

**A special edition in solidarity with the Black Lives uprising**

# Peace & Planet News

*Dedicated to Abolishing War, Establishing Justice, and Fighting Climate Disaster*  
*Published Quarterly by Vietnam Full Disclosure and New York City Veterans For Peace*

**Number 3**  
**Fall 2020**

## Police and Pentagon Bringing Our Wars Home



*After years of hypermilitarization, U.S. police departments are recreating our global war zones here at home. With these weapons on our streets, our history of structural racism becomes that much deadlier.*

**By Rev. Dr. William J. Barber II and Phyllis Bennis**

**A** U.S. military helicopter hovered over crowds of unarmed civilians, its down-drafts whipping debris and broken glass into their faces. Was it Mogadishu or Washington, D.C.?

Armed, uniformed men surrounded unarmed civilians. One of them shouted “light ‘em up” and began firing projectiles. Was it Baghdad or Minneapolis?

Armor-clad, armed U.S. officers targeted and fired on journalists. Was it Iraq or Louisville?

In every case, it was both. Thanks to years of hypermilitarization, American police departments are recreating our global war zones here at home. With these weapons on our streets, our history of structural racism becomes that much deadlier.

In recent weeks, overwhelmingly peaceful demonstrators protesting police killings and racism have been met by riot police, National Guard troops, and armed federal officers wielding tear gas, pepper spray, and rubber-coated metal bullets. Armored personnel carriers prowl the streets, turning U.S. cities and towns into war zones.

It’s shocking, but it’s not the first time. When a police officer killed 17-year-old Michael Brown in Ferguson,

Mo., in 2014, an armored personnel carrier stalked the agonized protesters who filled the streets.

Throughout U.S. history, policing has always been bound up with racism—and the military.

Organized police forces in the United States trace their roots to the slave patrols organized to capture and return enslaved people who managed to escape bondage.

After reconstruction, when a pandemic of lynching spread across the country, police stood by and in many cases initiated or assisted the kidnapping, torture, and murder of people in their custody.

In the 1950s and ‘60s, brutal police attacks against civil rights activists and African Americans trying to register to vote continued the pattern. So did police and National Guard violence against antiwar protesters at Kent State, Jackson State, and the Chicano Moratorium in Los Angeles in the 1970s.

This militarism at home is linked inextricably to U.S. militarism abroad. The troops that Trump called in to deploy against protesters in Washington, for example, had just returned from duty in Iraq.

Today’s “global war on terror” is less visible than in earlier years. But those wars continue—and it’s mostly

*continued on page 17 ...*



## Meeting the Moment

*Fifty-four years ago, three courageous Army draftees refused to participate in the illegal war in Vietnam. What are the lessons for active-duty military today?*

**Page 20**



# From the Editors



## 'Getting in Necessary Trouble'

As we were producing this special issue, focusing on the Black Lives uprising resulting from the murder of George Floyd and over 400 years of unending racial oppression, we lost two civil rights icons, Rep. John Lewis and Rev. C.T. Vivian. This issue is dedicated to the memory of these two, who, as young men, demonstrated grace and courage in the face of racist violence, and to the heroic young men and women of the Black Lives Matter rebellions going on in America and all over the world.

John Lewis was beaten almost to death by Alabama state troopers and was arrested over 40 times while standing up for racial justice. As King was, so were John Lewis and C.T. Vivian, true nonviolent revolutionaries.

John Lewis and C.T. Vivian, whom MLK Jr. called "the greatest preacher that ever lived," took the blows for justice as we see thousands these days in the streets, willing to risk their health and safety for justice and an enduring freedom. Lewis and Vivian showed the way.

Rev. Vivian said, "There must always be the understanding of what Martin had in mind. ... Nonviolent, direct action makes us successful. We learned how to solve social problems without violence. We cannot allow the nation or the world to ever forget that."

John Lewis came close to death in 1965 at age 25 on the Edmund Pettus Bridge in what became known as Bloody Sunday: "I was hit in the head by a state trooper with a nightstick. I had a concussion at the bridge. My legs went out from under me. I felt like I was going to die. I thought

I saw Death."

When asked what kept him moving forward on that day at the bridge, he replied, "Well, my mother, my father, my grandparents, my uncles and aunts, and people all around me had never registered to vote. I had been working all across the South. The state of Mississippi had a Black voting-age population of more than 450,000, and only about 16,000 were registered to vote. On that day, we didn't have a choice. I think we had been tracked down by what I call the spirit of history, and we couldn't—we couldn't turn back. We had to go forward."

A month before the march on Selma, Rev. Vivian led a group to the Dallas County courthouse. Confronted by County Sheriff Jim Clark, he adamantly said, "You can turn your back now and you can keep your club in your hand, but you cannot beat down justice. And we will register to vote, because as citizens of these United States, we have the right to do it." Clark then punched Vivian in the face so hard he broke his own hand.

These brave men of conscience and many others, men and women, set an example for all of us.

As actress and producer Rhodessa Jones says in a remarkable interview with staff writer Denny Riley on page 24, "I am standing on the shoulders of the generations who came before."

In 1963, as a 23-year-old with Martin in Washington DC, John Lewis spoke these meaningful words at the Lincoln Memorial to a crowd of 250,000 people.

"To those who have said, 'Be patient and wait,' we must say that we cannot

be patient. We do not want our freedom gradually, but we want to be free now. We are tired. We are tired of being beaten by policemen. We are tired of seeing our people locked up in jail over and over again, and then you holler, 'Be patient.' How long can we be patient? We want our



John Lewis on the ground about to be clubbed.

*'You must find a way to get in the way and get in good trouble, necessary trouble. You have a moral obligation, a mission, and a mandate, when you leave here, to go out and seek justice for all.'*—John Lewis

freedom, and we want it now.

"We do not want to go to jail, but we will go to jail if this is the price we must pay for love, brotherhood, and true peace. I appeal to all of you to get in this great revolution that is sweeping this nation. Get in and stay in the streets of every city, every village and hamlet of this nation, until true freedom comes. ... We must get in this revolution and complete the revolution, for in the Delta of Mississippi, in southwest Georgia, in the Black Belt of Alabama, in Harlem, in Chicago, Detroit, Philadelphia and all over this nation, the Black masses are on the march for jobs and freedom.

"They're talking about slow down and stop. We will not stop. All of the forces of Eastland, Barnett, Wallace, and Thurmond will not stop this revolution. ... We

must say, 'Wake up, America! Wake up!' for we cannot stop, and we will not and cannot be patient."

Rev. James Lawson Jr. in a passionate and profound eulogy, said this at John Lewis' funeral at the Ebenezer Baptist church:

"[L]et all the people of the USA determine that we will not be quiet as long as any child dies in the first year of life in the United States. We will not be quiet as long as the largest poverty group in our nation are women and children. We will not be quiet as long as our nation continues to be the most violent culture in the history of humankind. We will not be quiet as long as our economy is shaped not by freedom but by plantation capitalism that continues to cause domination and control rather than access and liberty and equality for all!"

In a commencement address to the 2016 graduating class at Bates College, John Lewis told the graduates, "You must find a way to get in the way and get in good trouble, necessary trouble. ... You have a moral obligation, a mission, and a mandate, when you leave here, to go out and seek justice for all. You can do it. You must do it."

As I write this, in Portland, the battle for truth and justice rages. Mike Hastie,

photographer, journalist and former Vietnam Army medic, has been out there at night exposing the reality. He writes, "I have been tear gassed multiple times. I am usually drenched with sweat and water down my chest from the medics flushing out my eyes. The CS gas is a choker to say the least. I run on adrenaline and caffeine, because a 75-year-old body needs some high-octane mixture." You can see Mike's photos and his searing commentary on page 12.

Veteran labor journalist J.J. Johnson, who joined our editorial team for this issue, was among the first active-duty military personnel to refuse orders to go to Vietnam (page 20).

He and Private David A. Samas, and Private Dennis Mora formed what be-

*continued on page 7 ...*

### Peace & Planet News

*Peace & Planet News* is published quarterly by Vietnam Full Disclosure ([vietnamfulldisclosure.org](http://vietnamfulldisclosure.org)) and the New York City chapter of Veterans For Peace. Bundles are \$35 for 45 and \$50 for 70. To donate, subscribe, or order bundles, visit [peaceandplanetnews.org](http://peaceandplanetnews.org) or send a check to NYC Veterans For Peace, 28 Arnold Drive, Woodstock, NY 12498.

**Editorial staff:** Tarak Kauff, Editor-in-Chief; Ellen Davidson, Managing Editor; Mike Ferner, J.J. Johnson, Ken Mayers, Doug Rawlings, Editors; Denny Riley, Staff Writer

**Website coordinator:** Jeff Paterson **Advisor:** Susan Schnall



# ‘Black Lives Matter’ Is About More Than Police

*Black lives should matter in all stages of life—and to honor that truth, we must transform the system from its roots.*

By Patrisse Cullors

Every time another Black person is murdered by the police, it’s easy to point to a single officer as the culprit. George Floyd was killed under the knee of officer Derek Chauvin—we saw it ourselves. But Chauvin is just one officer in a culture of police violence, and policing is just one of the systems responsible for taking Black lives. COVID-19 exposed others.

It’s no coincidence that Black people who are more likely to be killed by police are also dying disproportionately from COVID-19. While some say it’s due to the prevalence of underlying health issues like diabetes and high blood pressure in the Black community, pointing a finger at these conditions misses the bigger picture. We need to ask: how did we end up here?

The Black community is not inherently vulnerable to COVID-19. We’ve been made vulnerable through decades of unequal access to health care. We are made vulnerable every time a doctor dismisses us because they don’t believe our symptoms. We are made vulnerable through over-policing, which has led not only to our murders, but to overrepresentation in jails and prisons. Even though public health experts have warned of the severe risk that incarcerated people face due to the conditions they live in, most have been left to languish as COVID-19 threatens to turn their detention into a death sentence.

Jails and prisons are visibly where multiple systemic failings—over-policing, over-incarceration, poverty, and inadequate health care—converge to take Black lives. Black lives should matter in all stages of life. To honor that truth, we must radically transform the system from its roots.

## Policing Doesn’t Make Us Safer

Systemic problems aren’t easy to fix, but we can take steps by re-examining the way we fund and rely on law enforcement in this country. A huge amount of public resources is put toward law enforcement agencies, at the expense of critical



Patrisse Cullors.

social services like education and health care. This doesn’t make us safer. It puts Black lives in danger of police brutality and of getting ensnared in the mass incarceration system. More law enforcement is not the answer. It’s what got us here in the first place.

Our culture of law enforcement puts the police in places they don’t need to be. Police don’t have to be the first responders to all crises. Social workers, doctors, and others can serve in place of police for issues including mental health crises, domestic violence, addiction, and homeless-

ness. However, to create this reality we need to de-prioritize law enforcement—and cutting funding is a good start. Lawmakers should divert funding for police departments and put it to better use in community-led initiatives. Investing in services like health care and education will reduce the role of police in society, protect Black lives, and shift the focus to helping people rather than harming them.

When I co-founded Black Lives Matter almost seven years ago, the conversation about police brutality was just beginning to enter the mainstream—not because police violence was anything new, but because of the work of activists and advocates who brought the issue to light with the help of technology that allows us to capture incidents on our phones.

Today, more people are rallying for Black Lives than I would have ever imagined. That is a sign of progress. But to turn Black Lives Matter into more than a rally cry, we must roll up our sleeves and do the work. Let’s tear down systems that harm us and strengthen systems that will advance true equality.

Let’s make sure that Black life matters at every stage and in every facet of society, well before a cop has his knee on a man’s neck.

*Patrisse Cullors is a co-founder of Black Lives Matter.*

## Blind Boone’s Pianola Blues

By Tyehimba Jess

They said I wasn’t smooth enough  
to beat their sharp machine.  
That my style was obsolete,  
that old rags had lost their gleam  
and lunge. That all I had  
left was a sucker punch  
that couldn’t touch  
their invisible piano man  
with his wind up gut-  
less guts of paper rolls.  
And so, I went and told them  
that before the night was through  
I’d prove what the son of an ex-  
slave could do: I dared them  
to put on their most twisty  
tune. To play it double-time  
while I listened from another  
room past the traffic sounds  
of the avenue below.  
To play it only once,  
then to let me show  
note for note how that scroll  
made its roll through Chopin  
or Bach or Beethoven’s best.  
And if I failed to match my fingers  
and ears with the spinning gears  
of their invisible pneumatic piano  
scholar, I’d pay them the price  
of a thousand dollars.  
And what was in it for Boone?  
you might ask ...  
Might be the same thing that drives men  
through mountains at heart attack pace.

Might be just to prove some tasks  
ain’t meant to be neatly played  
out on paper and into air,  
but rather should tear  
out from lung, heart and brain  
with a flair of flicked wrists  
and sly smile above the 88s ...  
and, of course, that ever-human  
weight of pride that swallows us  
when a thing’s done just right ...  
But they were eager to prove me wrong.  
They chose their fastest machine  
with their trickiest song and stuck it  
in a room far down the hall from me.  
They didn’t know how sharp  
I can see with these ears of mine—  
I caught every note even though  
they played it in triple time.  
And when I played it back to them  
even faster, I could feel the violent  
stares ... heard one mutter  
Lucky black bastard ...  
and that was my cue to rise,  
to take a bow in their smoldering  
silence and say, Not luck,  
my friend, but the science  
of touch and sweat and  
stubborn old toil. I’d bet  
these ten fingers against any coil  
of wire and parchment and pump.  
And I left them there to ponder  
the wonders of blindness  
as I walked out the door  
into the heat of the sun.



Blind Boone.

Tyehimba Jess is the author of two books of poetry, *Leadbelly* and *Olio*. *Olio* won the 2017 Pulitzer Prize, the Anisfield-Wolf Book Award, and the Midland Society Author’s Award in Poetry, and received an Outstanding Contribution to Publishing Citation from the Black Caucus of the American Library Association. It was also nominated for the National Book Critics Circle Award, the PEN Jean Stein Book Award, and the Kingsley Tufts Poetry Award. *Leadbelly* was a winner of the 2004 National Poetry Series. *The Library Journal* and *Black Issues Book Review* both named it one of the “Best Poetry Books of 2005.”

# Protesters Must 'Defend Their Ability to Exercise Disruptive Power'

By Mie Inouye

Frances Fox Piven is on the faculty of the Graduate Center of the City University of New York and the author of numerous books, including, with Richard Cloward, *Poor People's Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail*.

In a mid-May interview, Frances Fox Piven predicted “waves of mass protest” in the United States’ near future. Since then, the country has erupted into an unprecedented multiracial mass movement against police brutality.

**Mia Inouye:** You predicted “waves of mass protest” coming off the pandemic and its mishandling by the Trump administration. Since then, we have seen protests in every U.S. state and territory. In your view, what political and economic factors contributed to this uprising?

**Frances Fox Piven:** Donald Trump had a lot to do with it. Trump has been virtually working to create a kind of legitimization crisis in the United States. He comes in the wake of a series of campaigns to strip away New Deal concessions to working people in the United States that left the system bare, exposed, without the softening and the protections that unions gave people and that the Democratic Party once gave people before it became a Wall Street party. So, in the wake of an aggressive neoliberal assault on working people, we got a leader who was, in a way, a reflection of de-legitimation because he was so crude and so vulgar and so aggressive in attacking Black people and immigrants. But in the end, he also attacked white working people by ridiculing and dismissing the programs that they depended on.

This is also the only deeply interracial protest I can recall having ever occurred in the United States. That is so important, because racism has been a kind of prop of holding the white working class in the system no matter how they themselves fare as a result of being in the system.

**MI:** In *Poor People's Movements*, you and Richard Cloward argued that people needed to gain two beliefs in order for a social movement to emerge. First, they needed the belief that the system was unjust. But then they also needed to believe that they could do something about it.

Were you surprised, though, that it was the murder of George Floyd by police officers that sparked the movement?

**FFP:** The triggers or sparks that light up a protest movement are numerous. They're all over the place, if the underlying conditions are right. There was nothing new about this grotesque murder in particular, except that it was filmed. But that seems to me not enough to make it so distinctive.

It was the coming together of this kind of inciting, outrageous act with the underlying conditions—and underlying conditions not only of hardship but also of gross incompetence on the part of the government in charge—which contributed to the sense that people could win something, that they could make an impact on their society.

**MI:** What about the conjunction of what we tend to understand as a particular form of racial oppression, police brutality, with the underlying economic and political conditions that accompanied the pandemic?

**FFP:** I think that people experience them as very similar. The poverty of Blacks is a reflection of racism, isn't it? The fact that Black home ownership is so much less widespread than white home ownership, and that when Blacks do own homes, they're more likely to be foreclosed on and to lose their homes—that's a form of racism. I think



we experience racism, or other kinds of nationalism, economically as well as in the attitudes or slogans or songs or advertisements of the dominant media.

**MI:** Why do you think that so many white people are making abolitionist demands in the streets right now?

**FFP:** It's a combination of moral outrage on behalf of Black and brown Americans with the shock of a leadership that defies all of the softening norms of American political culture. Norms that say, “we are all one people,” “we care about one another,” “we would not cut old people off of Social Security.” But we would! That's what they're busy trying to do right now!

What happened instead is we had a set of leaders, but especially the President of the United States, defending the police and ignoring the appalling brutality of what they had done and had been doing.

**MI:** You've argued that poor people's power lies in their capacity for disruption, rather than their ability to work within “the system.” And this uprising has been breathtakingly disruptive.

*‘Instead of shrinking from either acknowledging or experimenting with the role of violence in movements, we have to ... look at what actually has happened in historical movements.’—Frances Fox Piven*

**FFP:** For a very long time now, people who are sympathetic with movements from below and who study movements from below have drawn the line at violence. There's been a kind of fetish, almost a sort of religion of nonviolence in movement studies.

There's a reason for this. Movements are playing to a public, because they interact with electoral politics, which depend on the behavior of mass publics in the voting booth. The public shrinks from violence, especially violence from below.

