

# Washington, DC's Democratic mayor renames city street “Black Lives Matter Plaza”

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On Friday, June 5, Washington, DC's Democratic Mayor Muriel E. Bowser directed city workers to emblazon the intersection of 16th and K Street NW, which is directly viewable from the White House, with the popular protest slogan “Black Lives Matter.” The mayor later announced that this portion of the thoroughfare would be renamed “Black Lives Matter Plaza,” in honor of the protests which have gripped the city for the past several weeks following the police murder of George Floyd last month in Minneapolis.

Washington, DC, like nearly two thousand other cities across the globe, has been rocked by protests over the past two weeks. Washington, DC has been the site of a number of high-profile attacks by city and federal military forces on unarmed protestors. On June 1, just 4 days before Bowser's stunt, the world watched as President Donald Trump initiated an attack on the Constitution in an attempted coup d'état, calling for federal troops and militarized police forces to attack protesters in direct violation of the Posse Comitatus Act and other federal laws.

Protests swelled in the days following these events and the political establishment, extremely nervous about the prospects of a mass turnout of opposition on the weekend following Trump's provocation, sought to take a different tack in order to co-opt the movement rather than seek to directly challenge it with force. Bowser, owing to her qualifications as an African American stalwart of the Democratic Party's business wing and mayor of the nation's capital, has played a critical role as the face of the political establishment's so-called opposition to the Trump administration.

The Saturday following the name change, Bowser touted her opposition to Trump's deployment of out-of-state National Guardsmen in the capital, pompously

declaring that she had “pushed the Army away from our city.” Bowser was undisturbed by the broader implications of Trump's moves in the capital, complacently describing the use of military force on American streets as an opportunity to vote: “Today we say no. In November, we say next.”

Bowser is neither a committed opponent of police brutality nor a champion of civil liberties. In the initial days of protests, Bowser took to network television alongside fellow Democratic Party officials to denounce the protests as violent looters and imposed harsh curfews. On Wednesday, Bowser intervened when the District's legislative body passed a police reform bill which included, among other things, a rule that the Metro Police Department release publicly the names of police officers involved in violent uses of force as well as body camera footage taken at the scenes.

Commenting on the bill, Bowser cautioned the District Council, saying, “Anything that would hinder an investigation and prosecution, we would be concerned about.” The mayor previously has sought to withhold from the public body camera footage and names of officers involved in violent interactions.

As the *Washington Post* acknowledged, “In responding to the unrest, Bowser has generally deferred to the DC police department, which has more training and experience than other city police forces in managing large protests, which take place regularly in the nation's capital.”

Aside from her fealty to the police, Bowser possesses a storied relationship with the interests of big business in the District of Columbia. The mayor is steeped in the dark arts of corrupt big city Democratic Party politics. She began her political climb as a coordinator for the DC mayoral campaign of Democrat Adrian Fenty in 2006.

Fenty's administration was marked by an acceleration of pro-big business policies; particularly in education, where he appointed Michelle Rhee, a nationally-recognized charter school proponent as his public schools chancellor.

During the Democratic primary last winter, Bowser gave a full-throated endorsement to Michael Bloomberg, the former Republican mayor of New York City. Bloomberg, a multi-billionaire media mogul who entered the Democratic race to ensure that the party toed the line dictated by Wall Street, has a long history of supporting aggressive policing, most notoriously through the "stop-and-frisk" policy in which the New York Police Department routinely and disproportionately stopped African American and Hispanic youth for arbitrary searches.

The local DC chapter of Black Lives Matter (BLM), feeling a danger of being discredited by sharing the same political space as Bowser, tweeted denunciations of the mayor following her public relations move. "This is a performative distraction from real policy changes. Bowser has consistently been on the wrong side of BLMDC history. This is to appease white liberals while ignoring our demands. Black Lives Matter means defund the police," stated the group's local account. On Saturday, the group staged a protest outside Bowser's home to demand she cut funding for the police.

Despite these protests, one could just as easily say that the Black Lives Matter organization's own political record is one of "performative distraction." Aside from the group's attack on "white liberals," what alternatives does BLM have to offer?

The BLM-affiliated group Campaign Zero, co-founded by Democratic Party activist DeRay Mckesson, has floated a list of police reforms under the label "8 Can't Wait." The list includes proposals such as the banning of police chokeholds, requiring police to seek to de-escalate confrontations and exhausting all alternatives before firing a weapon. Many of the demands are already standard operating procedure in many police departments across the United States, including in jurisdictions which have seen acts of police violence in recent years.

When asked by the online publication Vox to comment on the proposals, Texas A&M economist Jennifer Doleac told the online publication that the demands amounted to a "brilliant marketing strategy" that are "not evidence-based" reforms for stopping police violence.

In addition to the paucity of alternatives on offer, leading BLM activists are interested in obtaining a place at the table with big business. Underscoring their venality

is the Amir bank card. Created by the Movement for Black Lives (M4BL) umbrella organization in partnership with OneUnited Bank, the card was heavily promoted as a step forward in combating racism and police violence, but was unclear as to how this would be accomplished beyond regular encouragement of card holders to donate to M4BL.

This marketing stunt was only the most tasteless of many instances where BLM leaders have leveraged the prominence they gained during the protests following the police murder of Michael Brown in 2014 into financial rewards.

Brittany Packnett Cunningham, cofounder of Campaign Zero, was appointed to the Obama administration's 21st Century Policing Task Force, and to the Ferguson Commission established by Missouri's Democratic Governor Jay Nixon after the protests over Brown's death in 2014. McKesson became Baltimore City Schools' chief personnel officer in 2016, making a six-figure salary and twice visited with President Barack Obama in the White House. Both Packnett Cunningham and McKesson vocally supported Hillary Clinton in the 2016 presidential election.

"Black Lives Matter" has been adopted as a rallying cry by interracial and interethnic crowds of youth and workers protesting the actions of the police across the planet because it evokes their rage over the fact that the lives of black workers and youth do not matter to the ruling elite. In opposing police violence across the world, workers and young people must embrace a political strategy aimed at more than the rebranding and racial diversification of the bodies of armed officials which comprise the guards of the capitalist class. In order to put an end to the onslaught of police violence, war and social inequality, the protests must turn to the working class as whole and advance a program of revolutionary socialism.



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