The recent protests in the U.S. after the death in police custody of George Floyd – augmented by riots, arson, vandalism and looting – have drawn a moral response from some that “systemic racism” in the U.S. either explains the causes or even justifies such violence. The narrative provided is one of relentless, unforgiving oppression calling forth revolutionary retribution and punishment, a sanctioning of violence in a way inappropriate for any society which sought true justice.

How can such a narrative be tested for truth?

In the last few days, I have read commentaries refuting the narrative. They have offered in evidence of such refutation statistics on police killings and other murders of African Americans.

The statistics do refute the narrative, but document, to my sadness, a deep wound in our social well-being. I enthusiastically took part in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, going south for the last day of the march from Selma to Montgomery. I was confident that the victory of the movement, turned into law by the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1965, had ended southern segregation forever and so had ended forever the regional cult of systemic white supremacy.

Now, we see that, with all the progress since 1965 and the rise of a large and dynamic African American middle class, decades have been wasted with respect to black lives in the inner city. Public schools have failed to educate most children born and raised in those communities. Without good education, most inner city African Americans have been unable to find employment, gain wealth and join the middle class. The leadership role of the black church has been overlooked by reformers. Though billions have been spent, the recent protests and riots reveal that too little has been accomplished in these neighborhoods.

I excerpt the relevant statistics on systemic police racism here:

The Washington Post acknowledges that fatal shootings by police have run steadily at around 1,000 per year since 2015 — 995 (2015), 963 (2016), 987 (2017), 998 (2018) and 1,004 (2019).
Fatal Encounters with Police:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>457</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>399</td>
<td>209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>370</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020 (so far)</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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In 2015, police shot to death 38 unarmed blacks and 32 unarmed whites. In 2019, according to the Washington Post’s searchable database on police shootings, police shot dead 9 unarmed black people and 19 unarmed white people.

According to Statista, there had been 7,407 black homicide victims the previous year, 2018. Assuming a comparable number of victims in 2019, the nine unarmed black victims of police shootings during 2019 were 0.1% of all African Americans killed that year.

According to the U.S. Department of Justice’s Bureau of Justice Statistics, from 1980 to 2008, when African Americans were 13% of the population (7% of all males), 52.5% of all murders and 65.6% of all drug-related homicides were committed by African Americans.

According to FBI reports, of the 2,870 African American deaths from homicide in 2016 included in their database, 89.5% of the killers were African American and .08% were Caucasian.

In 2018, when the homicide victim was black, so was the suspected killer 88% of the time.

Of the 776 black–white and white-black homicides in 2016, blacks committed 533 and whites 243. With respect to interracial crime, between 2012 and 2015, blacks committed 85.5% of all black-white interracial violent victimizations, excluding homicides.

As a norm, African Americans commit 53% of murders and 60% of robberies.

According to the Chicago Sun Times, while Chicago was roiled by another day of protests and looting in the wake of George Floyd’s murder, 18 people were killed on Sunday, May 31, making it the single most violent day in Chicago in six decades, according to the University of Chicago Crime Lab. The lab’s data doesn’t go back further than 1961.

From 7:00 p.m. Friday, May 29, through 11:00 p.m. Sunday, May 31, 25 people were killed in the city, with another 85 wounded by gunfire, according to data maintained by the Chicago Sun Times.

The paper also reported that in 2019, there were 492 homicides in Chicago and only 3 of them involved the police.
The Rev. Michael Pfleger, a longtime crusader against gun violence who leads St. Sabina Church in Auburn Gresham, said it had been “open season” in his Chicago neighborhood and others on the south and west sides. “On Saturday and particularly Sunday, I heard people saying all over, ‘Hey, there’s no police anywhere, police ain’t doing nothing,'” Pfleger said. “I sat and watched a store looted for over an hour,” he added. “No police came. I got in my car and drove around to some other places getting looted and didn’t see police anywhere.”

Mayor Lori Lightfoot said on May 31 alone, Chicago’s 911 emergency center received 65,000 calls for all types of service — 50,000 more than on a usual day.

The data seem to indicate that those protesting continuing disparate life outcomes for African Americans – in education, income and wealth and in public safety – are not looking in the right direction for successful remedial action. In 2020, imputation of institutional or systemic racism in America may not really explain the numbers relating to police behaviors or other disparities. If so, what might?