FROM #BLACKLIVESMATTER TO BLACK LIBERATION

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"*From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation* is a must-read for everyone who is serious about the ongoing praxis of freedom."
—**Barbara Ransby**

CHAPTER ONE

A Culture of Racism

Negro poverty is not white poverty. Many of its causes and many of its cures are the same. But there are differences—deep, corrosive, obstinate differences—radiating painful roots into the community, and into the family, and the nature of the individual.

These differences are not racial differences. They are solely and simply the consequence of ancient brutality, past injustice, and present prejudice. . . . For the Negro they are a constant reminder of oppression. For the white they are a constant reminder of guilt.

Nor can we find a complete answer in the experience of other American minorities. They made a valiant and a largely successful effort to emerge from poverty and prejudice.

The Negro, like these others, will have to rely mostly upon his own efforts. But he just cannot do it alone. For they did not have the heritage of centuries to overcome, and they did not have a cultural tradition which had been twisted and battered by endless years of hatred and hopelessness, nor were they excluded—these others—because of race or color—a feeling whose dark intensity is matched by no other prejudice in our society.

Nor can these differences be understood as isolated infirmities. They are a seamless web. They cause each other. They result from each other. They reinforce each other.

—**President Lyndon Johnson,** Howard University commencement speech, June 4, 1965

> *I understand there's a common fraternity creed here at Morehouse: "Excuses are tools of the incompetent used to build bridges to nowhere and monuments of nothingness." Well, we've got no time for excuses. Not because the bitter legacy of slavery and segregation have vanished entirely; they have not. Not because racism and discrimination no longer exist; we know those are still out there. It's just that in today's hyperconnected, hypercompetitive world, with millions of young people from China and India and Brazil—many of whom started with a whole lot less than all of you did—all of them entering the global workforce alongside you, nobody is going to give you anything that you have not earned. Nobody cares how tough your upbringing was. Nobody cares if you suffered some discrimination. And moreover, you have to remember that whatever you've gone through, it pales in comparison to the hardships previous generations endured—and they overcame them. And if they overcame them, you can overcome them, too.*
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> —**President Barack Obama,** Morehouse University commencement speech, May 20, 2013

On the same day that the Ferguson Police Department finally revealed the name of Darren Wilson to the public as the police officer who killed Mike Brown, police chief Thomas Jackson simultaneously released a grainy video that appeared to depict Brown in the act of stealing cigarillos from a local convenience store. Jackson later admitted that Wilson did not know that Brown was suspected of having stolen anything. But the real work of the tape had already been done. Brown had been transformed from a victim of law enforcement into a Black suspect whose death was probably justified.

Brown's depiction as a possible criminal did not derail the fight to win justice for him, but for the mainstream media and other political elites who had stuck their toes in the waters of social justice, Brown's possible involvement in a criminal act in the moments before his murder cast doubt on his innocence. The *New York Times* ran an unwieldy story about Brown's interest in rap music and reported that he had occasionally smoked marijuana—hardly alien activities for youth of any color, but the *Times* declared that Brown was "no angel." Months later,

Times columnist Nicholas Kristof tweeted that twelve-year-old Tamir Rice, killed by police in Cleveland, was a better face for the movement because his death was more "clearcut [*sic*] and likely to persuade people of a problem."[1] The attempt to differentiate between "good" and "bad" Black victims of state violence tapped into longstanding debates over the nature of Black inequality in the United States. Was Brown truly a victim of racist and overzealous police, or was he a victim of his own poor behavior, including defying police? Was Brown deserving or undeserving of empathy, humanity, and ultimately justice?

There are constant attempts to connect the badges of inequality, including poverty and rates of incarceration, to culture, family structure, and the internal lives of Black Americans. Even before emancipation, there were relentless debates over the causes of Black inequality. Assumptions of biological and cultural inferiority among African Americans are as old as the nation itself. How else could the political and economic elite of the United States (and its colonial predecessors) rationalize enslaving Africans at a time when they were simultaneously championing the rights of men and the end of monarchy and establishing freedom, democracy, and the pursuit of happiness as the core principles of this new democracy? Thomas Jefferson, the father of American democracy, spoke to this ironically when advocating that freed Blacks be colonized elsewhere. He said of the Black slave:

> His imagination is wild and extravagant, escapes incessantly from every restraint of reason and taste, and, in the course of its vagaries, leaves a tract of thought as incoherent and eccentric, as is the course of a meteor through the sky. . . . Upon the whole, though we admit him to the first place among those of his own color who have presented themselves to the public judgment, yet when we compare him with the writers of the race among whom he lived, and particularly with the epistolary class, in which he has taken his own stand, we are compelled to enroll him at the bottom of the column. . . .
>
> The improvement of the blacks in body and mind, in the first instance of their mixture with the whites, has been observed by every one, and proves that their inferiority is not the effect merely of their condition of life. . . . It is not their condition then, but nature, which has produced the distinction. Whether further observation will or will not verify the conjecture, that nature has been less bountiful to them in the endowments of the head.[2]

This naked racism flattened the contradiction between enslavement and freedom and, in doing so, justified slavery as a legitimate, if not natural, condition for African Americans. This, of course, was not driven by blind hatred but by the lucrative enterprise of forced labor. Historian Barbara Fields reminds us that "the chief business of slavery," after all, was "the production of cotton, sugar, rice and tobacco," not the "production of white supremacy."[3] The continuing pursuit of cheap and easily manipulated labor certainly did not end with slavery; thus, deep-seated ideas concerning the inferiority of Blacks were perpetuated with fervor. By the twentieth century, shifting concepts of race were applied not only to justify labor relations but more generally to explain the curious way in which the experiences of the vast majority of African Americans confound the central narrative of the United States as a place of unbounded opportunity, freedom, and democracy. This observation challenges the idea that race operates or acts on its own, with only a tangential relationship to other processes taking place within our society.

Ideologically, "race" is in a constant process of being made and remade repeatedly. Fields explains the centrality of ideology in making sense of the world we live in:

> Ideology is best understood as the descriptive vocabulary of day-to-day existence, through which people make rough sense of the social reality that they live and create from day to day. It is the language of consciousness that suits the particular way in which people deal with their fellows. It is the interpretation in thought of the social relations through which they constantly create and re-create their collective being, in all the varied forms their collective being may assume: family, clan, tribe, nation, class, party, business enterprise, church, army, club, and so on. As such, ideologies are not delusions but real, as real as the social relations for which they stand. . . . An ideology must be constantly created and verified in social life; if it is not, it dies, even though it may seem to be safely embodied in a form that can be handed down.[4]

The point is that explanations for Black inequality that blame Black people for their own oppression transforms material causes into subjective causes. The problem is not racial discrimination in the workplace or residential segregation: it is Black irresponsibility, erroneous social mores, and general bad behavior. Ultimately this transformation is not about "race" or even "white supremacy" but about "making sense" of and rationalizing poverty and inequality in ways that absolve the state and capital of any culpability. Race gives meaning to the notion that Black people are inferior because of either culture or biology. It is almost strange to suggest that Black Americans, many of whose lineages as descendants of slaves stretch back to the first two centuries of the beginning of the American colonies, have a culture separate and distinct from other Americans. This framework of Black inferiority politically narrates the necessity of austere budgets while sustaining—ideologically at least—the premise of the "American dream." The Black experience unravels what we are supposed to know to be true about America itself—the land of milk and honey, the land where hard work makes dreams come true. This mythology is not benign: it serves as the United States' self-declared invitation to intervene militarily and economically around the globe. Consider President Obama's words in September 2014, when he declared a new war front against the Islamic State in the Middle East. He said, "America, our endless blessings bestow an enduring burden. But as Americans, we welcome our responsibility to lead. From Europe to Asia—from the far reaches of Africa to war-torn capitals of the Middle East—we stand for freedom, for justice, for dignity. These are values that have guided our nation since its founding."[5] What an utterly absurd statement—but that, perhaps, is why the US political and economic leadership clings so tightly to the framework of Black inferiority as the central explanation for Black inequality.

Finally, ideologies do not work when they are only imposed from above. The key is widespread acceptance, even by the oppressed themselves. There are multiple examples of African Americans accepting some aspects of racist ideology while also rejecting other aspects because of their own experiences. At various times, African Americans have also accepted that "culture" and "personal responsibility" are just as important in understanding Black oppression as racism and discrimination are. But the Black freedom struggle has also done much to confront explanations that blame Blacks for their own oppression—including throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s. The Black Lives Matter movement has the potential to shift this again, even as "culture of poverty" politics remain as entrenched as ever and Black inequality remains a fact of American life.

A Cultural Tailspin

Why are ideas about a defective Black culture so widespread when there is so much evidence for material causes of continued Black inequality? One reason is the way that the political system, elected officials, and the mainstream media operate—sometimes in tandem and sometimes independent of each other—to reinforce this "common sense" view of society. The hearty shouts of "culture," "responsibility," and "morality" come with reckless abandon when politicians of all stripes explain to the world the problems in Black America. Representative Paul Ryan used a commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty programs as an opportunity to explicate what he considers its failures: "We have got this tailspin of culture, in our inner cities in particular, of men not working and just generations of men not even thinking about working or learning the value and the culture of work, and so there is a real culture problem here that has to be dealt with." Ryan did not need to invoke "race" explicitly. The code is well known, not only because white conservatives like Ryan readily invoke it but also because liberals both normalize and legitimize the same language.

For example, when Democratic Party leader and Chicago mayor Rahm Emanuel tried to garner support for his plan to curb gun violence, he focused on what he likes to describe as the "four Ps: policing, prevention, penalties, and parenting."[6] Here Emanuel parrots conventional wisdom about juvenile crime: that it requires better parenting and, perhaps, some preventative programming, but if those fail, there are always policing and penalties to fall back on. At other times Emanuel has been less charitable, simply saying, "It's not about crime, it's about values."[7] President Obama also linked youth gun violence in Chicago to values and behavior when he said, "We have to provide stronger role models than the gangbanger on the corner."[8] The problem, according to these examples, is that crime and poverty in cities are not products of inequality but of a lack of discipline. Black youth need better values and better role models to change the culture that produces their dysfunctional and violent behavior, which, of course, is the real obstacle to a successful and meaningful life. Mayor Emanuel made the distinction between his own kids' lives of privilege and luxury and those of Chicago's Black and Brown children clear when, after an extravagant South American vacation, he quipped to a local newspaper, "Every year, we try to take the kids to a different part of the world to see. When you . . . grow up . . . you want to be an Emanuel child. It's unbelievable."[9]

It is not just in the world of politics that elected officials blame poor Black children for their own hardships. The mainstream media provides a very public platform for these ideas—from the seemingly innocuous to the very serious. For example, the mainstream media made an enormous ruckus about the antics of professional football player Marshawn Lynch, who ignored the press during the Super Bowl in 2015. It was quite the topic of discussion during much of the week leading up to the game, but the media attention shifted when another African American football player, Larry Foote, chastised Lynch for sending the "wrong message" to kids from an "urban environment." He ranted,

> The biggest message [Lynch]'s giving these kids . . . is "The hell with authority. I don't care, fine me. I'm gonna grab my crotch. I'm gonna do it my way." . . . In the real world, it doesn't work that way. . . . How can you keep a job? I mean, you got these inner-city kids. They don't listen to teachers. They don't listen to police officers, principals. And these guys can't even keep a job because they say "F" authority.[10]

In other words, police violence against and higher rates of unemployment among Black youth exist because Black kids do not respect authority—and because Marshawn Lynch is a poor role model.

In a much more serious reflection on these issues, *New Yorker* columnist Jonathan Chait and *Atlantic* columnist Ta-Nehisi Coates debated in a series of articles whether a "culture of poverty" actually exists. According to Chait, some African Americans' lack of "economic success" is directly related to the absence of "middle-class cultural norms." The combination of the two can be reduced to the presence of a Black culture of poverty: "People are the products of their environment. Environments are amenable to public policy. Some of the most successful anti-poverty initiatives, like the Harlem Children's Zone or the KIPP schools, are designed around the premise that children raised in concentrated poverty need to be taught middle class norms."[11]

Chait blithely links Black success to programs promoting privatization—charter schools and "empowerment zones" that have hardly been proven to end poverty. This old argument disintegrates when we try to

make sense of the Great Recession of 2008, when "half the collective wealth of African-American families was stripped away," an economic free fall from which they have yet to recover.[12] The "middle-class norms" of homeownership could not stop Black people's wealth from disappearing into thin air after banks fleeced them by steering them toward subprime loans. Nor do "middle-class norms" explain why Black college graduates' unemployment rate is well over twice that of white college graduates.[13] Coates responded with an argument that does not often elbow its way into mainstream accounts of Black oppression:

> There is no evidence that black people are less responsible, less moral, or less upstanding in their dealings with America nor with themselves. But there is overwhelming evidence that America is irresponsible, immoral, and unconscionable in its dealings with black people and with itself. Urging African-Americans to become superhuman is great advice if you are concerned with creating extraordinary individuals. It is terrible advice if you are concerned with creating an equitable society. The black freedom struggle is not about raising a race of hyper-moral super-humans. It is about all people garnering the right to live like the normal humans they are.[14]

American Exceptionalism

While the rest of the world wrestles with class and the perils of "class envy," the United States, according to the legend of its own making, is a place where anyone can make it. Much earlier, colonial leader John Winthrop famously described it as "a city upon a hill," adding that "the eyes of all people are upon us."[15] On the night he won the presidency in 2008 President Barack Obama said, "If there is anyone out there who still doubts that America is a place where all things are possible, who still wonders if the dream of our founders is alive in our time, who still questions the power of our democracy, tonight is your answer."[16] Former secretary of state Madeleine Albright has called the United States the "indispensable nation,"[17] while Ronald Reagan, years earlier, spelled out the specific metrics of the American dream:

> One-half of all the economic activity in the entire history of man has taken place in this republic. We have distributed our wealth more widely among our people than any society known to man. Americans work less hours for a higher standard of living than any other people. Ninety-five percent of all our families have an adequate daily intake of nutrients—and a part of the 5 percent that don't are trying to lose weight! Ninety-nine percent have gas or electric refrigeration, 92 percent have televisions, and an equal number have telephones. There are 120 million cars on our streets and highways—and all of them are on the street at once when you are trying to get home at night. But isn't this just proof of our materialism—the very thing that we are charged with? Well, we also have more churches, more libraries, we support voluntarily more symphony orchestras and opera companies, non-profit theaters, and publish more books than all the other nations of the world put together. . . . We cannot escape our destiny, nor should we try to do so. The leadership of the free world was thrust upon us two centuries ago in that little hall of Philadelphia. . . . We are indeed, and we are today, the last best hope of man on earth.[18]

American exceptionalism operates as a mythology of convenience that does a tremendous amount of work to simplify the contradiction between the apparent creed of US society and its much more complicated reality. Where people have failed to succeed and cash in on the abundance that American ingenuity has apparently created, their personal failures or deficiencies serve as the explanation.

But there is something more pernicious at the heart of this contradiction than a simple morality tale about those who try hard and those who don't. The long list of attributes that Reagan proudly recites is wholly contingent on the erasure or rewriting of three central themes in American history—genocide, slavery, and the massive exploitation of waves of immigrant workers. This "cruel reality" made the "soaring ideals" of American exceptionalism and American democracy possible.[19] From the mutual foundation of slavery *and* freedom at the country's inception to the genocide of the Native population that made the "peculiar institution" possible to the racist promulgation of "manifest destiny" to the Chinese Exclusion Act to the codified subordinate status of Black people for a hundred years after slavery ended, they are all grim reminders of the millions of bodies upon which the audacious smugness of American hubris is built. Race and racism have not been exceptions; instead, they have been the glue that holds the United States together.

Historian James Adams first popularized the concept of the American dream in his 1931 book *Epic of America*. He wrote:

> But there has been also the *American dream*, that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for every man, with opportunity for each according to his ability or achievement. It is a difficult dream for the European upper classes to interpret adequately, and too many of us ourselves have grown weary and mistrustful of it. It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position.[20]

This powerful idea has lured immigrants to this country and compelled internal migrants to other parts of the country. But it is rife with contradictions, just as it was in the 1930s, when the failures of the American economy produced widespread insecurity and poverty, despite the personal intentions or work ethic of those most affected. At the same time, the Russian Revolution in 1917 cast a long shadow, and the threat of radical and revolutionary activity loomed over Europe. In this context, the mythology of the United States as different and unaffected by class tensions and dynamics took on new urgency. The New Deal legislation and the reorganization of capital was a reflection of this. As Hal Draper pointed out about the 1930s, "The New Deal liberals proposed to save capitalism, at a time of deep going crisis and despair, by statification—that is, by increasing state intervention into the control of the economy from above."[21]

Indeed, Roosevelt referred to himself as the "savior" of the free-market system. In his bid for reelection, he said: "It was this Administration which saved the system of private profit and free enterprise after it had been dragged to the brink of ruin by these same leaders who now try to scare you. The struggle against private monopoly is a struggle for, and not against, American business. It is a struggle to preserve individual enterprise and economic freedom."[22] In an era when revolution was perceived not as idealistic but as a possibility, it was absolutely necessary to introduce new regulatory measures to create equilibrium in the system. But "preserving" the system was not only about change at an institutional level, it was also a political contest over collective ownership, for which socialists and communists organized, versus private enterprise, the lifeblood of capitalism. There were two

significant shifts in the American political economy toward this aim. The turn to Keynesian economics and the bolstering of demand-based consumption helped to underpin perceptions of economic stability. In turn, the development of state-sponsored social welfare—Social Security, aid to mothers with children, public housing—created a bottom through which the vast majority of ordinary people could not fall. These, combined with the US entrance into World War II, revitalized the American economy and gave rise to the longest economic expansion in American history.

The robust postwar economy put flesh on the ideological scaffolding of the American dream. Massive government subsidies were deployed in ways that hid the state's role in the development of the American middle class, further perpetuating the mythology of hard work and perseverance as the key ingredients to social mobility.[23] This was especially true in housing. The private housing lobby and its backers in Congress denounced publicly subsidized housing as creeping socialism. The federal government therefore did not subsidize homeownership through direct payment but through interest-rate deductions and government-guaranteed mortgages that allowed banks to lend with abandon. Not only did it rebuild the economy through these measures—and on a sounder basis than the unregulated capitalism of the previous period—but it reinforced and gave new life to the idea of American exceptionalism and the good life. As David Harvey has explained,

> The suburbanization of the United States was not merely a matter of new infrastructures. . . . it entailed a radical transformation in lifestyles, bringing new products from housing to refrigerators and air conditioners, as well as two cars in the driveway and an enormous increase in the consumption of oil. It also altered the political landscape, as subsidized home-ownership for the middle classes changed the focus of community action towards the defense of property values and individualized identities, turning the suburban vote towards conservative republicanism. Debt-encumbered homeowners . . . were less likely to go on strike.[24]

But the fruits of these new arrangements did not fall to African Americans. Political scientist Ira Katznelson describes the uneven distribution of postwar riches in his well-known book *When Affirmative Action Was White*, including the initial exclusion of African Americans

from Social Security collection and other New Deal benefits. When it came to homeownership, for example, federal mortgage guarantees were contingent on the recipients living in new, suburban housing, from which most African Americans were excluded. This meant that while the federal government subsidized suburban development, urban living spaces were an afterthought.[25] As businesses began to relocate their firms and entire industries to suburban areas because of lower land costs and taxes, the urban disinvestment dynamic was exacerbated, leaving cities bereft of the jobs that had initially lured millions of people to them in the first place.[26] Meanwhile, real-estate interests and their backers in government ensured that neither Black renters nor Black home buyers could participate in the developing suburban economy.[27]

Cold War Conflict

The aftermath of World War II introduced a new dynamic into American "race relations." The war itself created a new, bipolar world in which the United States and the Soviet Union were the "superpowers" that competed with each other for influence and control over the rest of the planet. The war also unleashed massive upheaval among the colonial possessions of the old world order. As the colonized world went into revolt against European powers, the superpowers made appeals to newly emerging independent countries. This made discrimination against American Blacks not only a domestic issue but also an international one.[28] How could the United States present itself as a "city upon a hill" or as the essential democratic nation when its Black citizens were treated so poorly?

Black migration out of the South picked up at an even greater speed than before the war. The postwar economic expansion offered Black laborers their chance at escaping the grip of Jim Crow. One hundred and twenty-five thousand Black soldiers had fought in World War II and were returning to cities across the North—to the most serious housing shortage in American history. Competition over jobs and housing in cities was an old story in the postwar period, but a renewed sense of sense of militancy among African Americans created a palpable tension. One army officer in the Morale Division reported that "the threats to the nation were 'first Negroes, second Japs, third Nazis'—in that order!"[29] A Black GI from Tennessee asked, "What I want to know is how in the hell white folks think we are going to fight for the fascism under which we live each moment of our lives? We are taught to kill and we are going to kill. But do you ask WHO?"[30] White violence directed at Blacks continued, especially when Blacks attempted to breach the boundaries of segregation. Southern whites' "massive resistance" in defense of Jim Crow is well integrated into American folklore, but this attempt at racist mob rule was not regional. In Chicago and Detroit, in particular, thousands of whites joined mobs to terrorize African Americans who attempted to move into white areas.[31] In both the North and South, white police either joined the attacks on African Americans or, as they had done so many times before, passively stood aside as whites stoned houses, set fires, destroyed cars, smashed windows, and threatened to kill any Blacks who got in their way.

The ideological battlefield on which the Cold War was fought compelled Northern political and economic elites to take progressively more formal stances against discrimination and to call for more law and order. This especially became necessary when African Americans began to mobilize against racial injustice and actively tried to bring international attention to it, greatly aware of American vulnerability in racial politics given its vocal demands for democracy and freedom. The Nazi genocide of Jews in the 1930s and 1940s had deeply discredited racism and eugenics; the United States had characterized World War II as a battle between democracy and tyranny. It was therefore increasingly concerned about international perceptions of its treatment of African Americans. Mob violence and physical threats against Black people collectively threatened its geopolitical positioning. The developing Black militancy, fueled by political dynamics within the United States as well as the global risings of Black and Brown people against colonialism, set the US state on a collision course with its Black population. African Americans had certainly campaigned against racial injustice long before the civil rights era, but the confluence of several overlapping events brought Black grievances into sharper focus. These factors combined to push the United States toward emphasizing its political commitment to formal equality for Blacks before the law; they also emboldened African Americans to fight not only for formal equality but for social and racial justice as well.

The United States' commitment to formal equality in the context of the Cold War was not only intended to rehabilitate its reputation on racial issues, it was also an effort to bolster its free-market economy and system of governance. The government and its proponents in the financial world were making a global claim that the United States was good to its Black population, and at the same time they were promoting capitalism and private enterprise as the highest expressions of freedom. American boosters sustained the fiction of the "culture of poverty" as the pretext for the persisting inequality between Blacks and the rest of the country. In some ways, this was even more important as the United States continued its quest to project itself as an economic and political empire. Cold War liberalism was a political framework that viewed American racial problems as existing outside of or unrelated to its political economy and, more importantly, as problems that could be fixed within the system itself by changing the laws and creating "equal opportunity." Themes of opportunity, hard work, resilience, and mobility could be contrasted to the perceptions of Soviet society as being impoverished because of its planned economies, prison labor, and infringement of freedom.

President Johnson, for example, described the contest between East and West as "a struggle" between two distinct "philosophies": "Don't you tell me for a moment that we can't outproduce and outwork and outright any communistic system in the world. Because if you try to tell me otherwise, you tell me that slaves can do better than free men, and I don't believe they can. I would rather have an executive vice president . . . than to have a commissar!"[32]

Upholding American capitalism in the context of a bitter Cold War had multiple effects. Elected officials in both parties continued to demonize social welfare as socialism or communism and an affront to free enterprise, as did private-sector actors who had a financial interest in seeing the American government shift its functions to private institutions. As scholar Alexander von Hoffman explains:

> From the 1930s onwards, private housing financiers, real estate brokers, and builders denounced the idea of the government directly helping Americans of modest means to obtain homes. It was, they cried, not only a socialistic plot, but also an unjustified give-away to a select undeserving group of people. It soon became evident, if it was not already, that self-interest, as much as ideology, fueled the hatred of the leaders of private industry for public housing.[33]

Historian Landon Storrs argues that anticommunism—the "Red Scare"—had an even more profound impact on public policies because it weeded out "employees deemed disloyal to the U.S. government." Between 1947 and 1956, "more than five million federal workers underwent loyalty screening," and at least 25,000 were subject to a stigmatizing "full field investigation" by the FBI.[34] An estimated 2,700 federal employees were dismissed and about 12,000 resigned.