On top of that, we have these grand movements, like the civil rights movement, that came to be understood and celebrated for their nonviolence, even though that's not a good analysis of the civil rights movement. There was violence both within the movement and allied with it. The Deacons for Defense, for example, were very important in protecting civil rights protesters.

There's always been violence associated with mass movements. And there are two important things to be said about that. One is that a lot of the sort of quasi-religious regrets about violence ignore the fact that most of what

people decry as violence is property destruction, not violence against persons. That distinction has to be made.

And the other part of what we ignore in the study of movements is that people often have to threaten or exercise violence in order to defend their ability to disrupt social and economic relations by refusing to do what they're supposed to do.

Look at the history of strikes. There would not have been any strikes without the threat of collective violence by workers who were trying to defend their ability to withdraw their labor by preventing scabs from replacing them. That's why every mass strike in American history involved physical confrontation at the plant gates, as workers tried to protect their property right in the job from these transgressors who were going to replace them.

**MI:** How does that way of narrating historical movements frame our vision of contemporary movements, like the one we're in now?

**FFP:** Everybody seems to agree that we have to be non-violent. I think that's a judgment that has to be made for each movement action. I do agree that the public that we play to doesn't like violence. But at the same time, the violent capacity of the crowd is an important way of defending its ability to exercise disruptive power.

This movement has been very disruptive. Well, its disruption hasn't been that of the classical strike. These are crowd disruptions. These are disruptions of our streets and our cities, disruptions of traffic patterns, disruptions of commerce. These are important forms of disruption. You have to defend your ability to do that kind of action, and the defense is knitted very closely to the action itself. It's the crowd's capacity for violence that is the defense of its ability to shut the city down.

Instead of shrinking from either acknowledging or experimenting with the role of violence in movements, we have to be tougher and look at what actually has happened in historical movements.

Look at the difference, for example, between strikes that walk out and strikes that occupy factories. Strikes that occupy factories have much more leverage than walkout strikes, all other things being equal. (Of course, all other things are never equal.) But the success of the sit-down strikes in the 1930s, and the reason for their success, is not quite appreciated.

Those workers had control of the plant! Of the equipment! Of the factory!

**MI:** Is part of what you're saying that we need not only to be honest about the facts of history, but also to train to do forms of disruptive direct action that might not be part of our current repertoire?

**FFP:** We have to figure that out. We have to do it with caution. We have to worry about repression. We have to worry about the cops beating our heads in. We have to be careful. We have to be informed. We have to protect ourselves with bail money and lawyers. But we should not

*continued on next page ...*



# Move from Prison Culture to Caring Community

*These edited remarks were given April 24 at the “U.S. Empire vs. Political Prisoners” webinar teach-in sponsored by Mobilization4Mumia and held in honor of the 66th birthday of political prisoner and revolutionary Mumia Abu-Jamal, incarcerated for 39 years.*

By Marc Lamont Hill

It's such an honor to be here tonight, surrounded by so many brilliant thinkers and courageous activists, freedom fighters who have been long distance runners, and political prisoners who have made the ultimate sacrifice, giving their all, their very bodies to the struggle.

Tonight what brings us together is the 66th birthday of our dear brother Mumia Abu-Jamal, one of the great freedom fighters, one of the greatest truth-tellers that we've ever seen—and a political prisoner.

Since 1981 we've been battling and fighting and struggling to liberate Mumia. Mumia is such a passionate voice, such a courageous voice, we need him so desperately on the other side of the dungeon. And we're gonna

continue to fight until he's out.

If anybody knows Mumia, they know that he wouldn't want us here talking about him. Mumia would want us to talk about his case, but he'd also want us to put his case

*Even as we moved into a postslavery moment, all we did was shift the means of captivity. Now, instead of putting people on plantations, we have people in a cage.*

in the context of everybody else's.

Mumia is being held under the most absurd, violent and ugly circumstances that we've seen. Just last week, people received a phone call saying that he had been taken to the hospital with COVID-19, making us think that he'd been given a death sentence. That's the type of cruelty and the type of evil the prison industry, and the

prison specifically targeting Mumia Abu-Jamal, demonstrates every single day.

It's not just about Mumia, because right now we are in a human rights crisis, a crisis of carcerality, a crisis of mass incarceration. The U.S. Empire feeds off of mass incarceration. Ever since the slave enterprise, when African people were brought here and enslaved, the United States has made its money, it has built an empire, it has expanded its economy off of human captivity.

Even as we moved into a postslavery moment, all we did was shift the means of captivity. Now, instead of putting people on plantations, we have people in a cage, in what we call “correctional” facilities, jails and prisons, juvenile facilities and such.

We continue to take all of our contradictions as a nation and put them behind bars, whether it's mental illness, whether it's poverty, whether it's homelessness, whether it's drug addiction—and of course, political dissent. Anyone who dares speak out against this empire ends up in a cage. That's why we have Mumia Abu-Jamal in a cage. That's why we have Sekou Odinga in a cage.

*continued on page 6 ...*

## Disruptive Power

*... continued from previous page*

fall on this very narrow path of nonviolence.

**MI:** I've heard many organizers, myself included, look at these crowds and say things like, “If only all these people belonged to a leftist organization, we could win socialism.”

**FFP:** I want to point to two episodes in the very recent past. One is the wave of teachers' strikes that spread from West Virginia throughout very conservative parts of the country. Teachers went on strike with a lot of support from their communities and from the parents of the children they taught. They were strategic. They worried whether the children would get lunch if they were on strike. There was a great deal of self-consciousness in this mass action.

But what there was not was a lot of union organization. There were unions there, but they were very frail. They did not include many teachers and they did not call the strikes. But those teachers won! And what happened afterward? The unions that existed took credit for the strikes and claimed them as a great union victory.

I am very sympathetic to those teachers' unions. But I think we have to be a little bit more hardheaded about what actually happened. There was an uprising that was smart. Collective action can be smart even without a union sometimes, especially if there are predecessors like the Chicago Teachers Union, which has been a very strategic and very intelligent union organizer of action.

Or the movement that we're in right now—who organized it? Well, there were a lot of organizations in the Black Lives Matter movement, and many others. But you could not say that an organization created the movement or should inherit the movement.

We have to be very careful, very cautious. If what we say we should do now is collect those dues cards, we may be forfeiting the power that we gain through collective action that is more loosely organized. It's for that reason that the return of popular protest after Seattle, after the Zapatistas, the turn away from conventional forms of organization, was a good thing, actually. It loosened us up. We have to take advantage of that.

**MI:** But do you see any role for organizers and organization during this uprising?

**FFP:** Maybe. We haven't developed that role very well, but maybe we should. Maybe that could be done. I think there is a role for organizers. I know quite a few people who are good organizers. They know how to talk to people, they know how to talk to a crowd, they know how to keep up the momentum of a protest.

But what they're wrong about is the overall role that they play. They are not the architects of action. They



move in a kind of dynamic tension with the action that is unfolding. They don't build it.

**MI:** In your study of the unemployed workers' movement during the Depression you talk about the role Communists played in agitating the masses.

**FFP:** I think there's something else the Communists did in the 1930s. They created exemplary actions and they put themselves on the outside perimeter of the action, where they were more likely to receive the blows of the cops. That was a very important part of the teachings of the Communist Party USA at the time. They told the comrades that they should always be on the outside to be the first to receive the blows.

**MI:** You don't see the disruption and the riots as a reflection of disillusionment with electoral politics?

**FFP:** No, and I've never seen that before. I've never seen the way in which they bolster each other and the way that people explicitly talk about the two kinds of activism.

I also think we are at a historic juncture where the issue is survival. More and more people, especially young people, are beginning to recognize it. Maybe that will make a difference. I'm not sure. But the prospects of global warming and the exhaustion of fossil fuels really may create historic turning points. We have to hope that that's true.

Three weeks ago, I was feeling very somber about the political situation in the United States. I saw this party, the Republican Party—that had become a fascist party, certainly under fascist leadership, with the wholehearted

support of economic interests in finance and in fossil fuels—as the party in command, and I didn't know where the opposition would come from. It didn't look to me like it was going to come from the Democratic Party, although I liked the efforts, small though they might be, to transform that party.

Now it's different. All of a sudden, there are new possibilities! We can't exactly map them, but we have to appreciate them and widen them.

**MI:** Do you mean that deeper changes may be possible now than in the past?

**FFP:** Yes. I don't think that we can do a Green New Deal or we can conquer the problems of global warming without strong central authority, for example. That requires big changes in all rich countries.

**MI:** So this is a moment that is calling for something like a revolution?

**FFP:** Certainly a revolutionary transformation, yes. Something like a revolution. It's hard to imagine a revolution in the old style, the French style, in the United States. But a revolutionary transformation in the United States, and in European countries as well.

Nobody has been in this situation before. So we have to figure it out if we want to survive. There are no models.

*This interview was first published at jacobinmag.com. It has been edited for clarity and length.*

*Mie Inouye is a doctoral candidate in political science at Yale University, where she's writing a dissertation on theories of political organizing in the 20th-century U.S. labor and civil rights movements.*

# Abolish Prisons

... continued from page 5

That's why we had Herman Bell in a cage. That's why we continue to have everybody from here and around the globe caged, when they have the audacity to speak out against the empire.

We call for the release of all political prisoners right now because it is the right thing to do. But we also make a bolder call, a more radical call, and that is the abolition of prison itself.

## Moving Outside the 'Logic' of Prison

We must move into a moment that no longer uses the prison as the resolution to our social contradictions. The prison must no longer be a resolution to harm that is done. The prison must no longer be the resolution to all of our challenges in society.

We must call for the end of prison construction right now. We must call for decarceration. That means we must begin to let people out of prison immediately. We must call for ex-carceration. That means we have to stop putting people in prison. That means we have to legalize



things, that means we have to dismantle laws that criminalize. We have to decriminalize, get rid of this logic of criminalization. We must think about restraint of the few; we must think about how we can protect society from harm that is done, but outside the logic of the prison.

And we must build a caring community. We must develop the resources and the infrastructure; we must find ways to protect those who are vulnerable. We must find ways to invest in those who have not been invested in. We must find ways to provide food, clothing, and shelter for every single person.

That's what this is about—what abolition is about.

But we not only have the long-term abolition goal, we need to exercise abolitionist principles right now because COVID-19 has created a human rights crisis that amplifies the already existing human rights crisis.

To live in a U.S. prison right now is to live with a death sentence. Whether you're there for three months or six months, whether you've gotten a life sentence, you are on death row right now if you're in a U.S. prison. The type of social distancing that the best medical experts—not the President, but the best medical experts—suggest can't be exercised in prison. The type of protection that you want to be able to engage in, you can't in prison.

So anybody who's incarcerated right now doesn't even have the means to defend themselves. What they're getting is cruel and unusual punishment. In areas of the world right now, infection rates were 1 and 2 out of 1,000. Then you go into Rikers Island in New York City, and you got 54 out of 1,000.

Can you imagine being anywhere in the world with 54 out of 1,000 people as the infection rate, and not see that as a human rights crisis? Unless it's poor people, unless it's Black people, unless it's Brown people. Free all political prisoners!

*Marc Lamont Hill is an author, activist, and television personality. He is a professor of media studies and urban education at Temple University in Philadelphia.*

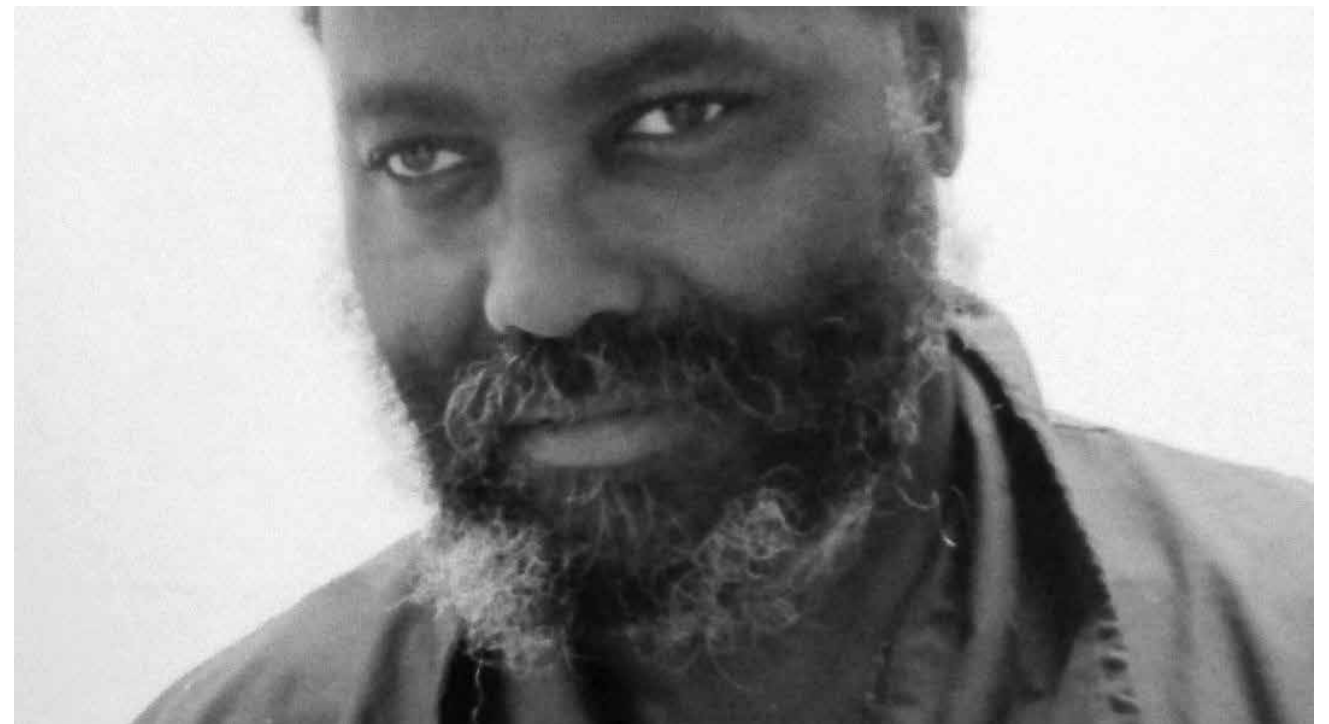
# Mumia Abu-Jamal Speaks Out from Prison

*Mumia Abu-Jamal is a former Black Panther, an award-winning journalist and author of nine books, most recently Murder Inc.. In 1982, in a trial that Amnesty International says "failed to meet international standards," he was convicted of killing Philadelphia police officer William Faulkner and sentenced to death. That sentence was overturned by a district court and he is now serving a life sentence in the Pennsylvania State Prison System. He has written and broadcast more than 2,500 essays from prison. Below are two of his recent commentaries; more can be found at [prisonradio.org](http://prisonradio.org)*

## The Perils of Reform

For years, indeed for decades, we have seen the mirage of reform being presented by neoliberal leaders and their media tools only to awake too late to ghoulish nightmares of shattered promises and hopes betrayed. So reform is betrayal. A devil's bargain of better days to come.

That only brings worse days. Today, the nation shocked by the savagery of George Floyd's curbside execution for all the world to see. Just five years ago, politicians claiming themselves progressive, sold illusions of police body cameras as some kind of solution. But George Floyd, not to mention, Rayshard Brooks, put the nail in that coffin



for it meant nothing when it came to changing cop behavior. Today's reformers in Congress promise much, but they can and will deliver little but new illusions. Reforms are but reformulations of old promises, of old wine in new bottles, of things to come that never make it. For that is the nature of capitalist society. New items to sell that ended up producing new problems.

New days need new ways of thinking. They need creativity. They need deep change. That truly transforms. Not discussions, but relationships. And who will dare say that this miserable present is awash in outright oppression, not the lie of service, but truly repression, suppression, and oppression. New oppressive systems can only bring more of the same.

To quote Dr. Huey P. Newton, founder of the Black Panther Party, "We want freedom, not another reform." From *Imprisoned Nation*, this is Mumia Abu-Jamal.

## The Other Women's Movement

In the frenzied aftermath of the police asphyxiation of George Floyd, we have seen the emergence of a remarkable and sustained movement against racism and the state terror of police. As I watch it in wonder and really awe, it occurred to me that the organizers of this new movement are women.

This movement, this mass, multi-racial not to mention multi-gender and many-aged movement, is led by people who occupied the lowest rungs of America's ladder of race and class. Black women, mostly very young black women. They have seized the hour and brought forth people from almost every segment of society.

They are the nucleus of the Black Lives Matter Movement, and they are ringing the bells in the night, warning America, and the world, that the American house is on fire. They are, to quote the iconic scholar-activist up there, Angela Davis, "smarter and better than their elders of the sixties." They are students of history, and they've proven that they are masters of organizing.

The issue of state terror against Black and poor communities has been thrown on the table. And few, if any, politicians have a meaningful response. Marks and Engels argued that the state is but the executive committee of the rulers and voilà, they have no real answer to this problem that has lasted for generations. So ideas are coming from the movement and fought by politicians. Politicians who allegedly represent the will of the people and the media, or, should I say, the corporate media. We're in the midst of a movement, kind of like chilling in the eye of a hurricane and everything is being shaken, if not removed.

What a day. What an hour. From *Imprisoned Nation*, this is Mumia Abu-Jamal.

## won't you celebrate with me

By Lucille Clifton (1936–2010)

won't you celebrate with me  
what i have shaped into  
a kind of life? i had no model.  
born in babylon  
both nonwhite and woman  
what did i see to be except myself?  
i made it up  
here on this bridge between  
starshine and clay,  
my one hand holding tight  
my other hand; come celebrate  
with me that everyday  
something has tried to kill me  
and has failed.



# Mass Mobilization Key to Military Siding with Democracy

By Jeff Paterson

Recently, Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden grabbed national headlines by sharing that his greatest fear is that President Trump will “try to steal this election.”

Looking at Trump’s own comments, it’s a legitimate fear. Trump has on many occasions shown open admiration for rulers of countries known for suppressing political opposition and violating international human rights in their quest to maintain power, including Vladimir Putin of Russia, Kim Jong Un of North Korea, and Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey.

