

Protesting Police Violence: “Blacklivesmatter” And Visual and Performance Art in the Era of Extrajudicial Police Killings

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Introduction

This visual essay is an exploration of the art, performance, and visual iconography associated with the BlackLivesMatter social movement organization.[1]Here I examine art that is used to protest and draw awareness to extrajudicial violence and the “increasingly militarized systems of killer cops...in the United States of America.”[2]In this review, secondary themes of racism, dehumanization, racial profiling and political and economic injustice will also be highlighted.

Ultimately this work intertwines (and illustrates with art) stories of recent and historic episodes of state violence against unarmed black and brown citizens, and my goals with this project are several. First, I simply seek to organize, in one place, a record of visual protest against excessive policing. In particular, I am interested in what these images have to say about the use of state violence when compared and analyzed collectively. Second, via these images, I hope to explore the various ways they have been used to generate commentary and suggest explanations (as well as alternatives) to racism, police brutality, and a militarized culture within police departments. Within this second goal, I ask whose consciousness is being challenged, what social change is being sought, and how these images hope to accomplish this change. Third, I claim these images as part of the symbolic soul of the BlackLivesMatter social movement—and I explore the art directly within the movement as well as the art in the surrounding culture.[3]

I begin however with conceptions of social movement activism. So what do I mean by a social movement organization? Social scientists note that the term inspires considerable debate and the phrase has been used quite loosely in both academic and popular discourse. Despite this, I find T.V. Reed’s definition most useful: social movement organizations are “the unauthorized, unofficial, anti-institutional, collective action of ordinary citizens trying to change the world.”[4] In my claim that BlackLivesMatter is a movement of actors connected by a desire to force social change, I note that there are approximately two-dozen BlackLivesMatter chapters worldwide and there have been close to one thousand BlackLivesMatter demonstrations since the beginning of 2015. To further bolster my claim of social movement status, I turn to co-founder Alicia Garza, who states:

I created the hash tag #BlackLivesMatter with Patrisse Cullors and Opal Tometi, two of my sisters, as a call to action after the death of Travon Martin. But the death of Michael Brown and the aggressive policing in response to protesting his death moved the hash tag from social media to the streets. BlackLivesMatter is an ideological and political intervention in a world where Black lives are systematically and intentionally targeted for demise.[5] One core component of the BlackLivesMatter mobilization effort has been the attempt to bring public awareness to the extrajudicial killing of Blacks by police officers. According to the National Safety Council, statistics show that black males are 21 times more likely to be shot, maimed, or killed at the hands of police than any other racial group.[6] Further, in 2013, the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement released a study revealing that one Black person was murdered by police or vigilantes in an extrajudicial killing every 28 hours in the United States.[7] This has resulted in the frequent retweeting of the hash tag #1Every28 as part of the broader BlackLivesMatter movement. A movement which, as Treva Lindsey writes is a call to action “in which activists, artists, Black communities and scholars grapple with the white domestic terror lineage that extends from Emmett Till to recent victims of state violence.”[8]

The Art of the Movement and the Power of Art

While several scholars of race and social justice have begun to detail this emerging movement, it is “only a start in terms of what needs to happen to adequately address illegal actions by the police, and the institutional racism that runs rampant in the US criminal justice system.”[9] So stated, this essay is an exploration of one particular aspect of the movement—the exploration of how citizens and activist-artists have used art, performance, and visual iconography to protest and draw awareness to the aforementioned issues.

While none of the officials or figureheads within the movement has commissioned any of the works within this paper, some of the art is nonetheless the creation of movement members, and allies. Additionally, select movement leaders give support to the use and appropriation of “social justice imagery.” Please consider the writings of several movement members:

We are humbled by cultural workers, artists, and designers who expand and communicate our goals...they affirm Black folks’ contributions to this society, our humanity, and our resilience in the face of deadly oppression... We consider them allies.[10] We use the arts to address the issue of police officers killing unarmed black citizens without facing any consequence, and to awaken the humanity in people...[11] Indeed, artists—like all people—are affected by a range of circumstances and motives. At some points in their lives they are more dedicated to expressing their personal or aesthetic vision; at other times they are more interested in advancing a political position and/or supporting a political movement. To the extent their work is of importance to the movement (used by and/or reflective of the movement’s goals)—regardless of the artist’s own desires or motives—I refer to it as movement-art. Finally, It should be noted that I carried out a limited (yet ongoing) participant observation with select movement activists, and the implication given to me was that the “art of the movement” may date to the Civil rights era or exist as anything that reflects upon the injustice committed against, or works toward the empowerment of, Black Americans.[12]

