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Write a 1-pg reflection or write a paragraph response on the blog.

Bracing for a new civil rights movement

By Los Angeles Times, adapted by Newsela staff

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Grade Level **8** Word Count **906**

NEW YORK — The protest chants are angry, but simple: “I can’t breathe!” “Hands up, don’t shoot!” “Black lives matter!” Demonstrators have shouted these slogans from coast to coast after two grand jury decisions that cleared white policemen in the deaths of unarmed black men. Now, activists are counting on the rage and pain behind those words to create a new civil rights movement. They want the United States to face the issues of race and police, and push the government to automatically investigate when police abuse their powers.

“They’re asking for something simple. They want to be treated the same,” New York Mayor Bill de Blasio said of protesters Thursday. De Blasio sought to calm the city experiencing its second day of protests after a grand jury on Wednesday decided not to indict, or charge, policeman Daniel Pantaleo in the killing of a black man.

Decision Sparks Protests

On July 17, Eric Garner died after allegedly being put in a chokehold by Pantaleo, a white police officer, during an arrest. Garner's death was captured on cellphone video.

On Wednesday, mainly peaceful demonstrations broke out in New York soon after grand jury's decision. Protesters blocked major streets and gathered at landmark sites, including Times Square and Grand Central Terminal railroad station.

More large demonstrations erupted Thursday night in New York and throughout the nation, including Boston, Washington, Pittsburgh and Chicago. As night fell in New York, helicopters thundered over Manhattan while protesters gathered in Foley Square, near the courthouse and police headquarters.

“It was a murder on video and there was no justice,” said Mickey Thomas, a 21-year-old Hunter College student. “I definitely think we’ve had enough. I feel like there is a new civil rights movement.”

Ida Dupont is a Pace University sociology professor specializing in criminology. She too thought the Garner incident was an “open-and-shut case” because of the video.

Dupont said she was out protesting to show her outrage.

“I’ve been talking to my students about it,” she said. “All the young people know something is seriously wrong.”

Rally For Change

Last week, violence, arson and looting erupted in Ferguson, Missouri, after a grand jury decided not to indict Darren Wilson, a white policeman, in the shooting death of Michael Brown, 18, another unarmed black man. Protesters have taken to the streets almost daily there since Brown’s shooting on Aug. 9.

At a Thursday news conference, black leaders urged protesters from around the country to come to Washington, D.C., for a Dec. 13 rally. They plan to press for federal intervention when police use excessive force.

“Marches and boycotts led to the ’64 Civil Rights Act,” Al Sharpton, of the National Action Network, said. The Civil Rights Act, passed by Congress in 1964, outlawed discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex or national origin.

Sharpton said that just as federal legislation led to change 50 years ago, similar action is needed now. He said prosecutors should no longer handle cases involving their own local police force.

Change Is Being Eyed From the Top

Those pushing for change have the attention of some of the nation’s top leaders. These leaders view their demands through personal eyes — from President Barack Obama and Attorney General Eric H. Holder Jr., who are black, to de Blasio, whose wife is black.

The New York mayor spoke emotionally this week of the concerns he and his wife had for their 17-year-old son, Dante. “I couldn’t help but immediately think of what it would mean to me to lose Dante,” de Blasio said. “Life could never be the same.”

Holder has launched federal inquiries into several police departments in recent years, which have led the federal Justice Department to order reforms. But those investigations often follow years of claims of abuse. Right now, there is no guarantee an investigation will take place. The black leaders demanded that the Justice Department automatically investigate cases in which law enforcement officials face possible criminal charges stemming from civilian deaths or injuries. The impact of Garner’s death and the recent case of a 12-year-old black boy killed by Cleveland police could inspire protesters to push for change, experts said.

"A Rising Awareness"

Connie Rice is a civil rights attorney and founder of the Advancement Project in Los Angeles. She said that if the protesters translate their demonstrations into political action, “we’ll see a response that’s more than lip service.”

“It’s a continuation of a very old civil rights era,” Rice said of the latest cries for change. “It’s not going to look like it did, but that doesn’t mean it’s new.”

One question is whether the current anger will bring actual change.

“The luxury that some have is to just express outrage,” Sharpton said. “Those of us who have the connections to actual victims — we have to sit with them and say how this will achieve justice.”

Darnell Hunt, a media and race expert at the University of California, Los Angeles, said only time would tell whether Sharpton fulfills his goals. But, he said, there does seem to be “a rising awareness around questions of race and fairness.”

The New York Police Department said Thursday it is investigating the officer's actions on the day Garner died. Pantaleo could face punishments, including being fired from the NYPD, said Lieutenant Colonel John Grimpel, a department spokesman.

Pantaleo and the police officers’ union have denied that he used a chokehold on Garner, which is banned by police rules.

Possible Response Questions:

- Write a response that explains the central idea of the article. Use at least two-three details from the article to support your response.
- What search terms might you use to conduct more research to understand some of the topics in this article better? What would you hope to learn in your research?
- Select any passage and respond to it.