

How journalists can **stay safe** in times of unrest

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Case study

George Floyd protests: Seattle, WA



Context: May 30, 2020, 1 p.m.

Ramon and I return to the newsroom to grab lunch after filming a **peaceful protest at police headquarters**.

We're relieved the crowd was nothing like what we saw in Minneapolis earlier in the week. **The next protest is downtown at 3 p.m.**

Amanda asks if she can ride there with us after filing her photos, and we agree.

Amanda doesn't finish filing until 2:30 p.m., but we're too busy enjoying lunch to notice the time.

Ramon drives us all downtown – but the crowd is massive and streets are blocked. **It's 2:45 p.m. – there is no time** to find parking.

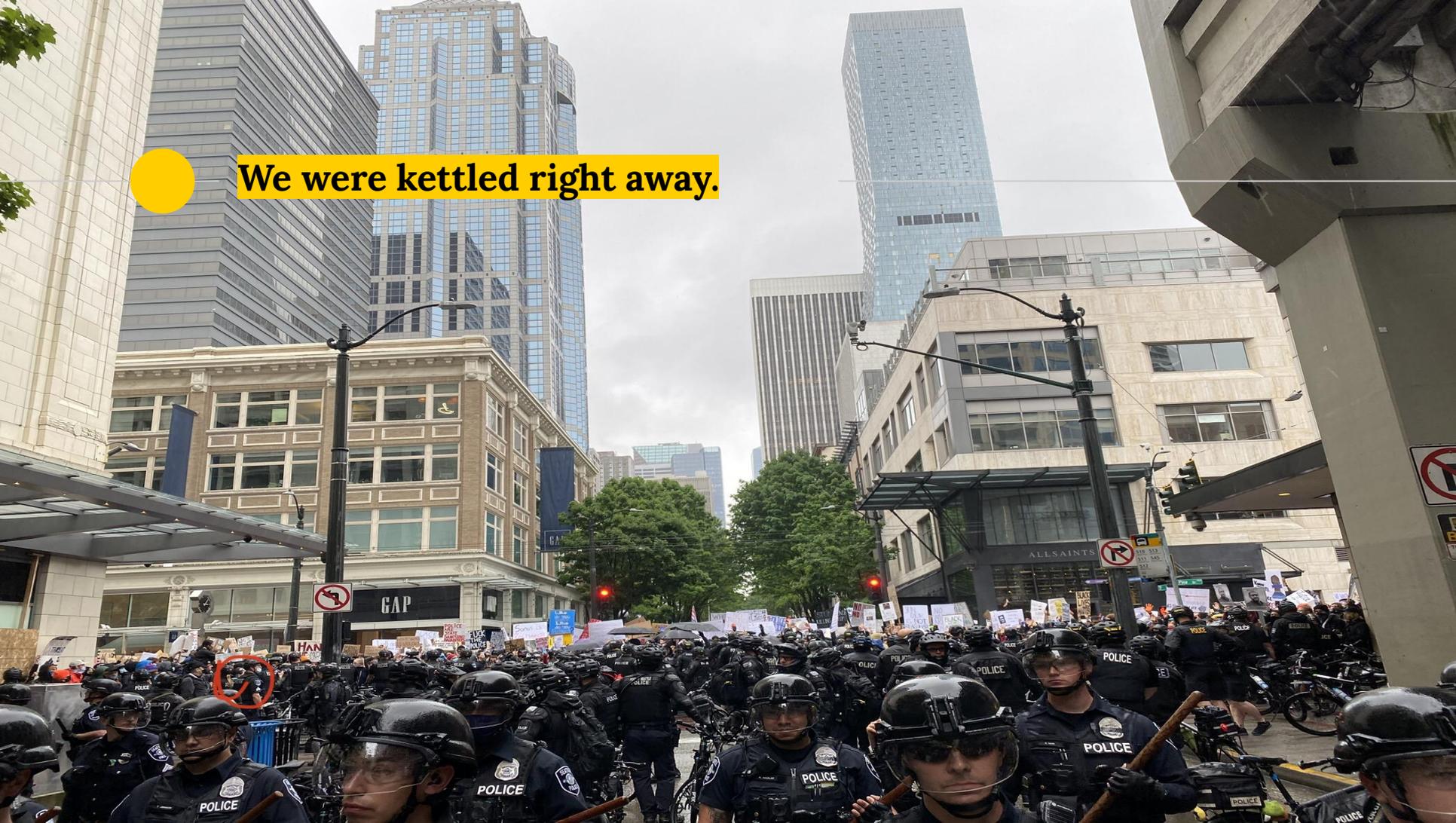
Ramon tells us to **hop out while he parks; he'll find us later.**



What should we do next?