Those most affected, according to Storr, "were a varied group of leftists who shared a commitment to building a comprehensive welfare state that blended central planning with grassroots democracy." The impact was indelible: "The power of these leftists was never uncontested, but their expertise, commitment, and connectedness gave them strength beyond their numbers. Before loyalty investigations pushed this cohort either out of government or toward the center of the political spectrum, the transformative potential of the New Deal was greater than is commonly understood."[35] Of course, McCarthyism's impact reached beyond liberal public policies; it was generally destructive for the entire left. The state specifically targeted leading activists and intellectuals involved in the fight against racism; antiracist campaigns were dismissed out of hand as subversive activity. As Manning Marable observes, "The purge of communists and radicals from organized labor from 1947 through 1950 was the principal reason for the decline in the AFL-CIO's commitment to the struggle against racial segregation."[36] More generally, anticommunism and the complicity of Black and white liberals in its witch hunts "retarded the Black movement for a decade or more."[37]

The volatile politics surrounding who should be eligible for public welfare also aided in creating the political categories of "deserving" and "undeserving." These concerns overlapped with the growing popularity of "culture" as a critical framework for understanding the failure to find the American dream. This political context, as well as the deepening influence of the social sciences as an "objective" arbiter in describing social patterns (sponsored by the Ford Foundation, among others), helped to map a simplistic view of Black poverty that was largely divorced from structural obstacles, including residential segregation, police brutality, housing and job discrimination, and the systematic underfunding of public schools in Black communities. The problem was described as one

of "assimilation" for Blacks migrating from south to north. This fit in with a developing global perspective on US poverty that was shaped by the Cold War as well as the social sciences.[38]

In 1959, liberal anthropologist Oscar Lewis coined the term "culture of poverty" to describe psychological and behavioral traits in poor people in underdeveloped countries and "to understand what they had in common with the lower classes all over the world."[39] Lewis wrote, "It seems to me that the culture of poverty has some universal characteristics which transcend regional, rural-urban, and even national boundaries." He identified these cultures in locations as disparate as "Mexican villages" and "lower class Negroes in the United States."[40] The shared traits he identified included resignation, dependency, present-time orientation, lack of impulse control, weak ego structure, sexual confusion, inability to delay gratification, and sixty-three more.[41] These were overwhelmingly psychological descriptions, highly malleable and certainly not endemic to the condition of the people themselves outside of any larger economic context. Lewis was not a political conservative—he was a left-wing liberal who linked this "culture of poverty" to "class-stratified, highly individuated capitalistic societies." But, as Alice O'Connor notes, "the problem was that Lewis made very little attempt to provide direct evidence or analysis that actually linked behavioral and cultural patterns to the structure of political economy as experienced by the poor." The "culture of poverty" in its original incarnation was viewed as a positive pivot away from "biological racism," rooted in eugenics and adopted by the Nazi regime. Culture, unlike biology, was mutable and capable of being transformed. Finally, O'Connor argued, "by couching the analysis so exclusively in terms of behavior and psychology, the culture of poverty undercut its own radical potential and deflected away from any critique of capitalism implicit in the idea."[42]

Locating the Source

As insightful as Lewis's original iteration of the "culture of poverty" may have been, it did not account for the profound racial terrorism that confronted Black people in the North as well as the South. The movement against state-sponsored racism and violence across the South

exposed to the world—and, more importantly, to the rest of the United States—the racially tyrannical regime under which African Americans were living. The 1963 March on Washington was the first national display of the breadth of the Southern civil rights movement. It focused on the many manifestations of racial discrimination and gave clear and definable contours to the constraints imposed on African Americans. In doing so, the march also communicated that the movement's understanding of freedom extended beyond simply repealing unjust laws in the South.

A portion of King's much-memorialized "I Have a Dream" speech speaks to the relationship between economic and racial injustice:

> There are those who are asking the devotees of civil rights, "When will you be satisfied?" We can never be satisfied as long as the Negro is the victim of the unspeakable horrors of police brutality. We can never be satisfied as long as our bodies, heavy with the fatigue of travel, cannot gain lodging in the motels of the highways and the hotels of the cities. We cannot be satisfied as long as the Negro's basic mobility is from a smaller ghetto to a larger one. We can never be satisfied as long as our children are stripped of their self-hood and robbed of their dignity by signs stating: "For Whites Only." We cannot be satisfied as long as a Negro in Mississippi cannot vote and a Negro in New York believes he has nothing for which to vote. No, no, we are not satisfied, and we will not be satisfied until "justice rolls down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream."[43]

Here King also links the codified racial discrimination of the Jim Crow South to the informal but equally pernicious de facto segregation of the urban North. In both cases, King clearly located the Black condition in public and private institutional practices throughout the United States. Of course, King was not the first to do this, but the scale, scope, and ultimate influence of the march elevated these arguments to a national level.

As early as the 1930s, and certainly throughout the postwar era, Blacks engaged in campaigns for "better jobs, an end to police brutality, access to new housing, representation in government, and college education for their children."[44] Malcolm X considered it "ridiculous" that civil rights activists were traveling to the South to fight Jim Crow when the North had "enough rats and roaches to kill to keep all of the freedom fighters busy."[45] In a speech given at the founding of his

new Organization of Afro-American Unity, in the year before his death, Malcolm described the political economy of Black poverty in the North:

> The economic exploitation in the Afro-American community is the most vicious form practiced on any people in America. In fact, it is the most vicious practiced on any people on this earth. No one is exploited economically as thoroughly as you and I, because in most countries where people are exploited they know it. You and I are in this country being exploited and sometimes we don't know it. Twice as much rent is paid for rat-infested, roach-crawling, rotting tenements.
>
> This is true. It costs us more to live in Harlem than it costs them to live on Park Avenue. Do you know that the rent is higher on Park Avenue in Harlem than it is on Park Avenue downtown? And in Harlem you have everything else in that apartment with you: roaches, rats, cats, dogs, and some other outsiders disguised as landlords. The Afro-American pays more for food, pays more for clothing, pays more for insurance than anybody else. And we do. It costs you and me more for insurance than it does the white man in the Bronx or somewhere else. It costs you and me more for food than it does them. It costs you and me more to live in America than it does anybody else and yet we make the greatest contribution.
>
> You tell me what kind of country this is. Why should we do the dirtiest jobs for the lowest pay? Why should we do the hardest work for the lowest pay? Why should we pay the most money for the worst kind of food and the most money for the worst kind of place to live in?[46]

His influence and wide appeal across the Black North helped to articulate a different understanding of Black poverty and hardship as the products not of bad behavior but of white racism.

The passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act removed the last vestiges of legal discrimination across the South. It was a surprising accomplishment that could not have been imagined even ten years before it happened. Its success was an amazing accomplishment by the ordinary men, women, and children of the civil rights movement, and it forced a monumental shift in the political and social order of the American South. But almost before the ink could dry on the legislation, its limits were displayed. Ending legal segregation and disenfranchisement in the South did not necessarily guarantee free and unfettered participation in the public and private

spheres of employment, housing, and education. This was also true in the North. The civil rights movement had much clearer targets in the South; the means of discrimination in the North, such as housing and job discrimination, were legal and thus much harder to change. Black children went to overcrowded schools in shifts in Chicago and New York—all perfectly legal.

Five days after the Voting Rights Act was signed into law, the Watts Rebellion exploded in South Central Los Angeles. Cries of "Selma" could be heard above the chaos of rebellion.[47] The civil rights movement had hastened the radicalization of all African Americans. There had been smaller uprisings in New York City, Philadelphia, Rochester, and other cities the previous summer, in 1964, but the Watts Rebellion was on an entirely different scale. For six days, an estimated ten thousand African Americans battled with police in an unprecedented rebellion against the effects of racial discrimination, including police brutality and housing discrimination. Thirty-four people were killed, hundreds more injured. Four thousand people were arrested and tens of millions of dollars in property damage occurred.[48]

The fires in Los Angeles were evidence of a developing Black radicalization rooted in the incongruence between America trumpeting its rich abundance as proof of the superiority of free enterprise and Black people suffering the indignities of poverty. After the passage of civil rights legislation, Black suffering could no longer be blamed only on Southern racism.

The Black freedom movement of the 1960s fed the expansion of the American welfare state and its eventual inclusion of African Americans. Though the New Deal had mostly excluded African Americans, Johnson's War on Poverty and Great Society programs were largely responses to the different phases of the Black movement. In 1964, Johnson reminded his supporters in the Chamber of Commerce of the consequences of not backing social welfare:

> Please always remember that if we do nothing to wipe out these ancient enemies of ignorance and illiteracy and poverty and disease, and if we allow them to accumulate. . . . If a peaceful revolution to get rid of these things—illiteracy, and these ancient enemies of mankind that stalk the earth, where two-thirds of the masses are young and are clamoring and are parading and are protesting and are demonstrating

> now for something to eat and wear and learn and health—[then] a violent change is inevitable.[49]

The War on Poverty and Great Society programs reflected Cold War antipathy toward total government control by emphasizing public-private partnerships and "equal opportunity," as opposed to economic redistribution. Nevertheless, Black protests polarized the political debates concerning the nation's welfare policies and the course of action needed to remedy the growing Black Power revolt—and debates over the nature of Black poverty reemerged.

Presidential consultant Daniel Patrick Moynihan penned a controversial report, titled *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, that blamed the problems endured by Black people on a "tangle of pathology." The Moynihan report, as it came to be known, claimed to ground the problems experienced in Black communities in theory and research. Instead, it was a more sophisticated recycling of stereotypes infused with an air of science that located social problems in the supposed behaviors of poor Black families. Moynihan claimed that the heart "of the deterioration of the fabric of Negro society is the deterioration of the Negro family."[50] This deterioration was rooted, he said, in the historic way that American slavery had broken up Black families. Moynihan blamed Black women for emasculating Black men, who then shirked their role as the head of the family. The result was antisocial behaviors experienced far beyond the borders of Black families. At one point, the report casually suggests that "it is probable that at present, a majority of the crimes against the person, such as rape, murder, aggravated assault are committed by Negroes"—then concedes in the next sentence that there is, of course, "no absolute evidence" for this claim. Moynihan identified these problems as the outcome of Black families led by single women.

It is important to note that Moynihan was a liberal serving with the Johnson administration. He viewed his ideas as progressive because he located the "root causes" of Black social pathology in family structure, which could be overcome by "equal opportunity" and other government action. This is where liberal and conservative thought converge, however: in seeing Black problems as rooted in Black communities as opposed to seeing them as systemic to American society. Moynihan offered little description of contemporary manifestations of racism. Instead, he emphasized the role of slavery in explaining the

many problems that developed from the overwhelming poverty that most Black families were trying to survive. But the Black rebellion produced other explanations for entrenched Black poverty.

Over the next three years, violent and furious explosions of Black rage in American cities punctuated every summer. They shocked the nation. The triumphalism of the American dream withered with each convulsion. Black protests forged an alternative understanding of Black inequality. Black psychologist Kenneth Clark dislodged the Harlem rebellion from Moynihan's "tangle of pathology" in his book *Dark Ghetto*. Though Clark would later be accused of promoting his own theories about Black pathology, his descriptions of the Harlem rebellion could very easily describe the dynamic underlying all of the Black uprisings in the 1960s:

> The summer of 1964 brought violent protests to the ghettos of America's cities, not in mobilization of effective power, but as an outpouring of unplanned revolt. The *revolts* in Harlem were not led by a mob, for a mob is an uncontrolled social force bent on irrational destruction. The revolts in Harlem were, rather, a weird social defiance. Those involved in them, were in general, not the lowest class of Harlem residents—not primarily looters and semi-criminals—but marginal Negroes who were upwardly mobile, demanding a higher status than their families had. Even those Negroes who threw bottles and bricks from the roofs were not in the grip of wild abandon, but seemed deliberately to be prodding the police to behave openly as the barbarians that the Negroes felt they actually were. . . . [There was] a calm within the chaos, a deliberateness within the hysteria. The Negro seemed to feel nothing could happen to him that had not happened already—he behaved as if he had nothing to lose. His was an oddly controlled rage that seemed to say, during those days of social despair, "We have had enough. The only weapon you have is bullets. The only thing you can do is kill me." Paradoxically, his apparent lawlessness was a protest against the lawlessness directed against *him*. His acts were a desperate assertion of his desire to be treated as a man. He was affirmative up to the point of inviting death, he insisted upon being visible and understood. If this was the only way to relate to society at large, he would rather die than be misunderstood.[51]

Clark's description of how, at least, the Black male psyche was essentially repaired through the course of fighting against racism reflected

the widespread growth of Black political organizations in response to every conceivable issue. But it was not just Black men who were being "repaired" through fighting racism; Black women were also at the forefront of many of the most important struggles in the 1960s. From tenant unions to welfare-rights organizations to Black public-sector workers demanding union recognition, ordinary African Americans organized to both define and combat racial injustice.[52]

Lyndon Johnson's administration churned out legislation in an effort to stay in front of the mounting protests and "civil disorder." The most obvious way to keep up was by expanding the American welfare state.[53] The limits of the American welfare state have been the subject of intense debate, but Johnson's Great Society programs included job training, housing, food stamps, and other forms of assistance that inadvertently helped to define Black inequality as primarily an economic question. The greater emphasis on structural inequality legitimized Black demands for greater inclusion in American affluence and access to the benefits of its expanding welfare state. Theresa Vasta spoke for many women on welfare when she said that she had "no time for games. My children are hungry and my oldest one is missing school because I have no money to send her. . . . I am American born. I think I deserve the right treatment. Fair treatment, that is."[54]

The expansion of the welfare state, the turn to affirmative action practices, and the establishment of the EEOC by the end of the 1960s reinforced the idea that Blacks were entitled to a share in American affluence. The development of Black struggle over the course of the decade, from the protest movement based in the South to the explosion of urban rebellions across the country, changed the discourse surrounding Black poverty. Johnson noted this in his well-known commencement address at Howard University:

> The American Negro, acting with impressive restraint, has peacefully protested and marched, entered the courtrooms and the seats of government, demanding a justice that has long been denied. The voice of the Negro was the call to action. But it is a tribute to America that, once aroused, the courts and the Congress, the President and most of the people, have been the allies of progress. . . . But freedom is not enough. You do not wipe away the scars of centuries by saying: Now you are free to go where you want, and do as you desire, and choose the leaders you please. You do not take a person who, for years, has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him up to the starting line of a race and then say, "you are free to compete with all the others," and still justly believe that you have been completely fair. . . . Thus it is not enough just to open the gates of opportunity. All our citizens must have the ability to walk through those gates. . . . We seek not just freedom but opportunity. We seek not just legal equity but human ability, not just equality as a right and a theory but equality as a fact and equality as a result.[55]

The phrases "freedom is not enough" and "equality as a result" pointed to structural inequality and affirmed the demand for positive or affirmative action on the part of the state to cure impoverished conditions brought on by centuries of discrimination.

Hundreds of thousands of Black Americans drew even more radical conclusions about the nature of Black oppression in the United States as they were drawn directly into the radicalizing movement; hundreds of thousands more sympathized with the rebellions. The struggle broke through the isolation and confinement of life in segregated Black ghettos and upended the prevailing explanation that Blacks were responsible for the conditions in their neighborhoods. Mass struggle led to a political understanding of poverty in Black communities across the country. Black media captured stories of injustice as well as the various struggles to organize against it, feeding this process and knitting together a common Black view of Black oppression while simultaneously providing an alternative understanding for white people. A Harris poll taken in the summer of 1967, after major riots in Detroit and Newark, found 40 percent of whites believed that "the way Negroes have been treated in the slums and ghettos of big cities" and "the failure of white society to keep its promises to Negroes" were the leading causes of the rebellion.[56] Many, including Martin Luther King Jr., began to connect Black oppression to a broader critique of capitalism.

King began to make those connections in his politics, especially when his organizing brought him in direct confrontation with Northern ghettos and residential segregation. At a Southern Christian Leadership Conference convention in the summer of 1967, he gave a speech that raised broader questions about the economic system:

> Now, in order to answer the question, "Where do we go from here?"

> which is our theme, we must first honestly recognize where we are now. When the Constitution was written, a strange formula to determine taxes and representation declared that the Negro was sixty percent of a person. Today another curious formula seems to declare that he is fifty percent of a person. Of the good things in life, the Negro has approximately one-half those of whites. Of the bad things of life, he has twice those of whites. Thus, half of all Negroes live in substandard housing. And Negroes have half the income of whites. When we view the negative experiences of life, the Negro has a double share. There are twice as many unemployed. The rate of infant mortality among Negroes is double that of whites and there are twice as many Negroes dying in Vietnam as whites in proportion to their size in the population.[57]

The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense (BPP) went even further when it declared its intent to rid the United States of its capitalist economy and build socialism in its place. The Black Panthers were not a fringe organization—far from it. FBI director J. Edgar Hoover declared the party the "greatest internal threat" to the security of the United States. Formed in Oakland, California, directly in response to the crisis of police brutality, the Panthers linked police brutality to the web of oppression and exploitation that entangled Black people across the country. Not only did they link Black oppression to its material roots, they connected it to capitalism itself. Panther leader Huey P. Newton made this clear:

> The Black Panther Party is a revolutionary Nationalist group and we see a major contradiction between capitalism in this country and our interests. We realize that this country became very rich upon slavery and that slavery is capitalism in the extreme. We have two evils to fight, capitalism and racism. We must destroy both racism and capitalism.[58]

The Panthers were not a mass party, but they had appeal that stretched far beyond their actual numbers. At its high point, the BPP was selling an astonishing 139,000 copies of its newspaper, the *Black Panther*, a week.[59] In this paper, readers would have seen multiple stories about police brutality in cities across the country. They would have also read the Panthers' Ten-Point Program, a list of demands intended to explain the aims and goals of the party, which linked capitalist exploitation and the American political economy to Black poverty and oppression.

In doing so, the party audaciously made demands on the state to fulfill its responsibility to employ, house, and educate Black people, whose impoverished state had been caused by American capitalism.

The Panthers were a regular topic of discussion in Black mainstream media. For example, in 1969, *Ebony*, the most popular weekly magazine in Black America, allowed Newton to pen an article from jail to articulate the Panthers' program in his own words. The article included a detailed discussion on the relationship between capitalist exploitation and racism. It read, in part, "Only by eliminating capitalism and substituting it for socialism will all black, *all* black people, be able to practice self-determination and thus achieve freedom." This was not just the observations of a marginal left: this was the most well-known Black revolutionary organization making a case to a much broader Black population about their oppression. The Panthers, who were deeply inspired by Malcolm X, linked the crisis in Black America to capitalism and imperialism. Racism could not be separated from the perpetual economic problems in Black communities. In fact, the economic problems of Black America could not be understood without taking account of racism. Blacks were underemployed, unemployed, poorly housed, and poorly schooled *because* they were Black.

Identifying structural inequality or institutional racism was not just of scholastic interest; linking Black oppression to structural and institutional practices legitimized demands for programs and funding to undo the harm that had been done. This logic underlined calls for what would become "affirmative action" but also much broader demands for federal funding and the enforcement of new civil rights rules to open up the possibility for greater jobs, access to better housing, and improvement in Black schools.

The entire dynamic of the Black struggle pushed mainstream politics to the left during this period, as evidenced by the growth of the welfare state and the increasing number of mainstream voices that identified racism as a problem. The Black struggle also heightened an already intense political polarization. Of course, racists and conservatives had always existed and dominated politics, but the growing movement now put them on the defensive. The political establishment was split over how to respond. Where some liberals gravitated toward including more structural arguments about Black inequality,

conservatives clung to stereotypes about Black families. The more ghetto inhabitants rebelled, the more conservative politicians' ideas about the ghetto and the people who lived there hardened.

Generally speaking, however, the positive impact of the struggle could be measured by shifting opinions among the public regarding social programs. There was a nuanced public response to the riots in the late 1960s, not just a backlash. The emphasis on backlash by historians and political figures has simplified the multiple factors that contributed to a conservative shift in formal politics by the end of the decade and into the 1970s. To be sure, there was resentment against the uprisings, the tone of which can be captured by a liberal *New York Times* editorial, written only a few weeks after the riots in Detroit, that read in part, "The riots, rather than developing a clamor for great social progress to wipe out poverty, to a large extent have had the reverse effect and have increased the crises for use of police force and criminal law."[60] Yet the totality of that perspective did not appear to correspond with a number of polls taken ten days later that showed wide-ranging support for expanding social programs aimed at mitigating the material deprivation that many connected to the spreading violence. In a *Washington Post* poll of African Americans published in 1967, Blacks linked deteriorating conditions in their communities with the uprisings. Fully 70 percent of Blacks "attributed rioting to housing conditions." Fifty-nine percent of Blacks said they knew someone living in rat-infested housing. In the same poll, 39 percent of whites said they believed the condition of Black housing was responsible for the ongoing riots. In another poll of African Americans and whites, strong majorities came out in support of antipoverty programs. A *Washington Post* headline read, "Races agree on ghetto abolition and the need for a WPA-style program." Sixty-nine percent of *all* Americans supported federal efforts to create a jobs program. Sixty-five percent believed in tearing down ghettos. Sixty percent supported a federal program to eliminate rats and 57 percent supported summer-camp programs for Black youth.[61]

In some ways, these findings prefigured the coming results of a federal investigation into the regularly occurring Black rebellions. In the spring of 1967, Johnson impaneled a federal commission to investigate them. The Kerner Commission, named after Illinois governor Otto Kerner, interviewed Black people in every city that had

experienced urban uprisings over the previous three years. The findings were a damning embarrassment for the Johnson administration. The report's introduction was quite clear in assigning blame for the discord in American cities. It read, in part:

> We have visited the riot cities; we have heard many witnesses. . . . This is our basic conclusion: Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal. Segregation and poverty have created . . . a destructive environment totally unknown to most white Americans. What white Americans have never fully understood—but what the Negro can never forget—is that white society is deeply implicated in the ghetto. White institutions created it, white institutions maintain it, and white society condones it. Social and economic conditions in the riot cities constituted a clear pattern of severe disadvantage for Negroes compared with whites, whether the Negroes lived in the area where the riot took place or outside it.[62]

The top three grievances it found in Black communities were police brutality, unemployment and underemployment, and substandard housing.

Johnson was angered by the report because it indicated that, even after his administration had spent tens of millions of dollars, hundreds of millions more were still needed to respond adequately to the depth of the "urban crisis." Despite Johnson's disappointment and his refusal even to mention the report during the first week of its release, more than two million copies were sold to the public, making it one of the most widely distributed government reports in history. The Kerner Commission, like most liberal bodies by the late 1960s, espoused both structural critiques and cultural arguments about Black families. In the end, though, the report called for massive investment in existing welfare programs to undo segregation and poverty in the United States.

Conclusion

A concerted effort continues to link Black poverty to Black culture and the Black family. As always, both conservatives and liberals make these arguments. It is not hard to understand why. There can be significant political disagreements between them, but the shared limits of their political imagination follow the same parameters as the existing society. They cannot see beyond that which exists. To really address

the systemic and utterly destructive institutional racism throughout the country would have two immediate consequences, both of which would be unacceptable to liberals and conservatives alike.

The first would be to fundamentally undermine America's continual efforts to project itself as the moral leader of the world. Addressing institutional racism is not the same as firing a racist cop or punishing some other individual for a racist transgression. It is also not the same as blaming slavery or history for the continuation of racial discrimination. It would require a full accounting of the myriad ways that racial discrimination factors in and shapes the daily lives of African Americans, in particular working-class and poor African Americans. The second consequence would be a massive redistribution of wealth and resources to undo the continuing damage.

Instead, the political establishment clings to cultural explanations for the frightening living conditions in places as varied as West Baltimore, Oakland, North Philadelphia, and Overtown in Miami, because such explanations require them to do very little. When social and economic crises are reduced to issues of culture and morality, programmatic or fiscal solutions are never enough; the solutions require personal transformation. This is why Black neighborhoods get police, not public policy—and prisons, not public schools. For example, in the raging debates over the future of public education, corporate education-reform advocates deny that poverty has any bearing on educational outcomes.[63] Instead, they describe Black children as being disinterested in education because to be smart is to pretend to be white. (The president of the United States once argued that this explains why Black students do poorly.[64]) All that remains is an overwhelming focus on charity and role modeling to demonstrate good behavior to bad Black youngsters as opposed to offering money and resources. Obama has organized a new initiative, My Brother's Keeper, specifically aimed at young Black and Brown boys and teenagers, whose problems, it says, exceed the capacity of government policy to address. It relies on corporate philanthropic donations, role models, and willpower. Obama, in introducing the measure, was quick to clarify that "My Brother's Keeper is not some big, new government program . . . [but] a more focused effort on boys and young men of color who are having a particularly tough time. And in this effort, government cannot play the only—or even the primary—role."[65]

The widespread and widely agreed-upon descriptions of Black people as lazy cheats rationalizes the social and economic disparities between African Americans and the rest of the population and absolves the economic and political systems from any real responsibility. This is not only a problem for African Americans. It also helps to disguise the greater, systemic inequities that pervade American capitalism. So, even while the ranks of the white poor continue to grow, their poverty is seen as somehow distinct from "generational" Black poverty. The growing ranks of the white incarcerated are distinguished from Black incarceration, which is supposed to be an outgrowth of Black irresponsibility. In the DOJ report on the Ferguson Police Department, released in March 2015, "several" officials told investigators that the reason Blacks received a disproportionately large number of citations and tickets was a "lack of personal responsibility."[66] Pathologizing "Black" crime while making "white" crime invisible creates a barrier between the two, when solidarity could unite both in confronting the excesses of the criminal justice system. This, in a sense, is the other product of the "culture of poverty" and of naturalizing Black inequality. This narrative works to deepen the cleavages between groups of people who would otherwise have every interest in combining forces. The intractability of Black conditions becomes seen as natural as opposed to standing as an indictment of the system itself, while the hard times befalling ordinary whites are rendered almost invisible. For example, the majority of poor people in the United States are white, but the public face of American poverty is Black. It is important to point out how Blacks are overrepresented among the poor, but ignoring white poverty helps to obscure the systemic roots of all poverty. Blaming Black culture not only deflects investigation into the systemic causes of Black inequality but has also been widely absorbed by African Americans as well. Their acceptance of the dominant narrative that blames Blacks for their own oppression is one explanation for the delay in the development of a new Black movement, even while police brutality persists.