This raises the question: If Trump tries to interfere with a fair election or refuses to leave office if he loses, what will citizens like you and I do?

These past few months, the Black Lives Matter protests have been a powerful testimony to the impact of collective action. Hundreds of thousands of people have filled the streets in cities across the United States in response to the murder of George Floyd to draw attention to systematic racism and call for reforms. In response to the public pressure, the House has proposed a sweeping police reform bill.

Trump, on the other hand, has threatened to use the military to suppress domestic protests and citizens’ freedom of speech. On June 1, President Trump ordered military and police to clear peaceful protesters from the front of the White House to make way for a photo op. They did so using dangerous rubber bullets, noxious gas, and flash-bangs. According to *The New York Times*, Trump

---

*“I can’t do it. Even looking at my uniform is making me feel sick that I’m associated with this, especially after [the National Guard unit] shot that man ...”*

---

also wanted to invoke the Insurrection Act to override objections of U.S. governors in deploying active-duty troops to other states. Trump has been a consistent advocate for expanding the use of military on U.S. soil, having already set a dangerous precedent by using the military for civil law enforcement at the southern border. Who’s to say he might not try a similar tactic to undermine our democracy around the election?

As citizens, I’m afraid we can’t afford to just sit by and see what happens next. The string of lies and corruption that have been a hallmark of this presidency reveal what is at risk. Biden has said that if Trump hesitates to leave office after losing the vote, he believes the military would escort him out. However, while members of the military refusing illegal orders in order to side with democracy will be critical to any resistance movement, I believe the actions of regular citizens will play a crucial role in encouraging members of the military to do the right thing.

We have seen already how this can work in the case of the Black Lives Matter protests. Following massive public outcry, prominent military personnel have been objecting publicly to Trump’s use of the military to attack peaceful protesters. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Mark Milley apologized for appearing publicly next



Photo: U.S. Army/Charles E. Spirtos

to President Trump during the June 1 event. Ex-Defense Secretary and retired United States Marine Corps general James Mattis condemned Trump’s actions and publicly voiced support for the goals of the Black Lives Matter protests. And four-star General Robert Abrams held a town hall with Black service members calling for action to address racism in the military’s own ranks.

An increasing number of National Guard members and other U.S. soldiers on the frontlines are expressing political objections to Trump’s anti-democratic actions as well.

One National Guard member, who enlisted with hopes to help provide medical services in natural disasters, told Truthout, “I can’t do it. Even looking at my uniform is making me feel sick that I’m associated with this, especially after [the National Guard unit] shot that man who owned that barbecue shop [in Louisville, Kentucky].”

Another stated, “I feel that I cannot be complicit in any way when I’ve seen so many examples of soldiers and police acting in bad faith,” and expressed concern that “we have not had any training or conversation relating to de-escalation tactics.”

Yet another told Politico that “a lot of us are still struggling to process this, but in a lot of ways, I believe I saw civil rights being violated in order for a photo op. What I just saw goes against my oath.”

The military oath of office says, “I, [NAME], do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic.” Articles by retired Chief of Staff at Special Operations Command, Central, Andrew Milburn on the U.S. Army’s own website and elsewhere assert, “Any member of the military has a commonly understood obligation to disobey an illegal order” and “As officers, our oath is to the Constitution rather than to any individual or administration.”

However, we know that in practice, soldiers disobeying orders for conscientious reasons often face punishment after court-martial unless they have strong political support on their side. Research shows military personnel can play an important role in helping stop authoritarianism, such as in Tunisia, Egypt, and Myanmar (Burma), but in each case public pressure played a crucial role in convincing members of the military to break ranks.

While the United States may not be in as dire of a political crisis yet, it’s not out of the question that we could find ourselves there soon. We have an administration that has succeeded in desensitizing much of the public to regular violations of previously valued norms and civil rights. History in countries around the world, from Nazi Germany to the Congo, tells us that given the right circumstances, the slide from democracy to dictatorship can be quick and unexpected.

This makes the actions of vigilant citizens and activists that much more important. Courage to Resist has already been raising funds for the legal defense of National

Guard members who refused to deploy against peaceful protesters. Supporting these brave service men and women is one way to send a message that can embolden more to take a moral stand in the future.

Additionally, civilians and veterans have an important role to prepare for. We need to be ready for a “people’s eviction” if necessary. The military is much more likely to “do the right thing” with tens of thousands surrounding the White House and every county courthouse or city hall in America.

If Trump tries to order the military to further degrade our democracy, massive nonviolent mobilizations are our best chance to create pressure for service members to stand down, and side with the people and the Constitution instead.

*Jeff Paterson is an Oakland, Calif.-based peace and justice organizer, and the director of Courage to Resist, an organization dedicated to supporting U.S. military war objectors. In 1990, Marine artillery controller Cpl. Paterson publicly refused Gulf War deployment.*

---

## ‘Necessary Trouble’

... continued from page 2

came known as the Fort Hood Three. They spoke out, stuck to their principles and inspired a movement. They were court-martialed and spent over two years in prison for following their consciences.

As a national consciousness awakens to the undeniable racist police violence, corporate mainstream news and liberal politicians take a knee and promote peace based on reform. Primarily sold to the public as a solution to racism and police violence, they want to see less disruptive, more peaceful protests and then modest reforms to return to a slightly better normalcy. But as Mumia Abu-Jamal warns us on page 2, “For years, indeed for decades, we have seen the mirage of reform being presented by neoliberal leaders and their media tools only to awake too late to ghoulish nightmares of shattered promises and hopes betrayed. Reform is betrayal. A devil’s bargain of better days to come.”

It is the editors’ hope and intent that this 24-page paper encourages much more than “reform.” We want to see racist capitalism and the militarized police violence that protects and defends it abolished. Four hundred years of genocidal crime, slavery, almost constant wars for profit and the oppression of working people is enough. We believe in a humane and environmentally sustainable socialist alternative. We want this paper to stand the test of time and hope that what is included here will still be relevant in a year or many years.

In the meantime, let’s “get in the way and get in good trouble, necessary trouble.” A lot depends on that.

—Tarak Kauff

# The Failed American Experiment



Burning building in Minneapolis on May 29, 2020, during protests around the murder of George Floyd.

Photo: Hungryogrephotos, CC0, Wikimedia Commons

By Patrick Lawrence

**T**he American experiment” is a familiar phrase among us. When we reference it, we do so fully confident that it has proven out: America is an enduring success. But experiments, by definition, are just as liable to fail as to succeed. Is it our fate to join the sad list of failed or failing states?

That is Cornell West’s take on our perfect storm of calamities. “I think we are witnessing America as a failed social experiment,” the Harvard philosopher said in a remarkable appearance on CNN’s *Anderson Cooper 360°* program in May. It says something about the gravity of what is going on around us that Cooper invited the plain-speaking West on the air and that his employer consented. Cooper and CNN profess America’s righteous success with unflagging loyalty to the orthodoxy.

Whether or not our troubled republic is failing in a way that will land us in the history books—and in my view it is—there is one feature of this spring’s back-to-back disasters that is to be affirmed. Let us now praise the precipitous decline in American power and global primacy as hastened by the COVID-19 pandemic and now the crisis playing out on American streets.

The failure of empire is a dead certainty. There is no reversing this, however long and messy the collapse will prove, and long and messy are about it. Imperial decline is to be celebrated without reservation.

This waning of American authority is now starkly evident across both oceans. The Europeans, setting aside the sycophantic British, have been restive within the American embrace for decades. At last they appear set to go their own way.

The Chinese were never going to cave to U.S. intimidation and threats. Now

they openly defy Washington’s hopelessly miscalculated campaign to “contain” them.

These are excellent developments. Who would have guessed that our tragic failures at home would precipitate our worthy-of-applause failures abroad? At this point, it is to be noted, the two are inseparable.

America’s unique brand of “free-market,” profit-über-alles capitalism has

long claim to moral authority—“City on a Hill,” beacon of the world, and all the other fanciful rubbish—the stunningly swift collapse of this authority is of fundamental consequence. Does anyone think our decadent leadership is capable of reconstituting this presumption? Out of the question, given that our national pose was bogus from the first. This is what makes ours a turning point.

---

*Race is the immediate issue; behind it we find the failures of our radical neoliberalism—poverty, inequality, malnutrition, unlivable wages next to vulgar accumulations of wealth, poor schools, collapsing infrastructure, mass deprivation of medical care.*

---

proven abjectly unprepared to manage a mass public health crisis. The demonstrations we are either part of or watch daily on our streets go to the same point; so do the violent responses of local police departments—and now the creeping threat of de facto martial law.

Race is the immediate issue; behind it we find the failures of our radical neoliberalism—poverty, inequality, malnutrition, unlivable wages next to vulgar accumulations of wealth, poor schools, collapsing infrastructure, mass deprivation of medical care.

The world is watching closely now. Others have not been propagandized such that they do not see what lies in plain sight. They no longer confuse might with right: It is self-evident now that our nation is powerful but at the same time weak.

Given the bedrock importance of our

Let us ask ourselves: Have the Danes or the Italians or the French or the South Koreans or the Chinese or, or, or swooned into mass unemployment while failing to deliver benefits to many millions who deserve them? Have they deprived as many of health care when it is urgently needed? Have they incurred unmanageable trillions in public debt? Have they given billions of dollars to corporations in no need of assistance? Do their corporations indulge in embarrassingly raw displays of greed? Are they about to begin a nationwide wave of evictions among those who cannot make the rent?

Do any of these nations now face nationwide protests over discrimination, official violence, or the grinding deprivations underlying our national discontent? This hardly bears asking.

Here comes the price of all this. Here

comes the front edge of a new era, one in which America finally falls off its horse, its global standing properly diminished. Let it be, let it be, given how consistently Washington has abused the privilege that fell to it after the 1945 victories.

Europeans have for years nursed their resentment of America’s overweening assertions of power even as they have managed to contain it. Now Jack springs out of his box.

When Angela Merkel announced in May that she won’t attend this year’s Group of 7 summit in the United States, the German chancellor’s now-overt contempt for the Trump administration can be taken to reflect the Continent’s. Even French President Emmanuel Macron, who has made a determined effort to accommodate President Donald Trump since taking office three years ago, seems to have given up.

This appears to be a river crossing from which there can be no turning back. One has waited decades for the Europeans to find their own place in global affairs, allied with the United States, but not beholden to its every wish. This is at last the anticipated moment, in my read. Not even a president more palatable across the Atlantic than Trump is likely to reverse these emerging facts on the ground.

In May, I noted indications that the Chinese have determined to find their future in the non-West, having given up on constructing mutually accommodating relations with the United States. Its indifference to American censure over planned security laws in Hong Kong was a blunt signal of this.

## ‘Cheap Grace’

Our corporate captains are treating us to a festival of “cheap grace,” meaning compassion without cost, with no skin in the game.

Jamie Dimon, the chief exec at JPMorgan Chase, had himself photographed the other day kneeling before a bank vault—“taking a knee” in supposed solidarity with those of us on the streets these past 10 days. You’ve now got Goldman Sachs pledging \$10 million “to help address racial and economic injustice,” while Intel promises \$1 million and Nike adjusts its signature slogan to suit the zeitgeist.

In a stunning display of nitwittery, *The New York Times’* Tom Friedman published a column last week nominating “America’s principled business leaders ... to come together to lead a healing discussion.”

The best take on this drift in the national discourse arrived over the weekend on Twitter from Hamilton Nolan, a labor reporter for *In These Times* and the *Washington Post’s* public editor:

If all the companies saying “Black Lives Matter” would stop making it impossible for their workers to unionize it would cause a transfer of wealth to black and brown working people a thousand times greater than any charity donation and that is exactly why they won’t do it.

*Originally published by Consortium News.*

*Patrick Lawrence is a longtime columnist, essayist, critic, and lecturer. He is a contributing writer at The Natiton.*



# Corporations Clamber on the Black Lives Bandwagon

*But real support for Black lives means paying a living wage and not busting unions*

By Toni Gilpin

Never underestimate the American business community's capacity for hypocrisy.

That's one of the lessons to be drawn from the explosive reaction to George Floyd's murder. As demonstrators flooded the streets, corporate PR departments flew into rapid response, issuing a flurry of agonized, apologetic pledges to do more to combat racism and inequality.

Such statements may be personally sincere: the depth of righteous pain and anger expressed by African Americans has induced widespread soul-searching, even in executive suites. Yet this high-profile handwringing is used to separate the outpouring of outrage from capitalist practices now and always at the root of racial and economic injustice.

As they nimbly co-opted the language of the protests, corporate leaders offered up "solutions" to structural racism that won't diminish managerial control or redistribute power in the workplace. Their proposals won't promote actual structural change of any sort. With a few well-publicized contributions and new rounds of diversity training, business elites hope to emerge from the present crisis with their privilege and their profits intact.

"Tragic, painful and unacceptable," Walmart CEO Doug McMillon described George Floyd's death. "The inequitable and brutal treatment of Black people in our country must stop," an Amazon tweet proclaimed. "We do not tolerate inequity, injustice or racism," McDonald's announced, with CEO Joe Erlinger insisting, "when any member of our McFamily hurts, we all hurt."

## Chump Change

To address this "hurt," McDonald's announced it will donate \$1 million to the NAACP and the National Urban League and promised "tangible goals related to diversity." Many corporations made similar commitments. Amazon said it will give \$10 million to "organizations supporting justice and equity," and Walmart pledged \$100 million over five years to create "a new center on racial equity" aimed at promoting "economic opportunity and healthier living."

Such contributions are chump change. For Walmart, \$100 million over the next five years represents less than 1/250 of one percent of the nearly \$3 trillion in income it expects during that period.

And American CEOs are wealthy almost beyond imagination: Amazon's Jeff Bezos, the world's richest person, is worth \$150 billion, a figure so much larger than the average median household income of \$63,000 it requires special graphics just to illustrate it.

If these companies really want to address inequality and improve opportunities for African Americans, there's a fix readily at hand: they could simply give more money to their own employees, a substantial percentage of whom are Black and largely concentrated in low-wage occupations. African Americans earn less than white workers in this country do, and the jobs they hold are more unstable and less likely to offer benefits, all crucial factors that contribute to our persistent racial wealth gap.

Walmart has a U.S. workforce of one and a half million. Nearly half of Walmart workers are people of color. Yet Walmart, Amazon, and McDonald's don't pay liv-



Sept. 4, 2015: Hundreds fill the streets of downtown Los Angeles and essentially shut down traffic while practicing civil disobedience. Workers from the LA Fight for \$15 campaign were eventually arrested and detained.

able wages. Benefits, when offered at all, are paltry (the lack of paid sick leave has become especially visible in COVID times). Schedules are unpredictable and job security tenuous. Working conditions are onerous.

How much do Black lives matter to America's leading corporations? Not enough to put any real money on the table.

## They Want a 'Dialog,' Not a Union

Also not to be taken seriously is the desire for "dialog" these big business titans claim. There is one meaningful way to ensure that workers will truly be heard: through a union. Unions democratize workplaces, giving employees the collective voice necessary to put them on a more equal footing with management, to ensure their concerns are heeded.

For people of color, unions are especially valuable. While unions are financially advantageous for all workers, "the gains from union membership in terms of pay, benefits, and stability are more pronounced among non-white families than among white families," one recent study notes. African Americans who are unionized make more money and are more likely to have benefits like health care and employer-supported retirement plans, translating to greater savings and home ownership levels. Union membership, in other words, is critical to narrowing the racial wealth gap.

Unions clearly empower African Americans—yet Walmart, Amazon, and McDonald's are unabashed union-busters. To crush organizing efforts (very often led by people of color), these companies invest far more in lawyers, consulting firms, and employee surveillance than they'll ever dish out to promote "diversity."

For Bezos, Erlinger, McMillon, and the other CEOs who follow their lead, genuine "justice and equity" for their workers would come at too high a cost: unions would require them to relinquish the total control they now exert.

This form of hypocrisy isn't scrutinized by mainstream media, which are, after all, corporate enterprises. Much recent coverage of business initiatives to address inequity has omitted issues like fairer compensation or union representation. A lengthy *New York Times* article: "Corporate America Has Failed Black America," doesn't mention unions at all and allots only a few sentences to

low-wage workers. The focus is the dearth of African Americans in top management.

And in a stunning act of appropriation, the New York Stock Exchange observed a moment of silence to honor George Floyd. This took place just as the stock market roared back to full recovery, alleviating the real anxieties of the 1%, an irony that drew little notice.

Will corporate executives get away with purporting to be troubled by the structural racism and economic inequality that they perpetuate and benefit from? It's through this sort of misdirection, and by narrowing the "legitimate" terms of debate, that capitalists, as the early labor historian Selig Perlman once noted, "convince other classes that they alone, the capitalists, know how

*... this high-profile handwringing is used to separate the outpouring of outrage from capitalist practices now and always at the root of racial and economic injustice.*

to operate the complex economic apparatus of modern society."

After George Floyd's death, Black Lives Matter activists and their allies refused to allow business as usual, and through massive protests and direct action achieved the extraordinary: exposing to the world the brutality and racism that define American policing. For the moment, though, it seems that CEOs are maintaining their authority over the "complex economic apparatus of modern society."

Union supporters must stand up and assert their own power, to ensure that the practitioners of economic oppression are called to account—and forced to make concessions.

*Originally published by Labor Notes*

*Toni Gilpin is a labor historian, activist, and writer. She is the recipient of the 2018 Debra Bernhardt Award for Labor Journalism.*

# Black Lives Matter: The Best Thing to Happen to Palestinians in a Long Time

By Nora Lester Murad

At her last class on her last day of 11th grade in Newton, Mass., my Palestinian-American daughter received a shock. Just before the Zoom call ended, one student mentioned he'd be taking a gap year in Israel after graduation. Another student smirked, "I hear there's a lot of land opening up over there." The screen quickly went blank, and my daughter burst into angry tears.

I realize that many people reading this article won't understand why. The fact that Israel may annex an additional 30% of the Palestinian West Bank is not widely known or understood. In the United States and elsewhere, the discourse about Palestinian rights has been distorted and silenced, by fear of being called anti-Semitic, by U.S. foreign policy interests, by Christian Zionism, and by Islamophobia. Perhaps worst is the common misbelief that Israelis and Palestinians constitute "two equal sides" and that being "neutral" does no harm.