- ◉ **Hop out of the car** – we're late! I'll share my phone location with Ramon so he can catch up with us.
- ◉ **Insist on finding a parking spot** together so we don't get separated. But we'll risk missing the moment, which would mean The Seattle Times won't have *any* relevant coverage.

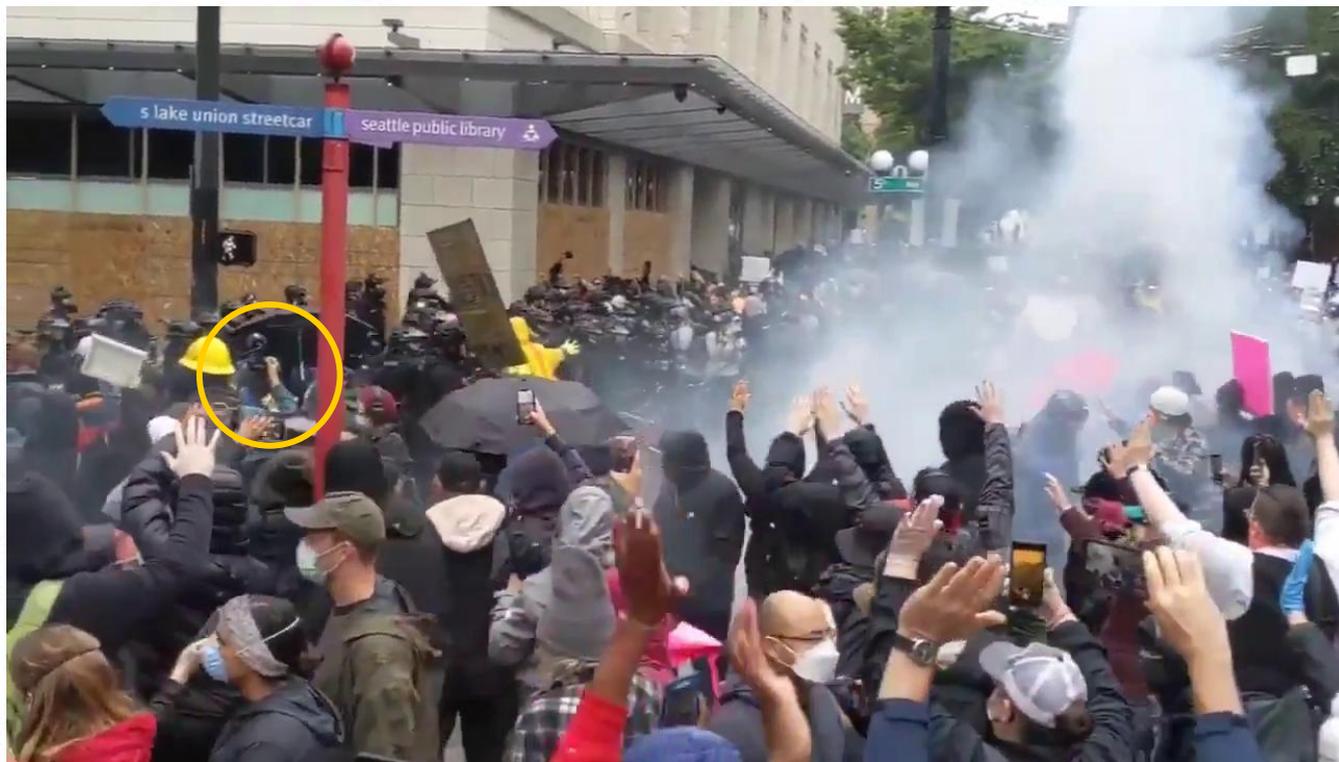
We were kettled right away.





Mike Baker  @ByMikeBaker · May 30

Already some early clashes between police and protesters in Seattle.



