

## **Bad Boys: What is Utah Gonna Do?**

Heather Corder

COMM 1130

Charnell Peters

June 26, 2020

As Black Lives Matter protests around the country have snowballed, Salt Lake City has made national attention for the fervor of its protests, most notably when a man's car was burned after he shouted, "all lives matter" and pointed a bow and arrow at protestors. Recently, thousands of protesters were heard shouting in unison, "SCLPD, suck my dick."

With no sign of slowing down soon, local politicians are forced to respond to calls to both address systemic racism and to defund the police. The Utah Legislature passed a bill banning knee-to-neck chokeholds and Governor Herbert has agreed to meet with Black Lives Matter organizers with his office stating that, "Governor Herbert very much looks forward to meeting with Lex Scott later this week to share perspectives about how to promote greater inclusion and equity here in Utah."

Despite these concessions, many residents of Utah feel that this is not enough. At a protest last Saturday, one of the organizers, Daniel Smith\*, stated that, "we need to disband and defund the police and replace them with local members of the community who care about our specific needs and who understand that black lives matter."

Despite the pressure from its constituents to defund the police, the Salt Lake City Council still approved the majority of its police department's budget while allocating \$5.3 million for the city to spend on programs and training in order to address police brutality and racism.

In response to the disappointment with The Council's approval of the police budget Salt Lake Council Chairman, Chris Warton stated that, "The problems of systemic and institutional racism are deeper than \$10 million, \$20 million or \$30 million funding fixes." He nonetheless encouraged people voicing their opinions by stating that, "A lot of you are angry. A lot of you are still going to be angry about this proposal. ... We understand that. But we are hopeful you will continue to dialogue with us. Stay determined. Stay engaged. Keep telling us what you want to see and we'll keep listening and working."

Not all Utahns agree with the sentiment that the police need to make significant changes to policing. A Utah county resident stated that, "We need law and order with police protection. We see what anarchy is like in other states, and we do not want that in Utah. Thank you to the City Council for having the wisdom and courage to not listen to a few naysayers who want to throw out the whole criminal system out the window. Guidelines and adjustments will be made as they

deem necessary. A huge shout out and thank you to police who put their lives on the line every day to keep us safe in our homes!”

In contrast to what’s happening in Salt Lake, many other cities across the nation are addressing similar concerns. In 2012, the city of Camden, NJ disbanded its entire police department and recreated it from the ground up. This process focused on community relations, de-escalation, and other measures similarly proposed to the Salt Lake City Council. Over the course of 7 years, the violent crime rate in Camden dropped 47%. (Andrew 2020) This model shows that drastic measures to readdress policing can be done and can have significant results.

In Minneapolis, MN where the national focus of this movement has taken place, the city council is moving towards disbanding its police department. The actual cuts and reallocations are yet to be decided, however the focus from the council members is that they would like to focus on investing in community resources such as schools and housing and readdressing how 911 calls related to mental health are handled. One solution being looked at is to use more social workers and mental health professionals as first responders to many of these calls. (Navratil 2020)

The Salt Lake City council has many places to look for ideas on how to address the concerns of the public, and we will have to wait and see which direction they choose to take to ensure that black lives matter.

*\*Indicates names were changed to protect the identity of the individual.*

## Works Cited

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