As a white anti-Zionist Jew from the United States who married a Palestinian Muslim and lived in Palestine for 13 years, I see things differently. I see a "side" that wants equality and peace for everyone, and a "side" that believes that Israel should be a state for Jews maintained by institutional racism and military control over non-Jews.

The United States has long supported Israel with money and political support—that gives cover to Israel's land grabbing. As a result, Israel, despite its ideology of Jewish supremacy, has been "normalized." It is common for people I know to take family trips to Israel to celebrate a Bat Mitzvah or just to hang out on the beach in Tel Aviv. Despite being liberals, they are willing to ignore Israel's ongoing human rights violations against Palestinians. This explains why my daughter and so many other Palestinians feel invisible, dehumanized, and unsupported—even in self-proclaimed "liberal" spaces.

But there may soon be a historic development in the Palestinian struggle.

It is August 2020 and we're in the midst of arguably the most important escalation of the movement for racial justice in U.S. history. The movement for Black lives calls not merely for Black liberation, but for sustainable transformation of our communities. The movement is Black-led, intersectional, multiracial and has mobilized people all over the world. On the local, state, and national levels, actors as diverse as corporations, schools, and even restaurants are making public statements against institutional racism, a topic that was taboo in mainstream media just months ago.

And the protests are making a difference. Not only is there pressure for national police reform legislation, there are surprising and visible changes happening in local communities. In the city where

I live, the police chief has resigned, possibly influenced by pressure for systemic change from our local Defund Newton Police Department group. Changes like support for Black businesses, the removal of statues glorifying Confederate racists, and improvements to school curricula are real. Embedded in these changes is a dislodging of normalized inequality and the mainstreaming of ideas previously considered radical—like social transformation.

More and more white people seem to "get" that inequality isn't accidental, but rather the natural outcome of a system that has institutionalized white supremacy.



This is a new chapter for Black Americans, one that will surely see both great gains and violent pushback. It also appears to be a new chapter for white people. More and more white people seem to "get" that inequality isn't accidental, but rather the natural outcome of a system that has institutionalized white supremacy.

As for Palestinian rights, while there have been gains in recent years in U.S. discourse, including by progressive Jewish groups, and while Black-Palestinian solidarity remains a strong pillar of both liberation movements, white people in the United States are far from understanding Israel's institutionalized racism against Palestinians, this despite strong parallels with the United States.

White colonists took North America by committing genocide against Indigenous peoples; Israel's colonization project is ongoing. Palestinian demands for self-determination remain a threat—not to Jews as people, but to the position Jews hold at the top of a highly racialized hierarchy in Israel. That explains, I think, the continued portrayal of all Palestinians as terrorists and Israeli violence against Palestinians being justified by "security" concerns.

So, while the image of unarmed Black men being murdered by U.S. police (finally!) sparks outrage, the persistent murders of Palestinians by the U.S.-funded

state of Israel are met merely with muted criticism. And Israel's historic decision to illegally expand its territory becomes a casual aside in a conversation among U.S. teenagers.

I argue that Black Lives Matter may be the best thing that's happened to Palestinians in a very long time. Because BLM targets the power structure of the United States—the very heart of global capitalism—the movement for Black lives is positioned to make real changes in the colonial, neocolonial, militaristic, capitalist and racist DNA of the United States that is wreaking havoc around the world.

I am hoping that the newfound popularity of Black struggles will lead white U.S. people to listen more, act more, and make reparations. I also hope they will consider BLM's internationalist analysis and realize that the U.S. original sins of genocide and slavery are being recreated against peoples of the Global South right now—with U.S. funding and political support. I am hoping that white people, including white people who identify as Jewish, will be able to expand their commitment to racial equality to include their engagement with the Palestinian struggle, for the sake of my daughter and all our daughters and sons.

Racism (like all the other "isms") is a global industry in the service of profit, and therefore, struggles against racism must be simultaneously local, national, and transnational. Today's Black liberation movement will help challenge the root causes of inequality in the United States, in Palestine, and around the world.

*Nora Lester Murad, PhD, is a mother, writer, and social justice activist living in Massachusetts. She is co-author of Rest in My Shade, A Poem about Roots and I Found Myself in Palestine: Stories of Love and Renewal From Around the World. She blogs at [noralestermurad.com](http://noralestermurad.com) and can be reached on Twitter at [@NoraInPalestine](https://twitter.com/NoraInPalestine).*

## The Hoodie Stands Witness for Trayvon Martin

By Lauren K. Alleyne

I was built for bodies like his, between boy and man, sauntering in angles he couldn't hold but swung his limbs from, careful cool in every step.

I can tell you the story of him, unexceptional—he put change and candy into my pockets, the necessary jangle of keys and cellphone hushed in the sock of me.

I watched him from the soft pile he made of me on the floor of his messy adolescent room where I lay beside his sneakers and backpack. He did his homework with chat windows open; white headphones hooked him into some steady beat.

That day, he was thinking of nothing in particular. He was quiet in his skin; tucked into the shade of me, he was an easy embrace until an old ancestral fear lay its white shadow across us like an omen.

I can tell you his many hairs raised in warning beneath me; his armpits funk me up with terror. His saunter slipped into a child's unsteady totter under the weight of a history staggering behind him mad with its own power.

He clung to me then, wholly unmanned, a baby clutching his blanket. He pulled me close and I stroked his head, caressed the naps he had brushed to waves that morning. I felt him brace his bones beneath me, his heart a thousand beating drums.

The bullet ripped through us like a bolt of metal lightning. His blood, losing its purpose, ran into me and I wished we were truly a single body, that I could have held its rush and flow like a second, sweaty skin. I can tell you how his spirit slipped out—like steam from cooling water—slowly, fading by degrees, until he stilled.

Lauren K. Alleyne is the author of two collections of poetry, *Difficult Fruit* and *Honeyfish*. She is assistant director of the Furious Flower Poetry Center and an associate professor of English at James Madison University.



# The View from Europe

*Black Lives Matter is not just a slogan for the United States; it challenges Europeans to question our history and transform our present*

By Bue Rübner Hansen

Black Lives Matter demonstrations across European capitals have been huge. Predictably, pundits and politicians wonder why protests against police brutality and murder in the United States would attract such masses in Berlin and Vienna, London and Copenhagen. Why do so many people in Europe care so much about the fate of Black people across the Atlantic?

In some ways, this question mirrors the media complaint, in the early days of the U.S. protests, that riots and protests were instigated by “outside agitators.” But soon, protests spread so widely there was no longer a credible “outside” in the United States. In Europe, the charge is the reverse: not agitators from somewhere else, but agitation about somewhere else.

In his 1963 “Letter From Birmingham Jail,” Martin Luther King Jr. forcefully rejected the idea that only local folks could legitimately fight for justice in their towns:

“... I am cognizant of the interrelatedness of all communities and states. I cannot sit idly by in Atlanta and not be concerned about what happens in Birmingham. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. Never again can we afford to live with the narrow, provincial ‘outside agitator’ idea.”

Just like King’s remarks on injustice, and the old IWW slogan it resonates with—“an injury to one is an injury to all”—the affirmation that Black lives matter knows no geographical bounds. Its solidarity and struggle cannot be limited to any geographic region: neither Minneapolis, Ferguson, and Baltimore, nor the

United States of America.

Over the last years, a number of European countries have seen uprisings led by Black and brown people, such as the 2005 Banlieue Riots in France, the 2011 England Riots and the 2016 riots in Sweden. Back in 2013–14, people organized Black Lives Matter groups in many European cities, and long before that, people campaigned to demand justice for Black and brown people murdered by police and against the EU and European countries’ trade, foreign and border policies, as well as against the exploitation and discrimination of migrant workers.

## A Global Color Line

The murder and devaluation of Black and brown lives is the living history of centuries of colonialism, enslavement and imperialism—the common history of what is known as “the West,” or “the Global North.” In the first half of the 20th century, the Black American scholar W.E.B. Du Bois spoke of a global color line, which expressed and served to justify the pillage of the colonies and divided workers in different countries just as the local color line worked to prevent class solidarity within nations.

For Martin Luther King Jr., justice was always a strategic, and not merely a moral question, which could only be answered through the solidarity between those who are affected directly and indirectly acting together in solidarity. For Du Bois, the color line was the “problem of problems,” standing in the way of solidarity between colonized people and workers everywhere.

In Du Bois’ time, the color line was rationalized; “a theory of the inferiority of the darker peoples” that was expressed as “a contempt for their rights and aspi-



Mural in Naples, Italy. Photo: Alessandro Pone

rations,” which together had “become all but universal in the greatest centers of modern culture.” Today, even if few continue to believe in explicit race science, our institutions are still full of such contempt. Border regimes and policing, mass media, and school systems still act as if Black and brown lives matter less, little, or not at all.

Statues to mass murderers of Black people—like that of the slave trader Colston, which was joyfully dumped in Bristol harbor from which his ships set out, or of genocidaire supreme King Leopold II in Antwerp, which was set on fire by protesters before being taken down by the authorities—show that official Europe has failed to question its legacy of white supremacy. Germany, a partial exception, was destroyed and shamed for its attempt to colonize Europe, its Nazi monuments torn down long ago (curiously, people seem to remember that history despite the absence of monuments), but German schools still do not teach children about the colonial crimes in Namibia and East Africa, let alone about its present neocolonialism.

A reconsideration of European history is overdue, and the assault on European monuments to mass killers has already started this process. However, the deepest and most urgent challenge of the current movement concerns the present and future.

## An Inescapable Network of Mutuality

Even less recognized than the crimes of colonialism is the current wealth of European and euro-descended corporations and states, as well as the climate and ecological disasters we face, are rooted in the competitive process by which those corporations and states grabbed land and extracted wealth. In the process of accumulation, they transformed the relationship of humans to the land across the globe, destroying Indigenous modes of life.

This treatment of the earth as private property, as a passive repository of resources and depository of waste, brought us onto the path of accelerated ecological and climate destruction. All this continues to this day.

Environmental degradation, waste and pollution is pushed to local and global

“sacrifice zones,” where Black and Indigenous people live. Climate refugees are abandoned to the sea or pushed back into the arms of warlords. Europe continues to consume and waste in ways incompatible with halting the climate emergency. All this suggests that many implicitly believe that European and euro-descended people—white people—deserve safer and cleaner environments, more security, and higher, even unsustainable levels of consumption than others.

Much would be different if European institutions took the worth of Black and brown lives as axiomatic. European border management, which is currently designed to let thousands drown in the Mediterranean or suffer in EU-funded camps in North Africa or Turkey would be the first to fall. EU trade and foreign policy would change profoundly, away from its support of extractive industries and intellectual property rights that block poor countries’ access to essential medicines and technologies, as well as EU countries’ involvement in wars and occupations in Africa and the Middle East.

In short, the devaluation of Black, brown, and migrant lives continues to be a problem that blocks the solution to other problems. It stops us from recognizing that, in the words of Dr. King, “we are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny.” A firm rejection of the color line is a condition for dealing with global warming, ecological breakdown, imperialist war, poverty and inequality, and the global structure of capitalist competition that is a key driver of them all.

Black Lives Matter is not a purely American slogan or a simple fact. It is a universal and generative truth, from which great implications flow. It is up to all of us to explore these implications from where we are: complicit with, or submitted to the color line, directly or indirectly affected by its violence and corrosion of solidarity.

Bue Rübner Hansen has a PhD from Queen Mary University, London. He is an editor of Viewpoint Magazine, and has been an activist researcher in student, municipalist, and migrant solidarity movements. His current research focuses on social reproduction, ecology and interest formation.



Mural in Glasgow, Scotland. Photo: Jeff Mitchell.



# On the Front Lines in Portland

*A veteran's-eye view of the protests*

**Photos and story by Mike Hastie**

**I**t has been more than two months straight of nightly demonstrations and ear-shattering protests in Portland, Ore. A continuous drum corps is beating hypnotic rhythms that give thousands of Portlanders a reason to be alive.

The energy is electrifying, as people take turns chanting their built-up frustrations about what they see as utter failure in the U.S. government. They are extremely angry at President Trump for sending in federal police to make matters much worse. It is pepper spray, rubber bullets, and cops hitting protesters with their batons.

The chant, "All Cops Are Bastards," has become much louder since the feds started kidnapping protesters off the street in unmarked vans, without identifying themselves. It has been swift and terrifying for those who have been arrested in this black ops fascist mentality. It is against the law, as people are being stolen without probable cause. The crime is being committed by people who took an oath not to do these kinds of things.

But, then again, in Viet Nam, the U.S. military had absolutely no rules in warfare. Geneva Convention Rules were for fools. In a way, this is the tragedy of what is happening in Portland and all over the country. We are seeing the accumulation of terror that the U.S. government commits all over the world.

People in Portland have seen the truth. How much longer will the government persist with the illusion that we are a country built on law and order? If we started talking about U.S. atrocities

ties in Viet Nam, this current situation would get much darker.

Since George Floyd was murdered on May 25, there's been tear gas, flash-bang grenades, looting, statues coming down, and the cops coming at us. With two Nikon cameras, I take pictures as fast as I can.

The most significant thing that was not happening in the past is the overwhelming solidarity of white people supporting Black Americans. Young white Americans, and older ones, men and women, are following the leadership of African-Americans. The respect is everywhere. Black Americans are feeling safer in their ability to trust white Americans. At these rallies and marches, I do not sense any separation between the races. Black Americans are more open with how they feel, and white Americans are emotionally overwhelmed with the honesty they are hearing. We are

---

*As the cops backed away from the intersection, one of them fired a round at me ... A direct hit from one of these rounds can kill you if it hits you in the head.*

---

seeing genuine trust being born based on a common enemy.

Black soldiers in Viet Nam taught me a lot. I was always jealous of them, because they had something I didn't have—solidarity. I was fascinated with the bond they had for each other, which was born out of mutual pain and suffering.

I have been out on the streets every night for days. I'm tired. It has been exhausting, the intense demonstrations are beginning to run together. I have been tear-gassed multiple times. I am usually drenched with sweat, water

aging or destroying federal property. There is graffiti everywhere.

But let's get real here. While the protesters are damaging some federal property, including ripping down the reinforced steel fencing, the federal government uses drones, jets, artillery, and ground troops to blow the hell out of essential infrastructure and human lives in Third World countries all over the world.

American people have been dumbed down by mass media, corporate backed misinformation, call it propaganda as Trump and company try desperately to own the narrative.

But the murder of George Floyd and so many other Black Americans has set off a powerful rebellion. Black Lives Matter has become the consciousness of a sleeping giant.

Since Trump called in the feds, the turmoil and violence has escalated. We all know what Trump is doing. Feds are baiting the demonstrators, and when they react to the police violence, Fox News is there to convince the American people that the demonstrators are the bad guys, and the police are the good guys. This is a political recipe as old as lying itself. The feds and the news want to portray protesters as violent mobs of anarchists and thugs. If the American people really want to know about mobs and thugs, they can go back in history and examine the U.S. Empire, beginning with the genocidal wars against Native peoples living on this land for millennia. After that the U.S. military was sent all over the world to steal and murder for corporate profits.

We have been standing our ground against President Trump's arrogance of power. The courage of resistance and dissent has been remarkable. Thousands of Portland activists showed with the profound hope of permanent and dynamic change.

FOX News sends camera crews out to film this battle and focus most of their attention on the behavior of the protesters. They show the protesters dam-

aging or destroying federal property. There is graffiti everywhere. But let's get real here. While the protesters are damaging some federal property, including ripping down the reinforced steel fencing, the federal government uses drones, jets, artillery, and ground troops to blow the hell out of essential infrastructure and human lives in Third World countries all over the world. American people have been dumbed down by mass media, corporate backed misinformation, call it propaganda as Trump and company try desperately to own the narrative. But the murder of George Floyd and so many other Black Americans has set off a powerful rebellion. Black Lives Matter has become the consciousness of a sleeping giant. Since Trump called in the feds, the turmoil and violence has escalated. We all know what Trump is doing. Feds are baiting the demonstrators, and when they react to the police violence, Fox News is there to convince the American people that the demonstrators are the bad guys, and the police are the good guys. This is a political recipe as old as lying itself. The feds and the news want to portray protesters as violent mobs of anarchists and thugs. If the American people really want to know about mobs and thugs, they can go back in history and examine the U.S. Empire, beginning with the genocidal wars against Native peoples living on this land for millennia. After that the U.S. military was sent all over the world to steal and murder for corporate profits.

On one night, the cops chased us a couple of blocks. They then started firing projectiles at us from a couple of different weapons, to include more tear gas. One round set off a fire, which the protesters quickly put out. I took a few more pictures of the cops firing what they like to call less-than-lethal riot munitions. As the cops backed away from the intersection, one of them fired a round at me. I saw it coming and stepped out of the way. It missed me by a few feet. A direct hit from one of these rounds can kill you if it hits you in the head. This is exactly what almost happened to a 26-year-old man in July who was hit in the head by a projectile across the street from the Federal Justice Center. His name is Donavan La Bella. He was knocked unconscious. You can still see his blood on the sidewalk. He was sent to the hospital where emergency reconstructive surgery was performed. He will survive.

The feds are playing a chess game with Portland. If there is more overwhelming violence against protesters, and more people get injured, or possibly killed, the call from social media will bring more people out to the streets. I have been around these protesters a lot; they are fearless. As John Lewis once said: "Find a way to get in the way." His legacy is now in Portland, Ore. I need to close, as John Lewis is calling me to prepare for another night.



Mike Hastie on the streets of Portland. Photo: Daniel Shea







Clockwise from top left:  
 Protester in downtown Portland shortly after George Floyd's murder.  
 Police in mid-August marching toward protesters with smoke from flash-bang grenades. Police come out of the Mark Hatfield Federal Courthouse shooting tear gas. On the receiving end of the tear gas at the courthouse. African American family in front of the mural painted on plywood surrounding the Apple Store. Children adding their own drawings to the mural.





