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As the United States continues to undergo hardships brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, [protesters](#) across the country have unified against institutionalized racism and the use of police brutality against Black Americans. They have also advocated for the enactment of criminal justice reform by the federal government.

This outrage sparks from the deaths of African-Americans who have died from systemic racism and deadly police force.

These individuals include [George Floyd](#), a 46-year old Black man who died from a knee chokehold in police custody, [Breonna Taylor](#), a 26-year old Black woman who was fatally shot by police officers during a no-knock warrant raid on her apartment, and [Ahmaud Arbery](#), a 25-year old Black man who was shot by two White men for jogging in a Georgia neighborhood.

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To better understand the national movement, the Tartan assembled a panel of criminal justice professionals and social activists.

The panelists for the discussion included President of the National Urban League [Marc Morial](#), retired NYPD officer [Corey Pegues](#), and [Dr. Theresa Beardall](#), an Assistant professor of Sociology, Criminology, and American Indian Studies at Virginia Tech University.

The Interview

[Watch the full panel discussion above the article]

The Tartan interviewed the panelists Friday, Aug. 14, via Zoom in the Hurlburt Student

Center. The event was sponsored by Radford University's Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ).

On June 25, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act of 2020.

The bill introduced by congresswoman Karen Bass, will make police officers liable for damages in lawsuits, halt the distribution of military surplus equipment to police departments, and implement a nationwide ban on chokeholds.

President Trump has publicly stated that he will not support a bill that hurts police officers. When speaking with Morial, the paper wanted to know the specific alternatives political officials could use if the bill is not passed in the Senate.

Morial said, "First of all, I am confident that if the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act were put to a vote on the floor in the Senate, that it would indeed pass."



Photo Credit: (Sushil Nash) The people of Manchester break lockdown to join the global Black Lives Matter protests.

"Now maybe it's going to require the voters to weigh in during November, before there is a president who would sign the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act." Morial said, "The

George Floyd Justice in Policing bill incorporates many of the Urban Leagues recommendations that have been made to Congress over several years in relation to police reform and accountability.”

“Over the years, police officers have been given special protections against misconduct that have not been given to any other public employee or public official. The protections afforded to a police officer, when they violate the rights of a citizen, or engage in a corrupt or brutal act, are beyond what a firefighter, building inspector, transit operator, or any other public employee is granted,” Morial said.

“The George Floyd Justice in Policing Act will be a vital change with respect to federal law when it pertains to the accountability of officers in both the state and federal systems,” Morial said.

An independent autopsy report conducted by George Floyd’s family found that Floyd died of **mechanical asphyxiation**. As a former police officer, Pegues knows that police officers are trained to use reasonable force and that the restraint used by Derek Chauvin on Floyd is inherently dangerous.

The Tartan asked Pegues if he could explain to the paper’s readers the necessary protocols that officers use to avoid a situation like the one used against George Floyd. The paper then asked Pegues why there is such a “gray line” when it pertains to police officers’ use of reasonable force.



Photo Credit: (Matt Popovich) A police car belonging to the United States Secret Service Uniformed Division patrols a street adjacent to the White House in Washington, DC.

Pegues said, "I've never seen anything like the George Floyd murder, to have a man sit there and beg for his life and call out to his mother created a black sky around law enforcement."

"In my heart, I want to believe that the overwhelming majority of police officers in America would have gotten up off his neck, or a couple of the cops would have pushed him off [Derek Chauvin]," Pegues said. "Police officers are only suppose to use reasonable force when it pertains to special circumstances."

"They have Non-lethal weapons such as mace, batons; they can use physical force by using their hands, or deadly physical force by using their firearms. None of those things should have been used because he was already cuffed, and from my experience, when the cuffs are on, the game is over," Pegues said.

Morial said, "First of all, I am confident that if the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act were put to a vote on the floor in the Senate, that it would indeed pass."

[According to USA Today](#), police officers have a history of using violence and aggression toward minority communities in the U.S., including Latino, Muslim, LGBTQ, and Black

Americans.

The Tartan asked Dr. Beardall how police departments can regain trust with minority communities. Furthermore, the Tartan asked Dr. Beardall about the federal government's involvement in combating division between police officers and minorities.

Dr. Beardall said, "Through a broad perspective, the research that I do looks at everyday acts of violence, injustice, and degradation by police officers against people of color."

"Oftentimes, rightfully so, we focus on officer-involved shootings. However, there are thousands of Americans, particularly Black & brown people, and Black & brown men who are accosted and assaulted unnecessarily by police officers," Dr. Beardall said. "When our trust is eroded with police officers, we become fearful, reticent, or hesitant to contact other agents of government for assistance."

Dr. Beardall said, "Having a sense of what a community really is on behalf of officers, is just as important as community members having the opportunity to build relationships with police. Overall, trust & legitimacy are built two ways."