There is, however, reason for hope. This chapter has tried to show the fluidity of political ideas and the conditions under which they can be challenged and ultimately changed. Public perceptions about poverty changed in the 1930s when it became clear that the actions of bankers had sent the economy into a tailspin—not the personal

character of workers. The connections between capitalism, corruption, and the condition of the working class were made even clearer by communists and socialists, who linked the living conditions of the working class to an economic system rather than just bad luck. The political and economic elite responded by burying the left and its critiques of capitalism—while honing and deploying the "culture of poverty" theory to explain poverty in the "land of plenty." But this state of affairs was not etched in stone. The political uprisings of the 1960s, fueled by the Black insurgency, transformed American politics, including Americans' basic understanding of the relationship between Black poverty and institutional racism—and, for some, capitalism. Ideas are fluid, but it usually takes political action to set them in motion—and stasis for the retreat to set in.

CHAPTER TWO

From Civil Rights to Colorblind

If the problem of the twentieth century was, in W. E. B. Du Bois's famous words, "the problem of the color line," then the problem of the twenty-first century is the problem of colorblindness, the refusal to acknowledge the causes and consequences of enduring racial stratification.

—**Naomi Murakawa**, *The First Civil Right: How Liberals Built Prison America*

In his book *Black Reconstruction in America*, W. E. B. Du Bois described the promise of Reconstruction as a "brief moment in the sun" for Blacks, before its disastrous end moved African Americans "back again toward slavery."[1] The receding of the Black Power insurgency during the 1970s didn't return Blacks to a state of neo-slavery, but the hope and expectations raised by the movement of the 1960s proved elusive.

By the end of the 1970s, there was little talk about institutional racism or the systemic roots of Black oppression. There was even less talk about the kind of movement necessary to challenge it. Instead, when Ronald Reagan ran for the Republican presidential nomination in 1976, he made a play for the racist vote by complaining about a fictitious "strapping young buck" using food stamps to buy T-bone steak. He famously invented the stereotypical "welfare queen," who, he said, "used 80 names, 30 addresses, 15 telephone numbers to collect food stamps, Social Security, veterans' benefits for four nonexistent deceased veteran

Black people's progress has always been propelled by the strength of the movements of the mass of ordinary Black people. Not only did the Black struggle of the 1960s transform the lives of African Americans, it was the pivot upon which all progressive movements in that era turned. It was the Black insurgency that created the conditions that allowed Black elected officials to become viable politically. But the more the movement on the streets waned, the greater the distance between ordinary Black people and the elected officials claiming to represent them. Added to that dilemma were the constraints of governing in a time of budget cuts and austerity that compelled Black officials to act in fiscally conservative ways—just as their base was in desperate need of robust spending and resources. The conflict between the Black political establishment and ordinary Blacks, however, has been driven not only by budget constraints but also by contempt for the Black poor and a dramatically narrowed vision for what constitutes Black liberation. Complaining about sagging pants or characterizing low-income Black people as "thugs and criminals" during an uprising legitimizes the racialization and criminalization of Black people. It explains the hardships of African Americans in such a way as to rationalize the poor conditions and lack of resources that pervade working-class communities of color. It is difficult for white conservatives to get away with such blanket stereotypes, but for Black politicians they have become a default position, a way to deflect attention from their incompetence—and sometimes malfeasance. Arriving in the heat of a Ferguson summer only to bellow on about the criticality of midterm elections demonstrated that Black members of Congress did not understand the watershed nature of the uprising. Perhaps this should not be surprising: not only did the Ferguson rebellion expose the racism and brutality of American policing, it also exposed Black elected officials' inability to intervene effectively on behalf of poor and working-class African Americans.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Double Standard of Justice

The white cop in the ghetto is as ignorant as he is frightened, and his entire concept of police work is to cow the natives. He is not compelled to answer to these natives for anything he does; whatever he does, he knows that he will be protected by his brothers, who will allow nothing to stain the honor of the force. When his working day is over, he goes home and sleeps soundly in a bed miles away—miles away from the niggers, for that is the way he really thinks of black people.

—**James Baldwin,** *No Name in the Street*, 1972

I want to live until I'm 18. . . . You want to get older. You want to experience life. You don't want to die in a matter of seconds because of cops.

—**Aniya,** age thirteen, marching in
Staten Island, New York, 2015

At the turn of the twentieth century, African Americans began their long transition from living largely in rural areas to living predominantly in urban ones. In that time, there have been many changes in Black life, politics, and culture, but the threat and reality of police surveillance, scrutiny, violence, and even murder has remained remarkably consistent. The daily harm caused by the mere presence of police in Black communities has been a consistent feature of Black

urban history and, increasingly, Black suburban history. Police brutality has been a consistent badge of inferiority and second-class citizenship. When the police enforce the law inconsistently and become the agents of lawlessness and disorder, it serves as a tangible reminder of the incompleteness of formal equality. You cannot truly be free when the police are able to set upon you at will, for no particular reason at all. It is a constant reminder of the space between freedom and "unfreedom," where the contested citizenship of African Americans is held.

The racism of the police is not the product of vitriol; it flows from their role as armed agents of the state. The police function to enforce the rule of the politically powerful and the economic elite: this is why poor and working-class communities are so heavily policed. African Americans are overrepresented among the ranks of the poor and the working class, so police overwhelmingly focus on those neighborhoods, even as they direct their violence more generally against all working-class people, including whites. But the police also reflect and reinforce the dominant ideology of the state that employs them, which also explains why they are inherently racist and resistant to substantive reform. In other words, if the task of the police is to maintain law and order, then that role takes on a specific meaning in a fundamentally racist society. Policing has changed over time as the nature and needs of the American state have changed, but it has also remained incredibly consistent as a thoroughly racist institution trained on Black communities. The racism of the police, historically, has also overlapped with the economic needs of business and the state to create a racialized political economy that is particularly burdensome on Black communities.

Race, Class, and the Police

The political economy of the modern policing state was created in the opening moments of Black freedom. Historians have identified multiple origins of the modern American police, including nineteenth-century slave patrols. After emancipation, the purpose of racism, like the purpose of the police, was transformed. Biologically inflected ideological explanations, no longer necessary to justify enslavement, were deployed instead to justify the surveillance and control of Black people, especially Black workers. "Black Codes," a series of laws, rules, and restrictions

imposed only on African Americans, criminalized poverty, movement, and even leisure. Blacks could be arrested for vaguely worded or innocuous "crimes" such as vagrancy and sentenced to "hard labor" in slavery-like conditions as punishment. Law enforcement officials could also "hire out" Black vagrants to white employers to "work off" their sentences. African Americans had to produce labor contracts to prove they were not vagrants or be hurled back into conditions intimately resembling slavery. It was an effort to re-create slavery "by another name."[1] The police were deployed to enforce these codes, as agents of states still largely controlled by a white planter class that had been militarily defeated but not quite economically and politically destroyed.

Racism and modern policing were thus mutually constitutive in reinforcing the subjugated status of Blacks. The Black Codes conflated Blackness with criminality, as this example from St. Landry's Parish in Louisiana, passed immediately after the end of the Civil War, shows:

> SECTION 1. *Be it ordained by the police jury of the parish of St. Landry*, That no negro shall be allowed to pass within the limits of said parish without a special permit in writing from his employer. Whoever shall violate this provision shall pay a fine of two dollars and fifty cents, or in default thereof shall be forced to work four days on the public road, or suffer corporeal punishments as provided hereinafter.
>
> SECTION 2. *Be it further ordained*, That every negro who shall be found absent from the residence of his employer after 10 o'clock at night, without a written permit from his employer, shall pay a fine of five dollars, or in default thereof, shall be compelled to work five days on the public road, or suffer corporeal punishments as provided hereinafter.
>
> SECTION 3. *Be it further ordained*, That no negro shall be permitted to rent or keep a house within said parish. Any negro violating this provision shall be immediately ejected and compelled to find an employer; and any person who shall rent, or give the use of any house to any negro, in violation of this section, shall pay a fine of five dollars for each offence.
>
> SECTION 4. *Be it further ordained*, That every negro is required to be in the regular service of some white person, or former owner, who shall be held responsible for the conduct of said negro. But said employer or former owner may permit said negro to hire his own time by special permission in writing, which permission shall not extend over seven days at any one time. Any negro violating the provisions of this section shall be

> fined five dollars for each offence, or in default of the payment thereof shall be forced to work five days on the public road, or suffer corporeal punishment as hereinafter provided.
>
> SECTION 5. *Be it further ordained*, That no public meetings or congregations of negroes shall be allowed within said parish after sunset; but such public meetings and congregations may be held between the hours of sunrise and sunset, by the special permission in writing of the captain of patrol, within whose beat such meetings shall take place. This prohibition, however, is not intended to prevent negroes from attending the usual church services, conducted by white ministers and priests. Every negro violating the provisions of this section shall pay a fine of five dollars, or in default thereof shall be compelled to work five days on the public road, or suffer corporeal punishment as hereinafter provided.
>
> SECTION 6. *Be it further ordained*, That no negro shall be permitted to preach, exhort, or otherwise declaim to congregations of colored people, without a special permission in writing from the president of the police jury. Any negro violating the provisions of this section shall pay a fine of ten dollars, or in default thereof shall be compelled to work ten days on the public road, or suffer corporeal punishment as hereinafter provided....
>
> SECTION 11. *Be it further ordained*, That it shall be the duty of every citizen to act as a police officer for the detection of offences and the apprehension of offenders, who shall be immediately handed over to the proper captain or chief of patrol.[2]

All white citizens were expected to police the activities of African Americans, but it was ultimately the responsibility of law enforcement officers to make arrests. These laws make it clear that policing was more than simply racist: the police worked with those in power to provide a regular labor force to replace the labor that had been disrupted by slavery's end. This was cloaked in the rhetoric of law and order, but after slavery, the white elite in the South used the law to control and manipulate newly freed African Americans.[3]

The period of Reconstruction after the Civil War held promise that Black citizenship might be fulfilled; in that context, the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865 and the Civil Rights Act of 1866 expressly banned practices such as Black Codes that could be considered a badge or emblem of slavery.[4] There was, however, a loophole in the Thirteenth Amendment that allowed for the incarcerated to be treated like slaves,

and "convict leasing" was born.

Over the course of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, convict leasing became a new way for Southern employers to manipulate the law and resolve a perpetual labor shortage. The desperate need for labor seemed insatiable; it turned all Black people into potential suspects and justified surveillance and scrutiny. Convict leasing was lucrative for employers compared to slavery, since it involved lower overhead expenses. As one observer put it, "Before the war we owned the Negroes. If a man had a good nigger, he could afford to take care of him; if he was sick get a doctor. He might even put gold plugs in his teeth. But these convicts: we don't own 'em. One dies, get another."[5] The police were the linchpin to this new arrangement.

Frederick Douglass, writing on convict leasing, explained:

> To have Negro blood in the veins makes one unworthy of consideration, a social outcast, a leper, even in the church. The second reason our race furnishes so large a share of the convicts is that the judges, juries and other officials of the courts are white men who share these prejudices. They also make the laws. It is wholly in their power to extend clemency to white criminals and mete severe punishment to black criminals for the same or lesser crimes. The Negro criminals are mostly ignorant, poor and friendless. Possessing neither money to employ lawyers nor influential friends, they are sentenced in large numbers to long terms of imprisonment for petty crimes. The *People's Advocate*, a Negro journal, of Atlanta, Georgia, has the following observation on the prison showing of that state for 1892. "It is an astounding fact that 90 per cent of the state's convicts are colored; 194 white males and 2 white females; 1,710 colored males and 44 colored females. Is it possible that Georgia is so color prejudiced that she won't convict her white law breakers? Yes, it is just so, but we hope for a better day."[6]

In some Southern states, convict leasing was critical to the economy. In 1898 almost 73 percent of total revenue in Alabama was derived from convict leasing in coal mines.[7]

The rampant exploitation of Black labor was contingent on the denigration of Black humanity. Assumptions of Black criminality became seamlessly integrated into collective common sense of what constituted "the Negro." Historian Khalil Muhammad argues that "crime itself was not the core issue. Rather the problem was racial criminalization:

the stigmatization of crime as 'black' and the masking of crime among whites as individual failure. The practice of linking crime to blacks, as a racial group, but not whites . . . reinforced and reproduced racial inequality."[8] It was not only "racial criminalization," in other words, but criminalization in the name of securing a stable workforce. Race did not take on a life of its own. It was consciously invoked to rationalize the debased status of Blacks. Muhammad argues that statistics, particularly rates of Black incarceration, were woven together by the mainstream media, the Southern political and economic elite, and the emergent field of social science to build a narrative of post–Reconstruction Black criminality.

Some of the Black elite contributed to this discourse of Black criminality as a way to distinguish themselves from poorer Blacks. As William S. Scarborough, a professor at the historically Black Wilberforce College, said at the turn of the century, "The criminal negro is one of the heaviest burdens that the race has to carry today."[9] He elaborated on his complaints:

> There are *negroes* and *negroes*, crude, cultured, shiftless, thrifty, grotesque, urbane; immoral and grossly debased; clean and living the life of the spirit. The Vardamans of the world [James K. Vardaman was then governor of Mississippi] know no distinctions, make no discriminations, brand us all alike as a lower order of creature. Therefore Negro criminality cannot be ignored by us.[10]

Elite Black observers admitted that "white oppression was largely to blame," but their acceptance of the conflation of Blackness and crime lent legitimacy to the draconian law-and-order regime. As historian Evelyn Higginbotham Brooks argues, "Black leaders argued that 'proper' and 'respectable' behavior proved blacks worthy of equal civil and political rights. Conversely, nonconformity was equated with deviance and pathology and was often cited as a cause of racial inequality and injustice."[11]

Certainly, by the twentieth century, the criminality and inferiority of Black people constituted a type of racial logic and common sense. As Muhammad explains, "For white Americans of every ideological stripe—African American criminality became one of the most widely accepted bases for justifying prejudicial thinking, discriminatory treatment, and/or acceptance of racial violence as an instrument of public

safety."[12] The Supreme Court's 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision nationalized the "separate but equal" paradigm while also codifying Black inferiority at the highest levels of the American government. These perceptions, and the widespread acceptance of theories of eugenics, were not confined to the South but became a national phenomenon, especially as African Americans began to move into Northern cities, creating panic among elites.[13] In the summer of 1917, the *Chicago Tribune* ran a screaming headline: "Half a Million Darkies from Dixie Swarm to the North to Better Themselves."[14]

Racism was stoked, in part, by Northern employers' cynical use of newly arrived African Americans as strikebreakers in the late 1910s and early 1920s.[15] Tensions also rose because cities generally lacked the housing and infrastructure needed to support the waves of immigrants and Southern Blacks. Blacks' housing choices were strictly limited, no matter how many thousands continued to make their way to cities across the Northeast and Midwest. Landlords fully exploited the segregated housing market, charging Black tenants more for inferior housing and refusing to maintain their properties because Black tenants had no housing alternative outside of overcrowded Black areas. In 1917 the Chicago Real Estate Board amended its bylaws to warn that it would discipline any real-estate agent who introduced a minority resident into a racially homogenous neighborhood.[16]

Housing segregation was important because the physical separation of people allowed heinous stereotypes about African Americans to flourish. This was a product of ignorance and also of the material impact segregation had on Black living spaces. Overcrowding led to rapid deterioration of the housing stock, while an overabundance of refuse resulted in rat infestations and health problems. Whites blamed these conditions on Black people's inferior hygiene instead of the racist manipulation of the housing market.

The concentration and effects of Black poverty provided a constant pretext for police incursions, arrests, and violence, which fueled the antagonistic relationship between the police and African Americans. As early as the 1920s, patterns of police abuse that would be recognizable today contributed to Blacks' growing disillusionment with the police and the supposed freedoms of the North. Police harassment and violence blurred the distinctions between the supposed "land of hope" in

the North and the Jim Crow apartheid of the South. In 1925 the *Detroit Independent* reported "repeated police assaults on Negroes. Fifty-five blacks had been shot by policemen in the first half of the year alone. A few of them had been executed—there was no other word for it."[17] It was a "common practice" for Detroit police to "stop Black men at random and subject them to searches, often at gunpoint, and those taken into custody sometimes spent days in jail just waiting to be charged with a crime."[18] Compounding the physical deterioration of Black areas, officials allowed vices, including drugs, illegal alcohol, and prostitution, to flourish in order to keep them out of white areas. According to Muhammad, "estimates from Chicago and other cities suggest that from 80 to possibly 90 percent of vice businesses were owned by nonblacks." The cops knew, "but they didn't care unless they saw a colored man walking in the company of a white woman. Then they ran him in."[19] One investigator at the time observed that "uniformed police officers, prostitutes and the hold-up men divide the money between them in this court."[20]

A larger police presence did not mean greater protection for African Americans in an era of raging white mob violence. White police displayed their contempt for Black communities in multiple ways, including failing to intervene when white mobs attacked African Americans. In many cases the police joined in. In Chicago in 1919, for example, police stood by while racist whites rampaged through Black areas in anger after a Black teenager, Eugene Williams, violated the informal rules of segregation at a local beach. Williams was murdered. Even when his killer was identified, white police refused to arrest him.[21]

In 1943, bubbling tensions would boil over again. African Americans' rising incomes and expectations clashed with whites' sense of dominion over urban space. Black and white workers competed over the use of "schools, playgrounds, parks, beaches" and housing in the city, with conflicts breaking out right at the height of the war effort.[22] In 1943 there were "242 racial riots in 47 cities, the worst of them in Los Angeles, Beaumont, Texas, Mobile, Alabama, Harlem and Detroit."[23] In Harlem that year, rebellion was sparked again when a white police officer murdered an unarmed Black veteran. In Detroit, a violent confrontation between Black and white workers erupted over competition for gainful employment as well as housing. This race riot was frightening as well as shocking to the establishment. Here was the most important

industrial city in the country, with some of the highest living standards among ordinary Black and white workers, socially combusting in a way that resulted in the deaths of dozens and millions of dollars in property damage. Elites worried that there could be a "succession of Detroits." While police violence was not the direct cause of this explosion, it was certainly a contributing factor. This was not peculiar to Detroit. As one Black woman said of white violence, including that of police: "There ain't no North anymore. Everything now is South."[24]

African Americans were questioning all of the existing order, including the police function of "maintaining order." The vast majority of police in the United States were white, uneducated, working class, and completely consumed with racism. The racialization of crime and the haggard conditions in Black neighborhoods made them susceptible to great surveillance. It also contributed to the greater rates of poverty and unemployment among Blacks, as stereotypes about Black criminality and lawlessness rendered growing numbers of Black men unemployable or marginally employable. This mark of inferiority also isolated Black women in low-paying jobs. Nevertheless, American cities were increasingly combustible as Black citizens' expectations grew, bringing greater attention to the incongruence between inequality and the promises of US democracy. Police brutality was the most egregious example.

Postwar Policing

In the middle of the 1960s, hundreds of thousands of African Americans participated in urban rebellions to protest and confront racism, police brutality, and injustice. In cities as different as Detroit, Tampa, Houston, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Prattville, Alabama, the rebellions raised basic questions about American democracy. The widespread and continuous nature of the riots turned them from episodic outbreaks of discontent into a force that transformed politics. The issues that defined the urban crisis—poor housing, police brutality, poor schools, and unemployment, among many others—went from being politically peripheral to what President Lyndon Johnson termed "the nation's most urgent task." Black rebellions are usually seen as the dysfunctional cousin to the civil rights movement: while the civil rights movement is universally lauded as successful because of its strategic

emphasis on nonviolence, the riots are universally condemned because of their inherent violence. A *New York Times* editorial written only a few weeks after the 1967 Detroit riots captured this argument: "The riots, rather than developing a clamor for great social progress to wipe out poverty, to a large extent have had the reverse effect and have increased the crises for use of police force and criminal law."[25] Yet what ignited the riots was almost always an incident of police brutality.

After the deadly riots in Detroit and Newark in the summer of 1967, Lyndon Johnson impaneled the Kerner Commission, discussed in chapter 1, which reported that

> to some Negroes police have come to symbolize white power, white racism and white repression. And the fact is that many police do reflect and express these white attitudes. The atmosphere of hostility and cynicism is reinforced by a widespread belief among Negroes in the existence of police brutality and in a "double standard" of justice and protection—one for Negroes and one for whites—a deep hostility between the police and ghetto . . . was a primary cause of the riots.[26]

The report really did not capture the absolute hatred Black communities held for the police. James Baldwin more perfectly summarized the feeling in an essay titled "A Report from Occupied Territory":

> Now, what I have said about Harlem is true of Chicago, Detroit, Washington, Boston, Philadelphia, Los Angeles and San Francisco—is true of every Northern city with a large Negro population . . . the police are simply the hired enemies of this population. They are present to keep the Negro in his place and to protect white business interests, and they have no other function. They are, moreover—even in a country which makes the very grave error of equating ignorance with simplicity—quite stunningly ignorant; and, since they know that they are hated, they are always afraid. One cannot possibly arrive at a more surefire formula for cruelty. This is why those pious calls to "respect the law," always to be heard from prominent citizens each time the ghetto explodes, are so obscene. The law is meant to be my servant and not my master, still less my torturer and my murderer. To respect the law, in the context in which the American Negro finds himself, is simply to surrender his self-respect.[27]

One 1968 poll found that 52 percent of Blacks blamed "police brutality" as a "major cause of disorder" compared to only 13 percent of whites,

though 63 percent of everyone polled believed that "until there is justice for minorities there will not be law and order."[28]

In 1965, in the months before the explosive Watts Rebellion in South Central Los Angeles, the Johnson administration formed the Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice to investigate "law and order" and policing. The central focus of the commission was improving policing in Black communities by actually transforming the profession, including recruiting more Black officers. Its report concluded that "a major, and most urgent, step in the direction of improving police-community relations is recruiting more, many more, policemen from minority groups."[29] It blamed tensions between African Americans and the police on white officers' "lack of understanding of the problems and behaviors of minority groups" and inability to "deal successfully with people whose way of thought and action are unfamiliar. . . . In order to gain the general confidence and acceptance of a community . . . personnel within a police department should be representative of the community as a whole." Officials also focused on "professionalizing" the police, whose profession at this point was not highly regarded. The average salary for the police in small cities in the late 1960s was $4,600, lifting them just above the poverty line. In 1965, only four states mandated *any* police training, and more than twenty states did not have minimum education and literacy requirements. There was so little training that "barbers and beauticians, on average, were required to train more than and three times as long as the average American cop." In Detroit, for example, most cops came from the bottom 25 percent of their high-school class; as Parenti noted, "This was not a unique situation."[30]

While this effort got under way, there was a simultaneous effort to describe postwar racial civil unrest as a problem of Black lawlessness. The commission also argued,

> We must identify and eliminate the causes of criminal activity whether they lie in the environment around us or deep in the nature of individual men. This is a major purpose of all we are doing in combatting poverty and improving education, health, welfare, housing, and recreation. All these are vital, but they are not enough. Crime will not wait while we pull it up by the roots. We must arrest and reverse the trend toward lawlessness.[31]

This was an effort to recast the riots as simple criminal activity, not

rebellions against racial discrimination and systematic exclusion from the bounty of the ongoing economic expansion. In reality, as Naomi Murakawa has written, "The U.S. did not confront a crime problem that was . . . racialized; it confronted a race problem that was . . . criminalized."[32] Characterizing Black anger at discrimination and segregation as criminal helped to explain Black Power and independent Black politics as crime, creating a pretext for yet more policing, arrests, and repression of the movement in general. This coincided with an intensification of the "culture of poverty" rhetoric described in chapter 1.

As Black mayors and other managers of city and urban affairs gained prominence during the 1970s and 1980s, so did the demand to diversify local law enforcement. The most successful result was the dramatic transformation from "the virtually all-white, virtually all-male departments of the 1950s and 1960s . . . to departments with large numbers of female and minority officers, often led by female or minority chiefs. Openly gay and lesbian officers, too, are increasingly commonplace. Today's Los Angeles Police Department is not the homogeneous workplace celebrated on *Dragnet*—and neither is the police."[33] In 1970, Blacks composed 6 percent of sworn officers in the 300 largest police departments in the country; by 2006 that figure had grown to 18 percent. By the twenty-first century, in cities with populations over 250,000, 20 percent of officers were Black and 14 percent were Latino. In New York City in 2005, for the first time in history, a majority of the new officers graduating from the NYPD Police Academy were members of racial minorities. In some cities the increases in minority officers has been even more dramatic. In Detroit, more than 60 percent of the police force is Black, compared to less than 10 percent in the 1960s. In Washington, DC, minorities constitute almost 70 percent of the police today, whereas in the 1960s there were fewer than 20 percent.[34]

These dramatic changes in composition and professionalization have not had the effect of mitigating the tensions between police and Black communities, as Johnson's crime commission predicted. Some studies have shown that "black officers shoot just as often as white officers"; "black officers arrest just as often as white officers"; "black officers are often prejudiced against black citizens"; "that black officers are just as likely, or even more likely, to elicit citizen complaints and to be the subject of disciplinary actions."[35] Though there is a popular perception that more nonwhite police can help ease tensions with nonwhite populations that are patrolled, perhaps more compelling is the fact that the explosion of the incarceration of Black men, women, and children took place *after* the years-long effort to "professionalize" and diversify the police.[36] The most diverse police forces in American history have not altered more than a century's worth of violent, racially discriminatory, and unfair policing.