Photo: Sue Brisk, *The Independent*

# Why We Explode

By Nicholas Powers

I refused to see him die. I did not look at the newspapers in bodegas or on Facebook, or texts from friends. At a restaurant, a TV showed a white cop kneeling on a Black man's neck and I left before my food arrived.

The video of Officer Derek Chauvin killing George Floyd ripped the scab off our Blackness. Inside, where Color connects us, pain throbbed. We just buried our grandparents and friends who died from Covid-19. We just lost our jobs. Maybe the worst was over? I mean damn, can we catch a break?

Outside the bodega, neighbors stared at cellphones, faces twisted in horror. "Did you see how they did that brother?" "I can't breathe?" "Fuck the police!" I saw open pain in their eyes. Beneath their mask of street machismo was a deep underground cavern where life's bitterness had pooled. And Floyd's death was a lit match falling in.

The next day the news showed Minneapolis burning. And then D.C. burned. And Brooklyn too. Headlines focused on the fire. Pundits focused on police brutality. But it was larger than Floyd's murder. The white officer who killed him was a symbol of racism. In this case, police brutality. In other cases, the violence is muted. Our bodies carry the hurt that sloshes inside like a sea of gasoline and it, not the latest headline, is what sets the world ablaze.

## To Serve and Protect

A police SUV whooshed by us. We swiveled our heads to follow it. Another police SUV sped by so fast it spun the sidewalk trash into mini-tornados. One. Two. Three more. Loud alarms echoed down the street.

"Man," T. said, "I keep tracking these cops, I'll sprain my neck."

We laughed. I asked him if he was protesting. He said "naw." He avoided my eyes. And fidgeted his COVID-19 mask. We had had this talk before. When Sean Bell was killed by the NYPD, I went to the funeral and joined the protests. He did not. When Eric Garner was killed, the same. Most of my neighbors do not march.

In their long New York lives, they've heard too many gunshots and seen too many dead. They watched mayors make promises that never came true or protests that shook the city but left no lasting change. To protect themselves from the vulnerability of hope, they devel-

oped a stoic fatalism. Nothing gets better. Just do your hustle, man.

"I gotta go. Things to do," T. said, and we bumped elbows. What hope he had left was stuffed into a zip lock bag and thrown into the cavern we carry. Splash.

He had been arrested once. When he got out, we cheered. Damn near everyone here has been in detention at one time or another. It is to be expected.

Jail gave us crazy hallway talk-a-thons, and midnight stoop confessions. I laughed at neighbors' tales of faking illness to get out of jail and into a hospital, or masturbating so much it hurt. At some point, the tone shifted. I heard of rape, of learning after the funeral that an aunt or grandpa had died, of coming out and their child not running into their arms. They gasped, mid-sentence, as if drowning in themselves.

It is easy to get caught out there. Lord. I've seen old men stopped and frisked, and teens carrying groceries. My ex-roommate, a Nigerian student, went out for a loosie and came back wild eyed and sweaty. The police stopped and frisked him. His hands shook while lighting the cigarette. I tried to avoid that fate with middle-class camouflage. Nice clothes. Nice diction. Didn't work. I was busted for an unpaid fine. The cop clamped handcuffs on me. I spent 16 hours in jail. I paced the dirty cell in an endless circle, breathing in and out slowly.

After I paid the fine and was released, that night in jail plummeted somewhere inside me. I'm not sure what happens there. I'm not sure I can open it again.

## Breath Work

Helicopters circled the city, needling the protests below with thin spotlights. I stood on the roof under a purple New York night, scrolling my Facebook feed and seeing friends' protest photos. A beatific glow shined on them. The truth that guided them was so sacred and so strong. They marched fearlessly into rows of police armored in riot gear.

Text after text came.

"Are you coming?" "We'll be at this rally. Join!" "We're bringing this system DOWN."

"Maybe," I texted back. I knew I was going. But the video had to be seen first. Googling up George Floyd, I saw his face on screen, lifted it to the sky where he looked like a patron saint, a big handsome man that could blow the helicopters away.

The link to his recorded murder was there and I

pressed it. A wobbly camera showed three cops crushing him with their knees. "I can't breathe man. Please." Chauvin grinds his knee into Floyd's neck. "I can't move." He gasps. "Mama." Eyes shut. No breathing. I stopped the video.

His last words echoed in the night. Helpless and scared, he called for his mother. The father in me wanted to push the cops off and stand him up, wrap my arms around Floyd as if he were my son and tell him he's safe.

In a way, he was my son. He was my father too. And brother. He was my uncle and grandfather. He was my aunt, sister, and mother. He was every one of us, because all of us can see ourselves or someone we love in him. When he died, a piece of us died.

I closed my eyes and Floyd's face fell like a shooting star down, down into that place where the night in jail was buried in my body. The deeper it went, the more it illuminated. I saw again, Sean Bell in the casket, and remembered how young he looked, and I heard again T. saying how he missed his kid while locked up, and, further in, I saw again Eric Garner, Sandra Bland, Tamir Rice, even deeper, Emmitt Till and the Scottsboro Boys, and the nameless burnt bodies of Black people lynched as white crowds cheered, and, deeper yet, was the memory of white boys in a car, shouted slurs at me and speeding off as I threw a rock, or hearing that my best friend's dad had called me a "nigger friend."

The obscene light of Floyd's death illuminated not my pain but the pain others shared with me, like the night a Black poet told me her sister, a sex worker who sold herself to mostly white men, died of a drug overdose, or a Black man I met walking home at night, lifted his shirt to show me knife scars. Or a close friend, embarrassed at wearing wigs, after years of straightening cream had burned her scalp bald. Story, after story, after story.

Voices poured into the basin of the soul to form a sea larger than space and time. And Floyd's face touched its surface and it ignited. In that brief moment, the ancestors' one demand was clear: Take responsibility for that pain and remake this world into one where everyone we love can breathe.

"Thank you, Floyd," I said to the sky, "Thank you, brother, for showing the way."

*First published by The Independent, independent.com.*

*Nicholas Powers teaches English at the State University of New York. He is a contributing editor at The Independent.*



# A Working Alternative

## *A 31-year-old program in Oregon is a model in de-escalating situations that could end with law enforcement violence*

By Anna V. Smith

As citizens across the country fill the streets to protest police killings of Black people, the violent response from law enforcement has added urgency to a national conversation about police brutality. Pressure is mounting to reform or abolish police departments. As cities look for what's next, there is already a proven system of de-escalation for the high volume of mental health calls that police respond to, which often end in violence.

Mobile, community-based crisis programs employ first responders that are not police to address disturbances where crimes are not being committed. One of the nation's longest-running examples is CAHOOTS—Crisis Assistance Helping Out on the Streets—in Eugene, Ore. CAHOOTS has inspired similar programs in other cities in the region, including the Denver Alliance for Street Health Response, Mobile Assistance Community Responders of Oakland and Portland Street Response in Oregon.

Such programs take police out of the equation when someone is going through a mental health crisis, struggling with substance abuse, or experiencing homelessness. When police show up, situations can escalate, and the use of force can be disproportionate, especially toward Black people; a 2016 study estimated that 20% to 50% of fatal encounters with law enforcement involved someone with a mental illness. The CAHOOTS model shows those encounters aren't inevitable: The CAHOOTS system relies on trauma-informed de-escalation and harm reduction, which reduces calls to police, averts harmful arrest-release-repeat cycles, and prevents violent police encounters.

The White Bird Clinic in Eugene started CAHOOTS 31 years ago as an alternative for people who felt alienated or disenfranchised from systems that had failed

them, CAHOOTS Operations Coordinator Tim Black said in an interview. "We're there to listen, we're there to empathize, and we're there to really reflect on what they're going through," and to discuss ways to access resources to help them. CAHOOTS—a free, 24/7 community service—is funded by Eugene and neighboring Springfield at a cost of around \$2 million, equal to just over 2% of their police departments' annual budgets.

Under the model, instead of police, a medic and a mental health worker are dispatched for calls such as welfare checks or potential overdoses. In 2017, such teams answered 17% of the Eugene Police Department's overall call volume. This has saved the city, on average, \$8.5 million each year from 2014 to 2017, according to the White Bird Clinic.

Though CAHOOTS uses the police department's central dispatch, it is distinct from the department. Employees do not carry guns or wear uniforms; instead, they wear casual hoodies and drive vans with a dove painted on the side. CAHOOTS' methods are designed to prevent escalation, Black said. "If an officer enters that situation with power, with authority, with that uniform and a command presence, that situation is really likely to escalate."

It's a false assumption that people experiencing a mental health crisis will respond violently, Black said, and a police response is often unnecessary. CAHOOTS fielded over 24,000 calls last year; less than 1% of them needed assistance from police, and no one has ever been seriously injured. "By and large, folks who are unhoused, who are experiencing behavioral health issues, are much more likely to be the victims of violence than the perpetrators," said Black.

CAHOOTS differs from other mental health partnerships with the police in important ways: Staff employ "unconditional positive regard," a phrase from psychology that means complete support and acceptance for the people they encounter, and the organization is run as a "consensus collective," rather than a hierarchy. Every employee's voice carries equal weight.

Each crisis worker completes 500 hours of training in areas including medical care, conflict resolution and crisis counseling. Around 60% of CAHOOTS' patients are homeless, and about 30% have severe or persistent mental illness. "The patient that we're serving is the expert in their situation," Black said. "They know that we're a voluntary resource and that we're not going to take their rights away just because we've shown up on scene."

Dorothy Siemens, an artist who grew up in Eugene and still lives there, said that she, her family, and her friends all call CAHOOTS, rather than the police, when they see someone in distress. The option makes her feel like a more responsible community member. When Siemens managed a downtown cafe, she used the service often. "I really don't have the tools, and I think the police in our community also don't have the tools" for people in crisis, she said. "There really shouldn't be one group of people who is expected to cover all of those bases, especially a group of people who are weaponized and militarized. ... Their training shows them 'that's something I have to respond to with force.'"

Community organizers are reaching out to CAHOOTS, hoping to develop similar programs. Since 2013, the city of Portland, Ore., just a couple of hours north of Eugene, has seen a 60% increase in "unwanted person" calls to 911. In 2017, an Oregonian analysis found that 52% of arrests involved homeless individuals, even though they make up less than 3% of Portland's population.

In 2019, Portland City Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty and *Street Roots*, a homeless advocacy publication, introduced Portland Street Response, a police alternative based on the CAHOOTS model. Hardesty, the first Black woman elected to Portland's city council, said in a statement to *High Country News*, "There's no doubt we need to reimagine what it looks like to get the right responder to the right situation at the right time."

*"The patient that we're serving is the expert in their situation. They know that we're a voluntary resource and that we're not going to take their rights away just because we've shown up on scene."*

Nationwide protests have spurred urgency for programs like these, which show a stark contrast to the typical police response.

In Denver, in May, Vinnie Cervantes worked as a medic with the Denver Alliance for Street Health Response, which he also directs. It's part of a mutual aid nexus that emerged during protests in the city over the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis. Cervantes and others treated protesters who were left bleeding and bruised after police fired off tear gas, rubber bullets and flash-bangs and pummeled them with batons. To Cervantes and others, it was yet another example of how quickly police resort to excessive force. Policing and jails account for 30% of Denver's overall budget. The repurposing of those funds would be a huge opportunity for collective efforts like Denver Alliance, which resembles the CAHOOTS model. But no single model will work for every city, said Cervantes. Each program needs to be adaptive and reflect its community; Eugene, after all, is much smaller and has a whiter population than Denver, Oakland, or Portland. "It's really important that it is community-based, by people that look like us and that have our shared experience," said Cervantes, who is Latino. Otherwise, the program will only replicate the same systemic problems.

In June, Cervantes' organization helped start a pilot program in partnership with the city of Denver, called Support Team Assisted Response. Cervantes hopes to develop a full-fledged program by 2021. But, for now, on the streets, "We're literally seeing our own proof of concept of how we can take ownership of crisis ourselves, and have solutions," he said. "We don't have to view everyone as a threat."

*First published by High Country News, hcn.org.*

*Anna V. Smith is an assistant editor for High Country News. Email her at annasmith@hcn.org.*



With just over 2% of the Eugene and Springfield police departments' annual budgets, CAHOOTS teams answered 17% of the department's overall call volume, saving the city, on average, \$8.5 million each year. Photo: Thomas Patterson



# Defund Militarization from the Local Police to the Pentagon

By Adam Dahl

In the wake of the global protests against the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, activists have begun to reclaim public spaces by destroying statues of conquerors, slave traders, white supremacists and colonizers. In the United States alone, protesters have torn down and defaced statues of Confederate generals in Richmond, Va.; Nashville, Tenn.; and Montgomery, Ala.; and statues of Christopher Columbus in St. Paul and Boston. Globally, sympathetic protesters in Bristol, UK, threw a statue of Edward Colston—a prominent 17th-century slave trader—into the River Avon, while activists in Belgium defaced a statue of King Leopold II—the founder of the Congo Free State—prompting city officials to remove it.

In response, the liberal intelligentsia and a bipartisan coalition of congressional representatives have offered their own efforts to confront the racist history of the United States. In a recent opinion piece, *The New York Times* editorial board charged the U.S. military with celebrating white supremacy, calling for the renaming of

expanding the military budget masks the global roots of structural racism in the United States. It neglects that racialized policing domestically is intricately connected to the exercise of U.S. international police power abroad. Several sociologists and historians have shown how counterinsurgency tactics developed to quell anti-colonial revolts boomeranged back to the metropole, influencing the tactics that urban police forces use to counteract the tactics of Black-led protest movements.

Calls to rename military bases exemplify what Aziz Rana calls “national security citizenship.” From Crispus Attucks fighting in the American Revolution to W.E.B. Du Bois’s call to “close ranks” and set aside Black grievances in support of U.S. entry into World War I to the demands of the NAACP to desegregate the military, Black Americans are frequently forced to align their demands for racial inclusion with the imperatives of the national security state.

What the call to rebrand these military bases ultimately misses is the intertwined nature of domestic and international politics. It misses how the terrifying displays of firepower by municipal police against the recent protests

*There is no question that military bases named after Confederate generals should be renamed. But responding to the problem in this way while simultaneously expanding the military budget masks the global roots of structural racism in the United States.*

military bases honoring Confederate generals. On June 10, the Senate Armed Services Committee approved an amendment offered by Sen. Elizabeth Warren to remove the names of Confederate officials from U.S. military assets in three years, a measure that would include renaming military bases as well as aircraft, ships, weapons, and streets. In the House, Speaker Nancy Pelosi has supported a similar bipartisan amendment to the \$740 billion defense spending bill, while also calling for the removal of 11 Confederate statues from the Capitol.

There is no question that military bases named after Confederate generals should be renamed. But responding to the problem in this way while simultaneously

are enabled by a \$721.5 billion military budget in 2020 that makes up 37% of global military expenditures, an amount larger than the next seven biggest military budgets of major global powers combined. These military expenditures directly make their way to the police. In 1990, President George H.W. Bush signed into law the 1033 Program, which authorized the transfer of surplus military equipment and weapons from the Department of Defense to local law enforcement. In 2015, President Obama signed an executive order modestly limiting the program, only to be reversed in 2017.

The call to rename bases also misses how domestic bases honoring white supremacists and Confederate gen-

erals are part of a global military apparatus that spans 800 bases in over 70 countries. This “empire of bases,” as the late political scientist Chalmers Johnson has called it, has since 1945 reinforced a liberal international order predicated on free trade, structural adjustments, unbridled multinational capital and global financial deregulation. Just as this empire of bases segregates the impoverished peoples of the Global South in a system of global apartheid, municipal police forces similarly enforce the boundaries between urban poverty and suburban affluence. Stationed at these imperial outposts, CIA agents or other branches of the national security state have interfered with at least 85 elections worldwide since 1947, a number that does not include military coups and regime change following elections of leaders opposed to U.S. interests.

Racialized policing domestically is intricately connected to the exercise of U.S. international police power abroad.

In the 1960s, Black Power activists referred to the structural conditions facing Black Americans as a system of “internal colonialism.” More than an analogy that metaphorically likens structural racism in the United States to colonial domination abroad, the idea of internal colonialism exposes how anti-Black violence and poverty domestically is systematically tethered to the exercise of U.S. imperial power and the foreign policy of the national security state.

The Black Lives Matter movement has recently revived this vibrant connection between anti-imperialism and anti-racism. In its 2015 policy platform, “A Vision for Black Lives: Policy Demands for Black Power, Freedom, and Justice,” the Movement for Black Lives called for the simultaneous “divestment from exploitative forces including prisons, fossil fuels, police, surveillance, and exploitative corporations” and “investments in the education, health, and safety of Black people.” The platform went on to demand “a cut in military expenditures and a reallocation of those funds to invest in domestic infrastructure and community well-being.” The drafters of the platform explicitly declared that “America is an empire that uses war to expand territory and power.”

In framing the problem in this way, the platform captures the vicious circle of racialized policing and U.S. empire: Over-investment in the military budget designed to maintain global supremacy resulted in divestment from domestic social programs to combat poverty, increase access to public education, ensure equitable health care and reverse patterns of hyper-incarceration. The social problems arising from this divestment from poor and Black communities then became evidence of the need for greater investment in urban police forces to deal with “Black criminality,” which, as we have seen in recent weeks, is merely a veiled reference to politically motivated resistance. The result is a self-fulfilling prophecy rooted in the militarization of U.S. society. What the platform very simply shows is that bloated police budgets and bloated military budgets are two sides of the same coin. They are both causes and symptoms of a national divestment in poor people and communities of color.

Renaming military bases that memorialize white supremacists through a spending bill that expands the defense budget by \$20 billion amounts to nothing more than a racially inclusive militarism domestically that remains imperialistic globally. In the wake of this year’s unprecedented uprisings and protests, the demands of Black activists are beginning to materialize. But if calls to defund the police are to have any teeth, they must move in tandem with calls to radically defund the U.S. military. To respond to the demands of protesters by leaving the paraphernalia of U.S. empire intact is not simply to miss the point—it is to resign oneself to the self-defeating logic of the adage expressed by composer Richard Wagner: “The wound can only be healed by the spear that smote you.”