 15

 124

 126





**What could we have
done to prepare?**

BEFORE:

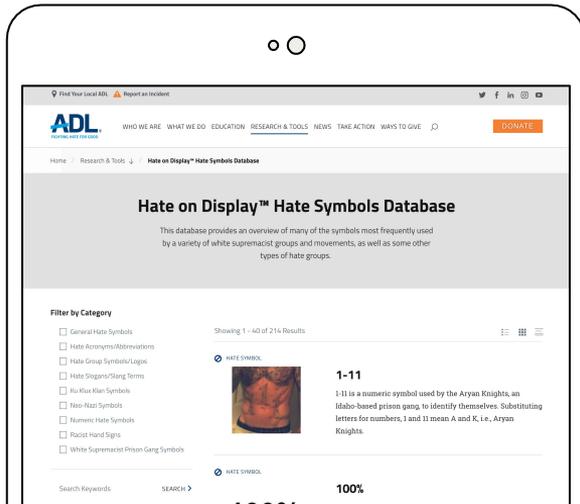
What to Research

- ◉ **Location scouting**
 - Visit ahead of time to scope out choke points, exit routes
 - Or use Google Maps, Google Earth, even Snap Map
 - Determine your team's meeting points
 - Admin point
 - Security point
 - Parking :)

- ◉ **Cultural norms**
 - For the physical spaces
 - For the people you'll be reporting alongside

BEFORE: What to Research

- Power structures
Police, military, etc.
Political, social, racial



BEFORE:



What to Plan

- ⦿ **Communication and digital security**
 - Designated check-in times
 - How will you communicate with your colleagues and editor?
 - What if cell networks go down?
 - Biometric unlocking (Face ID and Touch ID)
- ⦿ **Risk tolerance**
 - How will you signal you're ready to leave?
 - What will you do if colleagues don't respect your boundaries?

BEFORE:

What to Bring

- ⦿ **Emergency contacts**
- ⦿ **Identification**
 - Press pass
 - Government ID
- ⦿ **Clothing**
 - Appearance
 - Practicality
- ⦿ **Personal protective equipment**
 - Respirator, goggles, etc.
 - Body armor?
- ⦿ **First Aid/Medical Kit**
- ⦿ **A buddy!**



BEFORE YOU GO:

Risk Assessment

Risk Assessment Template

Dates: *When is the assignment? When was this risk assessment reviewed?*

Activity: *What are you doing?*

Location: *Where are you going? Break down by different locations/assignments*

Hazards	Who/What is at Risk	Risk Rating/Impact	Likelihood	Risk Mitigation
<p><i>Outline what could cause harm or damage</i></p>	<p><i>For example:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Self Equipment (e.g. damage, confiscation) Digital security (e.g. trolling, doxxing etc.) Communication (e.g. cell networks down) Reputation 	<p><i>Consider the level of risk, in your opinion:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Negligible ● Minor ● Moderate ● Severe ● Critical <p><i>and why</i></p>	<p><i>Consider the level of risk, in your opinion:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Unlikely ● Possible ● Likely ● Certain or Imminent <p><i>and why</i></p>	<p><i>Precautions that should be in place to control each hazard</i></p>

Risk Assessment Template

Dates: May 30, 2020

Activity: Protest after the killing of George Floyd

Location: Westlake Park, downtown Seattle

Hazards	Who/What is at Risk	Risk Rating/Impact	Likelihood	Risk Mitigation
Tear gas	Self Communication	Moderate with no mitigation Minor with mitigation	Certain/imminent; Seattle Police use tear gas liberally for crowd dispersal	Respirator, goggles Bring water Seek elevation Monitor wind direction



DURING:

Situational Awareness

- **Where are you? Where are the exits?**
- **Who is around you? Are they dangerous?**
- **Where is your team? How are they handling the situation?**
- **How is your presence impacting the environment? How are people reacting to you?**
- **How are you feeling? Is your current mental state impacting your decision making?**



Additional resources

A woman wearing a gas mask and goggles is looking out a window at a city street during civil unrest. She is holding a camera and appears to be documenting the scene. The street outside is filled with debris and people, and a sign for '12 AVE ARTS' is visible in the background.

LEARN MORE:

Strategies for Safely Covering Civil Unrest

iwmf.org/strategies-for-safely-covering-civil-unrest/