Policing in the Modern Era

There have been three distinct periods of policing in the post–civil rights era, each building upon the previous: Reagan's War on Drugs, Clinton's crime regime, and the era of the "War on Terror." These overlapping periods have culminated in the phenomenon of "mass incarceration," including increased scrutiny, surveillance, policing, and imprisonment of all working-class people, but especially African Americans. As cities have become more financially independent from the federal infusions of money and have been forced to generate their own sources of income, the police have also become agents of gentrification and municipal revenue collection. This transformation illustrates the degree to which law enforcement is an armed extension of the state, regularly wielded in the interests of the rich and powerful.

It is well known today that the United States houses 25 percent of the world's prisoners even though it only accounts for 5 percent of the world's population. In 1971 there were fewer than 200,000 inmates in the United States. Since then the prison population has risen by 700 percent, bringing the number of the incarcerated to 2.4 million, "with another nearly five million under an increasingly restrictive system of correctional control in lieu of or after incarceration."[37] The prison population began to rise in the 1970s when Richard Nixon began the first iteration of the War on Drugs.[38] Beginning in the mid-1970s, state prison populations grew at an unprecedented rate, nearly quadrupling between then and now. By the 1980s, rates of incarceration had taken a qualitative leap forward: the US prison population had quadrupled by 2013.[39] This was not only fueled by the War on Drugs, as noted in chapter 3: "incarceration rates for violent, property and other crimes . . . increased dramatically as well."[40] The consequences of the bipartisan demand for "law and order" were a massive expansion of police forces, prison and

jail construction, the criminal code, and the criminal justice system as a whole. These events coincided with bleak economic prospects for most Americans and significant cuts to the already weak social welfare state.

Former Nixon advisor Kevin Phillips said of the 1980s that "no parallel upsurges of the era of the riches had been seen since the late 19th century, the era of the Vanderbilts, Morgans and Rockefellers."[41] Ronald Reagan reduced the federal income tax rate for the very rich from 70 percent to 28 percent, but this was only the tip of the iceberg.[42] The 1990s produced an even greater concentration of wealth in fewer hands: "By 2000, the United States could be said to have a plutocracy."[43] It was easy for the rich to pay attention to rising crime rates while ignoring the massive gutting of social services and the poverty and insecurity of the bottom ranks.

Even before Bill Clinton became president, he showed that he would not be outflanked on the right by accusations of being "soft on crime." In 1992, Clinton famously left the campaign trail to personally oversee the execution of a mentally disabled Black man who was so unaware of his pending death that he asked to have his dessert after his execution. Clinton went on to make crime-fighting a centerpiece of his presidency.[44]

In the months before his election, the Los Angeles Rebellion ignited South Central once again. Clinton and the Democrats responded by seizing the opportunity to make crime-fighting a core party value. Within two years, Clinton would champion and eventually have voted into law the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994. The $30 billion Crime Bill, as noted in chapter 3, provided for 100,000 more police to be hired, expanded the death penalty by creating sixty new offenses for which a person could be executed, expanded construction of new prisons, created "three-strikes" provisions, and ended inmate education. These policies were only the beginning. The Clinton administration also created financial incentives for states to not only imprison more people but keep them in prison longer, under "truth in sentencing" provisions.[45] There was no question that these policies were directed at African American communities, where a gutted welfare state and the introduction of crack cocaine and the drug war had prompted a rise in crime.

In 1996, Clinton championed the Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act, intended to strengthen the Crime Bill by further restricting prisoners' ability to challenge their sentences. By the end of the Clinton presidency in 2000, Black incarceration rates had tripled. Clinton's other legacy was "ending welfare as we know it" in 1996. The consequences of this war on poor people would be borne out during the recession of the early 2000s and the economic collapse of 2008.

Resistance to the growing criminal justice system increased at the end of the 1990s, but the attacks on September 11, 2001, eclipsed most of the political spaces in which those critiques were developing. The political establishment united around the expansion of the "security state" with the passage of the USA PATRIOT Act and a host of other new tools that increased the power of the state in the name of fighting terrorism. The "War on Terror" legitimized concentrating greater surveillance, scrutiny, and power in the hands of all law enforcement—not to mention weapons.

During the Clinton administration, the Pentagon was authorized to donate surplus military equipment to local police departments. According to one report, "in the first three years after the 1994 law alone, the Pentagon distributed 3,800 M-16s, 2,185 M-14s, 73 grenade launchers, and 112 armored personnel carriers to civilian police agencies across America. Domestic police agencies also got bayonets, tanks, helicopters and even airplanes."[46] After September 11, elected officials actively promoted the notion that the War on Terror had to be fought on the home front—and that the police were on the front lines of this new "war." In 2006, the Pentagon distributed "vehicles worth $15.4 million, aircraft worth $8.9 million, boats worth $6.7 million, weapons worth $1 million and 'other' items worth $110.6 million" to local police agencies."[47] In 2012, the military transferred a record $546 million worth of property to local police departments.[48] The process of transforming police into soldiers in the inner city exacerbated existing problems, as one former police chief described:

> An emphasis on "officer safety" and paramilitary training pervades today's policing. . . . Police in large cities formerly carried revolvers holding six .38-caliber rounds. Nowadays, police carry semi-automatic pistols with 16 high-caliber rounds, shotguns and military assault rifles, weapons once relegated to SWAT teams facing extraordinary circumstances. Concern about such firepower in densely populated areas hitting innocent citizens has given way to an attitude that the police are fighting a war against drugs and crime and must be heavily armed.[49]

The federal government also provided grants allowing departments to purchase armored personnel carriers, even in places that could hardly be considered potential terrorist targets, like Alabama and Idaho.

This growth has had its greatest impact in African American communities. For more than thirty years, the War on Drugs has been waged in Black communities. The perception of African Americans as responsible for drug-related violence has been fostered by a range of actors, from elected officials in both parties to the mainstream media to popular culture. It has contributed to a general suspicion of African Americans as criminals deserving of extra scrutiny. But the wider the policing net grows, the greater its propensity to entangle those previously able to avoid it. For example, from 2000 to 2009, incarceration rates for African Americans actually dropped—not surprising, given how historically high the rate had climbed—while the rate of imprisonment for whites and Latinos increased over the same period, rising 47.1 percent for white women and 8.5 percent for white men.[50] The overarching aims of the War on Terror at home legitimized the "criminalization creep" throughout American society.

Twenty-First-Century Policing

The rebellion in Ferguson led to deeper investigations into policing there, which found that African Americans were overrepresented among those stopped for traffic violations: they are 67 percent of the population but account for 89 percent of traffic stops. Blacks also accounted for 92 percent of arrests that originated with a traffic stop.[51] Ferguson's policing practices became the subject of national scrutiny, but according to a *USA Today* investigation, "Blacks are stopped, searched, arrested and imprisoned at rates higher than people of other races" nationwide: "When it comes to racially lopsided arrests, the most remarkable thing about Ferguson, Missouri, might be just how ordinary it is."[52] The report found that 1,581 other police departments arrested Black people at "rates even more skewed than in Ferguson, including cities like Chicago and San Francisco. At least 70 police departments arrested Black people at a rate 10 times higher than non-Blacks."[53] These numbers do not include information from all police departments across the country, but African Americans are generally more likely to be arrested than whites.

Curiously, the policing state has expanded even as crime rates have fallen precipitously, as the *Atlantic* notes:

> Over the past 25 years, the tide of crime and violence seemed to simply recede. Crime is about half of what it was at its peak in 1991. Violent crime plummeted 51 percent. Property crime fell 43 percent. Homicides are down 54 percent. In 1985, there were 1,384 murders in New York City. Last year there were 333. The country is an undeniably safer place. Growing urban populations are one positive consequence.[54]

There is little to no consensus on the cause of the drop in crime rates in the United States, but most experts agree that it had little to do with Clinton's draconian sentencing practices. Many elected officials from the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s hinged their careers on clamoring loudly for "tough-on-crime" policies, but "it turns out that increased incarceration had a much more limited effect on crime than popularly thought. We find that this growth in incarceration was responsible for approximately 5 percent of the drop in crime in the 1990s."[55]

But after thirty years building up the policing state, the temptation to use it is overwhelming. "Nuisance crimes" and other "quality of life" offenses have become the new frontier of American policing, which has little to do with fighting crime. Instead, agents of law enforcement police poverty while instilling fear in and monitoring oppressed populations. As municipalities and state legislatures cut social services and critical aspects of the public sector intended to mitigate the worst aspects of poverty, the police are deployed to "clean up" the consequences.

Crime—where it is actually a problem—is treated as moral depravity instead of the product of poverty or social injustice, relieving the state of any obligation to address poverty; instead, it concentrates even more resources into policing. The starkest example of this is that jails have become the predominant destination for those who commit crimes of mental health. This is because of the dearth of mental healthcare, including treatment facilities that would be more appropriate destinations. Chicago mayor Rahm Emanuel closed half of the city's twelve mental health clinics, leaving those without private insurance struggling to find help. Those who cannot are often arrested. Emanuel cried fiscal poverty as an excuse for closing the clinics, even as he gave the police raises and tens of millions of dollars in overtime.[56] Cook County sheriff Tom Dart has said that one-third of the county jail's ten

thousand inmates are mentally ill, even higher than that national average among the incarcerated, 17 percent.[57] Across the country, mental healthcare systems have been devastated by $4.53 billion in state-level budget cuts since 2009. It is hardly surprising, then, that at least half of the people killed by police since 2000 were suffering from some form of mental illness.[58]

The social consequences of austerity budgets have effectively made the police stormtroopers for gentrification, as cities compete to attract businesses and young white professionals with disposable incomes. This is obvious from the new rules, ordinances, and laws that criminalize public displays of poverty. In more than half of the cities in the United States, it is a crime to sit on the sidewalk. In 18 percent it is a crime to sleep in a public place. Seventy-six percent ban soliciting for money or begging in public. Thirty-three percent ban loitering in entire public jurisdictions, while 65 percent ban loitering in particular places. Fifty-three percent prohibit lying down in particular public places. In 43 percent of cities, it is illegal to sleep in a car. In a growing trend, 9 percent of cities have banned sharing or giving food to the homeless.[59] So-called quality of life offenses include victimless "crimes" like loitering, public urination, or begging in public. These offenses have multiplied as jobs and programs to aid the working poor have been cut to the bone or eliminated.

This approach to policing is broadly informed by the "broken windows" theory, popularized by New York City police chief William Bratton in the 1990s. "Broken windows" was the creation of conservative social scientists James Q. Wilson and George L. Kelling, who argued that stopping low-stakes or "nuisance" crimes, such as subway fare evasion, public drinking, or graffiti, would prevent more serious crimes. There is no empirical evidence for its effectiveness, but it has created a pretext for aggressive policing of poor and working-class people, who are more likely to been seen engaged in such "nuisance" activities because their neighborhoods are more likely to be patrolled. Bratton described George Kelling as a mentor, and when Rudolph Giuliani was elected mayor in 1993, he hired Bratton to implement "broken windows" policing in real life. Bratton introduced CompStat, the software that is still used to track stops and arrests across New York City and generate crime statistics for each precinct on a daily basis. An internal NYPD bulletin described the way CompStat organizes their police work:

> In the past, crime statistics often lagged events by months, and so did the sense of whether crime control initiatives had succeeded or failed. Now there is a daily turnaround in the "CompStat" numbers, as crime statistics are called, and NYPD commanders watch weekly crime trends with the same hawk-like attention private corporations pay to profits and loss. Crime statistics have become the department's bottom line, the best indicator of how police are doing precinct-by-precinct and nationwide.[60]

The New York approach to policing, combining "broken windows" and CompStat, was adopted across the country in the 1990s. By 2013, 58 percent of large police departments (a hundred or more officers) were using or planning to use CompStat.[61] Part of the CompStat method involves praising individual cops for showing up in the statistics as a way to encourage them to keep their numbers up. The opposite is also true. As Kelling put it, "If commanders make bad decisions or allow their subordinates to perform poorly, they should not be protected from humiliation."[62] This atmosphere has certainly contributed to the skyrocketing use of "stop-and-frisk" among New York City police—they search for criminal activity in the hope of boosting precinct numbers.

The 1999 police killing of Amadou Diallo first raised questions about the NYPD's practice of race-based stops. From 1998 through 1999, police stopped 175,000 New Yorkers. Even though Blacks make up only 26 percent of New York's population, they accounted for 51 percent of police stops. Latinos, with 24 percent of the population, accounted for 33 percent of stops.[63] By 2011 the number of stops had mushroomed to 684,000, the vast majority of whom were Black and Brown men. According to the Center for Constitutional Rights, between 2004 and 2012 more than four million people were stopped, and in less than 6 percent of those stops was an arrest made. More than 80 percent of those four million people were African American or Latino. Representatives of those communities filed a federal lawsuit, arguing that stop-and-frisk was codified racial profiling.[64]

NYPD officer Pedro Serrano testified during the lawsuit proceedings that he had received direct orders to engage in stop-and-frisk. He also recorded his precinct commanders threatening officers with

reassignment to an unfavorable task if they did not stop "the right people at the right time in the right location." If there was any confusion as to who the "right people" were, the commander clarified, "Male blacks. And I told you that at roll call, and I have no problem telling you this: male blacks 14 to 20."[65]

Kelling and Wilson admitted that "broken windows" would turn police into "the agents of neighborhood bigotry." For them, this was the price of doing business: "We can offer no wholly satisfactory answer to this important question [of abating police discrimination]. We are not confident that there is a satisfactory answer, except to hope that by their selection, training, and supervision, the police will be inculcated with a clear sense of the outer limit of their discretionary authority."[66] At a separate hearing, police commissioner Ray Kelly testified that fear and intimidation were the objectives of stop-and-frisk. New York state senator Eric Adams testified that he personally heard Kelly say that stop-and-frisk should "instill fear in them, every time they leave their home, [that] they could be stopped by the police." Adams clarified that "them" referred to Blacks and Latinos.[67] In the summer of 2013, a US District Court for the Southern District of New York declared the NYPD's use of stop-and-frisk unconstitutional. But this has not stopped the practice from continuing in New York and elsewhere, often under other names. In the spring of 2015, a lawsuit was filed on behalf of six African Americans in Chicago for racial discrimination related to stop-and-frisk practices. After an investigation, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) found that the Chicago Police Department's use of stop-and-frisk was even more pervasive than the NYPD's had been before it was declared unconstitutional. In the summer of 2014, Black Chicagoans were subjected to 182,048 stops, 72 percent of all stops, while only accounting for 32 percent of Chicago's population.[68]

This aggressive policing not only leads to an increasing rate of arrest of African Americans, but every encounter with law enforcement draws working-class and poor Blacks into a matrix of fines and fees. Twenty-first-century municipalities, urban and suburban, increasingly rely on revenue generated by fines and fees that either originate with or are the products of arrests. Because politicians have been reluctant to raise taxes on wealthy individuals or corporations, police are

increasingly responsible for municipal revenue. As a result, fees as a percentage of state and local revenue have increased over the last several years. The rebellion in Ferguson uncovered how the local government was literally extorting the Black population, to such a degree that monies derived from these fines and fees were the second largest source of revenue. The town issued 33,000 minor-crime arrest warrants for a population of 21,000, mostly for traffic violations—and overwhelmingly to Black residents. Whites, who are 29 percent of the population, accounted for only 12.7 percent of stops.[69] Throughout Missouri, this process of legal extortion is considered a perfectly acceptable practice.

According to a report from Better Together, a nonprofit group, Ferguson does not even rank among the top twenty municipalities in St. Louis County that rely on fines and fees as the central source of their operating budgets. The small city of Edmundson, five miles away, brings in nearly $600 a year for every resident in court fines, more than six times the amount in Ferguson.[70] In the nearby town of Bel-Ridge, a traffic light was rigged so that police could change it as people entered the intersection, boosting their city budget by 16 percent.[71] Local officials, including African American officials, defend this exploitative method as an important source of revenue. "You don't dismantle the whole house in order to kill one bug," said Mayor Patrick Green of Normandy, who is Black. He said that his police force had issued more citations since state agencies asked it to help patrol Interstate 70, and that the money had been used to pay for public safety. "Everyone's saying, 'Oh, no, that's cities just taking advantage of the poor,'" he said. "When did the poor get the right to commit crimes?"[72]

The fees and fines, however, are only the beginning of the ways that the criminal justice system traps poor and working-class people. Nearly a third of US states jail people for not paying off their debts, including court-related fees.[73] This is a completely illegal practice. A 1983 Supreme Court decision ruled that people cannot be jailed for being too poor to pay a fine, fee, or debt, but it takes money to challenge illegal practices throughout the criminal justice system. Shifting the tax burden from those with higher incomes to the poor and working class is regressive at best, exploitative and predatory at its worst. When these fees are not paid, they create a legal odyssey from which it can be difficult, if not impossible, for ordinary people to emerge with

their finances intact. Forty-eight states have either increased criminal and civil court fees or added new ones.[74] The number of Americans with unpaid fees and fines grows every year. As National Public Radio notes, "In 2011, in Philadelphia alone, courts sent bills on unpaid debts dating back to the 1970s to more than 320,000 people—roughly 1 in 5 city residents. The median debt was around $4,500. And in New York City, there are 1.2 million outstanding warrants, many for unpaid court fines and fees."[75] More fees and fines are incurred as punishment for late payment. The government then has the right to seize property. Eventually there is the threat of arrest—which, of course, results in a new round of fees and fines. According to DOJ statistics, 66 percent of the incarcerated "owed court-imposed costs, restitution, fines and fees," up from 21 percent in 1991.[76]

Alabama has tried to make up for lost revenue by imposing fees, such as $35 for posting bail, and by charging a 30 percent collection fee for debts. There are currently half a dozen lawsuits that contend that local courts in Alabama perpetuate a cycle of fines for minor offenses and jail for those who cannot pay. Florida allows private debt collectors to add a 40 percent surcharge to the original debt. Some Florida counties also use what are called "collection courts," where debtors can be jailed but do not have a right to a public defender. In at least forty-three states, poor people can be billed for using a public defender—meaning that poor defendants may be priced out of legal counsel.[77] In forty-one states, inmates can be charged "room and board" for jail and prison stays. Texas and Wyoming treat truancy as a criminal offense: in Texas, children ages twelve to eighteen can be tried in criminal court for truancy. Ten unexcused absences in six months automatically generate a citation. Children arrested for truancy in Texas are seen as adults in the eyes of the court, meaning that their parents cannot intervene on their behalf. Said one judge, "I realize that some people believe that there should be [court-appointed] representation. Right now the process doesn't provide for that." In 2013 Texas charged 115,782 children with "failure to attend school," generating $16 million in court fees and other fines. A remarkable yet unsurprising 83 percent of those charged were Black or Latino.[78]

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When New York mayor Bill DeBlasio tepidly criticized police for choking Eric Garner to death in July 2014, the NYPD declared a work slowdown. The slowdown revealed the extent to which the city depends on the police, not only to protect private property but also to expropriate money and property from ordinary citizens. In 2014, New York City handed out roughly 16,000 parking tickets, bringing in $10.4 million a week.[79] The city makes almost a billion dollars a year in court, criminal, and administrative fines for "quality of life" offenses. These effectively amount to a "race tax," as it is nonwhite populations who bear the disproportionate burden of being overpoliced.

Although budget cuts to social programs fuel aspects of the new policing state, the police force appears to be the only public institution that does not have to worry about budget cuts. Even as cities across the country pay out hundreds of millions of dollars to settle lawsuits alleging police brutality, police continue to operate with impunity.[80] In 2014, cash-strapped Chicago paid more than $50 million to settle misconduct suits (not including the $63 million paid to the lawyers litigating the cases).[81] Over the last decade, the city has paid more than half a billion dollars to settle police brutality suits. This does not include the recent $5 million settlement paid to those who survived police torture in the 1970s and 1980s.[82]

Chicago is not alone. In ten years, New York City has paid, on average, $100 million a year—to the tune of $1 billion—to settle police misconduct cases. The Los Angeles Police Department, celebrated by some as an exemplary reformed police department, paid $54 million in 2011 alone to settle lawsuits against brutality and misconduct.[83] Since 1990, the city of Oakland has spent $74 million to settle 417 such lawsuits. Minneapolis has doled out $21 million since 2003.[84] Philadelphia, whose African American police chief, Charles Ramsey, was handpicked by President Barack Obama to lead a national study on reforming policing, has paid out $40 million during Ramsey's tenure to settle lawsuits involving wrongful shooting deaths, illegal searches, and excessive force complaints. As one lawyer who successfully sued the city explained about Philly police, "The rank and file have no expectation that their behavior is ever going to be subject to any real, meaningful review. . . . That becomes admissible evidence that shows the city is not properly supervising and disciplining officers."[85]

Astronomical sums of taxpayer money to settle police brutality and misconduct cases are apparently a given as one of the costs of running a city. Most other public institutions responsible for this kind of debt and malfeasance—hospitals, clinics, libraries, schools—are either privatized or suffer deep budget cuts that threaten their ability to function properly. When the Chicago Public Schools were facing a $1 billion deficit in 2013, Mayor Rahm Emanuel shuttered fifty-four public schools despite the pleas of thousands of parents. Yet rarely, if ever, are police rebuked for costing cities millions of desperately needed public dollars. Instead, they are universally lauded by public officials and shielded from any consequences—including for killing or brutalizing civilians. The free rein of police is a critical component of urban governance today.

This lack of culpability gives some insight into why police default so quickly to killing. American police kill like no other law enforcement agencies in the so-called First World. In only seven years, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the police have killed 7,427 people. It is a stunning number. The same study found that the police were killing an average of 928 people a year.[86] Consider that only fifty-eight American soldiers were killed in Iraq in 2014.[87] In Canada in 2014, seventy-eight people were killed by law enforcement. From 2010 to 2014, police in England killed four people. German police killed no one in 2013 and 2014. China, with a population four and half times the size of the United States, recorded twelve police killings in 2014.[88]

The enormous body count is only a partial picture of the lethality that infuses American law enforcement. Authorities dramatically underreport police killings, when they are even reported at all. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, hundreds of police killings between 2007 and 2012 were never reported to the FBI.[89] The investigation found that, in the 105 largest police agencies, more than 550 police killings were missing from the record. Incredibly, the federal government does not require that police departments report the number, race, or ethnicity of the people they shoot or kill, thus making it impossible to piece together a full picture of the problem. For example, Florida has not reported police killings to the FBI since 1997; New York City has not done so since 2007.[90]

Without accurate tracking, it is impossible to know who exactly is being killed by police. We do know, however, that the disproportionate contact Black men, women, and children have with law enforcement means that they are most likely bearing the brunt of these killings. One 2005 simulation study showed that a group of mostly white male officers in Florida were "more likely to let armed white suspects slip while shooting unarmed black suspects instead."[91] In real life, as well, the police are more likely to shoot or kill Black men more than anyone else. According to a ProPublica study, from 2010 to 2012, young Black men ages fifteen to nineteen were twenty-one times more likely than their white peers to be killed by the police. Police advocates attacked the study, claiming its sample size was too small to make definitive statements about police killings. When the authors went back to measure a wider sample, they discovered that the disparity of police killing young Black men to young white men was getting worse over time. From 2006 to 2008, the risk ratio was 9 to 1. By 2010, it had risen to 17 to 1; by 2012 it had risen to the study's original finding of 21 to 1.[92]

If the estimates of the number of Black people killed by police in the last decade are true, then police have also murdered hundreds of Latinos and thousands of white people. Not only does this constitute a crisis, it also establishes an objective basis upon which a multiracial movement against police terrorism can be organized. The overwhelming racist nature of American policing obscures the range of its reach, but it is in the interests of anti–police brutality activists to point out the specific *and* the generalized nature of police terror.

Conclusion

On March 2, 2015, after ninety days of investigation, President Obama's Task Force on Twenty-First-Century Policing delivered its findings. Obama hastily organized the committee in the heat of the first national waves of protest the previous December to create the appearance that the federal government was responsive to the demands of popular protest—and as a way to get demonstrators off the streets. He met with youth activists and even put some of them on the commission to give it an air of legitimacy. The commission made fifty-eight recommendations, including ending "racial profiling," expanding "community policing," "better training," and "revamping the entire criminal justice system."[93] Its report also called for "independent investigations" into police killings, seeming to ignore that in the cases of Michael

Brown and Trayvon Martin, "independent" investigations had quietly ended with no punishment for the accused. Moreover, "the report did not discuss how to pay for many of these proposals," nor did it clarify which mechanisms would be invoked to make 18,000 law-enforcement agencies comply. Perhaps most tellingly, some 29 days after the report was delivered, the police had already killed another 111 people, 33 more people than had been killed the month before. Also that month, the brutal murder of Walter Scott was captured on video. Scott had been pulled over because of a defective taillight. Fearing arrest, he took off running, only to be shot in the back eight times by white police officer Michael Slager. Slager was arrested and charged with murder, but Scott's death revealed an entrenched pattern.[94] In June 2015, the *Guardian* reported that US police had killed more than 489 people, including 138 African Americans, since January.[95]

Violence and brutality have always defined the police's relationship to African Americans. There is no "golden age" of policing to which elected officials can point, and there is little reason for optimism that American police can truly be reformed. Thus, the Obama administration's examples of "reformed" police departments reveal the poverty of the concept. In May 2015, Obama traveled to Camden, New Jersey, to tout the city as a "symbol of promise for the nation."[96] Obama was not referring to economic health or stability; he was referring to its approach to policing. In 2013, Camden eliminated its 250-officer police force because of malfeasance, corruption, and the expense of unionized cops and replaced it with a force directed by the county. Freed from the police union contract, Camden hired 411 police officers and 120 "civilian clerks" who act as "analysts in a new operations and intelligence center, monitoring 121 surveillance cameras and the gunshot-mapping microphones."[97] Camden's version of community policing has involved more police on foot patrol, with the objective of having a closer relationship with the people in the neighborhoods they are patrolling.

