



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on July 6, 2020

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Rioting Against Racism Ravages Black Businesses

Riots about the wrongness of the treatment of George Floyd by police have led to the destruction of black businesses and lives.

When Korboi Balla arrived at his Minneapolis sports bar the morning of May 28, he broke down. Just days before it was set to open, the bar, into which the firefighter, husband, and father of four had poured his life savings, was destroyed by rioters protesting the death of George Floyd seemingly at the hands of the Minneapolis police.



“I don’t know what we’re going to do,” Balla told *CBS This Morning*. “It hurts, man. It’s not fair, it’s not right. We’ve been working so hard for this place. It’s not just for me, it’s for my family.”

That night, Balla’s dream went up in smoke as protesters burned down the building. Upon arriving at the fire station the next morning and learning the news, Balla “had to leave work because the emotional toll was too substantial,” according to a GoFundMe page he set up to raise money to rebuild.

“To find out that the countless hours, hard work, late nights away from my kids, and family had all been for nothing was soul shattering,” he wrote.

The irony in the situation is that while the rioters were supposedly standing against racism, they were obliterating a business owned by a black man.

Giving Blacks the Business

“The riots and arson that followed protests of George Floyd’s death have devastated organizations and businesses that serve communities of color,” reported the Minneapolis *Star Tribune*. “Destruction from the south side’s Lake Street to West Broadway in north Minneapolis has hit immigrant- and minority-owned businesses already struggling amid the pandemic-induced shutdown. Now, ethnically diverse neighborhoods are grappling with the loss of jobs, services and investments.”

“Our dreams are being destroyed,” Faatemah Ampey, the black owner of the vandalized SuiteSpot Salonspa on Lake Street, said through tears in a Facebook video. “I cry for George, I cry for justice, and I cry for peace. But right now I’m crying for my community.”

On her block, she told *Forbes*, there are at least three black-owned businesses and one Asian-owned. “So just on that block, they destroyed three people of colors’ lives, our dreams,” she said.

In North Minneapolis, Trevon Ellis’ barbershop, Fade Factory, burned for more than 12 hours after rioters set it on fire. Ellis, too, is black.

“There’s a way to protest positively for George Floyd,” Ellis told *Forbes*. “You’re fighting someone that destroyed and took someone’s life, why would you do the same thing? People’s lives count on their



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business, like mine.”

Blacks weren't the only minorities whose life's work was wiped out by protesters. Hispanics, Indians, Asians, and American Indians suffered similar losses.

Seven years ago, Ecuadorian immigrant Luis Tamay sank a decade's worth of savings into his Lake Street restaurant, El Sabor Chuchi. The one night during the protests that he didn't guard it, thinking the National Guard would get things under control, rioters burned it down. “Seventeen years of work is gone,” he lamented to the *Star Tribune*.

Even posting a sign notifying protesters that a business is minority-owned, as many owners did, wasn't always enough to save it from destruction. Ghandi Mahal, an Indian restaurant, was torched despite its notice. Migizi, an American Indian nonprofit that had “native youth center” written on the window of its practically new, \$2-million building, was also burned.

The pattern was repeated in cities across the country, where rioters, interested not in justice for Floyd but in destruction and pelf, smashed windows, looted stores, and set them ablaze.

Philadelphia's acting commerce director, Sylvie Gallier Howard, told the *Wall Street Journal* that “possibly more than a thousand businesses” in the city were affected by rioters. Especially hard-hit was the 52nd Street corridor, which largely consists of small businesses owned by blacks and other minorities.

Atlanta's award-winning Wilbourn Sisters Dress Shop had its windows smashed on May 30. The owners, Janice and Carolyn Wilbourn, had posted signs saying the business was black-owned to no avail.

“This is devastating,” Janice Wilbourn told the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. “We're here for God. This is our ministry. This is our family legacy.”

A deli in Brooklyn, New York, was trashed by protesters. One of the store's co-owners, an elderly black woman, was captured on a video uploaded to YouTube doing to the miscreants what they had done to her store. “‘Tell me black lives matter?’ she said. ‘You lied. You wanted to loot this store. You needed money. Get a job like I do!’”

And the list goes on.

Misery's Company

Business owners won't be the only ones to suffer as a result of the destruction. Their employees will lose their jobs, at least temporarily, and their neighbors will now have fewer shopping options.

As a result of the rioting, Ampey said in her video, “There's no place to get gas within a five-mile radius [of SuiteSpot]. There's no place to get food.” People without vehicles — or without fuel for their vehicles — are “in trouble,” she added.

The negative consequences are likely to go far beyond these inconveniences, Zaid Jilani observed in a *Quillette* column:

All in all, the evidence suggests that violent protests and rioting ... provide an opportunity for gangs to enrich themselves and exploit destabilized local populations, impoverish property owners, and harm long-term economic fortunes. And so it's worth asking whether the well-intentioned progressives who are doing their best to cast the Minneapolis rioters in righteous terms are truly doing these



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underprivileged residents any favors.

They're certainly not doing the cause of justice for Floyd any favors. Morgan Pieper, owner of a Dallas organic convenience store that was vandalized in the rioting, told KTVT, "I actually think this is deflecting away from the real message and the point of this, and the poor man's death, George Floyd! I mean, the media can't talk about George Floyd when they have to talk about all of this destruction. It needs to stop."

Rebound Percentage

Bouncing back from the devastation of the riots would be difficult anytime, but it will be even harder in the wake of COVID-19. "African-Americans were disproportionately sickened or killed by the new coronavirus," noted the *Wall Street Journal*. "And black people and Latinos were more likely to lose their jobs than white workers as the economy shrank in March and April." Numerous businesses were shuttered by government orders and even now, in some jurisdictions, are only allowed to open if they abide by strict protocols.

Scraping up enough money to rebuild will be a struggle for many business owners. Those with insurance may recover more quickly, but many small, minority-owned businesses aren't insured, in part because insurance rates in their neighborhoods are high — and likely to climb after the riots.

"A lot of them, unfortunately, won't be able to weather the storm," Allen Riddick, director of supplier inclusion at Philadelphia's Drexel University, told the *Journal*. "The timing is horrible."

Even insured business owners may find it difficult to recoup all their material losses, and no amount of money will be able to heal the emotional damage they have sustained.

"Someone asked me, did I have insurance? Of course I have insurance," said Ampey. "But can insurance" — she began sobbing again — "bring back all the hard work I put into building a brand that is successful?"

Still, there is some hope in the midst of the chaos. Ampey made a point of showing in her video the people from her community — of all colors and ages — who had come to help clean things up. Balla, likewise, was grateful for all the strangers who showed up to help with his bar after it was vandalized. "The amount of gratitude in my heart right now is outweighing the sorrow and heavy-heartedness I feel," he wrote at the time.

Even after the building burned, making all that cleanup for naught, Balla's positive attitude remained. Of course, it helped that his story made national news, bringing in well over a million dollars' worth of contributions, including some from staffers of President Donald Trump's reelection campaign.

"COVID-19 and a fire cannot stop what plans I have to open my dream," Balla declared, "and I cannot wait to open the doors and serve all the people who have supported us and will continue to do so."

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BEHIND THE RIOTS



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