Why Demonstrators Protesting the Death of George Floyd in Minneapolis Keyed In on Target



MINNEAPOLIS, Minn.—The rallying cry of “no justice, no peace” continues to be heard in the streets of Minneapolis tonight, as protestors swollen with rage, have set buildings ablaze, shattered windows of businesses and ignited fireworks to denounce police brutality and demand retribution for the death of George Floyd.

Tension began building Tuesday, one day after Floyd’s death brought on by a police officer who today was charged with his murder. That tension escalated into aggression late Wednesday as the protest moved down Lake Street, a major commercial corridor lined with small businesses and big-brand stores. By Thursday morning, a Wendy’s had crumbled, an AutoZone and a Dollar General were set ablaze and a Cub Foods, Dollar Tree and CVS had been ransacked.

But the Lake Street store that got the most attention, from

both media and protesters, was Target, which was stripped bare. As demonstrations spilled over into St. Paul, the Midway Target store on University Avenue was subsequently looted, followed by chants from protestors of “I can’t breathe” to police officers at the scene.

Target, which is headquartered in Minneapolis, was not chosen at random. Twin Cities locals explained the reasoning behind keying in on the chain on social media, which includes a hiring discrimination lawsuit and a history of funding and supporting local police.

> *The people hit target so hard because that target funds the Minneapolis police department. They also denied service to protesters when they needed milk for those who were tear gassed.* *#GeorgeFloyd #icantbreathe*
>
> *— kalon????⁷ (@KALONSMERALDO)* *May 28, 2020*

A deep-rooted history

The red bull’s-eye logo of the eighth-largest retailer in the United States is ubiquitous in Minneapolis. The wagging tail of Target’s branded Miniature Bull Terrier can be seen whenever a Twins player hits a home run at Target Field. And Target Center, the home of the Minnesota Timberwolves and Minnesota Lynx, overlooks Minneapolis’ downtown entertainment district.

But, Target’s involvement with Minneapolis goes beyond its brand presence.

In 2004, Target donated $300,000 to the city’s police department to set up surveillance cameras throughout downtown Minneapolis—reportedly covering a roughly 40-block radius—as part of its SafeZone Collaborative program. It later evolved into a nonprofit called the Downtown Improvement District, and while it no longer relies on Target’s donations, Target still

supports and hosts initiatives with police (like its decade-long Heroes and Helpers program). In 2011, Target established a forensics crime lab at its campus in Brooklyn Park, Minn., which creates high-resolution images from surveillance data collected by cameras. Minneapolis police told MPR News in 2011 that they don't use Target's forensic services often, but they sometimes do (free of charge).

Adweek reached out to Target for comment, but has not heard back at the time of publishing this story.

> *Did you know that in 2004 Target spent 300k on cameras in downtown #Minneapolis to help MPD terrorize black + brown community members? And that Target actively funds the lie that cops exist to "protect communities"? pic.twitter.com/uQIKxum0X9*
>
> *— Denise ???? (@denisecheeseman) May 28, 2020*

In 2015, Target settled a $2.8 million hiring discrimination complaint filed by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. The EEOC claimed the retailer had used three employee assessments that disproportionally weeded out applicants based on race, gender and ability.

Many locals on social media claimed the Lake Street location—which is in front of the 3rd Precinct police station that protesters overtook and burned down on Thursday night—was also targeted because employees were apparently refusing to sell milk, baking soda and other supplies to aid those who had been sprayed with or exposed to chemical irritants. However, a video posted by a St. Paul resident on Twitter suggests that protesters were able to purchase milk from the Lake Street Target on May 26, the night before the bulk of the demonstrations began in the area.

Locals suggested the Midway location may have been targeted because it sits in what used to be St. Paul's largest black

neighborhood, Rondo, which served as a vibrant cultural and civil actions center for the Twin Cities' African American community for over a century before it was disrupted and decimated by the construction of an interstate highway. Rondo residents resisted construction efforts between 1956 and 1968, but police forcibly removed them from their homes. By the time I-94 opened, the booming mixed-income neighborhood had been fractured, displacing thousands in a discriminatory housing market.

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