

THE TORONTO RIOT OF 1992

“It was a mob scene like Toronto has never seen,” reported the *Toronto Star*. In the space of a few hours, a peaceful protest turned into a violent rampage that shook the streets of Toronto.

The outrage began in Los Angeles, 4000 km away. Rodney King, a black driver, had been pulled over and beaten by four white policemen. Even though the entire beating was caught on tape, the officers were acquitted. Anger erupted all over the world. In Los Angeles, the riots left 55 people dead and more than 2,000 injured.

A group called the Black Action Defense Committee (BADC) planned a peaceful protest at the U.S. Consulate in Toronto. But before it even began, Toronto police shot and killed a black man named Raymond Lawrence. They said he had threatened them with a knife.

To protest police brutality and racism, a few hundred people gathered in downtown Toronto for a peaceful demonstration. But soon the peace turned to pandemonium. A thousand angry people filled the streets. Many came to express their frustration and to lend support. But some were there just to cause trouble. They smashed windows, vandalized buildings and beat up other people. Most of the troublemakers weren't even part of the protest group. In the end, over 100 businesses were looted and dozens of people were injured.

Today, almost 30 years later, people are taking to the streets again to protest the way police treat minorities. The world watched George Floyd die with a policeman's knee on his neck. Across North America, black people are still far more likely than white people to be beaten or even killed by police. They are also much more likely to end up in jail.

After the 1992 protest, BADC leader Dudley Law said, “We have waited for the justice system to deal justly with our community, and it has failed.” Thirty years later, we are still waiting.

