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U.S.

# Museum Curators Sift Through History of George Floyd Protests in Real Time

National Museum of African American History and Culture curators are looking to preserve signs and artwork left by protesters in front of the White House



Posters and placards cover fencing on the north side of Lafayette Square, near the White House, in Washington on Monday.

PHOTO: MANDEL NGAN/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE/GETTY IMAGES

By [Rebecca Ballhaus](#) and [Dustin Volz](#)

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WASHINGTON—Curators from the National Museum of African American History and Culture spent hours at Lafayette Square on Wednesday laying the groundwork for preserving some of the signs and other artwork that protesters have hung near the White House in recent days.

“We collect to preserve memory, to preserve history, to preserve voices,” said Aaron Bryant, the museum’s curator for contemporary collecting and digital culture. He said he and the other museum curators wanted to let protesters know that “we’re interested in preserving their voices.”

Demonstrators have been gathering at Lafayette Square for nearly two weeks to protest the killing of George Floyd by Minneapolis police, which sparked a nationwide movement against police brutality. Fencing was erected around the square after law enforcement cleared protesters from the area last week using gas and pepper balls before [President Trump](#) [walked across the square](#) and took a photo in front of St. John’s Church. The

fence has since become a signboard for protesters.



Aaron Bryant, a curator for the museum, carries a folded up 'Black Lives Matter' banner to his car.

PHOTO: REBECCA BALLHAUS/THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

The curators didn't come to the square on Wednesday with the aim of collecting signs, but Mr. Bryant took a couple that he said he found particularly witty after talking to a young woman who had come to the square from Maryland along with her mother and friends.

"As a curator, if you have an object, you can tell that story and you find a way for that young lady to have a voice," he said during an interview outside the nearby St. John's Church. "It's not just a protest sign. This is someone's life, this is someone's memory."

He said the museum isn't collecting pieces with a specific exhibit in mind, but is more interested in ensuring that the material doesn't get lost. "We hope to exhibit it," whether in 50 days or 50 years, he said.



Crosses and drawings of victims of police violence and racism hang on a fence at Lafayette Square near the White House on Sunday.

PHOTO: JOSE LUIS MAGANA/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE/GETTY IMAGES

As he and other members of the museum prepared to head back to their cars, another group of protesters in the area took down a large black banner reading "Black Lives Matter" that had hung in the middle of the temporary fence around Lafayette Square, directly in front of the White House. The

banner had begun ripping in the wind, and the group told the curators they wanted to take it down before it was destroyed and give it to the museum to preserve.

Mr. Bryant said the museum would review the banner's ownership before deciding whether it could be added to its collection.

The curators plan to make more trips to the square in the coming weeks. "History happens in front of us every day," he said. "It's not just the past. It's our everyday lives and it's right in front of us."

The National Park Service said Tuesday morning that most of the temporary fencing around the park would be removed by Wednesday. Later in the day, the agency said the Secret Service was still in talks with the U.S. Park Police regarding the fencing around the park.

As of Wednesday afternoon, the fencing was still up, though many of the signs had been moved. A bright green and pink banner reading "8 MIN 46 SEC"—the amount of time prosecutors said a Minneapolis police officer knelt on Mr. Floyd's neck, killing him—and "HOW MANY AREN'T FILMED" was still attached to the fence.

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