Adam Dahl is an assistant professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. He is the author of *Empire of the People: Settler Colonialism and the Foundations of Modern Democratic Thought*.



# Support for Troops Who Refuse to Fight

*Veterans For Peace, Courage to Resist, and About Face: Veterans Against the War each issued statements opposing the use of federal troops, including the National Guard, to quell civil protests, even urging them to refuse orders if called upon to deploy against U.S. citizens. Below are excerpts from their statements.*

## Veterans For Peace

Veterans For Peace calls on all military leaders and personnel to refuse deployment. We, as veterans, know the terrible aftermath of participating in actions that are morally wrong against communities in other countries. Now is the time to refuse to participate in orders that are unjust.

We are appalled to see military weapons, vehicles and equipment once again deployed in U.S. cities to control community members who are reacting to a long history of state-sanctioned violence. When an already embattled community is subjected to militarized intimidation, their environment becomes a war zone. We call on all those who are serving with the National Guard to refuse to serve violent and racist interests.

We know that increased militarization in our communities will never bring peace. We know that peace is only achieved with a strong commitment to justice. As veterans who served in various wars, we know there is a connection between increasing racist violence in the United States and the massive indiscriminate killing of hundreds of thousands of people in other lands. Growing racism against black, brown and Muslim people in the United States is a reflection of the racism that justifies killing non-white people abroad. The U.S. military deliberately uses racism to motivate young men and women to kill.

As veterans, we know what it's like to

be called to a "duty" that goes against our conscience. We urge all current National Guard members to lay down their weapons and refuse to fight against their neighbors and fellow community members. We urge you all to be fully informed as you make profound choices with possibly serious consequences.

We condemn the inflammatory statements by Donald Trump. His declaration of calling for military troops on U.S. soil to quell people exercising their First Amendment right is inflammatory and incredibly dangerous. We stand unequivocally with the protesters who are in the streets calling for an end to senseless police killings and white supremacy.

## About Face: Veterans Against the War

Attention Members of the National Guard: We urge you to have the courage to do the right thing. Refuse activation orders.

A moral choice lies before you. As veterans who faced similar tests of conscience, only to realize too late that we chose wrong, we cannot stress enough the impact this decision will have on the rest of your life. We all took an oath to defend the country from enemies foreign and domestic. Are Black protesters the enemy of this country? Today you have to decide whether you are loyal to the values you swore to uphold or to the commanders who would order you to turn on your

neighbors for demanding justice. You cannot be loyal to both.

We know that it is your intention to be of service and prevent more harm, but we urge you to remember the deadly legacy of the National Guard enacting violence

*We, as veterans, know the terrible aftermath of participating in actions that are morally wrong against communities in other countries. Now is the time to refuse to participate in orders that are unjust.*

against protesters—Watts in 1965, Kent State in 1970, Los Angeles in 1992, and many other examples in recent history.

The military is designed to be lethal, not to de-escalate.

No amount of property is worth a single human life. Are you really prepared to carry out the violence President Trump threatened against Minnesotans and others? We ask that you stand up for Black lives by standing down. We know the consequences you may face for dis-

obeying orders. Many of us have faced them ourselves. And many of us live with the consequences of following orders we shouldn't have and can tell you that the cost of moral injury is far greater.

There is a long legacy of troops choosing what's right over what's ordered. You are not alone in your convictions.

## Courage to Resist

Tens of thousands of National Guard members have already been mobilized in at least 29 states. If you know you didn't join the National Guard to attack Americans who are using their freedom of speech and right to assemble to protest systemic racism and police violence, then now is your time to resist and stand with the people.

Courage to Resist ([couragetoresist.org](http://couragetoresist.org)) is currently assisting members of the National Guard who resisted Trump's orders to violently attack people on the streets of Washington, D.C., peacefully and lawfully protesting racial injustice.

We want to make sure we're there to support the brave men and women who continue to refuse these illegal orders. One guardsman shared, "I feel that I cannot be complicit in any way when I've seen so many examples of soldiers and police acting in bad faith ... No aspect of my training has touched on this subject ... We have not had any training or conversation relating to de-escalation tactics."

## Militarized Police

*... continued from page 1*

black, brown and Muslim people who die. Civilian casualties caused by U.S. bombing in Afghanistan, for instance, were higher last year than at any time in the 20-year-long war.

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. linked systemic racism and militarism as two of the three evil "triplets" he was committed to end. Yet that linkage remains a hallmark of U.S. policy in general—and of the militarization of police in particular.

Just in 2014, as Black Lives Matter demonstrations spread across the country, more than 500 law enforcement agencies received MRAP armored personnel carriers, designed to withstand bomb blasts in war theaters like Afghanistan and Iraq. Police in North Little Rock, Ark. (population: 62,000), got two MARCbots, armed robots designed for war in Afghanistan.

Local and state police departments across the country do not ordinarily include budget lines to buy armored personnel carriers. But under a once-invisible program known as 1033, the Pentagon offers "surplus military equipment" free to any police agency requesting it.

And if the good people of North Little Rock don't really need armed robots, well, they've got them anyway.

Does all that military gear make police officers more likely to act like occupying



armies? We can't say for sure, but we do know the relatively small town had two officer-involved shooting cases during one two-week period this spring.

"When the government equips police departments like they're equipping the military, we undermine healthy relationships between the police and the community," explains Equal Justice Initiative director Bryan Stevenson. "We have created a culture where police officers think of themselves as warriors, not guardians."

From the beginning, the Poor People's Campaign—a national mobilization of

poor and working-class Americans—has made ending the 1033 program a centerpiece of its demands.

Rather than tinkering around the margins, we need to end systemic racism and the militarism that makes it even deadlier—from Kabul to Atlanta and Baghdad to Minneapolis.

*The Rev. Dr. William Barber II is the president of Repairers of the Breach and co-chair of the Poor People's Campaign: A Call for Moral Revival. Phyllis Bennis directs the New Internationalism Project at the Institute for Policy Studies.*

## Resources for Active-Duty Military Resisting Illegal Orders

National Guard troops facing possible deployment to U.S. cities can contact the National Lawyers Guild Military Law Task Force at (619) 463-2369 and/or email [help@militarylawhelp.com](mailto:help@militarylawhelp.com) for referral to a civilian attorney to discuss your options.

The GI Rights Hotline can connect active-duty military with veterans ready to support them and stand with them in their decision; call (877) 447-4487 or email [support@aboutfaceveterans.com](mailto:support@aboutfaceveterans.com)

# A History of Institutional Violence at the U.S. Border

*Not only is the Border Patrol culpable for the murder of thousands forced to flee their homelands and migrate north, it also aids in the repression and violent murder of Black people in this country*

*Editor's Note: Following President Trump's boasting that he was sending federal troops to Portland, Ore., and other cities because "the locals couldn't handle it," the Department of Homeland Security sent Border Patrol Tactical Units (BORTAC) to Portland. Many Border Patrol personnel have been trained at Fort Benning in Georgia for use as paramilitaries wearing U.S. Army camouflage without identification. They have been responsible for grabbing nonviolent protesters off the streets and forcing them into unmarked cars with no charges.*

By Dévora González and Azadeh Shahshahani

When it comes to the U.S. government, don't confuse agency size for the likelihood of accountability. The U.S. Border Patrol is the Department of Homeland Security's largest federal law enforcement agency, yet has operated with little oversight and almost complete impunity. Nearly a century old, Border Patrol was created under the Department of Labor in 1924 to enforce xenophobic laws. Rooted in systemic oppression, the agency has fostered a culture of brutality among its agents since its inception.

The Border Patrol was created as a way to calm white supremacist fears and and it functioned as an instrument of racist vigilantism. Early agents were members of the Ku Klux Klan and Texas Rangers or from border town police departments. It was also created in response to migration to the United States, which was controlled through a quota system that privileged immigrants from Western European countries, while explicitly barring

entrance fees, and degrading hygienic inspections to "prevent" the spread of disease. Border Patrol Agents regularly beat, shot, and even hanged migrants. From 1974 to 1989, in the California/Baja California border alone, 44 people were injured or killed by Border Patrol or by the Border Patrol/San Diego Police Department collaboration called Border Crime Prevention Unit.

By the 1980s, migration from the South was not only for the purpose of obtaining employment, but also because of the urgency of fleeing from conditions created by U.S. foreign policy and intervention. Central Americans were significantly impacted by ongoing violence and economic hardship in their countries—the major-

Naturalization Services (INS) in Houston to run the first private detention center that same year. The Border Patrol's culture of cruelty has spread to for-profit detention centers, migration policies, and militarization of the borderlands and xenophobic policies continue to dehumanize people while profiting from those who need to migrate for economic or political reasons.

## Prevention Through Deterrence

In 1994, the Border Patrol implemented its Prevention Through Deterrence strategy in an attempt to control migration from unauthorized points of entry. To do so, it



Mexican police stand near a skull discovered with other remains in what is thought to be a large grave in the desert of victims of recent drug violence on March 19, 2010 in the county of Juarez, Mexico.

ity of which was exacerbated by U.S. intervention in the form of military training and financial backing for repressive regimes. Human rights violations and genocide were perpetrated by U.S. trained dictators. Priests, entire communities, and anyone challenging the state were brutally murdered and disappeared by U.S.-trained mi-

created mortal danger so that people would be deterred from crossing. They drastically increased the number of Border Patrol agents, in addition to creating checkpoints, towers, and walls to weaponize natural landscapes. This strategy worked alongside inhumane detention conditions, enhancing the profits of the prison-industrial complex and leading to enactment of policies such as Operation Streamline, which promoted increased criminalization of migration with no regard for the conditions causing people to flee. In 2003, Border Patrol became part of U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), taking on a counter-terrorism mission as it was reorganized into the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

No More Deaths, a humanitarian aid organization in the Sonoran Desert, recorded footage from 2010 to 2017 of Border Patrol slashing, dumping, and destroying bottles of water left for those crossing. The leading cause of death for bodies found in the Sonoran Desert is exposure to the elements. Unfortunately, tracking the cause of death also reveals a depressing reality—namely that the only evidence of migrants' journeys to the U.S. are often skeletal remains. While there are sometimes clues as to how an individual died, for many the cause of death remains undetermined. The true number of those who have disappeared crossing the U.S.-Mexico border will never be known.

Since 2010, 102 people have died at the hands of Border Patrol and thousands have disappeared, and yet no Border Patrol agent has ever been held accountable for murder, even when these cases violate the sovereignty of

*continued on next page ...*

*The Border Patrol's culture of cruelty has spread to for-profit detention centers, migration policies, and militarization of the borderlands and xenophobic policies continue to dehumanize people while profiting from those who need to migrate for economic or political reasons.*

others, such as people from Asia. Where exceptions were allowed for non-white migrants, they were made in service of capitalist interests; for example, Mexican migrants were excluded from the quota system so that Southwest businesses could continue to profit from their cheap labor. With the creation of the agency, and in order to control migration from the South, ports of entry became required for entrance into the United States. To legitimize ports of entry, crossing from anywhere other than a port of entry was criminalized, thus creating the concept of "illegal" immigration to the United States.

Violence in the name of "border protection" has been modus operandi for Border Patrol. People crossing over for work from Mexico were subjected to literacy tests,

litias. Those who survived were displaced, some to become refugees in the United States. As numerous countries were engaged in protracted conflict, migration to the United States, rather than being temporary, became more permanent. Non-white immigrants—such as Central Americans—entered and continue to exist in a political climate that remained highly unwelcoming.

Ignoring the consequences of U.S. intervention, the Border Patrol continues to operate in a political vacuum that deems ongoing presence in the borderlands and the development of for-profit detention centers justifiable and necessary. CoreCivic (formally known as Corrections Corporation of America-CCA) was founded in 1983 and entered its first contract with Immigration and



# Border Violence

... continued from previous page

another nation-state. Sergio Adrián Hernández Güereca and José Antonio Elena Rodríguez are two of six people killed on Mexican soil by agents located on the U.S. side of the border, establishing a disturbing precedent for agents to take the lives of whomever they want with impunity. Sergio Adrián Hernández Güereca was shot to death on June 7, 2010, while in Ciudad Juárez by Border Patrol Agent Jesus Mesa Jr. There have not been any criminal charges filed against Agent Mesa.

José Antonio Elena Rodríguez was fatally shot in the back 10 times through the border wall by Agent Lonnie Swartz on October 10, 2012. Elena Rodríguez was in his hometown of Nogales, Sonora, in Mexico. Swartz claimed that he was acting in self-defense, and yet had the opportunity to reload his weapon to continue shooting at the teenager, who was already dead. Swartz faced trial twice in Tucson, Ariz.; during the first trial, he was found not guilty of second-degree murder and faced a hung jury on the charges of voluntary and involuntary manslaughter. During the second trial, he was acquitted of involuntary manslaughter with a hung jury on voluntary manslaughter. The case did not go to trial a third time. Years after his murder, Elena Rodríguez's mother Araceli Rodríguez and grandmother Taide Zojo continue to seek justice.

The human rights abuses by the Border Patrol stem from the expanded militarization of the borderlands and the increasing use of detention. Torturous conditions in short-term facilities such as malnutrition, lack of wa-



Racism against Mexican-Americans clouds Texas history.

ness during transport back to the same hospital. He was pronounced dead at 11:48 p.m. A few months later, on May 19, 2019, Carlos Gregorio Hernández Vásquez, a 16-year-old who was also from Guatemala, died in South Texas at a Border Patrol station because he had the flu and was not given adequate medical attention even

crowded, medical care is insufficient, children die in custody, and pregnant women are mistreated and do not get adequate care. Now that we are in an era of a global pandemic that requires social distancing, frequent hand washing, and use of masks in order to stay and keep others safe, the Border Patrol has implemented the kind of rapid-fire deportation system President Donald Trump has long extolled as his approach to immigration enforcement. Before even being taken into a Border Patrol station and without any medical evaluation, migrants are expelled in an average time of 96 minutes. The Border Patrol deports about 85% of detainees, and criminalizes those who have prior deportations. The rhetoric of protecting borders from disease is once again part of the Border Patrol's public narrative, as it now bars even children from protections they once received. New immigration rules implemented on March 21, 2020, under the guise of the global health pandemic have led to the Border Patrol expelling and detaining over 10,000 Mexican and Central American asylum seekers without allowing them to exercise their legal right to seek refuge and asylum. Under the Trump administration, the Border Patrol still operates with unlimited and unchecked power, essentially functioning as a paramilitary organization continuously violating human and civil rights.

Amid COVID-19—which disproportionately impacts people of color—large-scale Black Lives Matter protests have erupted in the United States and globally to end state-sanctioned murder of Black people. As protests gained strength and Minneapolis police retreated, Trump tweeted: “when the looting starts, the shooting starts.” Later that day, a U.S. Customs and Border Protection Predator drone, frequently used for surveillance in the borderlands, flew over protesters in Minneapolis.

The Border Patrol is also aiding in the repression and violent murder of Black people in this country.

On May 31, CBP spokesperson Morgan announced via Twitter, “CBP is currently deploying officers, agents and aviation assets across the country at the request of our federal, state and local partners confronting the lawless actions of rioters.” By June 1, the Border Patrol was also present in Washington, D.C.; Buffalo; Chicago; Detroit; El Paso; Miami; and San Diego.

The Border Patrol continues to abuse its power without accountability. It continues to act in a way that dehumanizes and oppresses communities of color, reflecting its white supremacist roots. These are examples of why now, more than ever, it is time to dismantle the Border Patrol.

Dévora González is a field organizer with the School of the Americas Watch; she tweets @SOAWatch. Azadeh Shahshahani is legal and advocacy director with Project South and a past president of the National Lawyers Guild. She tweets @ashahshahani.

*Under the Trump administration, the Border Patrol still operates with unlimited and unchecked power, essentially functioning as a paramilitary organization continuously violating human and civil rights.*

ter, and lack of medical care, even imposed on pregnant women, are prevalent and have worsened under the Trump administration. From December 2018 to May 2019, five children have died in Border Patrol custody. Felipe Gómez Alonzo, an eight-year-old from Guatemala, died of Influenza type B on December 23, 2018, in Border Patrol custody. He was transported to a hospital in New Mexico where he was found to have a 103-degree fever. After being observed for 90 minutes, he went back to Border Patrol custody. By that evening, he was vomiting, nauseated, and lethargic and lost conscious-

though his fever was at 103 degrees. A video from the detention facility shows him on the floor writhing for at least 25 minutes. It shows him staggering to the toilet and then collapsing on the floor.

## Border Patrol, COVID-19, and Black Lives Matter Protests

The Border Patrol has made a practice of keeping people in inhumane conditions: water is unavailable, the food makes them sick, the cells are freezing and over-

## It Was Always Going to Be Customs & Border Protection

Portland was not the dress rehearsal.  
It is a play in acts though.

Anapra was the dress rehearsal.  
El Paso the stage.  
Eagle Pass, Welasco, San Ysidro, Tucson, Lordsburg.  
The border tour. The occupation.

It was always going to be CBP.  
We told you.  
We shouted as they chased us in the desert.  
We fought as they kicked the water out from in front of us.  
We died under unmarked vehicles.  
We told you.

Carlos Hernandez Vásquez knew it would be CBP.  
16 years old. A cell. The flu.  
It was always going to be CBP.

Unknown. Unknown. Unknown.  
“The man fled from agents across a Texas highway

and was hit by a car.  
No more details can be found at this time.”  
Unknown. Known.

Jakelin Amei Rosmery Caal Maquin.  
7 years old. Cardiac Arrest. “After being detained with her father in the New Mexico desert.”  
Home turned Hellscape.

2010-2020, a play in acts. At least 102 people died in as many encounters with CBP.  
We told you.  
We told you they were growing.  
We told you they didn't care about due process.  
We told you they would take us in the middle of the night.  
We told you we were disappearing.

We always knew.

