a war to begin with. Native Americans should not have to die for clean water. Flint residents should not need to use firearms just for the nation to remember them. You cannot simultaneously demand peaceful protests and then applaud white men who take over government buildings for tax issues, toting guns all the while, like the Bundy brothers did in 2016.

Any time marginalized communities use violence, people complain about their chaos and disrespect. They claim Martin Luther King, Jr. would be ashamed and that this isn't how you earn respect or make people listen. There's no way to win this argument. Colin Kaepernick kneels during an anthem — he's considered disrespectful. Protesters light car fires in Flint — they're considered disrespectful. Native Americans form a line to protect their sacred lands — they should just get out of the way. Women march on the capital and suddenly it's simultaneously a war on manhood but also the least effective route they could have taken. How long will it take for people to tell the truth? You don't care what a protest looks like. You just don't want to hear certain voices.

Those who complain about violent protests and shake their heads at anyone who isn't perfectly nice and sweet in protesting injustice don't realize the privilege they have now was largely done through violence. Civil rights for women, people of color, LGBTQ people and others were and are earned by making themselves heard. By lighting fires and destroying property. Only then will people listen. We don't need guns. We don't need death. We need to address the voices of the marginalized before it comes to violence. Change isn't made by being nice and asking “please” — and it never will be.
Sept. 2 At 6:40 p.m. Elena Maturo of Orono, 19, was found to be in possession …
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