In other respects, Camden is the perfect example of what "police reform" actually looks like. While the politicians and pundits celebrate falling crime rates, they ignore the unsavory underbelly. Over the first year of the "new and improved" approach to policing, Camden had the most complaints of "excessive force" against the police of any municipality in the entire state of New Jersey. According to the ACLU, the number of complaints "exceeded the combined totals reported by the departments in Newark and Jersey City, the two biggest cities in the state with hundreds more officers."[98] Camden police have also fully embraced "broken windows" policing. Summonses for riding a bike without a helmet increased from 3 to 339; summonses for disorderly conduct increased 43 percent, from 1,766 to 2,521; summonses for failure to adequately maintain lights or reflectors in a vehicle increased 421 percent, from 495 to 2,579; and summonses for tinted car windows increased 381 percent, from 197 to 948. The dispersal of tickets has increased the caseload of the Camden Municipal Court by 29 percent—and the fines and fees have begun to flow.[99] What have not changed or been reformed are Camden's depressed economy, its unemployment rate, and its failed housing market. Camden is 95 percent Black and Latino, 42 percent of the city's population lives below the poverty line, and between 30 and 40 percent of the population is unemployed. The median income in Camden is $26,000 a year, compared to $71,000 annually in the rest of New Jersey. The city of 77,000 people is pockmarked with more than 4,000 abandoned properties. The new focus on fees, fines, citations, and arrests for frivolous crimes threatens to increase poverty and unemployment. President Obama, then, said more than he probably even knew when he lauded Camden as a "national symbol."

American policing has changed as policing has become professionalized and better funded, but these changes have not resulted in better or more just policing. There has also been a frightening continuity of racism, exploitation, and abuse, even as police forces across the country have become more diverse and reflective of the communities they patrol. The police function primarily as agents of social control in a society that is fundamentally unequal, which means that they largely operate in poor and working-class communities. Because African Americans have historically been overrepresented in these neighborhoods, they are often the targets of policing. This is even truer today, as the consequences of policing include hundreds of deaths, hundreds of thousands of arrests, and millions of ruined futures when interactions with law enforcement lead to unemployment, criminal records that create chronic unemployability, and all of the social disorder that follows as a result. It is not surprising, then, that policing is always a focal point of Black social protest.

CHAPTER FIVE

Barack Obama: The End of an Illusion

When an assault rifle is aimed at your face over nothing more than a refusal to move, you don't feel like the American experience is one that includes you. When the president your generation selected does not condemn these attacks, you suddenly begin to believe that this system is a fraudulent hoax—and the joke is on you. Racism is very much alive in America, but as a president with so much melanin in his skin, you seem to address it very bashfully.

—**Tef Poe**, "Dear Mr. President: A Letter from Tef Poe," December 1, 2014

For more than a hundred days, a patchwork group of ordinary people-turned-activists had kept Mike Brown's name alive and held out hope that their protests would result in the indictment of Darren Wilson. Within a matter of minutes those hopes vanished into the November night, as the grand jury's decision not to indict Wilson was announced. One week later while the fires were still smoldering and the bitterness still lingered, hip-hop artist and St. Louis native Tef Poe sent an open letter to President Obama that spoke for a generation of young, Black people who had believed deeply in the promise of the president. He wrote,

> I speak for a large demographic of us that has long awaited our Black president to speak in a direct tone while condemning our murders. From our perspective, the statement you made on Ferguson completely played into the racist connotations that we are violent, uneducated, welfare-recipient looters. Your remarks in support of the National Guard attacks upon us and our community devoured our dignity.[1]

Yes We Can?

The hope and optimism that coursed through Black America in anticipation of Obama's victory as the first Black president in 2008 seemed a million miles away. Even while Black people endured the effects of the 2008 economic crisis, particularly the continuation of home foreclosures and double-digit unemployment, there was optimism that Obama's election could change the course. Even before Obama was elected, there had been great optimism about what a Black presidency could mean for American racial politics. National Public Radio hosted a roundtable titled "A New, 'Post-Racial' Political Era in America" several months before the 2008 election.[2]

President Obama turned out to be very different from candidate Obama, who had stage-managed his campaign to resemble something closer to a social movement. In the heated race for the Democratic nomination, Obama distinguished himself from establishment candidate Hillary Clinton by campaigning clearly against the war in Iraq and vowing to shut down the Guantánamo military internment camp. He spoke of economic inequality and connected with young people who were underwhelmed at the prospect of voting for yet another old, white windbag in John McCain. Black people's enthusiasm for the Obama campaign cannot be reduced to racial solidarity or recrimination. Obama electrified his audiences:

> We've been asked to pause for a reality check. We've been warned against offering the people of this nation false hope. But in the unlikely story that is America, there has never been anything false about hope. For when we have faced down impossible odds, when we've been told we're not ready or that we shouldn't try or that we can't, generations of Americans have responded with a simple creed that sums up the spirit of a people: Yes, we can. Yes, we can. Yes, we can.

> It was a creed written into the founding documents that declared the destiny of a nation: Yes, we can. It was whispered by slaves and abolitionists as they blazed a trail towards freedom through the darkest of nights: Yes, we can. It was sung by immigrants as they struck out from distant shores and pioneers who pushed westward against an unforgiving wilderness: Yes, we can. It was the call of workers who organized, women who reached for the ballot, a president who chose the moon as our new frontier, and a king who took us to the mountaintop and pointed the way to the promised land: Yes, we can, to justice and equality.
>
> Yes, we can, to opportunity and prosperity. Yes, we can heal this nation. Yes, we can repair this world. Yes, we can.[3]

In March 2008 Obama finally gave a comprehensive speech on race, in which he pulled off the feat of addressing the concerns of African Americans while calming the fears of white voters. That he broached the topic at all meant his speech was wildly misinterpreted by liberals and the mainstream media alike as further left of center than it actually was. For example, David Corn, writing for *Mother Jones*, described Obama's speech as "trying to show the nation a pathway to a society free of racial gridlock and denial. . . . Obama was not playing the race card. He was shooting the moon."[4] Obama had been pressured for weeks to rebuke his pastor, the Reverend Jeremiah Wright, who had delivered a sermon titled "God Damn America," referring to the wrong the United States had committed in the world. Obama's political enemies had unearthed the sermon and tried to attribute Wright's ideas to Obama. Obama used his platform in Philadelphia to distance himself from Wright, whom he described as "divisive" and with a "profoundly distorted view of this country." He went on to contextualize Wright's angry comments and condemnations as based on his coming of age in a United States where

> legalized discrimination—where blacks were prevented, often through violence, from owning property, or loans were not granted to African-American business owners, or black homeowners could not access FHA mortgages, or blacks were excluded from unions or the police force or the fire department—meant that black families could not amass any meaningful wealth to bequeath to future generations.[5]

No one running for president of the United States had ever spoken so directly about the history of racism in government and society at

large. Yet Obama's speech also counseled that a more perfect United States required African Americans "taking full responsibility for our own lives . . . by demanding more from our fathers, and spending more time with our children, and reading to them, and teaching them that while they may face challenges and discrimination in their own lives, they must never succumb to despair or cynicism; they must always believe that they can write their own destiny." Obama couched his comments in the language of American progress and the vitality of the American dream, but the speech was remarkable nonetheless in the theater of American politics, where cowardice and empty rhetoric are the typical fare. In that sense Obama broke the mold, but he also established the terms upon which he would engage race matters—with dubious evenhandedness, even in response to events that required decisive action on behalf of the racially aggrieved. He spoke quite eloquently about the nation's "original sin" and "dark history," but has repeatedly failed to connect the sins of the past to the crimes of the present, where racism—albeit often without epithet or insult—thrives when police stop-and-frisk, when subprime loans are reserved for Black buyers, when public schools are denied resources, and when double-digit unemployment has become so normal that it barely registers a ripple of recognition. A healthy cynicism runs especially deep among young African Americans: In 2006, 52 percent of Black youth (ages eighteen to twenty-five) described the US government as "unresponsive" to Black needs, while 61 percent said they had experienced discrimination when looking for work and 54 percent believed that Black youth receive a "poorer education" than white youth.[6]

Before Ferguson, Obama's Philadelphia speech was as close as he had ever come to speaking truthfully about racism in the United States, even though he presented himself as an interested observer, a thoughtful interlocutor between African Americans and the nation as a whole, rather than a US senator with the political influence to effect the changes of which he spoke. Obama would continue in his role as "informed observer" even as president. We are led to believe that a man who can direct drone strikes in the mountains of Pakistan and Afghanistan, who can mobilize resources to any corner of the world in the name of American foreign policy, is powerless to champion legislation and the enforcement of existing laws and rights in the interest of racial justice.

In the context of the 2008 election, eight years after the Republicans stole the White House by disenfranchising Black voters in Florida and three years after Hurricane Katrina, Obama's reluctant candor on race matters felt like a sea change. Political scientist Cathy Cohen identified Hurricane Katrina as a radicalizing event in the lives of Black youth, similar to the impact of the Rodney King beating on the previous generation.[7] The federal government's absence in New Orleans as thousands of Black people drowned dramatically pierced its post-9/11 declarations of national unity in the face of terrorism. While the American government had moved heaven and earth to rain war across the Middle East against an "axis of evil," its shocking indifference to Black suffering inside the United States was a stark reminder of how little had actually changed. As actor Danny Glover so poignantly said, "When the hurricane struck the Gulf and the floodwaters rose and tore through New Orleans, plunging its remaining population into a carnival of misery, it did not turn the region into a Third World country, as it has been disparagingly implied in the media; it revealed one. It revealed the disaster within the disaster; grueling poverty rose to the surface like a bruise to our skin."[8]

Shortly after Katrina struck, tens of thousands of mostly Black college students marched in the small town of Jena, Louisiana, to protest a racist attack on Black high school students there. Their activism did not mark the beginning of a movement, but they uncovered the persistence of racial inequality. Since September 11, wars and occupation had foreclosed the space for protest or even for articulating inequality, but Katrina exposed to the world that the United States was still the same old racist empire. Jena helped to revive a tradition of marching and protesting that had been decidedly muted. As Cohen argues, "For many in black communities, mobilization around the Jena Six reignited the hope that black politics—as it is often imagined and conceptualized: that is extrasystemic, collective, movement politics—is still alive among the younger generation of black Americans."[9]

Generation O

The themes of "hope" and "change" tapped into optimism that the future could be different and better. Hip-hop artist Young Jeezy lyricized,

"Obama for mankind, we ready for damn change so y'all let the man shine!" Khari Mosely, a Democratic Party ward chair in Pittsburgh, described Obama's effect on the "so-called 'lost' generation of inner-city youth . . . young guys with the oversized baseball caps, low-hanging pants and colorful sneakers . . . who, through him, have rediscovered a sense of purpose in themselves and of faith in this nation."[10] Jay-Z linked Obama's run to a longer narrative of Black struggle: "Rosa sat so Martin could walk; Martin walked so Obama could run; Obama is running so we all can fly!"[11] Rap mogul Sean Combs said, "I'm not trying to be dramatic, but I just felt like, Martin Luther King, and I felt the whole civil rights movement, I felt all that energy, and I felt my kids. It was all there at one time. It was a joyous moment."[12]

Black voters' enthusiasm for Obama was spelled out in the election returns. An unprecedented number, across all ages and genders, voted to put Obama in the White House. There were two million more Black voters in 2008 than in 2004.[13] Overall, 64 percent of eligible Black voters voted in the 2008 presidential election, including 68 percent of eligible African American women voters, produced the highest turnout in a presidential election since 1968.[14] But it was young Black voters who put Obama over the top. According to the Pew Research Center, the Black youth vote created the highest turnout among young voters from any ethnic group in US election history. Black millennials had the highest voter turnout "in the nation's history."[15] "I feel happy and optimistic when I see Barack and Michelle. They give me hope, and the kids I teach hope, for something better," said one woman.[16] By 2012, for the first time ever, the percentage of Black voter turnout eclipsed that of white voter turnout in a presidential election, 66 percent compared to 64 percent.

The excitement about Obama turned into postelection euphoria. That was certainly the feeling in Chicago on election night, when a cross-section of the city converged in Grant Park to hear the country's first Black president-elect address the nation. It was a rare, almost strange scene to see a multiracial crowd gathered in Chicago, one of the most segregated cities in the United States. That was the power of Obama's calls for hope and change. On the eve of President Obama's inauguration, 69 percent of Black respondents told CNN pollsters that Martin Luther King's vision had been "fulfilled."[17] In early 2011, asked whether they expected their children's standard of living to be better or worse than their own, 60 percent of Blacks chose "better," compared with only 36 percent of whites.[18] This was not just blind hope: it was the expectation that things would, in fact, be better. One researcher described the broader context: "Certainly, the Obama presidency has fueled euphoria in black circles. But even before Obama came on the scene, optimism was building—most notably among a new generation of black achievers who refused to believe they would be stymied by the bigotry that bedeviled their parents. Obama's election was, in effect, the final revelation—the long awaited sign that a new American age had arrived."[19] "Now we have a sense of future," said Yale sociologist Elijah Anderson. "All of a sudden you have a stake. That stake is extremely important. If you have a stake, now there's risk—you realize the consequences of compromising an unknowable future."[20] Almost 75 percent of African Americans in the South said that Obama would help America rid itself of racial prejudice.[21] *Forbes* ran an enthusiastic editorial opinion in December 2008 titled "Racism in America Is Over."[22]

Shots Ring Out

In the first hours of the new year, just weeks before Obama was to be inaugurated as the next president, shots rang out. It was a reminder that, as bright as the future seemed, the past was never far behind. An armed transit officer named Johannes Mehserle shot an unarmed twenty-two-year-old Black man who lay face down in handcuffs on a public transportation platform. His name was Oscar Grant. Dozens of witnesses, many of whom were returning to Oakland after New Year's Eve celebrations, watched in horror as Grant was murdered in cold blood. His murder was captured on several smartphone video cameras. Black Oakland exploded in palpable anger, with hundreds, then thousands of people taking to the streets, demanding justice.

Perhaps this outcry would have happened under any circumstance, but the brutality of Grant's murder in the few weeks before the nation's first Black president was to take office felt like a shock of cold water. Police brutality and even murder had been a long fact of life in Oakland, California. But the United States was supposed to have entered into a postracial parallel universe. A local movement, led by Grant's family and friends, unfolded across the Bay Area to demand

that prosecutors charge and try Mehserle. Protests, marches, campus activism, public forums, and organizing meetings sustained enough pressure to force local officials to charge Mehserle with murder. It was the first murder trial of a California police officer for a "line-of-duty" killing in fifteen years. In the end, Mehserle spent less than a year in prison, but the local movement foreshadowed events to come.

Obama's surprising electoral victory was beginning to lose its luster in the twilight of his first term. Obama has and will always poll high among African Americans, but that should not be mistaken for blind support for him or the policies he champions. As long as members of the Republican Party treat Obama in a brazenly racist manner, Black people will defend him because they understand that those attacks against Obama serve as a proxy for attacks on them. Early in his administration, however, with the full effects of the recession still pulsing in Black communities, conflict between the Black president and his base could be detected. Black America was in the midst of an "economic free fall" and with it the disappearance of Black wealth. As Black unemployment was climbing into the high double digits, civil rights leaders asked Obama if he would craft policies to address Black joblessness. He responded, "I have a special responsibility to look out for the interests of every American. That's my job as president of the United States. And I wake up every morning trying to promote the kinds of policies that are going to make the biggest difference for the most number of people so that they can live out their American dream."[23] It was a disappointing response, even if that disappointment did not manifest in his approval ratings. In 2011, with Black unemployment above 13 percent, 86 percent of Blacks approved of the overall job the president was doing, but 56 percent expressed disappointment in the "area of providing proper oversight for Wall Street and the big banks."[24] Only half of Blacks said Obama's policies had improved the nation's economic condition. For African Americans, Obama's presidency had been largely defined by his reluctance to engage with and directly address the ways that racial discrimination was blunting the impact of his administration's recovery efforts.

Obama has not shown nearly the same reticence when publicly chastising African Americans for a range of behaviors that read like a handbook on anti-Black stereotypes, from parenting skills and dietary choices to sexual mores and television-watching habits. These public admonishments work to close off the political space within which African Americans can express legitimate grievances about an economic recovery that has offered material relief to bankers and auto executives but only moral uplift to Black people. Their cries for relief have been met with quips that Obama is "not the president of Black America." Vann Newkirk, a self-described member of "Generation O," spoke for many when he wrote, "The Great Recession left us saddled with debt, deprived of savings, overeducated and underemployed, and deeply dissatisfied with the dissonance between American ethos and reality. Even now, in the midst of a recovery, we make up 40 percent of all unemployed individuals, still have a double-digit unemployment rate, and struggle with savings and debt."[25]

There is something disingenuous in focusing on poor and working-class Blacks without any discussion about the ways that the criminal justice system has "disappeared" Black parents from the lives of their children. When Obama talks about absentee Black fathers, he never mentions the disparity in arrests and sentencing that is responsible for the disproportionate number of missing Black men. Few media discussions about Obama's candidacy mentioned curbing the nation's criminal justice system's voracious appetite for Black bodies, but the scars of "law and order" were all over the Black body politic: a million African Americans incarcerated; 10 percent of the Black formerly incarcerated prevented from voting; and one in four of Black men (in the age group twenty to twenty-nine) are under control of the criminal justice system. "Postracial" America was disappearing under an avalanche of disparities throughout the criminal justice system.

Over the course his first term, Obama paid no special attention to the mounting issues involving law enforcement and imprisonment, even as Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow* described the horrors that mass incarceration and corruption throughout the legal system had inflicted on Black families. None of this began with Obama, but it would be naive to think that African Americans were not considering the destructive impact of policing and incarceration when they turned out in droves to elect him. His unwillingness to address the effects of structural inequality eroded younger African Americans' confidence in the transformative capacity of his presidency. As Newkirk put it:

> The jubilation that I felt: the jumping for joy; the tears. They were not just my own but those of people who'd marched before me. The experience was spiritual.
>
> But that idealism soon eroded. What we didn't expect was the false dream of blind post-race would supplant and masquerade as the dream of post-racism. . . . The alternating currents of willful ignorance of racial issues and virulent racist responses to the president frustrated many black millennials, especially those indoctrinated on Obama's progressive ideal of hope. We were left struggling to find a way to voice our concerns when the momentum of the campaign ended.[26]

The American Spring

There was one moment when Black America collectively came to terms with Barack Obama's refusal to use his position as president to intervene on behalf of African Americans. Troy Davis was a Black man on death row in the state of Georgia. It was widely believed that he had been wrongfully convicted, and in the fall of 2011 he was facing execution for a crime he had not committed. Davis's cries of innocence were not a voice in the wilderness: for years he and his sister, Martina Davis-Corriea, had joined with anti-death-penalty activists to fight for his life and exoneration. By September 2011, an international campaign was under way to have him removed from death row. The protests grew larger and more frantic as the death date crept closer. There were protests around the world; support from global dignitaries rolled in as the international movement to stop Davis's execution took shape. The European Union and the governments of France and Germany implored the United States to halt his execution, as did Amnesty International and former FBI director William Sessions. A Democrat in the Georgia Senate, Vincent Fort, called on those charged with carrying out the execution to refuse: "We call on the members of the Injection Team: Strike! Do not follow your orders! Do not start the flow of the lethal injection chemicals. If you refuse to participate, you make it that much harder for this immoral execution to be carried out."[27] As Davis's execution drew near on the evening of September 20, people from around the world waited for Obama to say or do something—but, in the end, he did nothing. He never even made a statement, instead sending press secretary Jay Carney to deliver a statement on his behalf, which simply

noted that it was not "appropriate" for the president to intervene in a state-led prosecution. In the end, the Black president succumbed to states' rights.[28] One Black observer captured the disappointment: "President Obama gives opinions on everything that's safe and what he thinks America wants to hear, but he straddles the fence on issues important to African Americans."[29] It was a moment of awakening for Generation O—and of newfound understanding of the limits of Black presidential power, not because Obama could not intervene, as his handlers insisted, but because he refused to do so. Johnetta Elzie, one of the best known of the Ferguson activists, told a reporter that Davis's execution "hurt me . . . that was the first time I'd ever been hurt by something happening to a stranger."[30]

The Troy Davis protests were certainly not in vain. The day after the state of Georgia murdered Davis, Amnesty International and the Campaign to End the Death Penalty called for a "Day of Outrage" in protest. More than a thousand people marched, eventually making their way to a small encampment on Wall Street that was calling itself "Occupy Wall Street." The Occupy encampment had begun a week or so before Davis was killed, but it was in its fledgling stages. When the Troy Davis activists converged with the Occupy activists, the protestors made an immediate connection between Occupy's mobilization against inequality and the injustice in the execution of a working-class Black man. After the march, many who had been activated by the protests for Davis stayed and became a part of the Occupy encampment on Wall Street. Thereafter, a popular chant on the Occupy marches was "We are all Troy Davis."[31]

Protests to save the life of death-row inmate Troy Davis and the electrifying Occupy Wall Street protests in 2011 seemed to signify the beginning of the "American Spring." Obama's refusal to intervene for Davis and the Republican victories in the 2010 midterm elections signaled that the progressive window many activists believed had been opened by the 2008 electoral victories had now slammed shut. The protest movement lost and Davis was executed.

The Occupy movement, by contrast, would develop into the most important political expression of the US class divide in more than a generation. The slogan "We are the 99 percent" and the movement's articulation of the divide between the "1 percent" and the rest of us

offered a materialist, structural understanding of American inequality. In a country that regularly denies the existence of class or economic inequality, this was a critical step toward making sense of the limited reach of the American dream. Occupy's close proximity to the protests for Troy Davis highlighted the entanglement of racial and economic inequality. Support for Occupy was higher among Blacks than among the general population, with 45 percent expressing a "positive" view of Occupy and another 35 percent saying the movement had been good for the American "political system."[32] Despite the movement's difficulties in coherently expressing the relationship between economic and racial inequality, its focus on government's bailouts for private enterprise while millions of ordinary people bore the weight of unemployment, foreclosures, and evictions addressed some of the most important issues affecting African Americans. It was hard to ignore that Black homeowners had been left to fend for themselves.

The media seized on descriptions of Occupy as "white," which diminished hard-fought and sometimes successful efforts to bring more African Americans into the movement. The Occupy movement was mostly white, overall, and at one point various currents within it debated whether or not the police should be considered a part of the "99 percent." However, the movement varied from city to city. In some cities there were very few Blacks, Latino/as, and other people of color involved, but Oakland activists named their encampment after Oscar Grant, and Atlanta activists named theirs after Troy Davis. Occupy Wall Street in New York had a "people of color working group" whose entire purpose was to organize around antiracist issues with the intent of drawing more Blacks and other people of color into the movement. Occupy Chicago organized teach-ins called "Racism in Chicago," "Our Enemies in Blue," and "Evictions and Foreclosures."

Most significantly, Black Occupy activists organized "Occupy the Hood," whose goal was to raise the profile of the Occupy movement in communities of color across the country and widen the range of people involved. Some "Occupy the Hood" organizers had also been involved in organizing against "stop-and-frisk." Thus, not only did Occupy popularize economic and class inequality in the United States by demonstrating against corporate greed, fraud, and corruption throughout the finance industry, it also helped to make connections between those issues and racism. The public discussion over economic inequality rendered incoherent both Democratic and Republican politicians' insistence on locating Black poverty in Black culture. While it obviously did not bury the arguments for culture and "personal responsibility," Occupy helped to create the space for alternative explanations within mainstream politics, including seeing Black poverty and inequality as products of the system. The vicious attack and crackdown on the unarmed and peaceful Occupy encampments over the winter and into 2012 also provided a lesson about policing in the United States: the police were servants of the political establishment and the ruling elite. Not only were they racist, they were also shock troops for the status quo and bodyguards for the 1 percent.

From Trayvon to the Future

The murder of Trayvon Martin in Sanford, Florida, in the winter of 2012 was a turning point. Like the murder of Emmett Till nearly fifty-seven years earlier, Martin's death pierced the delusion that the United States was postracial. Till was the young boy who, on his summer vacation in Mississippi in 1955, was lynched by white men for an imagined racial transgression. Till's murder showed the world the racist brutality pulsing in the heart of the "world's greatest democracy." To emphasize the point, his mother, Mamie, opted for an open-casket funeral to show the world how her son had been mutilated and murdered in the "land of the free." Martin's crime was walking home in a hoodie, talking on the phone and minding his own business. George Zimmerman, now a well-known menace but then portrayed as an aspiring security guard, racially profiled Martin, telling the 911 operator, "This guy looks like he's up to no good, or he's on drugs or something."[33] The "guy" was a seventeen-year-old boy walking home from a convenience store. Zimmerman followed the boy, confronted him, and eventually shot him in the chest, killing him shortly thereafter. When the police came, they accepted Zimmerman's account. Martin was Black and the default assumption was that he was the aggressor—so they treated him as such. They tagged him as a "John Doe" and made no effort to find out if he lived in the neighborhood or was missing. But the story began to trickle through the news media and, as more details became public, it

was clear that Martin had been the victim of an extrajudicial killing. Trayvon Martin had been lynched.