—Sarah Silva, New Mexico



# Meeting the Moment

## *Mass uprisings contain seeds of radical transformation*

By J.J. Johnson

The strains of Sweet Honey and the Rock's tribute to Ella Baker, "Ella's song," ring continuously in my ear: "We who believe in freedom cannot rest until it comes."

One stanza goes: "The older I get the better I know that the secret of my going on/Is when the reins are in the hands of the young, who dare to run/against the storm."

I ran against the storm many years ago, but today's activists might be better equipped to handle the reins and meet the moment. When I was drafted in December 1965, my level of consciousness and knowledge about Vietnam was close to nil. Fortunately, curiosity overtook ignorance. In advanced training as a switchboard operator in a signal battalion, I joined a study group that included Dennis Mora and David Samas, who, along with me, would become known as the Fort Hood Three.

I was especially moved by the writings of Vietnam's Ho Chi Minh and of his understanding of our struggle. In the 1920s, while he lived in New York, among the meetings he attended were some with Black nationalist Marcus Garvey. He wrote, "American Negroes still endure atrocious moral and material sufferings, of which the most cruel and horrible is the custom of lynching."

After advanced training in Georgia, most of the study group members returned to Fort Hood. In June we received orders to ship out to Vietnam. While on 30-day leave prior to deployment, three of us—Dennis, who is Puerto Rican; Dave, who is of Italian and Lithuanian descent, and I—were joined at a New York City press conference by Student Non-Violent Coordination Committee's (SNCC) Stokely Carmichael (later Kwame Toure), the Congress of Racial Equality's (CORE) Lincoln Lynch, Pacifist legend A.J. Muste and peace leader Dave Dellinger. In a joint statement, we announced that we had made our decision: We would not participate in an illegal, immoral and unjust war.

We were soon arrested, court-martialed, and convicted for disobeying a lawful order. We spent 28 months in prison, mostly in Leavenworth, Kansas. At the time, I lacked the context to connect justice and equality in the African American community to self-determination in Vietnam. My limited vision also blurred the connection between our armed forces and local police departments.

During my incarceration, I hastened to fill the gaps in my knowledge and understanding. I devoured whatever crossed my path about the war, peace, and civil rights. It was not long before I understood that the war was a symptom of far deeper ills.

I re-examined incidents in my life that had lurked in the back of consciousness.

In 1963, my father a progressive trade unionist, asked me to attend the historic March on Washington with his union brothers and sisters. I declined, unconvinced of the importance my dad assigned to the march and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Less than a year later, Andrew Goodman, with whom I loaded trucks in an after-school job at UPS's Manhattan headquarters, shook my hand and informed me that he was leaving his part-time job to head to Mississippi. Our parting barely registered.

Three months later, my heart sank when I saw his photo with those of Michael Schwerner and James Chaney accompanied by the headline "Slain civil rights workers found." I kicked myself for having failed to acknowledge his courage and sacrifice while we were shaking hands. Later, whenever I heard Nina Simone's "Mississippi Goddam," Goodman, Chaney and Schwerner came aching to mind.

1968, my last year at Leavenworth, marked a major turning point. The antiwar movement was raging. And the rebellions in our nation's streets had reached the military. So great was antiwar sentiment that on March 31, 1968, President Lyndon Johnson, who had won a landslide victory in 1964, announced that he would not seek re-election. Dave, Dennis, and I cheered along with the overwhelming majority of the inmates. We felt we had a hand in removing the warmaker

***Today, the conjunction of an unprecedented public health crisis, the nation's worst economic crisis in generations, and continued police killings and abuse have sparked some of the widespread protests in our nation's history. More, the uprisings have spanned the globe.***

from the highest office in the land.

Four days later, that joy turned to sorrow with the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. By then my esteem for Dr. King knew no bounds. I had determined that no one more eloquently tied the war to the nation's domestic failings. His eloquence inspired me.

"I knew that I could never again raise my voice against the violence of the oppressed in the ghettos without having first spoken clearly to the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today—my own government," Dr. King declared at Riverside Church in New York City on April 4, 1967, a year to the day before his death.

He was excoriated for following his conscience. Some 168 major newspapers, including The New York Times and the Washington Post, joined the condemnation chorus. He was also denounced by civil



At June 30, 1966, Fort Hood Three press conference: (standing) Dave Dellinger and Stokely Carmichael, (seated in background) A.J. Muste, (at table) Staughton Lynd, Dennis Mora, J.J. Johnson and David Samas.  
Photo: Finer/Memorial University of Newfoundland

rights organizations, including the NAACP.

I was also lifted up at the time by Muhammad Ali, the 25-year-old world heavyweight champion. In the prime of his career, the champ, who had converted to the Muslim faith, refused induction. He was immediately stripped of his title and sentenced to five years in prison.

Ali asked, "Why should they ask me to put on a uniform and go 10,000 miles from home and drop bombs and bullets on brown people in Vietnam while so-called Negro people in Louisville are treated like dogs? If I thought the war was going to bring freedom and equality to 22 million of my people, they wouldn't have to draft me. I'd join tomorrow."

My act of conscience had been validated and vindicated by Dr. King and the

by athletes such as basketball legend Kareem Abdul Jabbar and the iconic Black power salutes of sprinters Tommie Smith and John Carlos.

Dissent and disobedience among GIs reached record numbers. Notre Dame fellow David Cortright reported in his book, *Soldiers in Revolt*, that by 1971, there were 17 AWOLs and seven desertions for every 100 soldiers. According to the Army's own statistics, between 1969 and 1972, there were 551 fragging incidents, resulting in 86 deaths and some 700 injuries. The resistance movement was the most widespread revolt in the history of our armed forces. Black soldiers played the leading role, and for that suffered the harshest punishment.

That disparity was reflected in the prison population. When we entered Leavenworth in late 1966, its population was 500. Two years later, it had swelled to 1,500, the majority African American.

When the Fort Hood Three returned to civilian life in October 1968, we were welcomed as heroes. But I soon learned that the antiwar movement I had romanticized looked different up close. Among its shortcomings in my mind was its failure to address the centrality of race and its interconnection with class and gender.

I worked with the National Black Anti-War Anti-Draft Union, spearheaded by Gwendolyn (Gwen) Patton, the first women president of Tuskegee University's student government and a leading member of SNCC. Gwen was one of the many unsung women leaders in the antiwar movement.

I eventually found my way to the labor movement. There I could earn a living and help build the movement of working people to radically transform the political and economic system. Social justice unions often rose to the challenge, but too often were swimming against a more conservative stream.

And too often, the left and progressive movements found ourselves playing defense rather than advancing a bolder people's agenda. Today, the conjunction of an unprecedented public health crisis, the nation's worst economic crisis in generations, and continued police abuse and killings

*continued on next page ...*



# Remembering the Fort Hood Three

*‘We will not be part of this unjust, immoral, and illegal war’*

By Derek Seidman

On June 30, 1966, dozens of people assembled in the basement auditorium of the Community Church in midtown Manhattan for a big announcement. Journalists and photographers were there, and so were key leaders of New York’s antiwar left, such as A.J. Muste and Dave Dellinger. Stokely Carmichael, the chairperson of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) who had recently begun to popularize the phrase “Black Power,” also showed up. All of them gathered to hear the words of three soldiers, Privates David Samas and Dennis Mora, and Private First Class James A. Johnson. The trio had been stationed at Fort Hood, Texas, and they had just been informed they were going to Vietnam. They were given a 30-day leave before they had to embark. The GIs convened the press conference to perform a bold act: they intended to refuse their orders to go fight.

By June 1966, the United States had already been entangled in Vietnam for close to two decades, but its military aggression had taken a turn toward major escalation when President Lyndon Johnson began to send hundreds of thousands of ground troops beginning in 1965. This was accompanied by the onset of a three-year

bombing campaign in the north. Antiwar protest grew almost right away, with two mass demonstrations in 1965. By mid-1966, it was clear to many that the war wasn’t going away, and antiwar organizers, mostly long-time pacifists, students, and old radicals, began to deepen their commitments and try to broaden their coalition to include new constituencies.

One of these constituencies was soldiers. Antiwar organizers in New York had consciously sought out refusers and veterans to speak at their events. The most famous antiwar veteran up to that

point was probably Donald Duncan, who served as a Green Beret in Vietnam. But civilian organizers saw military personnel mostly as moral symbols whose presence in the movement could help disarm hawkish, pro-war opponents who red-baited protesters and criticized them as being against the troops. The notion that the antiwar movement might actually organize soldiers, or that they could help soldiers organize themselves, was yet a faint idea. It would take the actions of the troops themselves, of GIs like Samas, Mora, and Johnson, to crack open the



U.S. soldier in Vietnam in 1966.

possibility for a GI movement.

The three GIs had prepared a statement to read to the assembled crowd in the church auditorium. “We have decided to take a stand against this war, which we consider immoral, illegal, and unjust,” they declared. They planned to report to the Oakland Army Terminal, “but under no circumstances” would they embark for Vietnam, even if their refusal resulted in courts-martial. They spoke not only for themselves. “We have been in the army long enough to know that we are not the only GIs who feel as we do. Large numbers of men in the service do not understand this war or are against it.” They explained how the soldiers around them became resigned to going to Vietnam. “No one wanted to go,” they said, “and more than that, there was no reason for anyone to go.”

They criticized U.S. support for the government and military of South Viet-

*[Their] revolt was an early indication of what happens when the military’s trust in their leaders dissolves.*

nam, and they questioned the entire purpose of the war itself. In the army, they said, “No one used the word ‘winning’ anymore because in Vietnam it has no meaning. Our officers just talk about five or ten more years of war with at least half-million of our boys thrown into the grinder.” The three young men agreed

*continued on page 22 ...*

## The Moment

*... continued from previous page*

have sparked some of the most widespread protests in our nation’s history. More, the uprisings have spanned the globe.

The protests remind us of the unpredictability of such uprisings. We never know what spark will ignite the fire. But we do know that the fire cannot be started without ongoing organizing. Much credit should be given to those who have spent decades on the frontlines, but we also can learn much from today’s young leaders and all who picked up the baton. I count among them teachers around the nation who have taken to the streets, including in Republican-led states, to demand smaller classes and better pay and conditions.

The rise of non-traditional unions and community-based workers’ organizations have helped to build bridges between traditional unions and communities of color.

“Black Lives Matter” would not have become today’s battle cry without the formation of the Movement for Black Lives, which got its start through the work of Alicia Garza, Patrice Cullors and Opal Tometi.

Groundwork for today’s protests also can be traced to Occupy Wall Street, which shone a light on economic inequal-

ity and global capitalism, as did the Fight for \$15, while also underscoring gender discrimination and racism.

Those in the struggle for climate and environmental justice—our indigenous sisters and brothers in the first place—have pointed the way toward healthy, sustainable communities that foster the rights of all in harmony with the earth.

Immigrant rights activists have exposed the racism and cruelty that underpins an immigration system that separates families and locks children in cages. Advocates advance a family-based system grounded in civil and human rights.

The women’s movement has made incalculable contributions by emphasizing how race, gender, class, and sexual orientation intersect. That movement has mounted the largest and most militant demonstrations against the current administration. And it has consistently reminded us of the connection between white heteropatriarchy and the menace of militarism.

The United States maintains nearly 800 military bases in more than 70 countries and territories in every continent on the globe. The U.S., with about 4.4% of the world’s population, accounts for 37% of the world’s military spending, which is roughly the amount of the next seven mil-

itary budgets combined. Our official defense budget stands at \$721.5 billion, but experts estimate that the total cost of war spending exceeds one trillion dollars.

We have militarized our southern border, our sporting events, our schools, and our police. Today’s marchers—overwhelmingly peaceful—have been met by armored personnel carriers and have been assaulted by heavily armed police, troops, and federal officers with an assortment of weapons. One can trace a direct line between post-Civil War slave patrols and the over-policing of our African-American communities.

The call to defund or drastically reduce police department budgets does not seem radical when we recall that in 1980 spending on criminal justice and cash welfare were roughly equal. Today spending on law and order is double that of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).

I’m encouraged by The Poor People’s Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival, led by the Revs. Liz Theoharis and William Barber, who follows in the footsteps of Dr. King. The campaign connects economic justice—the demand of the original 1968 campaign—to broader issues, including sexism, ableism, militarism, and racism in all its forms.

Today’s protests and demands have

called into question not just racist oppression but the entire political and economic system. Activists see that another world without permanent war, widespread poverty, rampant exploitation, and mass incarceration is possible.

We have reached a moment of reckoning. “Which side are you on?” the old union anthem asks. We cannot determine where today’s uprising will take us. But we do know that it needs our participation to succeed. During a pandemic, many of us for various reasons are not able to take to the streets. But that does not negate joining the fight.

Regardless of one’s attitude toward electoral politics and our two-party system, it would be foolish for anyone to argue that the coming election doesn’t matter. As scholar-activist Barbara Ransby has argued, the presidential election is about damage control, stating, “If (Joe) Biden’s nobody dream, Trump is a nightmare.”

The year I was drafted, Curtis Mayfield recorded the soul anthem, “People Get Ready.”

In it, he calls us to get on the train to liberation. History calls us today. Let’s get on board.

*J.J. Johnson is longtime activist and labor journalist and a member of Veterans For Peace Chapter 34, New York City.*



# Fort Hood Three

... continued from page 21

on one thing: "The war in Vietnam must be stopped." The time for talk was over. They ended their statement: "We want no part of a war of extermination. We oppose the criminal waste of American lives and resources. We refuse to go to Vietnam!"

The three GIs first met at Fort Gordon, Georgia, where they were stationed before they were reassigned to the 142nd Signal Battalion of the 2nd Armored Division at Fort Hood. They bonded over their shared critique of the war. They all had opposed the war before entering the army, but now, with shipment to Vietnam looming, the stakes were much higher.

All three came from working-class backgrounds, and they all had some college education. Mora was Puerto Rican, Samas was Lithuanian and Italian, and Johnson was African American. "We represent in our backgrounds a cross section of the Army and America," they said. Mora was from Spanish Harlem and was a member of the Du Bois Club, a youth group connected to the Communist Party. He had participated in protests against U.S. foreign policy in Vietnam, Guatemala, and Puerto Rico. A classmate described him as "a socialist who's interested in the Marxist way of thinking." Mora's links to the New York left proved helpful when the three troops decided to act on their consciences.

After being ordered to Vietnam, the soldiers decided together that they would refuse. During their leave they hashed out a strategy and reached out to a lawyer. With Mora's connections to the antiwar left, they sought out civilian allies. They contacted leaders of the Du Bois Club and the Fifth Avenue Vietnam Peace Parade Committee. Antiwar leaders Dave Dellinger and Fred Halstead met with the GIs, and together with famed pacifist A.J. Muste, they all agreed to use the Parade Committee, perhaps the most important antiwar coalition at the time, to mobilize support for the three. They also agreed to use their refusal as a call to organize more GIs against the war.

This was the beginning of a civilian-soldier alliance that would help sustain the wave of GI protest to come. The organizers in New York worked to mobilize broad, national support for the soldiers. They formed the Fort Hood Three Defense Committee and sent out fact sheets to their contacts across the nation. They lined up support for the GIs on the West Coast, and they reached out to luminaries like Carmichael.

It was opposition to the war that drove the three soldiers to act, but their critique

of racism and support for the civil rights movement were also major motivations. They were some of the earliest antiwar protesters to really connect opposition to the war abroad to the fight for racial equality at home. "We know that Negroes and Puerto Ricans are being drafted and end up in the worst of the fighting all out of proportion to their numbers in the population," they said at their press conference, "and we have firsthand knowledge that these are the ones who have been deprived of decent education and jobs at home." In a speech, Johnson discussed the "direct relationship between the peace movement and the civil rights movement," and he drew a connection between the Vietnamese and African American struggles. "The South Vietnamese are fighting for representation, like we ourselves," he wrote. "[T]he Negro in Vietnam is just

and swooped away to Fort Dix, N.J. Unable to give their speeches, members of their families stepped in. James Johnson's brother read his talk, and Dennis Mora's young wife read her husband's statement. Meanwhile, the army fretted over how to handle the detained GIs. Fort Dix Commanding General J.M. Hightower told the army's chief of staff that he had "sufficient evidence" to charge the three with "uttering disloyal statements with intent to cause disaffection and disloyalty among the civilian population and members of the military forces." He decided, however, to issue movement orders to the soldiers to leave for Saigon on July 13. This would be their last chance at avoiding punishment. "Should orders be disobeyed," Hightower wrote, "appropriate action will be taken."

The orders to ship out actually came



Family members and supporters of the Fort Hood Three demonstrate at Fort Dix.

helping to defeat what his Black brother is fighting for in the United States."

Johnson also highlighted the contradiction for Black soldiers who were asked to fight abroad while being denied equal rights at home. "When the Negro soldier returns, he still will not be able to ride in Mississippi or walk down a certain street in Alabama," he wrote. "His children will still receive an inferior education and he will still live in a ghetto. Although he bears the brunt of the war he will receive no benefits." Nor was it just these three GIs who were connecting the dots between racism and the war. Their act of protest occurred within months of Muhammad Ali's draft refusal and the rise of the Black Panthers, who connected colonialism abroad to racial oppression at home. Martin Luther King Jr. would soon speak out against the war. "We were taking the Black young men who had been crippled by our society," King would later declare, "and sending them eight thousand miles away to guarantee liberties in Southeast Asia which they had not found in southwest Georgia and East Harlem."

On July 7, 1966, the three GIs were once again scheduled to speak to supporters at the Community Church. Nearly 800 people turned out to the event. On their way there, however, Samas, Mora, and Johnson were stopped by the police

down on July 14, 1966. The young men were told they must go to Vietnam. They refused. In doing so, they became one of the very first examples of active-duty GI refusal during the Vietnam War, and certainly the most visible to date. They also became something more than just three soldiers. To the antiwar movement, they were now the "Fort Hood Three."

The Fort Hood Three were court-martialed in September of 1966. In defense of their refusal, the soldiers argued that the war in Vietnam was illegal. The military refused this argument, and all three were convicted for insubordination. Samas and Johnson each received five years in prison at Fort Leavenworth. Mora received three years. All appeals would fail, including one to the Supreme Court, though the army would later reduce Samas' and Johnson's sentence to three years.

