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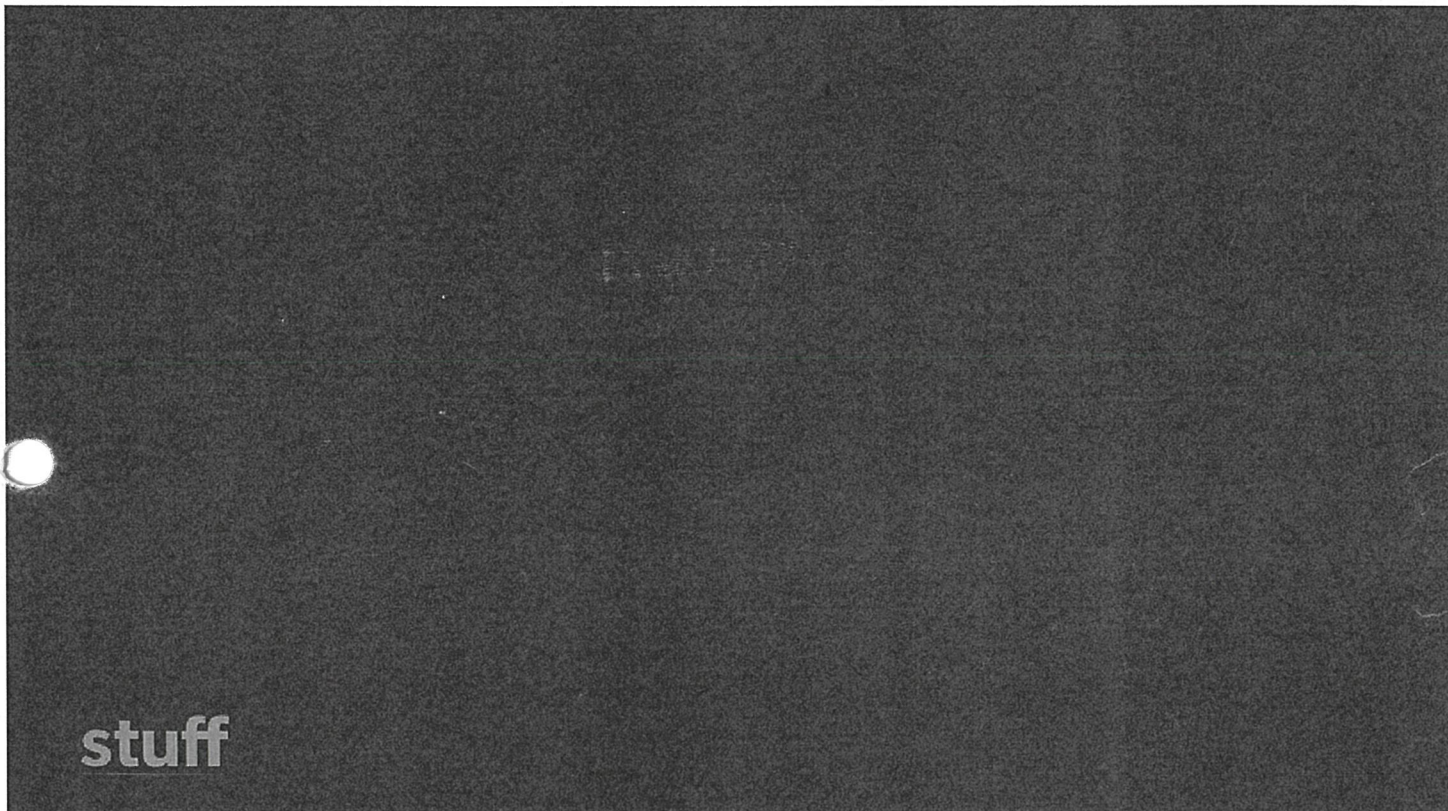


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Black Lives Matter: Thousands at Auckland and Wellington marches

Catrin Owen and Andre Chumko · 05:00, Jun 14 2020



ABIGAIL DOUGHERTY/STUFF

Thousands of protesters marched in Auckland on June 1 in solidarity after the death of African American George Floyd while in police custody.

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Auckland's rally on Sunday started in Aotea Square where speakers joined about 5000 people ahead of a march down Queen St to the US Consulate, chanting "no justice, no peace" and "black lives matter".

The events are the latest of a string across the country organised in support of protests in the United States following the death of unarmed black man George Floyd at the hands of a police officer.

Social justice activist Julia Whaipooti told the Auckland crowd: "When George Floyd took his last breath, it allowed the rest of us to breath."

RYAN ANDERSON/STUFF

Protesters make their way down Auckland's Queen St chanting 'black lives matter'.

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Whaipooti said when we look across in solidarity to the United States, we should send our Aroha, but we can't turn a blind eye as to what's happening here in New Zealand.

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"We need to actively work to dismantle the oppressive powers here.

"This is not a new movement, a hashtag, a square on Instagram, but a living and breathing fight to ensure the children don't have to stand up and do this again."

She encouraged people to have uncomfortable conversations and to continue to have them.

"George Floyd doesn't have any more breaths left, it's our job to ensure that wasn't in vain."

CHRIS MCKEEN/STUFF

Will 'Ilolahia, founder of the Polynesian Panthers, said New Zealand could show the world the way on fighting racism.

Polynesian Panthers founding member Will 'Ilolahia began his speech in Auckland with an “all power to the people” chant, and said those who had gathered on Sunday afternoon were part of history.

He encouraged everyone to turn around to speak to someone they didn't know, and told the crowd: “Racism is not a Māori or Pasifika problem it's a white, pākehā problem.”

The lively Auckland hikoi then made its way to the US Consulate where it was met by a Unite union truck playing music. Maori wardens were dancing and spirits were high all around, as calls for New Zealand police to be “arms down” followed.

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Protestors hold signs during a protest in support of the Black Lives Matter movement on June 14, 2020 in Wellington.

Thousands of people, if not tens of thousands, turned out to Wellington's march. Crowds were so vast, marchers were still leaving Civic Square while the front of the march got to the bottom of Lambton Quay, opposite Parliament.

Wellington City Council spokesman Richard MacLean estimated about 20,000 people took part, making it as big, if not bigger, than the 2019 School Strike 4 Climate.

He believed it was the biggest march in the capital for at least a decade.

Referencing the death of Floyd, one speaker told the crowd racism was built in to the framework of Aotearoa.

"Today we bring together our diverse communities ... Black lives matter, our lives matter."

There were discussions about racial bias and inequity, colonialism, Māori imprisonment rates, systemic racism, the push to remove statues of colonisers and issues of Māori land protection.

GETTY-IMAGES

The event in Wellington was organised in solidarity with protests in the United States following the killing of George Floyd.

"It takes all of us, each one of us has a part," another speaker said, talking about the need to address systemic racism in New Zealand.

"It is awkward ... it requires people to look introspectively. Any conversation that's hard to have, it's probably a conversation worth having."

A haka involving members of the African community was performed on the stage, prompting many in the crowd to join in, while others took to one knee in support of the kaupapa.

Protesters made their way down Auckland's Queen St chanting "black lives matter".

RYAN ANDERSON/STUFF

The crowd then marched to Parliament shouting: "What do we want? Change."

Christine Moriarty, who was there with her granddaughters, Amelie, 13, and Ella, 10 said: "If you are not here and trying to make change you might as well not exist."

She remembered being on the Springbok tour marches of the 1980s: "They were a lot more organised," she said.

Once at Parliament, the crowd was met by MPs James Shaw and Andrew Little.