Words Matter: The Language of Unrest

Scott Libin
Hubbard School of Journalism and Mass Communication
University of Minnesota

Terence Shepherd
WLRN-FM Miami
Words matter.

- Death
- Killing
- Homicide
- Murder
Words matter.

- Protest
- Demonstration
- Unrest
- Riot(ing)
- Uprising
Words matter.

- Reforming
- Defunding
- Dismantling
- Abolishing
Words matter.

- Racist/racism
Words matter.

“I understand the moral outrage behind wanting to slap this particular label on this particular president and his many incendiary utterances, but I disagree. Journalism may not have come honorably to the conclusion that dispassionate distance is a virtue. But that's the fragile line that separates the profession from the rancid, institution-debasing cesspool that is today's politics.”

-- Keith Woods, chief diversity officer, NPR
“... Report. Quote people. Cite sources. Add context. Leave the moral labeling to the people affected; to the opinion writers, the editorial writers, the preachers and philosophers; and to the public we serve. “We just have to do journalism.”

-- Keith Woods, chief diversity officer, NPR
Words matter.

- Chemical irritants
- Tear gas
- Pepper spray
- Pepper balls
Words matter.

- Nightstick
- Truncheon
- Club
- Baton
Words matter.

- Slashing
- Puncturing
- Strategic deflation
"State Patrol troopers strategically deflated tires ... in order to stop behaviors such as vehicles driving dangerously and at high speeds in and around protesters and law enforcement."

-- Department of Public Safety spokesman Bruce Gordon
(Star Tribune June 8, 2020)
Words matter.

“Officer-involved shooting”