The Fort Hood Three Defense Committee continued to mobilize support for the GIs after their conviction. They raised funds, spread awareness of the case, paid for newspaper ads, and circulated petitions. Sponsors of the defense committee included Tom Hayden, Stokely Carmichael, Harvey Swados, Noam Chomsky, and Floyd McKissick.

Some in the labor movement also rallied behind the soldiers. James Johnson's

father was a steward with the Retail, Wholesale, and Department Store Workers Union (RWDSU). District 65 of the AFL-CIO had a Peace Action Committee that mailed a leaflet to members with the headline: "Jimmy's Son Needs Your Help." The flyer explained that "Jimmy Johnson is a 65er" who "takes his job and his union seriously," and asked for readers to contribute to the GIs' defense fund and write to them with letters of support. Al Evanhoff, assistant vice president of District 65 of the RWDSU, put out a supportive statement. "As a trade unionist," he wrote, "long ago I learned the fact that an injury to one is an injury to all." Evanhoff criticized the war and pledged to form a defense committee for the Fort Hood Three.

This support from sections of the labor movement is worth noting, because it flies in the face of the conventional narrative that pits workers against the antiwar movement. While some union leaders and members were certainly pro-war, others opposed it. Major unions like the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), and powerful labor leaders like Walter Reuther criticized the war. Many locals and rank-and-file members were antiwar, and working-class people overall were more likely than the college-educated affluent to be against it. GI and veteran dissent would soon become one example of working-class antiwar protest to make a mark on history.

When the three soldiers were finally released after serving their time, the Hunter College Du Bois Club hosted a celebratory homecoming for them. It was called "Salute the Ft. Hood Three," and Pete Seeger, Ossie Davis, Dave Dellinger, and others attended. The GIs came out of prison, still, as supporters of the antiwar movement.

They also came out of prison to see a rising GI movement flourishing all around them. Hundreds of active-duty service members had joined the antiwar movement by the late 1960s. Some, like the Fort Hood Three, refused to go to Vietnam. Underground GI newspapers circulated throughout the military, and off-base coffeehouses were springing up around the nation. Antiwar soldiers marched, protested, petitioned, and formed their own groups to try to organize their fellow troops. Civilian support networks and legal defense organizations were aiding this rising tide of soldier dissent. And the GI movement had not yet reached its peak.

Little of this was true when David Samas, Dennis Mora, and James Johnson refused to ship to Vietnam on June 30, 1966. But a few years later, it was a reality. The Fort Hood Three set an example that others followed, and David Samas, Dennis Mora, and James Johnson emerged from their time in prison to see firsthand the GI movement that they helped to create.

*Derek Seidman is an assistant professor of history at D'Youville College in Buffalo, New York. He is currently writing a book on the history of soldier protest during the Vietnam War. To reach him, or to see a version of this article with citations, contact him at [seidmand@dyc.edu](mailto:seidmand@dyc.edu).*



The Fort Hood Three (L-R): Dennis Mora, David Samas, and James Johnson.



# Rhodesa Jones

... continued from page 24

could grow food. And it was like, well we were very, very poor. I mean, one winter was so heavy they dropped the cheese and cornmeal and all that stuff in by plane because we couldn't get out.

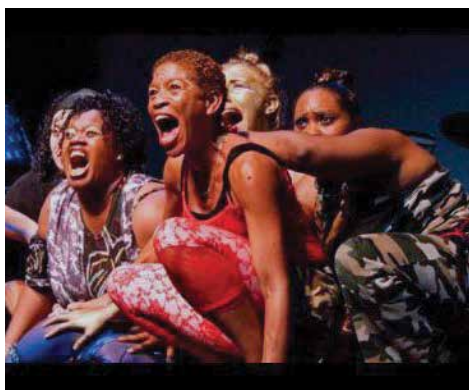
**DR:** Your brothers Bill and Steve and Gus told me about going out with a sled to find wooden packing crates and any other scrap wood to take home for firewood. They had socks on their hands because they didn't have gloves, and the white boys in Wayland would kid them about it. And your brothers would say, no, we're building a fort.

**RJ:** Yeah. Nobody in that part of New York was wealthy. Wayland was a poor hamlet. German and Italian immigrants. Even there black folks were the monkeys. We were the ones who weren't quite humans, so the other white boys could say all kinds of stuff. The other side of that was that when my sisters and I were like 12, 13 and 14, we moved into Wayland. My mother and father had decided that they were going to open a restaurant. And at night the fathers of kids I knew from the school would be knocking on the door downstairs, wanting to know if they could buy one of us girls. As if we were whores. And my father was beside himself. He knew these men. They had kids too. Yeah, that happened too, that happened.

I'm reminded of Toni Morrison saying that her grandmother told the grandfather, we have to leave here. We have to leave the South because the white boys are circling. She had beautiful young daughters and these guys would come and just sit and look at them. If you were

*They came up on my grandfather and they said, 'Look, nigga, if you value your life, you leave now.' And he asked, 'Can I go and say goodbye?' They said, 'No, you have to leave the state of Georgia now.'*

smart, you just got the hell out of there. You know? So it was very, very layered, because from another angle I'm so glad I grew up there. I was educated there. I mean, I write a great letter. I enjoy reading. I can add. I can subtract. I've read the classics, Victor Hugo, the Brontë sisters, Joseph Conrad, J.D. Salinger. I mean, that was a part of our learning. We were all studying this in school and my brothers and sisters and I loved it. When I moved to the city, I looked like a snob because I spoke well. I had a handle on language. And I could talk to white people truthfully, which was a whole thing. "You can talk to white people?" I had a white boyfriend. He worked in a soup kitchen and



had endless radical theories that made sense to me. That was you, Denny. You'd say you got all your best lines from me. This shaped me, moved me toward activism. I tell people my life has been very mythical. I feel like I was sent. I didn't go to art school. I didn't say, okay, I'm going to be an activist. My grandmother was a great storyteller.

Then Riley, you and I and my daughter Sandra woke during a snowy winter night with our apartment on fire. We made it out almost okay and left town, headed south and camped our way down to Central America and lived on a beach in Costa Rica. From there we came to San Francisco. California at that time was the enchanted state. My brother Azel moved out here and wrote a musical, Port Royal Sound, about the freeing of the first slaves in the Civil War. It's a musical. It all came out of who we were. It wasn't like Azel said "I'm going to be a great playwright." Azel was a Buddhist and he thought, how do I examine my reality through the lens of theater? And so we formed The Jones Company and did this musical about the freeing of the first slaves and the Civil War. And all of us were in it. There was money for the arts. I loved Isadora Duncan. She touched something in me, her early bearings as a citizen of the West Coast. I began to dance with Tumbleweed dance company. All of the other dancers were white girls who'd gone to good colleges. We toured all over the States and Europe. Then I was asked to go into the San Francisco jails and teach aerobics to incarcerated women.

I got in there and looked around and was like, what does incarceration have to do with rehabilitation? What does this jail have to do with saving the lives of women? But I kept going because I was curious, and I realized there were so many black and brown women arrested because of their relationships to men. I come from a family of 12 brothers and sisters, so I know something about Black men being incarcerated, but I had no idea there were so many women in lockdown. In most cases it was due simply to association with men. Being caught in the wrong place at the wrong time with the wrong guy. Women would just be taken along to jail. "Come on, bitch. You're going too, because you're in this house with him, that's why."

The realization I brought into the jails and all I could say to the women came from my own experience was that you have a right to a life. The women there just felt like they lost the contest. It was like, I'm not good. I got busted or I'm a junkie, or because I'm a junkie I'm a whore, or I'm a whore and I'm a mother. I

go out and turn tricks so my kids can have milk and cereal.

They were so down on themselves. I just knew instinctively that we all have a right to a life, and that had a lot to do with how I came up from that dirt road in upstate New York. I would ask the women what happened. Because I had a handle on literature and some sense of myself, and my grandmother, mother, and my father were all great storytellers, and I saw that these women had stories. I got the idea of these women acting out their predicaments, and once they started, I saw real passion, I felt real theater. That's how the Medea Project was formed.

To be down on yourself was a way to deal with the pain and to deal with the idea of being not counted. You could almost ignore the pain because you thought you were supposed to have it. I still struggle with that myself. I think that white supremacy affects all of us. Like if most people say you're no good, you're no good. You don't matter. I'm going to hang your brother. I'm gonna rape your sister and I don't even care if you tell. Who gives a shit? At the same time, what does that do to the white guy who's saying this? How entirely full of misery and hatred must he be? For people of color there's a lot of shucking and jiving that goes along with simply staying alive, like Stepin Fetchit, you know, you play that part. It may be degrading but it gives you a little space to move around. What does the white supremacist filled with righteous hatred do?

My daughter would say in street language, "I see you." I see you, I know you, I'll remember you. Right now I don't have the power, but I see what's going on. And then the people that are killed because they look at a cop eye to eye and go, yeah, I'm looking at you. Emmett Till. Emmett Till was just a kid who supposedly saw a pretty white lady and whistled. Later, we found out none of that happened. She lied, but they came into his grandparents' house and just took this kid away. And he was never seen alive again. But in the words of David Chappelle, nobody was ready for "what a fucking gangster his mother Mamie Till was!"

She demanded, "Leave the coffin open. I want them to see what they did to my baby." And Chappelle feels like that began the action of the civil rights movement. It's like because the whole world saw this 14-year-old boy who had been murdered, you know, just slaughtered.

Back to your question about how has civil rights influenced my life. Estella, my mother, was a woman who had lived without rights for so long and had lost her father to white supremacy and nevertheless, she would still say, "Y'all have rights, you know?"

My grandfather, Walden, was a brakeman on the Southern Railroad, just outside of Savannah. Grandpa Walden was coming home from work at two in the morning. Can you imagine he was a brakeman on the train? This was a real job. So he's walking through this area and there's only one house on the road. Two young white girls live there. They said a Black man, who they found later was a white man in blackface, looked in

the window at them, but the posse had gone out on horses with shotguns. They came up on my grandfather and they said, "Look, nigga, if you value your life, you leave now." And he asked, "Can I go and say goodbye?" They said, "No, you have to leave the state of Georgia now." And my grandfather left and didn't return for years and years and years. In the wake of that, my grandmother felt abandoned. She had nine children to raise on her own. My mother's dream of being a nurse ended; my mother had a father who had a regular job on the railroad so she could dream of being a nurse and all of a sudden, he's gone. Finally, he gets word to them but he's afraid to come back. So my grandmother had to raise nine children by herself. This is like the turn of the century. She would live and work on a plantation where life hadn't changed much from slavery. But if she saw a better job on another plantation, she'd tell the plantation owner she was leaving for a better job. The owners would say, no you're not. She'd say yes, I am. One owner beat my grandmother because she was leaving. My grandmother said, "Unless you kill me, I'm leaving here." He left my grandmother in a pile in the yard, but she left. The only freedom she had was that she



Rhodesa Jones with Denny Riley, 1970.

could leave so she did what she wanted. She was always looking for a better job. She had to feed her children, and also, she had that fury, she was furious.

She moved all over Georgia, ended up in Pavo where my mother met my father. My grandmother bought a shotgun and kept it loaded. She made a name for herself. "You're a crazy nigga, you know?" And she was like, "Yeah, I'm crazy. Step up on my yard and see how crazy I am." It must have been awful. My grandmother lost all of her teeth. She was big and black. She wasn't pretty and soft with golden skin and soft hair. She was a big, broad black woman who took care of her family. She was a midwife. She was a root worker. She did all these things to take care of that family of children and still lost some of them to smallpox. She was married five times. She was filled with grist. It sustains me to know this. How do they say it? I am standing on the shoulders of the generations who came before.

*Denny Riley is an Air Force veteran of our war in Vietnam, a writer, and a member of VFP Chapter 69 in San Francisco.*



# Rhodessa Jones: 'If You Don't See Color, You Don't See Me'

Rhodessa Jones is an actress, teacher, director, writer, and the founding director of the Medea Project, a performance workshop designed to achieve personal and social transformation with incarcerated women and women living with HIV. Her published works include *A Beginner's Guide to Community-Based Arts*. She was recently invited to be a Montgomery Fellow at Dartmouth College. Denny Riley interviewed her for Peace & Planet News.

By Denny Riley

**Denny Riley:** The term Black Lives Matter entered the lexicon a while ago, but now has come to the front. Many people and many corporations are changing attitudes and logos. Black Lives Matter is half of every news report. I know you were born in 1948 into less than affluent surroundings. I'd like to know what



kind of civil rights progress you've seen in your time.

**Rhodessa Jones:** The kind of progress I've seen is more reflected in my mother. She loved that she could vote. She didn't want to mail in her vote. She wanted to be at the polls. She wanted to stand among the people, as she would say. She'd tell us this, and then she would go into the whole, painful history of watching ... my mother was taken to a lynching when she was nine years old. She remembered being taken to a lynching of a family of seven brothers. This was in Georgia. She and her family were gathered up by the white folks, put on wagons. They took all the black folks who lived in that area, you know, to see the lynching. I remember Mama telling us something happened, something happened, and she saw seven brothers castrated. She saw the pregnant wife of one of the brothers begging for her husband's life. One of the white men stomped the baby out of this woman. My Mama was a nine-year-old girl and she said they weren't allowed to look away. The man had a shotgun pointed at them. They were forced to watch this, you know, and these were people she knew, neighbor

people begging for their lives. And she had to witness their murder as a way of telling us that we had no rights. We had no power. There's a great line from Margaret Walker's Harriet Tubman poem, where she writes, "Stand in the field Harriet; Stand alone and still; I am still the overseer, mad enough to kill. This is slavery Harriet, bend beneath the lash. This is slavery Harriet bow to poor white trash." And that's what my mother was living.

And then for her to come along in the sixties and be able to vote as well as to be able to file a claim, a complaint against an institution or our landlord. My mother was good at it. She sued people to demonstrate her rights. My mama had only a fourth-grade education but my brother Azel gave her a wonderful copy of Angela Davis' biography. She'd sit at the kitchen table underlining passages and mouthing some of the words.

Yet a whole lot hasn't changed at all. When we think about the death of George Floyd we see it woke the country to what has always been going on.

I love my country. I love America, even with the killings still going on. The police are murdering people right now. George Floyd died on the 25th of May and already the police are involved in four questionable deaths. And everybody can see it. I'm an activist, and I love all kinds of people. I've been blessed to have all types of friends and community. Right now, there are people that I love who I have to check. Such as one friend of mine, she told me that she didn't see color. A white woman. We're talking about all of what's going on and she goes, "Oh Rho, I love you so much I don't even see color." The world put the brakes on. I went, "Wait a minute, wait a minute." She goes, "I just love you Rho." I said, "If you don't see color you don't see me. You insult me if you tell me you don't see color. You come to my shows and you tell me you love it when I'm up there when I'm pouring it out, and you tell me you wish the show could go on forever. What do you think that show is? That's my color. That's part of being a



Augusta and Estella Jones, Rhodessa's parents. Photo: Property of Jones Family Foundation/Used with permission



Medea Project in performance

colored woman in the 21st century. A colored woman who has to find a way to hold it all together."

James Baldwin said, "To be black and conscious in America is to be in a constant state of rage."

We can't live like that. So we birthed the blues. We got rap. We got the walk. We got the talk. And it's all part of how we cope. How we live.

I am so grateful for Black Lives Matter. The flags are flying everywhere. It's too bad it had to come to this, but if we can embrace it, if we all can embrace Black Lives Matter, it can change all our lives. It's a shame that in this great country we have to say, Hey, y'all, black lives matter. And then you have a whole group of people saying, well, all lives matter. Of course, all lives matter, but why am I standing here screaming at the top of my lungs that black lives matter? Why? Let's examine this. Let's unpack this historical trauma. And that's what we're doing right now with Black Lives Matter.

Why are we at this place? We hear about the cops resigning because they can't use the choke hold. I hear this and it makes me want to disappear. I want to go live in Trinidad or Tobago, but I can't, as long as people gather and I can share with them our collective history so we can move the whole thing forward. The Black Lives Matter movement at least encourages us

to examine where we are.

**DR:** Could you describe the way the Jones family lived and your progress through to the point where you're known as a successful artist, awarded various honors including a U.S.A. Fellow and honorary doctorate in Fine Arts, a published playwright, and other tributes, still you are often pigeonholed as simply a Black artist. In the beginning few would have imagined your life taking this road.

**RJ:** I'm a migrant child. My mother and father were migrant workers. Actually, we all were. If your parents pick, you pick. At one point, my father had a crew of more than a hundred people. In 1948, the year I was born, Daddy set out to do this, because in America, if you could pull a crew together and get contracts from all up and down the Eastern states, you could make a living as a gypsy caravan. It was fantastic. That's one way to see it, to travel up and down the Eastern seaboard. But the winters were hard after we left Florida. We ended up on a dirt road in upstate New York. My parents wanted us to get an education and they knew we'd have to get off the migration. At that point, there were nine of us and we were poor. As Nikki Giovanni would say, "I didn't know I was so poor," We were kind of living on the outskirts of America, a black family snowed in on a dirt road. I loved even then the idea of being an outsider. I think part of my journey has been that I didn't know any better. I'm going to do this. I'm going to do that. My sister Flossie and I went with two white guys to the first Vietnam War moratorium in Washington. They were veterans. They served, as people say. We were in the streets. I tell people, when they ask me about protesting, that I went to the very first big one. They ask how'd I do that? I tell them it was the company I was keeping, the man I was involved with, you, Riley. Your brother was a Franciscan friar in D.C. and we stayed at the friary. Flossie was just along for the ride, but she had a ball. It was the beginning of a cultural revolution. But back to your question, the scenario you're creating. I had a baby. I was a mother before I was a woman. I had a baby at 16 and thank God my parents said, "You're not going to give this baby away." We had land and we

*continued on page 23 ...*

*The man had a shotgun pointed at them. They were forced to watch this, and these were people [my mother] knew, neighbor people begging for their lives. And she had to witness their murder as a way of telling us that we had no rights.*