Within weeks, marches, demonstrations, and protests bubbled up across the country. The demand was simple: arrest George Zimmerman for the murder of Trayvon Martin. The anger was fueled, in part at least, by the overwhelming double standard: if Martin had been white and Zimmerman Black, Zimmerman would have faced immediate arrest, if not worse. Instead, the case showed the deadly consequences of racial profiling and of the alternating fear and disgust of Black boys and men that allowed the police to try to sweep the matter under the rug. The protests were national, as they had been for Troy Davis, but they were much more widespread. This was the impact of Occupy, which had relegitimized street protests, occupations, and direct action in general. Many of the Occupy activists who had been dispersed by police repression the previous winter found a new home in the growing fight for justice for Martin. Protests in Florida and New York City reached into the thousands, with smaller protests in cities across the country.

The legal inaction around Martin's murder on the local, state, and federal levels demonstrated the racist hysteria that prevailed throughout American society. Martin was not a suspect because he had actually done anything suspicious; he was just Black. For weeks, President Obama deflected questions, commenting only that it was a local case. It took more than a month for Obama to finally speak publicly about the case, famously saying, "If I had a son, he'd look like Trayvon. . . . When I think about this boy, I think about my own kids." But he also said, "I think every parent in America should be able to understand why it is absolutely imperative that we investigate every aspect of this, and that everybody pulls together—federal, state and local—to figure out exactly how this tragedy happened."[34]

Obama could not come out and say the obvious, but the fact that he spoke at all was evidence of the growing momentum of the street protests that had been building for weeks. Martin's murder was a national and international embarrassment. Black people may have understood that Obama could not lead a social movement against police brutality as the president, but how could he not use his seat to amplify Black pain and anger? Though everyone applauded his personal touch, Obama was signaling that the federal government would stay out of

the "local" matter. But it was exactly for moments like these that Black people had put Obama in the White House. "We had hope riding—we got Barack Obama elected and got him reelected, but this is still happening. That's kind of like saying, you knew the system hated you, and now, whatever speculation you had about it, even though Barack's in office, you have to check yourself," said poet Frankiem Nicoli.[35]

It is impossible to know or predict when a particular moment is transformed into a movement. Forty-five days after George Zimmerman murdered Trayvon Martin in cold blood, he was finally arrested. It was the outcome of weeks of protests, marches, and demonstrations, many of which had been organized through social media, beyond the conservatizing control of establishment civil rights organizations. Parents, families, and friends of others killed by police, like Alan Blueford, Ramarley Graham, James Rivera, Danroy "DJ" Henry, and Rekia Boyd, fought alongside local activists to bring attention to the murders of their children and loved ones.

I wrote that summer of the gathering tension over unpunished killings by police:

> If the police continue to kill Black men and women with impunity, the kind of urban rebellions that shook American society in the 1960s are a distinct possibility. This isn't the 1960s, but the 21st century—and with a Black president and a Black attorney general serving in Washington, people surely expect more. Meanwhile, in a matter of a few days in late July, near-riots broke out in Southern California and Dallas after police, growing more brazen in their disregard for Black and brown life, executed young men in broad daylight, out in the open for all to see. . . . There's a growing feeling of being fed up with the vicious racism and brutality of cops across the country and the pervasive silence that shrouds it—and people are beginning to rise against it.[36]

In the summer of 2013, more than a year after his arrest, George Zimmerman was found not guilty of the murder of Trayvon Martin. His exoneration crystallized the burden of Black people: even in death, Martin would be vilified as a "thug" and an aggressor, Zimmerman portrayed as his victim. The judge even instructed both parties that the phrase "racial profiling" could not be mentioned in the courtroom, let alone used to explain why Zimmerman had targeted Martin.[37]

President Obama addressed the nation, saying, "I know this case has elicited strong passions. And in the wake of the verdict, I know those passions may be running even higher. But we are a nation of laws, and a jury has spoken. We should ask ourselves, as individuals and as a society, how we can prevent future tragedies like this. As citizens, that's a job for all of us."[38] What does it mean to be a "nation of laws" when the law is applied inequitably? There is a dual system of criminal justice—one for African Americans and one for whites. The result is the discriminatory disparities in punishment that run throughout all aspects of American jurisprudence. George Zimmerman benefited from this dual system: he was allowed to walk free for weeks before protests pressured officials into arresting him. He was not subjected to drug tests, though Trayvon Martin's dead body had been. This double standard undermined public proclamations that the United States is a nation built around the rule of law. Obama's call for quiet, individual soul-searching was a way of saying that he had no answers.

For Generation O, this response illustrated the limits of Black political power. FM Supreme, a young Black hip-hop and spoken-word artist from Chicago, described the meaning of Zimmerman's exoneration:

> When they announced it, it felt like a movie. . . . I just was like, man, this is fucked up. Are you kidding me? I wasn't really surprised, but I wasn't prepared for that. Overall, the decision that was made reinforces that the United States of America has no value for the life of Black people. . . . How they demonized Trayvon Martin, how they were prodding his dead body to see if he had drugs in his system—they don't value us. They didn't check to see if George Zimmerman had drugs in his system. . . . We gotta move. We've got to take action. Specifically, we've got to holler at Stand Your Ground. We need to address racism in America. We need to hit them economically. And so we have to come up with a strategy. We need to recall Emmett Till and how after his death, there was Rosa Parks and the bus boycotts.[39]

Almost two years after Zimmerman was acquitted, the DOJ quietly announced it would file no federal charges against him. Martin's mother, Sybrina Fulton, said, "What we want is accountability, we want somebody to be arrested, we want somebody to go to jail, of course."[40]

The acquittal did not spell the end of the movement; it showed all the reasons it needed to grow.[41] Out of despair over the verdict, community organizer Alicia Garza posted a simple hashtag on Facebook: "#blacklivesmatter." It was a powerful rejoinder that spoke directly to the dehumanization and criminalization that made Martin seem suspicious in the first place and allowed the police to make no effort to find out to whom this boy belonged. It was a response to the oppression, inequality, and discrimination that devalue Black life every day. It was everything, in three simple words.[42] Garza would go on, with fellow activists Patrisse Cullors and Opal Tometi, to transform the slogan into an organization with the same name: #BlackLivesMatter. In a widely read essay on the meaning of the slogan and the hopes for their new organization, Garza described #BlackLivesMatter as "an ideological and political intervention in a world where Black lives are systematically and intentionally targeted for demise. It is an affirmation of Black folks' contributions to this society, our humanity, and our resilience in the face of deadly oppression."[43]

Zimmerman's acquittal also inspired the formation of the important Black Youth Project 100 (BYP 100), centered in Chicago. Charlene Carruthers, its national coordinator, said of the verdict, "I don't believe the pain was a result, necessarily, of shock because Zimmerman was found not guilty . . . but of yet another example . . . of an injustice being validated by the state—something that black people were used to."[44] In Florida, the scene of the crime, Umi Selah (formerly known as Phillip Agnew) and friends formed the Dream Defenders; for thirty-one days they occupied the office of Florida governor Rick Scott in protest of the verdict. Selah said, "I saw George Zimmerman celebrating, and I remember just feeling a huge, huge, huge . . . collapse. . . . I'll never forget that moment . . . because we didn't even expect that verdict to come down that night, and definitely didn't expect for it to be not guilty."[45] Selah quit his job as a pharmaceutical salesman to organize full time.[46]

No one knew who would be the next Trayvon, but the increasing use of smartphone recording devices and social media seemed to quicken the pace at which incidents of police brutality became public. These tools being in the hands of ordinary citizens meant that families of victims were no longer dependent on the mainstream media's interest: they could take their case straight to the public. Meanwhile, the formation of organizations dedicated to fighting racism through mass mobilizations, street demonstrations, and other direct actions

was evidence of a newly developing Black left that could vie for leadership against more established—and more tactically and politically conservative—forces. The Black political establishment, led by President Barack Obama, had shown over and over again that it was not capable of the most basic task: keeping Black children alive. The young people would have to do it themselves.

CHAPTER SIX

Black Lives Matter: A Movement, Not a Moment

What happened to my daughter was unjust. It was unjust. It was really unjust. I've been through all the range of emotions that I can go through, concerning this. But I will not stop, as all of the rest of the mothers have said, until I get some answers.

—**Cassandra Johnson**, mother of Tanisha Anderson, killed by Cleveland police in 2014

Every movement needs a catalyst, an event that captures people's experiences and draws them out from their isolation into a collective force with the power to transform social conditions. Few could have predicted that white police officer Darren Wilson shooting Mike Brown would ignite a rebellion in a small, largely unknown Missouri suburb called Ferguson. For reasons that may never be clear, Brown's death was a breaking point for the African Americans of Ferguson—but also for hundreds of thousands of Black people across the United States. Perhaps it was the inhumanity of the police leaving Brown's body to fester in the hot summer sun for four and a half hours after killing him, keeping his parents away at gunpoint and with dogs. "We was treated like we wasn't parents, you know?" Mike Brown Sr., said. "That's what I didn't understand. They sicced dogs on us. They wouldn't

let us identify his body. They pulled guns on us."[1] Maybe it was the military hardware the police brandished when protests against Brown's death arose. With tanks and machine guns and a never-ending supply of tear gas, rubber bullets, and swinging batons, the Ferguson police department declared war on Black residents and anyone who stood in solidarity with them.

Since then, hundreds more protests have erupted. As the United States celebrates various fiftieth anniversaries of the Black freedom struggles of the 1960s, the truth about the racism and brutality of the police has broken through the veil of segregation that has shrouded it from public view. There have been periodic ruptures in the domestic quietude that is so often misinterpreted as the docility of American democracy: the brutal beating of Rodney King, the sodomy of Abner Louima, the execution of Amadou Diallo. These beatings and murders did not lead to a national movement, but they were not forgotten. As Ferguson protestor Zakiya Jemmott said, "My first protest was in 1999, when Amadou Diallo was murdered by police. I haven't seen any changes and have not changed my perception of police officers."[2]

It is impossible to answer, and perhaps futile to ask, the question "why Ferguson?" just as it's impossible ever to accurately calculate when "enough is enough." The transformation of Mike Brown's murder from a police killing into a lynching certainly tipped the scales. Writer Charles Pierce captured what many felt: "Dictators leave bodies in the street. Petty local satraps leave bodies in the street. Warlords leave bodies in the street. Those are the places where they leave bodies in the street, as object lessons, or to make a point, or because there isn't the money to take the bodies away and bury them, or because nobody gives a damn whether they are there or not."[3] In the hours after Brown's body was finally moved, residents erected a makeshift memorial of teddy bears and memorabilia on the spot where police had left his body. When the police arrived with a canine unit, one officer let a dog urinate on the memorial. Later, when Brown's mother, Lesley McSpadden, laid out rose petals in the form of his initials, a police cruiser whizzed by, crushing the memorial and scattering the flowers.[4] The next evening, McSpadden and other friends and family went back to the memorial site and laid down a dozen roses. Again, a police cruiser came through and destroyed the flowers.[5] Later that night, the uprising began.

The police response to the uprising was intended to repress and punish the population, who had dared to defy their authority. It is difficult to interpret in any other way their injudicious use of tear gas, rubber bullets, and persistent threats of violence against an unarmed, civilian population. The Ferguson police, a 95 percent white and male force, obscured their badges to hide their identities, wore wristbands proclaiming "I AM DARREN WILSON," and pointed live weapons at unarmed civilians engaged in legal demonstrations. The municipality resembled a rogue state, creating arbitrary rules governing public protests and assaulting the media, as both an act of revenge and an attempt to hide the sheer brutality of its operation. In the twelve days following Brown's death, 172 people were arrested, 132 of whom were charged only with "failure to disperse." At one point during the demonstrations, a Ferguson officer pointed his AR-15 semiautomatic rifle in the direction of a group of journalists and screamed, "I'm going to fucking kill you!" When someone asked, "What's your name, sir?" He screamed, "Go fuck yourself!"[6] For a moment, the brutal realities of Black life in Ferguson were exposed for all to see.

Black protestors went on to unmask the kleptocracy at the heart of municipal operations in Ferguson, revealing that the Ferguson police department, directed by the mayor and city council, were targeting the Black population as the major source of revenue for the town (see chapter 4). Black households were inundated with fines, fees, citations, tickets, and arrests to such an extent that the revenues were the town's second leading source of revenue. Court fines deriving from motor-vehicle violations were 21 percent of revenue, accounting for "the equivalent of more than 81 percent of police salaries before overtime."[7] Failure to pay or appear in court to respond to tickets instantly produced an arrest warrant. Emails between city administrators openly called for more. In March 2013, the finance director wrote to the city manager, "Court fees are anticipated to rise about 7.5%. I did ask the Chief if he thought the PD [police department] could deliver 10%. He indicated he could try."[8] By December 2014, the department had 16,000 outstanding arrest warrants, mostly for minor offenses.[9] Ninety-five percent of traffic stops were directed at Black drivers. As the DOJ report said, "Ferguson law enforcement practices are directly shaped and perpetuated by racial bias."[10] Black people in Ferguson were living under the near complete domination of the police.

Indeed, as the daily protests went on, the Ferguson police's escalating brutality and lawlessness seemed to arise out of frustration that they could not make the Black men and women of Ferguson submit. Quentin Baker, a nineteen-year-old from St. Louis, observed that "all of these things happen after the police provoke it. What they want to do is impose their will."[11] Just as residents rebuilt the memorials for Mike Brown within hours every time the police tried to destroy them, the same dynamic held for the protests. Every night the police used tear gas and rubber bullets to disperse the crowd; the next day, the crowds would reemerge. Ferguson activist Johnetta Elzie described how the protestors were changing even in the face of "unthinkable" police violence:

> I became less of a peaceful protester and more of an active one. Using my voice to chant loudly along with other protesters seemed to be enough but it wasn't. Instead, I decided to yell directly at the police. I decided to dare the police to look at the faces of the babies and children their dogs were so ready to chase down. As more people began to look directly at the police and yell their grievances, the more aggravated they became.[12]

Protestor Dontey Carter said, "I've been down here since the first day. . . . We all had the same pain and anger about this. We all came together that day. . . . They're killing us, and it's not right."[13]

Carter's words addressed the urgency of a summer that had turned into a killing season. Just weeks before Mike Brown was shot, the world had watched video of New York City cop Daniel Pantaleo choking the life out of Eric Garner. Four days before Brown was killed, the police struck in a suburb of Dayton, Ohio. John Crawford III, a twenty-two-year-old, unarmed African American man, was killed in the aisle of a Walmart while he talked on the phone with the mother of his children. Crawford had been holding a toy gun. Even though Ohio is an "open carry" state where citizens are allowed to carry unconcealed guns, local police opened fire on Crawford with little to no warning, killing him.[14] Two days after Brown's murder, police in Los Angeles shot unarmed Ezell Ford three times in the back as he lay face down on the sidewalk. The following day, elsewhere in California, Dante Parker, a thirty-six-year-old African American man, was detained by police and tasered multiple times before dying in police custody.[15] The Ferguson rebellion became a focal point for the growing anger in Black communities across the country.

For almost the entire fall, the Ferguson movement focused on winning an indictment of Darren Wilson. Prosecutors worked to drag out the grand jury proceedings as long as possible, believing that colder weather would edge the movement off the streets. Undoubtedly, given the level of repression, the intensity of the August protests was not sustainable over time. But when that level of intensity waned, the *persistence* of the protests kept the movement alive. Activists and others from around the country were also important in helping sustain the local movement. In late August 2014, Darnell Moore and Patrisse Cullors of #BlackLivesMatter organized a "freedom ride" to bring people from all around the country to the suburb in solidarity with the local movement. Moore described the breadth of the mobilization:

> More than 500 people traveled from across the United States and Canada to provide various forms of support to the activists on the ground in Ferguson. Those who traveled with us represented a new and diverse contingent of black activists. We weren't all the same age, nor did we share the same political viewpoints. We weren't all heterosexual or documented or free from past involvement with the criminal justice system. Some of us were transgender, disabled or bisexual.[16]

Local activists held vigils, picketed the Ferguson police department, and blocked traffic on Interstate 70, which runs through Ferguson, in a dogged effort to maintain pressure on local officials to indict Wilson. Continued police harassment was also critical to sustaining the movement. In late September, Mike Brown's memorial was doused with gasoline and ignited. The flames revitalized the protests: more than two hundred people gathered in an angry protest that saw five people arrested.[17]

When local officials began to speculate that the grand jury decision would be made public in October, local activism picked up. A multiracial protest erupted in the solidarity song "Which Side Are You On?" during a performance of the St. Louis Symphony. When the protestors marched out, chanting "Black lives matter," many in the audience—including symphony musicians—applauded. On October 8, an off-duty St. Louis police officer fired at Black teenager Vonderrit Myers seventeen times, hitting him with eight bullets and killing him. Days after Myers's death, two hundred students marched from Myers's neighborhood,

called Shaw, to join hundreds more students in an occupation of St. Louis University (SLU). For several days more than a thousand students occupied the campus, harkening back to the days of the Occupy movement.[18] The occupation of SLU coincided with Ferguson October, in which hundreds of people traveled to Ferguson—in solidarity with the local movement, but also to register their own protest. As protestor Richard Wallace from Chicago put it, "Everybody here is representing a family member or someone that's been hurt, murdered, killed, arrested, deported."[19] Ferguson officials continued to stall in announcing Wilson's fate, but the resilience of the Ferguson movement was inspiring people far beyond the Midwest. Historian Donna Murch wrote,

> I have no words to express what is happening in Ferguson. In the name of Michael Brown, a beautiful black storm against state violence is brewing so dense it has created a gravity of its own, drawing in people from all over the U.S., from centers of wealth and privilege to this city whose most prosperous years were a century ago. It looks explicitly not only to St. Louis city and county police and other municipal law enforcement, but also to the imperial wars in the Middle East as sites of murder and trauma. The call repeated over and over is Stokely Carmichael's: "Organize, Organize, Organize." And this growing youth movement has all the ancestral sweetness of kinship. In the words of a local hip-hop artist/activist, "Our grandparents would be proud of us."[20]

Changing of the Guard

A battle over the meaning of Ferguson between activists, civil rights leaders, elected officials, and federal agents was under way. For the activists and Black people of Ferguson, the point of the struggle was to win justice for Mike Brown, which meant keeping the protests alive. Winning an indictment against Wilson would vindicate their strategy and tactics, which often came into noisy conflict with establishment figures who made repeated calls for "calm" and often seemed more intent on criticizing the people in the streets than the conditions that compelled them to act in the first place.

The civil rights establishment, members of Congress, and federal agents were on hand for a variety of reasons. Members of the CBC

appeared most concerned with increasing the voter rolls through registration campaigns and trying to transform the anger in the streets into a midterm-election turnout that would favor the Democratic Party. The civil rights establishment had overlapping and competing goals. The NAACP, whose reputation had been in decline, was looking to rehabilitate its image by trying to lead and direct events in Ferguson. Jesse Jackson Sr., as a leading figure in civil rights lore, had been politically adrift and marginalized because he was not in the orbit of the Obama White House. He had been supplanted by the Reverend Al Sharpton as the new national face of the civil rights establishment. For years, families had called upon Sharpton to bring attention and resources to their children's murder by the police. Sharpton could and did provide both—and enhanced his reputation as a conduit into the Black community. He arrived in Ferguson shortly after Mike Brown's death. Barely a week after Sharpton's arrival came the DOJ, led by former attorney general Eric Holder. Sharpton and Holder worked in tandem to reestablish the legitimacy of "law and order" and of the federal government as a respectable arbiter in local situations that could not otherwise be resolved.

But by the time Sharpton arrived in Ferguson, it was too late. Young Black people had already endured two standoffs with police that had ended with tear gas and rubber bullets. People were furious. These bullying tactics had transformed the marches into much more than a struggle for Mike Brown. The battle in the Ferguson streets was also fueled by the deep grievances of the town's young people, whose future was being stolen by the never-ending cycle of fines, fees, warrants, and arrests. They were fighting for their right to be on the street and to be freed from the vice grip of the Ferguson police. They had experienced their own collective power and were drawing strength from outlasting the police. They were losing their fear. And they were not about to stand down or move aside to accommodate Sharpton's arrival as the spokesperson for a local movement already firmly in place.

The conflict was almost immediate. Sharpton convened a meeting the day he arrived. His first speech blamed protestors for the violence that had been the central theme of the mainstream media. He told the group, "I know you are angry. . . . I know this is outrageous. When I saw that picture [of Brown lifeless on the ground], it rose

up in me in outrage. But we cannot be more outraged than his mom and dad. If they can hold their heads in dignity, then we can hold our heads up in dignity." He added, "To become violent in Michael Brown's name is to betray the gentle giant that he was. Don't be a traitor to Michael Brown."[21]

Even though Sharpton had just arrived in town, he was describing Mike Brown's character and personality to his friends and peers. It was condescending and presumptuous. Sharpton's words also lent legitimacy to Ferguson officials' accounts, which blamed violence on protestors even as police blatantly violated their rights to assemble. But Sharpton's plan transcended events in Ferguson: if he could quell the fires of Ferguson, his political value would increase exponentially. This was an important case for the Obama administration, given the growing national focus on police brutality. Holder's presence in Ferguson confirmed this. When the protests continued despite Sharpton's arrival, he amplified his criticism of "violent" protestors by trying to draw a sharp line between them and "peaceful" demonstrators.

As Sharpton delivered the eulogy at Brown's funeral, he reserved his harshest words for the young Black protestors who had stood up to police violence and provocations. Brown's parents, he said,

> had to break their mourning to ask folks to stop looting and rioting. . . . You imagine they are heartbroken—their son taken, discarded and marginalized. And they have to stop mourning to get you to control your anger, like you are more angry than they are. . . . Blackness was never about being a gangster or a thug. Blackness was no matter how low we was pushed down, we rose up anyhow. . . . Blackness was never surrendering our pursuit of excellence. It was when it was against the law to go to some schools, we built black colleges. . . . We never gave up. . . . Now, in the 21st century, we get to where we got some positions of power. And you decide it ain't black no more to be successful. Now you want to be a nigger and call your woman a ho. You've lost where you've come from. We've got to clean up our community so we can clean up the United States of America.[22]

In one fell swoop, Sharpton not only condemned the young people of Ferguson but invoked stereotypes to do so. It confirmed a sense among the new activists that Sharpton and those like him were out of step. There was a lingering, if unspoken question: What gave Sharpton or Jackson or the NAACP or the Justice Department the authority to tell protestors how they should respond to the violence of the Ferguson police? What, really, did any of them know about the daily harassment local residents experienced? What had any of these officials ever done to stop police murder and brutality?

A New Civil Rights Movement?

The young people of Ferguson had great reverence and respect for the memory of the civil rights movement, but the reality is that its legacy meant little in their everyday lives. "I feel in my heart that they failed us," Dontey Carter said of contemporary civil rights leaders. "They're the reason things are like this now. They don't represent us. That's why we're here for a new movement. And we have some warriors out here."[23] When Jesse Jackson Sr. arrived in Ferguson, he was confronted by a local activist, who said, "When you going to stop selling us out, Jesse? We don't *want* you here in St. Louis!"[24] Other activists did not go that far, but they did note that young Black people had been thrust into leadership on the ground in Ferguson because they were the ones under attack. Johnetta Elzie recognized that: "The youth leading this movement is important because it is our time. For so long the elders have told us our generation doesn't fight for anything, or that we don't care about what goes on in the world. We have proved them wrong."[25]

This division between the "old guard" and the "new generation" grew deeper as the movement began to take form. During a "Ferguson October" forum, tensions threatened to boil over when the organizers asked representatives of the civil rights establishment who had not been on the streets or at any of the daily protests to discuss the state of the movement. As NAACP president Cornell William Brooks gave a speech, several young people in the audience stood and turned their backs. Hip-hop artist Tef Poe informed the gathering, "This ain't your grandparents' civil rights movement." He described the real movement as being made up of the young men in the streets with bandanas and young women who were supposed to be in school but were on the front lines instead. He said to the NAACP and the others assembled on the stage, "Y'all did not show up. . . . Get off your ass and join us!"[26]

Part of Sharpton's appeal for the political establishment has been his ability to keep protests narrowly fixed on the specifics of a given case, or at least on the narrow issue of "police accountability." But the deepening conflict between the young activists and the establishment was exacerbated as Ferguson officials dragged out the decision of whether or not to indict Wilson. For the young people, this meant escalating the pressure, while the "old guard" continued to counsel patience and allowing the process to play out. But there were other tensions. The young activists were beginning to politically generalize from the multiple cases of police brutality and develop a systemic analysis of policing. Many began to articulate a much broader critique that situated policing within a matrix of racism and inequality in the United States and beyond. Millennials United in Action activist Ashley Yates recognized that

> the youth knew something very early in that the older generation didn't. We knew that the system had already failed even before they began to show their hand publicly. We knew that not only was the murder of Mike Brown unjustified, it was another example of how the systems in place made it acceptable to gun us down. We are the generation that was ignited by Trayvon Martin's murder and placed our faith in a justice system that failed us in a very public and intentional manner.[27]

Elzie also observed, "Thanks to Twitter, I had been able to see photos of Gaza weeks before, and feel connected to the people there on an emotional level. I never thought the small county of Ferguson, this little part of Greater St. Louis, would become Gaza."[28]

There was truth to the generational divide, as there often is when a new generation of activists emerges and is not weighed down by earlier defeats or habituated to a particular method of organizing or thinking. They bring new ideas, new perspectives, and often, new vitality to the patterns and rhythms of activism. In general, as the movement has developed, there has been an impulse by some activists to celebrate the youth and denigrate age and experience. Generational tensions do not mean that movements and organizing in general cannot be multigenerational. Civil rights icon Ella Baker was significantly older and more experienced than the young activists she worked alongside in forming the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), yet she commanded tremendous respect because of the respect she had for the

young people she organized with. In a well-known essay that described some of her conceptions of organizing and leadership during the sit-in movement in 1960, she wrote

> [The] desire for supportive cooperation from adult leaders and the adult community was . . . tempered by apprehension that adults might try to "capture" the student movement. The students showed willingness to be met on the basis of equality, but were intolerant of anything that smacked of manipulation or domination. This inclination toward *group-centered leadership*, rather than toward a *leader-centered group pattern of organization*, was refreshing indeed to those of the older group who bear the scars of the battle, the frustrations and the disillusionment that come when the prophetic leader turns out to have heavy feet of clay.[29]

Despite the constant clamor of "generational divide" today, there is much fluidity between the youth and older African Americans, who are often the parents of the young people being killed by the police. Where the generational divide expressed itself most forcefully today is over the developing politics of the movement. The tactical and strategic flexibility of the youth activists flowed from a developing politics that could not be constrained by a narrow agenda of voter registration or a simple electoral strategy. In Ferguson, these emerging politics were embodied by the emergence of young Black women as a central organizing force.

Black Women Matter

Most murders of Black people at the hands of the state go unnoticed by the public and unreported by the mainstream media. The few cases—compared to the significantly larger number of people killed—that do come into the public spotlight often involve Black men or boys. This was certainly true in Ferguson and Baltimore. This is not entirely surprising since, when police shoot to kill, they are usually taking aim at African American men. But Black women who are partnered with, have children with, or parent Black men and boys also suffer the effects of violence against them. The erasure of this particular way that Black women experience police violence minimizes the depth and extent of the harm caused by the abusive policing state. Black men falling under the control of the criminal justice system has a deleterious impact on their families and neighborhoods. Ex-convict status increases rates of

poverty and unemployment, and the formerly incarcerated are banned from access to federal programs intended to blunt the worst effects of poverty, including housing vouchers, student loans, and other forms of financial aid. These policies affect not only Black men but also Black women who have Black men in their lives.

Black women, however, are also the victims of the policing state, including police violence and imprisonment. While Trayvon Martin became a household name, most people are not familiar with the case of Marissa Alexander, a Black woman who was a victim of domestic violence. After using a firearm to keep her abuser at bay, Alexander invoked Florida's "stand your ground" statute as a defense. Although George Zimmerman, who killed Martin, succeeded in using this defense, Alexander was sentenced to twenty years in prison. Even though Alexander would eventually be released from jail, the contrast was a stark reminder of the dual system of justice in the United States.

The police also kill Black women. The names of Rekia Boyd, Shelly Frey, Miriam Carey, and Alberta Spruill are less familiar than those of Mike Brown or Eric Garner, but their killings were motivated by the same dehumanizing factors. Police also view Black women's lives with suspicion and ultimately as less valuable, making their death and brutalization more likely, not less. It is hardly even newsworthy when Black women, including Black transwomen, are killed or violated by law enforcement—because they are generally seen as less feminine or vulnerable. Consider the case of Tulsa, Oklahoma, police officer Daniel Holtzclaw, who was convicted of raping thirteen Black women while on duty. Holtzclaw is believed to have targeted Black women because they were of "lower social status," meaning that they were less likely to be believed and fewer people would care.[30] Indeed, Holtzclaw's crimes barely made a ripple in the national news.

Even though Black women have always been susceptible to violence from the police and the criminal justice system, where organizing and struggle have emerged, they have, for the most part, had a male face. For cases that develop a national profile, a male lawyer or reverend or civil rights leader—such as Al Sharpton—is usually the most visible face. Of course, mothers and other women in the lives of the (typically male) victims are heard from, but the activism has been seen as male-led and organized—until Ferguson.

In fact, the media have been particularly cognizant of the "women of Ferguson" as central to turning "a string of protests into a movement, by seamlessly shifting between the roles of peace-keepers, disrupters, organizers and leaders."[31] Indeed, the women who played an indispensable role in keeping the Ferguson movement together through the summer until the early winter were also aware of their role. As Brittney Ferrell points out,

> The media has left out that if it were not for Black women, there would be no movement. We have seriously carried this to where it is now, not to say there are no men out here doing their thing because there are. What I am saying is that women have been here since day one, we are willing to lay our lives on the line to keep up the good fight without the support from anyone or any organization, hence why we built our own.[32]

To ask why Black women have played such a central role in this movement is to assume that they have played a lesser role in other movements. It should go without saying that Black women have always played an integral role in the various iterations of the Black freedom struggle. Whether it was Ida B. Wells, who risked her life to expose the widespread use of lynching in the South, or the mothers of the wrongfully accused Scottsboro Boys, who toured the world to build the campaign to free their sons, Black women have been central to every significant campaign for Black rights and freedom. Black women, including Ella Baker, Fannie Lou Hamer, Diane Nash, and countless and unknown others, were critical to the development of the civil rights movement, but that movement is still primarily known by its male leaders.

Today, though, the face of the Black Lives Matter movement is largely queer and female. How has this come to be? Female leadership may actually have been an outcome of the deeply racist policing Black men have experienced in Ferguson. According to the US Census Bureau, while there are 1,182 African American women between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-four living in Ferguson, there are only 577 African American men in this age group. More than 40 percent of Black men in both the 20–24 and 35–54 age groups in Ferguson are missing.[33]

It's not just Ferguson. Across the United States, 1.5 million Black men are "missing"—snatched from society by imprisonment or premature death. To put it starkly, "More than one out of every six Black

men who today should be between 25 and 54 years old have disappeared from daily life."[34] This does not mean that, if the 40 percent of Black men missing from Ferguson were present, they would be playing the same role that women have played in building, organizing, and sustaining the movement, but it does provide a concrete example of the impact of the hyperaggressive, revenue-generating approach to policing in Ferguson. It is more likely that these women have stepped into leadership roles because of the absolutely devastating impact of policing and police violence in Black people's lives in general. But whatever the reasons, their presence has contributed more than just gender balance.

The Black women leading the movement against police brutality have worked to expand our understanding of the broad impact of police violence in Black communities. Sometimes this is articulated through the straightforward demand that society as a whole recognize that the police victimize Black women. "The media is excluding the fact that the police brutality and harassment in our communities impacts the women just as much as the men," says Zakiya Jemmott, adding, "They're highlighting black male lives and pushing the black female lives lost to police violence to the side. I want for the media to understand that *all* black lives matter."[35] But Black women have also made a much more deliberate intervention to expose police brutality as part of a much larger system of oppression in the lives of all Black working-class and poor people. Charlene Carruthers of Black Youth Project 100 explains,

> It's important because we are really serious about creating freedom and justice for all black people, but all too often black women and girls, black LGBTQ folks, are left on the sidelines. And if we're going to be serious about liberation we have to include all black people. It's really that simple. And it's been my experience that issues of gender justice and LGBT justice have been either secondary or not recognized at all.[36]

The Black women who created the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter—Patrisse Cullors, Opal Tometi, and Alicia Garza—articulate most clearly the overlapping oppressions confronting Black people in the struggle to end police violence and win justice. In an essay that captures the expansive nature of Black oppression while arguing that the movement cannot be reduced only to police brutality, Alicia Garza writes,

> It is an acknowledgment Black poverty and genocide is state violence. It is an acknowledgment that 1 million Black people are locked in cages in this country—one half of all people in prisons or jails—is an act of state violence. It is an acknowledgment that Black women continue to bear the burden of a relentless assault on our children and our families and that assault is an act of state violence. Black queer and trans folks bearing a unique burden in a hetero-patriarchal society that disposes of us like garbage and simultaneously fetishizes us and profits off of us is state violence; the fact that 500,000 Black people in the US are undocumented immigrants and relegated to the shadows is state violence; the fact that Black girls are used as negotiating chips during times of conflict and war is state violence; Black folks living with disabilities and different abilities bear the burden of state-sponsored Darwinian experiments that attempt to squeeze us into boxes of normality defined by White supremacy is state violence.[37]

The focus on "state violence" strategically pivots away from a conventional analysis that would reduce racism to the intentions and actions of the individuals involved. The declaration of "state violence" legitimizes the corollary demand for "state action." It demands more than the removal of a particular officer or the admonishment of a particular police department, but calls attention to the systemic forces that allow the individuals to act with impunity. Moreover, these organizers are "intersectional" in their approach to organizing—in other words, they start from the basic recognition that the oppression of African Americans is multidimensional and must be fought on different fronts. The analytic reach of these organizers is what really underlies the tension between the "new guard" and the "old guard." In some ways, it demonstrates that today's activists are grappling with questions similar to those Black radicals confronted in the Black Power era, questions bound up with the systemic nature of Black oppression in American capitalism and how that shapes the approach to organizing.

Placing police brutality into a wider web of inequality has largely been missing from the more narrowly crafted agendas of the liberal establishment organizations, like Sharpton's National Action Network (NAN), which have focused more on resolving the details of particular cases than on generalizing about the systemic nature of police violence. This has meant that mainstream civil rights organizations tend to focus on legalistic approaches to resolve police brutality, compared to

activists who connect police oppression to other social crises in Black communities. Of course, that approach has not been fully supplanted; a significant focus of the Ferguson movement was voter registration and increasing the presence of African Americans in local governing bodies. But the movement in Ferguson has also validated those who embraced a much wider view by showing how the policing of African Americans is directly tied to the higher levels of poverty and unemployment in Black communities through the web of fees and fines and arrest warrants trapping Black people in a never-ending cycle of debt. The gravity of the crisis confronting Black communities, often stemming from these harmful encounters with the police, legitimizes the need for a more encompassing analysis. It allows people to generalize from police violence to the ways that public funding for police comes at the expense of other public institutions, and creates the space to then ask why. Not only do the "new guard's" politics stand in sharp contrast to those of the "old guard" but so does their approach to organizing. Beyond being led by women, the new guard is decentralized and is largely organizing the movement through social media. This is very different from national organizations like the NAACP, NAN, or even Jackson's Operation PUSH, whose mostly male leaders make decisions with little input or direction from people on the ground. This strategy is not simply the product of male leadership, but of an older model that privileged leveraging connections and relationships within the establishment over street activism—or using street protests to gain leverage within the establishment. The newness of the Ferguson movement and the incipient movement against police violence have temporarily prevented that kind of political shortcut.

From Moment to Movement

On November 24, 2014, a grand jury in Ferguson decided not to indict Darren Wilson for the murder of Mike Brown. Angry protests ripped through the suburb in the dead of night when the decision was announced. Rows of riot police protected City Hall and the police department while the commercial section of Black Ferguson was allowed to burn. There was little surprise about the decision not to indict, but there was anger at the completion of a legal lynching. President Obama

returned to the airwaves to counsel patience and respect for the law. He reminded his audience that "we are a nation built on the rule of law," a concept rendered hollow and meaningless by months of witnessing the lawlessness of the Ferguson police department.[38] Obama implored protestors to channel their concerns "constructively" and not "destructively," but the split screens of several networks showed the president's words were falling on deaf ears as fires burned through the night in Ferguson. This was not, however, a revival of the previous August, when the fires were igniting a new movement against police brutality; these were the flames of resignation and exhaustion.

As happened so often in 2014, at the moment when it appeared that the momentum of activism had swung back in the other direction, there was a new death at the hands of the police, like kindling on a fire. Two days before the Wilson decision was announced, young Tamir Rice, only twelve, was shot and killed by police in a playground in Cleveland, Ohio. Rice had been playing with a toy gun. Police shot and killed the boy within two seconds of their arrival—so quickly that the police car had not even stopped. Nine days earlier, Tanisha Anderson, also of Cleveland, had been killed when an officer performed a "judo" move to take her to the ground and in the process slammed her head into the concrete.[39] Days later, a Staten Island grand jury returned a decision not to indict Daniel Pantaleo, the officer who choked Eric Garner to death. Where the Ferguson decision seemed like an endpoint to the months-long struggle for justice there, these deaths and the Garner decision opened up an entirely new chapter. The continuation of the protests, however, was fraught with the tensions of going from "moment to movement."[40]

Obama quickly organized a meeting of some of the more visible activists from Ferguson and around the country to discuss police violence. James Hayes from the Ohio Student Union was one of the participants. "We appreciate that the president wanted to meet with us, but now he must deliver with meaningful policy," Hayes reported. "We are calling on everyone who believes that Black lives matter to continue taking to the streets until we get real change for our communities."[41] That such a meeting ever convened was proof alone that this was no longer just about Ferguson. The nation's political establishment was concerned about containing the movement.

This was no ordinary meeting; it included the president and vice president of the United States as well as the attorney general. But just as they were attempting to get in front of the anger over Ferguson, two days later the decision not to indict Pantaleo produced even larger protests than those that had greeted the Wilson decision. Tens of thousands of people across the United States clogged the streets in disgust, if not rage, over the refusal to punish another white police officer for the death of an unarmed Black man. In Garner's case, the evidence was incontrovertible. Hundreds of thousands of people had watched the video of him pleading for his life and repeating, eleven times, "I can't breathe" while Pantaleo squeezed the life out of his body. Yet the grand jury found no fault. In the aftermath of the Garner decision Obama shelved the talk about "a nation of laws" and announced the formation of a new task force charged with creating "specific recommendations about how we strengthen the relationship between law enforcement and communities of color and minority communities that feel that bias is taking place."[42]

Activists were not waiting. As waves of protests washed across the United States, the first national protests against police brutality were called for the following week: one in New York City and one in Washington, DC. The march in New York was organized on Facebook by activists, the Washington march by Sharpton's NAN. The emergence of the national movement was immediately confronted by the reemergence of the political tensions that had surfaced in Ferguson. Sharpton had intended to stage-manage the entire affair, featuring himself as keynote speaker. Activists from Ferguson had traveled to Washington, but were dismayed to see the stage filled with people who had no organic connection to the movement. In fact, security guards were demanding VIP badges to gain access to the stage, where the opening rally of the march would commence. Johnetta Elzie was infuriated: "When we first got there, two people from NAN told us that we needed a VIP pass or a press pass to sit on the ledge," she said. "If it is a protest, why do you need to have a VIP pass?"[43] When Sharpton finally made his way to the stage, he ripped the Ferguson activists, who were demanding to address the crowd, as "provocateurs." The breach between Sharpton and the Ferguson-hardened activists was not simply about stage passes or other perceived slights, however. One young organizer named Charles Wade observed, "I think part of it is people just don't connect with his leadership. . . . We've been excluded by the traditional groups, so we've started our own thing."[44] Both marches were wildly successful, bringing tens of thousands of people onto the streets and giving the movement its first profile as a national phenomenon, but the different paths forward were becoming clearer.

Days after the march, Sharpton wrote an article that revealed as much about the tremendous pressure he was under as it did his extremely vague view of how the movement would "reform [the] system":

> 10 or 25 years from now, it won't matter who got the most publicity or the most applause at a rally. . . . Let us not give in to pettiness and emotion, for true change is at our doorstep. You could see on the faces of those marching and chanting on Saturday, and you can see it in Washington as our elected officials are taking steps to reform a system that has failed far too many for too long. . . . You can literally feel it in the air—permanent change is on the horizon. Now we must seize it, and this moment, as we record history together.[45]

It was a far cry from his arrogant saunter into Ferguson. But Sharpton's mentions of "publicity" and "applause" showed that these were things that were on his mind. His vision of "big change" did not look like much: the two "major" reforms he named were body cameras for police and independent prosecutors to investigate police misconduct.

The smallness of his demands perfectly distilled the difference between the "old guard" and the growing youth rebellion. He made no mention of racism, mass incarceration, or any of the broader issues for which younger activists were arguing much more aggressively. Jesse Jackson also weighed in on this question: "To go from protesting to power, you need demonstrations, legislation and litigation. . . . Sprinters burn out real fast. These young people need to be in it for the long run. And it must be an intergenerational coalition. A movement that's mature requires clergy and lawyers and legislators. The struggle is never a one-string guitar."[46] Jackson was certainly less offensive than Sharpton, but his comments reflected a different conception of what the movement should focus on and look like. Moreover, it perpetuated the assumption that the new organizers were against "old people," which has never been demonstrated to be true. As Alicia Garza clarified in an interview, "We learned by making mistakes and from our

elders who are brave enough to share with us all that they've learned. I think it's about having courageous conversations about the world we want to build and how we think we can get there, and calling people out when we see things that are problematic."[47] Jackson's coalition of "clergy, lawyers and litigators" has failed miserably over the last forty years. Counseling the youth to pick up the tools of a failed strategy only served to reinforce the perception that the old guard was out of touch and out of its element. Sharpton's frustration at the questioning of his leadership and his role as the conduit to Black America eventually boiled over. Weeks after the December marches, Sharpton compared the "new guard" to "pimps" and to the people following them as "hoes." He went on:

> And while they got y'all arguing about old or young in Ferguson, they running an election and y'all ain't got a candidate in the race. Cause you're busy arguing with your mommy and daddy when they re-electing a mayor, and re-electing a prosecutor. They got you arguing about who going to lead a march—the old or the young—when they cutting up the city budget. You can't be that stupid! . . . It's the disconnect that is the strategy to break the movement. And they play on your ego. "Oh, you young and hip, you're full of fire. You're the new face." All the stuff that they know will titillate your ears. That's what a pimp says to a ho.[48]

Sharpton's stunning rant confirmed all of the concerns about his continuing role as the self-anointed leader of Black America.

In the days after the big December protests, Ferguson Action, the central body of the various activist formations located in and inspired by Ferguson, released a statement that included some of the activists who had been barred from speaking in Washington. It was titled "About This Movement" and, in its breadth and optimism, it made Sharpton's tantrum seem even pettier:

> This is a movement of and for ALL Black lives—women, men, transgender and queer. We are made up of both youth AND elders aligned through the possibilities that new tactics and fresh strategies offer our movement. Some of us are new to this work, but many of us have been organizing for years. We came together in Mike Brown's name, but our roots are also in the flooded streets of New Orleans and the bloodied BART stations of Oakland. We are connected online and in the streets. We are decentralized, but coordinated. Most importantly, we are organized. Yet we are likely not respectable negroes. We stand beside each other, not in front of one another. We do not cast any one of ours to the side in order to gain proximity to perceived power. Because this is the only way we will win. We can't breathe. And we won't stop until Freedom.[49]

Black Lives Matter

In December and January, "Black Lives Matter" was the rallying cry from every corner. A week after the Garner decision, several hundred congressional aides, most of them Black, walked off the job in protest.[50] Black professional athletes wore T-shirts adorned with the slogan "I Can't Breathe." Soon after, high school and college students began wearing the shirts as well. Thousands of college, high school, and even middle school students began organizing and participating in die-ins, walkouts, marches, and other forms of public protest.[51] At Princeton University, more than four hundred students and faculty participated in a die-in. The protest included mostly African American students, but a number of white, Latino/a, and Asian students participated in the direct action. Students at Stanford blocked the San Mateo Bridge across San Francisco Bay. Students at seventy medical schools organized die-ins under the slogan "White Coats for Black Lives."[52] Public defenders and other lawyers organized their own actions, including die-ins.[53] Protests were sweeping the nation and politicians raced to keep up. Presidential hopeful Hillary Clinton, who had never publicly mentioned Mike Brown's name, was forced to say "Black Lives Matter" when she spoke in New York three days after the march.[54]

Even Obama began to change his tune. When talking about young African Americans, he was speaking less about morality and "instead focused on African American concerns about unfair treatment and called them part of the American family—which makes it awfully hard to single them out as the problem child in need of some tough love."[55] Garza of #BlackLivesMatter spoke to the significance of the actions: "What's happening right now is that a movement is growing. We are building relationships and connections, exercising new forms of

leadership, new tactics, and learning lessons from our elders—people like Bayard Rustin, Diane Nash, Linda Burnham, Assata Shakur and Angela Davis—who have been part of social movements before us."[56]

With the momentum clearly on the side of the movement, its leaders now had to articulate a way forward. Sharpton and the establishment had provided a convenient foil against which to contrast their politics, strategies, and tactics. It was easy to focus on the differences, but how did the new organizers, like those who penned the Ferguson Action document, envision the movement forging ahead? In the aftermath of Sharpton's meltdown and with "Black Lives Matter" absorbed into the daily banter of African Americans, they now had the country's attention. The sharp contrast between the intersectional, grassroots organizing of the "new guard" and the top-down control of the civil rights establishment had helped to obscure important differences that existed *among* the new organizers. For example, some embraced building organizations like Black Youth Project 100 (BYP 100), #BLM, Dream Defenders, Million Hoodies, and Hands Up United, while others saw little need for that, instead embracing social media as the best way to organize the movement. Two of the most high-profile and influential activists in the movement, Johnetta Elzie and DeRay McKesson, were less committed to building an organization.

Ferguson Action's statement echoed this sentiment when it described the movement as "coordinated" and "organized" but "decentralized." In some sense, the futility of organization had been confirmed by their wild success in organizing protests and demonstrations on the fly. For months, Twitter and other social media platforms *were* successful in organizing large and influential protests. The December 13 march in New York City was organized by two relatively novice activists on Facebook; within hours thousands of people had "liked" it and committed to attending. Upward of fifty thousand people actually showed up for the rally. But how would the movement go from direct action, die-ins, highway closures, and walkouts to ending police brutality without dedicated spaces to meet, strategize, and engage in democratic decision-making? Considering the demands and "vision" that Ferguson Action put forward, everything from ending racial profiling to full employment and ending mass incarceration, it is impossible to imagine any of this happening only online.

These debates over organization resemble some of the hostility to organization that emerged in the Occupy movement from 2011. In both cases, the absence of formal structures and formal leadership was described as "giving everyone a voice." If there is no organization, then no one can take over control. DeRay McKesson acknowledged this when he said, "But what is different about Ferguson . . . what makes that really important, unlike previous struggle, is that—who is the spokesperson? The people. The people, in a very democratic way, became the voice of the struggle."[57] McKesson is one of the most visible actors in the movement and his insights are influential. He elaborates:

> It is not that we're anti-organization. There are structures that have formed as a result of protest, that are really powerful. It is just that you did not need those structures to begin protest. *You* are enough to start a movement. Individual people can come together around things that they know are unjust. And they can spark change. Your body can be part of the protest; you don't need a VIP pass to protest. And Twitter allowed that to happen. . . . I think that what we are doing is building a radical new community in struggle that did not exist before. Twitter has enabled us to create community. I think the phase we're in is a community-building phase. Yes, we need to address policy, yes, we need to address elections; we need to do all those things. But on the heels of building a strong community.[58]

Protests *are* for everyone—but how do you determine if the protest was successful or not, and how do you draw those who showed up deeper into organizing? Basically, how do you move from protest to movement? Historian Barbara Ransby speaks to this difficulty: "While some forms of resistance might be reflexive and simple—that is, when pushed too hard, most of us push back, even if we don't have a plan or a hope of winning—organizing a movement is different. It is not organic, instinctive, or ever easy. If we think we can all 'get free' through individual or uncoordinated small-group resistance, we are kidding ourselves."[59]

Not everyone rejects the need for organization. The fight against police terror has produced many new organizations and networks. At a forum at the historic Riverside Church in New York City, Asha Rosa of the Black Youth Project 100 spoke passionately on the need to be not only radical but also organized:

> Organizations are longer lasting than an action, longer lasting than a campaign, longer lasting than a moment. Organizations are where we can build structures that reflect our values, and build communities that help us sustain ourselves in this work and sustain the work itself. We saw 60,000 people in the streets in New York City [for the December protest]. . . . I won't be surprised if we don't see 60,000 people in the streets again until it's warm, and that's okay. . . . There are phases in these movements. We have to sustain that and make sure there are organizations for people to get plugged into.[60]

From the BYP 100, Dream Defenders, Hands Up United, Ferguson Action, and Millennials United to perhaps the most well known of the new organizations, #BlackLivesMatter (#BLM), this new era has produced an important cohort of activist organizations. Thus far, #BLM has become the largest and most visible group, with at least twenty-six chapters. #BLM describes itself as "a decentralized network aiming to build the leadership and power of black people." Patrisse Cullors describes its members as working "within the communities where they live and work. They determine their goals and the strategies that they believe will work best to help them achieve their goals. . . . We are deliberately taking a cautious and collaborative approach at developing a national Black Lives Matter strategy because it takes time to listen, learn and build."[61] #BLM has reinvigorated the Occupy method of protest, which believes decentralized and "leaderless" actions are more democratic, essentially allowing its followers to act on what they want to do without the restraint of others weighing in. But at a time when many people are trying to find an entry point into anti-police activism and desire to be involved, this particular method of organizing can be difficult to penetrate. In some ways, this decentralized organizing can actually narrow opportunities for the democratic involvement of many in favor of the tightly knit workings of those already in the know.

These are issues #BLM will have to resolve, but as the largest and most influential organization in the movement, its example is critical and has wider implications. Organizational autonomy and decentralization raise questions of how actions will be coordinated and the concentrated weight of the entire movement brought to bear on targeted institutions. Different locations have different issues: how are local actions woven into a coherent social movement, not just a series of

disparate demonstrations with no relationship to each other? If every city, organization, and individual does whatever it/she/he feels empowered to do in the name of the movement, how will we ever transform a series of effective local actions into a national movement? There have been situations where multiple groups have been able to coordinate: the #SayHerName campaign to highlight the effects of police violence on Black women stands out as a prime example. But the larger the movement grows, the more need there will be for coordination.

The Revolution Will Not Be Funded

If the success of the movement can be judged by the greater awareness it has created across the United States of police violence and brutality, it can also be measured by the amount of financial support some movement organizations have commanded. Some organizations involved in movement organizing have nonprofit status, while others do not but are still able to generate funding from influential foundations and wealthy individuals. The Black Lives Matter movement more generally has captured the attention of the nonprofit funding and philanthropy galaxy. This includes the Soros and Ford Foundations, but also Resource Generation, described as an "organization of wealthy people under 35 who support progressive movements."[62] In fact, there are philanthropic networks that exist for the sake of pressuring other foundations into donating resources to various social-justice movements. When the organizations connected to the Black Lives Matter movement were convening for a summer conference, the National Committee for Responsible Philanthropy made an appeal to other funders: "A profound transformation of the social, economic and political fabric that for decades has marginalized our Black communities is possible. The Movement for Black Lives convening will be a major step in that transformation. Any foundation that is committed to achieving real equity and contributing to the dismantling of racism has an opportunity and a responsibility to participate."[63] The appeal went on to thank "funders like the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund, the Levi Strauss Foundation, the Barr Foundation" for making "investing in leadership development a priority."

These facts alone do not cast aspersions on the many organizations that receive these funds. Virtually all of the leading organizations of the

civil rights movement received foundation funding, including SNCC, CORE, and SCLC. The Highlander Folk School—where many civil rights activists, including Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King Jr., were trained in civil disobedience and other protest techniques—received much of its funding from the Field Foundation. Social justice organizations rely on any number of sources to finance their important work. But while activists may only be in search of precious dollars to continue organizing, it's doubtful that multibillion-dollar foundations are donating for purely altruistic reasons. Indeed, historian Aldon Morris recounts funders' dubious collusion with agents of the state in a collective effort to undermine civil rights organizing:

> SNCC's financial situation improved in the summer of 1962, when it received some funds from the Taconic Foundation, the Field Foundation, and the Stern Family Fund. Those foundations worked in close conjunction with the Kennedy Administration and shared the Administration's view that black activists should channel their energies aimed at acquiring the vote for Southern blacks. . . . Following the tumultuous Freedom Rides, the Kennedy Administration made overt attempts to funnel the efforts of all the civil rights organizations into voter registration activities rather than disruptive protest movements. Indeed, the Kennedy Administration was adamant in opposing widescale civil disobedience.[64]

Morris goes on to quote James Farmer, a leader of SNCC, on how "the Kennedy administration attempted to 'cool out' the demonstrations": "Bobby Kennedy called a meeting of CORE and SNCC, in his office . . . and he said, 'Why don't you guys cut out all that shit, freedom riding and sitting-in shit, and concentrate on voter education . . . if you do that I'll get you a tax exemption.'"[65] Organizations that depend on outside funding can face problems if their funders develop political critiques of their work. "The nonprofit system is set up for foundations to have an inordinate amount of power and control over what grassroots organizations do," cautions Umi Selah, executive director of Dream Defenders. A former employee of a major funder for progressive Black causes also points out that many donations come "with a set of rules typically about how a funder wants to see things on the ground."[66]

Some groups have taken to collecting dues from their members and taking donations from the general public as way to offset dependence on outside funders. It is very early to understand fully the role that funders and the "nonprofit-industrial complex" will have on this movement, but they are certainly a factor, one that makes fully independent movement groups all the more necessary.[67] For example, the Ford Foundation seeks to play an important role in funding movement organizations, but despite its espoused intentions, it has played a historic role in subverting movements inside and outside the United States. Arundhati Roy writes of its deleterious impact in India in her book *Capitalism: A Ghost Story*:

> The Ford Foundation has a very clear, well-defined ideology and works extremely closely with the US State Department. Its project of deepening democracy and "good governance" is very much a part of the Bretton Woods scheme of standardizing business practice and promoting efficiency in the free market. . . . It is through this lens that we need to view the work that the Ford Foundation is doing with the millions of dollars it has invested in India—its funding of artists, filmmakers and activists, its generous endowment of university courses and scholarships.[68]

Perhaps the largest issue with the foundations and funders is that these organizations also attempt to politically shape the direction of the organizations they fund. The Ford Foundation, like many other funders, offers grants, but also produces "white papers," seminars, and conferences where it puts forward political perspectives and strategies aimed at directing the organizations it is funding.

Political scientist Megan Francis, describing the relationship between the NAACP and the American Fund for Public Service, also known as the Garland Fund, suggests that not only did the Garland Fund provide enormous financial resources to the NAACP in the 1950s, it also used its influence to redirect the NAACP's organizing focus:

> So why did the NAACP move from a racial-violence focused agenda to one that centered on education? In one word: money. The Garland Fund had so much sway over the NAACP's agenda because the Garland Fund had so much to offer the cash-strapped NAACP. In the negotiation of a grant, it quickly became apparent that the NAACP's black leadership favored a civil rights program with an explicit focus on racial violence. . . . Faced with the possibility of losing a critical funding source, the NAACP begrudgingly complied with the

> Garland Fund's requests. In the coming years, the NAACP relegated issues of racial violence to the margins and adopted a focus on education, for which it was known for the rest of the 20th century.[69]

Ultimately, funders and other philanthropic organizations help to narrow the scope of organizing to changing "policy" and other measures within the existing system.

Foundation money also "professionalizes" movements in a way that promotes careerism and the expectation that activism will be externally funded. In fact, most activism is volunteer-based, with fundraising a collective effort of the participants, not the particular expertise of grant writers. The important work of many grassroots organizations in the movement has been obscured by more financially stable organizations. Much smaller, local committees have sprung up around particular cases or to make specific demands that are tied to local situations in cities across the country.

For example, in Madison, Wisconsin, the group Young, Gifted and Black has been organizing for justice for Tony Robinson, a young Black man killed by the police in the spring of 2015. In Cleveland, community activists, including clergy, academics, and the Council on American-Islamic Relations, have come together to demand the arrest of the two officers who killed Tamir Rice.[70] In Chicago, a newly formed organization called We Charge Genocide traveled to Geneva, Switzerland, to call on international officials to compel the American government to stop police murder and brutality against African Americans. In Philadelphia, through the winter of 2014 and much of 2015, a citywide group called the Philly Coalition for REAL Justice brought together as many as sixty people twice a week to organize against police brutality. The coalition has organized thousands of people over the last year.[71] In Dallas, Texas, Mothers Against Police Brutality has not only helped to organize the important fight against police brutality but has actively tried to organize solidarity between the anti-police-brutality movement and the immigrant-rights movement. In the days before a May Day rally, marchers from both movements converged holding signs proclaiming "Black Lives Matter" and chanting "Down, down deportation; up, up immigration!"[72] These types of organizing efforts, often viewed by funders as "unprofessional," exist around the country and are an entry point for ordinary people who want to be involved in movements.

The Demands: This Is What We Want

The absence of an independent movement organization has meant that the actual demands of the movement have been muddled. Some of this arises from the difficulty of the task itself. Police violence is a part of the DNA of the United States. As I have argued earlier, there has been no golden age of policing in which violence and racism were not central to the job. But that does not mean that nothing can be done to rein in the policing state. The Ferguson Action website has compiled the most comprehensive list of movement demands, including demilitarizing the police, passing anti-racial-profiling legislation, and collecting data documenting police abuse, among other measures.[73] Hands Up United, based in Ferguson and St. Louis, has called for the "immediate suspension without pay of law enforcement officers that have used or approved excessive use of force."[74] #BLM has called on the attorney general to release the names of police who have killed Black people over the last five years "so they can be brought to justice—if they haven't already."[75]

The demands of different organizations in the movement overlap, but what is the mechanism for acting on these demands when they are disconnected from any structure coordinated through the movement? How can we pay systematic attention to the progress made in achieving these demands or determining whether or not the demands have to be recalibrated? Connecting police violence to the vast effects of institutional racism is a strength of the current movement, but there is also a danger of submerging reforms that are attainable now into a much broader struggle to transform the very nature of American society. In other words, fighting around the demand to be "free" does not clarify the steps it will take to achieve that goal.

Demanding everything is as ineffective as demanding nothing, because it obscures what that struggle looks like on a daily basis. It can also be demoralizing, because when the goal is everything, it is impossible to measure the small but important steps forward that are the wellspring of any movement. This is not an argument for thinking small or abandoning the struggle to completely transform the United States; it is an argument for drawing a distinction between the struggle for reforms that are possible today and the struggle for revolution, which is a longer-term project. To be sure, there is definitely a relationship between the two. The struggle to reform various aspects of our

existing society makes people's lives better in the here and now; it also teaches people how to struggle and organize. Those are the building blocks that can lead to larger and more transformative struggles. In the process, people in the movement develop politically, gain experience and expertise, and become leaders. It is impossible to conceive of leaping from inactivity to changing the world in a single bound.

For example, many Black people in the South who were radicalized in the 1950s in the struggle against Jim Crow would probably not have recognized themselves ten years later. Many people whose politics began with narrow demands to end Jim Crow eventually concluded that a government invested in racism could never achieve justice for Black people. Consider the experiences of the activists who made up SNCC, who in 1964 arrived at the Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City with the hope of seating Black delegates from their Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party as the delegation from Mississippi. The point was to expose and embarrass the national party for allowing the all-white Democratic Party to seat its delegation, knowing full well that Black people in Mississippi were violently disenfranchised. The SNCC activists believed if they were successful, they could break the grip of the Dixiecrats—the white Democratic Party of the South—on the electoral process throughout the South. But there was no way that Lyndon Johnson and the national Democratic Party were going to risk Southern white votes by acquiescing to the demands of civil rights activists. In the end, Johnson forced a deal down the activists' throats that left the convention and the white supremacist wing of the Democratic Party basically intact. James Forman, the executive director of SNCC, spelled out the meaning of the defeat:

> Atlantic City was a powerful lesson. . . . No longer was there any hope . . . that the federal government would change the situation in the Deep South. The fine line of contradiction between the state governments and the federal government, which we had used to build a movement, was played out. Now the kernel of opposites—the people against both the federal and state governments was apparent.[76]

Narrowing the demands of the movement in order to retain focus does not mean narrowing its reach. The brilliance of the slogan "Black Lives Matter" is its ability to articulate the dehumanizing aspects of anti-Black racism in the United States. The long-term strength of the

movement will depend on its ability to reach large numbers of people by connecting the issue of police violence to the other ways that Black people are oppressed.

This process is already under way, as "new guard" activists have worked to make those connections. The best example of this involves the struggle of low-wage workers to raise the minimum wage to $15 an hour. Twenty percent of fast-food workers are Black and 68 percent of them earn between $7.26 and $10.09 an hour.[77] In Chicago, fast-food restaurants employ 46 percent of Black workers—in New York it's 50 percent.[78] Twenty percent of Walmart's 1.4 million workers are African American, making it the largest employer of Black Americans. There is a logical connection between the low-wage workers' campaigns and the Black Lives Matter movement. The overrepresentation of African Americans in the ranks of the poor and working class has made them targets of police, who prey on those with low incomes. Black and Latino/a workers are also more likely to suffer the consequences of the mounting fees and fines discussed in chapter 4. Mwende Katwiwa of the BYP 100 in New Orleans explains the relationship between economic and racial justice:

> Too often Black youth are trapped in a singular narrative about their lived experience that does not address the structural and social conditions. . . . The #BlackLivesMatter movement goes beyond a call to end police brutality and murder against Black people—it is a recognition that Black life is valuable while it is still being lived. Valuing Black life means Black people should have access to their basic human dignity at their workplace—especially Black youth who are disproportionately impacted by unemployment and are over-represented in low-wage jobs.[79]

The movement today is in a much better position to nurture and develop a relationship with the growing low-wage-worker struggle than has been possible with the civil rights establishment. For years, Walmart and McDonald's have been reliable contributors to the CBC, NAACP, and NAN.[80] At Al Sharpton's sixtieth birthday bash, held at the Four Seasons hotel in New York, corporations were encouraged to make donations to the NAACP at various levels. The phone company AT&T pledged at the "activists level" with a full-page ad in the party program, while Walmart and GE Asset Management only pledged

at the "preacher level," with half-page ads. McDonald's and Verizon pledged at the "track suit" level with a back page ad. Sharpton would not say how much each level was worth, but he did say that NAN reached its goal of raising $1 million and that "we have no new liens. . . . We'll be operating in the black this year. The biggest debts have already settled, and the party . . . was the second big fund-raiser."[81] Is it any wonder Sharpton and the others have been so quiet about the fight to raise the minimum wage to $15?

The fight for educational justice in Black communities has also gained momentum in the last several years and could be another entry point for collaboration between movements. The education justice movement has focused on three issues that disproportionately affect Black students: efforts to privatize publicly funded schools, the school-to-prison pipeline, and high-stakes testing in public schools. There is a clear relationship between privatization and "zero-tolerance policies" that cause Black children to encounter law enforcement. Privately run but publicly financed charter schools have embraced "no excuses" discipline, in which "teachers rigorously enforce an intricate set of behavioral expectations on students. Minor infractions—a hand improperly raised, a shirt untucked, eyes averted—invite escalating punitive measures: demerits, lost privileges, detention, suspension. The policing theory that gave us stop-and-frisk now underpins the disciplinary system of the education reform movement."[82]

Zero-tolerance policies embedded in "no excuses" discipline have rapidly increased the use of suspension and expulsions as the primary disciplinary tool in public and charter schools. The rate of suspension has increased for Black students, from 6 percent in the 1970s to 15 percent today. Removal from school is only one aspect of this; as the impulse toward suspension has increased so has the presence of police in the halls of schools. Greater police presence has resulted in the criminalization of childhood antics that in an earlier era were handled in the principal's office. Black students bear the brunt of the punitive turn in public education. When hundreds of Seattle high school students walked out in reaction to the failure to indict Darren Wilson in Ferguson, teacher Jesse Hagopian drew a connection between Black Lives Matter and public education: "These students were surely animated by the injustice in Ferguson, but . . . they have no need to travel across the country to confront the ferocity of racism. The Seattle Public Schools are under investigation by the federal Department of Education for suspension rates for black students four times higher than white students for the same infractions."[83] Just as corporate money mutes the participation of civil rights organizations in the struggle to raise the minimum wage, it has the same effect on their participation in the fight against corporate education reform and privatization. The NAACP and the Urban League have received *millions* of dollars from the Gates Foundation alone[84]—the project of billionaire Bill Gates to transform education by championing charter schools—which has actually become a cover for attacking teacher unions and pushing standardized testing.

In both of these cases the Black Lives Matter movement has the potential to make deeper connections to and create relationships with organized labor. Black workers continue to be unionized at higher rates than white workers. The reason is simple: Black union workers make far above and beyond what nonunion Black workers make, in salary and benefits. Black workers also tend to be concentrated in the sectors most under attack by the state—federal, state, and local government, including education and other municipal jobs. Throughout the winter of 2015, Black Lives Matter activists all over the country organized actions to "shut it down," including highways, public transportation, shopping establishments—even brunch! Developing alliances with organized labor could lead to workers exercising their power to shut down production, services, and business as usual as pressure for concrete reforms concerning the policing state. The pathway for this has already been trodden. On May 1, 2015, tens of thousands of activists rallied across the country under the banner of Black Lives Matter—and in Oakland, California, the International Longshore and Warehouse Union, Local 10, conducted a work stoppage that halted the flow of millions of dollars' worth of goods and prevented them from being loaded onto cargo ships. This was the first time a major union had initiated a work stoppage in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement. The coalition that helped to organize the action said in a statement:

> Labor is one sector of the community that can truly shut this country down. If workers refuse to work, product doesn't get made, and money doesn't exchange hands. The only way this country is going to take us seriously is if we interrupt their commerce and impact their bottom

> line. Simply appealing to their humanity doesn't work. If that was the case, the epidemic of Black genocide at the hands of police would have ended decades ago.[85]

Broadening the reach of the movement also belies the notion that the movement is divided between old and young. Collaborating with Black workers, including Black teachers and other trade unionists, cuts across age groups and demonstrates that working-class African Americans of all generations have a vested interest in the success of the movement.

Solidarity

One important frontier of the movement also involves its capacity to develop solidarity with other oppressed groups of people. African Americans have always felt the most punishing aspects of life under American capitalism acutely. This has not meant, however, that Black people are alone in their desire to transform the harshness of society. The oppression of Indigenous people, immigrants, and nonwhite people more generally pervades American society. In profound ways, it is the secret to the conundrum of how the 1 percent can dominate a society where the vast majority has every interest in undoing the existing order. Basic math would seem to indicate that 12 or 13 percent of the population, which is what African Americans constitute, would have no realistic capacity to fundamentally transform the social order of the United States.

The challenge for the movement is transforming the goal of "freedom" into digestible demands that train and organize its forces so that they have the ability to fight for more, the movement must also have a real plan for building and developing solidarity among the oppressed. This means building networks and alliances with Latinos in opposition to attacks on immigrant rights, connecting with Arabs and Muslims campaigning against Islamophobia, and organizing with Native organizations that fight for self-determination within the United States. This is not an exhaustive list; it is only a beginning.

The struggle to build solidarity between oppressed communities, however, is not obvious. For example, when three young Muslims, Deah Barakat, Razan Abu-Salha, and Yusor Abu-Salha, were shot and killed by a white man in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, and

activists began the hashtag #MuslimLivesMatter, there was a backlash. Some activists described the hashtag as an "appropriation" of the ongoing Black movement:

> This is not at all to undermine or belittle the injustices that other minority groups in this country deal with every day; in fact, it is quite the opposite. Every community deserves to be able to think critically about their own positions in America, about their own challenges, about their own experiences, and in their own terms. Of course Muslim lives are under fire in our American systems. There is no question about that. However, building off the #BlackLivesMatter trend equates struggles that are, though seemingly similar, drastically different.[86]

It is one thing to respect the organizing that has gone into the movement against police violence and brutality, but quite another to conceive of Black oppression and anti-Black racism as so wholly unique that they are beyond the realm of understanding and, potentially, solidarity from others who are oppressed.

In the contest to demonstrate how oppressions differ from one group to the next, we miss how we are connected through oppression—and how those connections should form the basis of solidarity, not a celebration of our lives on the margins. The American government demonizes its enemies to justify mistreating them, whether it is endless war, internment, and torture or mass incarceration and police abuse. There is a racist feedback loop, in which domestic and foreign policies feed and reinforce each other. This is why US foreign policy in the Middle East has reverberated at home. The cynical use of Islamophobia to whip up support for continued American interventions in Arab and Muslim countries inevitably has consequences for Muslim Americans. And the ever-expanding security state, justified by the "War on Terror," becomes the pretext for greater police repression at home—which, of course, disproportionately affects African Americans and Latino/as in border regions.

In the late 1990s, a movement began to stop racial profiling against Black drivers in police stops. Major class-action lawsuits in Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Florida highlighted the extent to which African Americans were subjected to unwarranted suspicion and harassment on the nation's interstates. New Jersey became a center of anti-profiling activism when, in the spring of 1998 during a

routine police stop, an officer fired into a van filled with young African American men. Al Sharpton led a protest of several hundred people, including a five-hundred-car motorcade, onto Interstate 95. That same year, the ACLU filed a class-action lawsuit on behalf of several Black motorists who complained of racially motivated traffic stops on Interstate 95. The widespread suspicion of Blacks and Latino/as contributed to an atmosphere of intimidation and an implicit threat of violence. (This certainly seemed to be the case with the 1999 murder of Amadou Diallo, which touched off a wave of protests and civil disobedience demanding the prosecution of the cops involved.) Then, in March 1999, Republican New Jersey governor Christine Todd Whitman fired the state police superintendent when he said profiling was justified because "mostly minorities" trafficked in marijuana and cocaine.[87]

The movement's momentum however, was dramatically cut short in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of 9/11. The US government rushed to turn tragedy into a call for national unity in preparation for a new war with Afghanistan in 2001 and later in Iraq. Moreover, federal agents justified racial profiling to hunt down Muslims and Arabs in the aftermath. No longer was this tactic subject to federal investigation and lawsuits. It became a legitimate and widely supported tool in the War on Terror. For example, in 1999, 59 percent of Americans said they believed that the police engaged in racial profiling; of those, 81 percent thought the practice was wrong.[88] Even George W. Bush, several months before 9/11, addressed a joint congressional session on the practice to declare, "Racial profiling is wrong and we will end it in America."[89] However, by September 30, 2001, Black support for racial profiling of Arabs had jumped to 60 percent, compared to 45 percent among the general population.[90] Not only was the developing struggle against racism buried under a wave of jingoism and Islamophobic racism, but the focal point of the antiracist struggle, racial profiling, was now being championed as a necessary tool to protect the United States.

When the movement reflects divisions that the American state actively promotes, it makes all of the movements against racism weaker. This does not mean the movements should paper over actual differences among various groups of people, but it does mean there is a need to understand the commonalities and overlaps in oppression while also

coming to terms with the reality that there is a lot more to gain by building unity and a lot more to lose by staying in our respective corners.

Conclusion

Protests can expose these conditions and their relationship to the policing state; protests can draw in larger numbers of people; protests can compel public figures to speak against those conditions. Protests can do many things, but protests alone cannot end police abuse and the conditions that are used to justify it. The movement against police brutality, even in its current inchoate state, has transformed how Americans see and understand policing in the United States. Over the course of a year, Black people from coast to coast have led a struggle to expose the existence of an urban police state with suburban outposts. It has shown the country the depths of the lie that we live in a colorblind or postracial country. Eighty-three percent of Americans say racism "still poses a problem," up 7 percent from 2014. Sixty-one percent of whites and 82 percent of Blacks agree that "there's a need for a conversation about racism in American life."[91] In less than a year, the number of white Americans who view police killings as "isolated incidents" has fallen from 58 percent to 36 percent.[92] At the same time, in July 2015 alone, the police killed an astonishing 118 people, the most that had been killed over the entire year thus far.[93] By mid-August they had killed another fifty-four. On the anniversary of Mike Brown's death, Ferguson police shot and critically injured another Black teenager. In New York City, where there was a vibrant anti-police-brutality movement for years before the most recent iteration of the national movement, liberal mayor Bill DeBlasio has pledged to hire a thousand new police officers. This was surprising, since DeBlasio rode the success of the campaign to end stop-and-frisk into office in 2013. This is only one example of how resilient the police are as an institution, but it also shows elected officials' reluctance to discipline them.

The movement is confronted with many challenges, but it has also shown that it will not go away easily. This has less to do with the organizing genius of organizers than with deep anger among ordinary Blacks who have been beaten, imprisoned, humiliated, and abused, all the while being blamed for their own victimization. The power of

ordinary African Americans to push the movement forward was seen in June 2015 in McKinney, Texas, when the police attacked several Black children at a swimming party, including fifteen-year-old Dajerria Becton, who was manhandled by one officer in particular.

In years past, a story like this would have resulted in little if any attention. Instead, a few days later, hundreds of Black and white protestors filled the street of the small suburban development where the children had been set upon, chanting, "We want to go swimming" and "No swimming, no driving." It must have been a powerful scene to everyone who witnessed it—and for different reasons. Many of the suburban white neighbors who supported the police were outraged but could do nothing about it; they had been rendered powerless. The police were undoubtedly intimidated by the action, so much so that the most aggressive cop, who had attacked Becton, was forced to resign days later. Most importantly, though, for the Black children who had been abused and threatened at gunpoint by the police and for their parents, to have hundreds of people show up to insist that their lives mattered must have repaired some part of the damage. For them to see the solidarity of hundreds of white people must have given them some hope that not all whites are racist and that some would even stand up and fight alongside them. The demonstration may have also validated their right to resist and stand up to racism and racist violence and affirmed that they were right to protest from the very beginning.

The Black Lives Matter movement, from Ferguson to today, has created a feeling of pride and combativeness among a generation that this country has tried to kill, imprison, and simply disappear. The power of protest has been validated. For it to become even more effective, to affect the policing state, and to withstand opposition and attempts to infiltrate, subvert, and undermine what has been built, there must be more organization and coordination in the move from protest to movement.

CHAPTER SEVEN

From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation

On April 12, 1865, the American Civil War officially came to an end when the Union Army accepted the unconditional surrender of the Confederacy on the steps of a courthouse in Appomattox, Virginia. The Union Army, led by 200,000 Black soldiers, had destroyed the institution of slavery; as a result of their victory, Black people were now to be no longer property but citizens of the United States. The Civil Rights Act of 1866, the first declaration of civil rights in the United States, stated that

> citizens of every race and color, without regard to any previous condition of slavery or involuntary servitude, shall have the same right, in every State and Territory in the United States . . . to full and equal benefit of all laws and proceedings for the security of person and property, as is enjoyed by white citizens.[1]

There was no ambiguity that the war had buried chattel slavery once and for all. Days after the surrender of the Confederacy, Abraham Lincoln rode into Richmond, Virginia, the former capital of the slaveholders, where he stood upon the stairs of the former Confederate capitol building and told a large gathering crowd of Black people days into their freedom,