But why is the art of a movement worthy of a scholarly analysis? Visual and performing arts are woven into the histories of many movements for social change and artists do more than document change. As these movement activists expressed to me, “art may help inform and shape social change.”[13] To this end, journalist Jenna Barnett writes of the art of the movement:

While statistics, tweets, marches, and articles can bolster and enliven movements, art brings in the endurance. The art surrounding the BlackLivesMatter movement...makes injustice a song that gets stuck in your head. Art makes murals out of obituaries, and hope out of statistics.[14]

Indeed, a number of scholars have examined art’s political power in the context of social movements, identifying various ways that art may be useful. First, these scholars suggest that social movements use art as a medium of expression for communicating with the larger society about issues that are important to the movement (such as ending police militarization, racially biased policing, etc.). Despite the fact that messages may not be understood by the public at large, or may be interpreted differently than how members intend, art nonetheless communicates that there is an active movement that opposes the status quo. As such, artwork marks a movement’s existence and helps to provide legitimacy to outside viewers.

Second, to the above point, art can help mobilize protest and affiliation. One way it does so is by stirring up emotions and producing “moral shocks”[15] (or images that are too hard to ignore, for example Ti-Rock Moore’s sculpture of Michael Brown, below), thus motivating potential recruits and sympathizers to action. As Jennifer Miles and Laura Dawson write:

While academics study [issues such as] inequality in ways that provide statistical as well as narrative understanding of causes and consequences,[artists] deepen our understanding of that inequality by giving powerful voice to its effects. By speaking with naked emotions such as rage, helplessness, frustration, and hope,[art] delivers a perspective of inequality many individuals may never have encountered were it not for the[artist] baring their soul.[16]

In this way, the arts are able to trigger emotions in the bystander public and may be more effective in doing so than political speech alone. Political scientist Charles Hersch states:

If imagination is central to political education, then artworks are ideal teachers...artworks can do something that works of philosophy and theory do only secondarily: engage the emotions...It is because of their effect on the feelings that artworks have the ability to alter our perceptions more effectively than a political tract alone.[17]

Third, all movements need and use symbols to label and lend coherence to the various networks that make up the movement. Additionally, art is useful in this way because it can help create a feeling of group unity and shared meaning and value.[18] These collective identities are often expressed in cultural materials-such as names (e.g., BlackLivesMatter), and narrative memes (e.g., Hands Up Don't Shoot, I Can't Breathe), as well symbols, verbal styles, rituals, clothing, and so on-which carry with them the real and imagined relations of friendship, kinship, and organizational membership. Further to this end, a shared identity reduces the feelings of isolation, atomistic thinking, and fear that limits or prevents movement activism.

Finally, art communicates to the public the nature of the movement's ethos and direction for change. Art is an essential and fundamental element in shaping political ideas and political action, "for art shapes ideas of heroes and villains, of planning a more desirable society, [and] of forms of action that will or will not achieve the goals[movement activists] seek.[19]

As of this writing, it is not yet possible to know how (or if) these images inspired movement recruitment and activism. Nor do I know how members of the public outside of the movement have broadly received these images. Specifically, I do not know how (or again if) these images and performances actually operate to produce new meanings and feelings of support (certainly, future research is needed in this area). What I can say is that movement activists feel said images are valuable in terms of encouraging questioning about the status quo and the nature of police and minority relations. Therefore, what I can do is detail how these artists and activists intend their art to operate. For now, it is best to think of this work as "in progress" and conceptual regarding initial attempts to document the protestive cultural expressions against police violence by members and supporters of the BlackLivesMatter social movement.

The Movement's Spark: The Death of Michael Brown

Before I turn to an examination of the art that I, and various members, associate with this movement, please allow me to identify more concretely its mass formation. On August 9, 2014, Michael Brown, an unarmed African American teenager, was shot to death by Ferguson Missouri police officer David Wilson. The shooting followed Wilson's initial contact with Brown for alleged jaywalking. After a reported verbal and physical confrontation, officer Wilson fired ten shots at Michael Brown, striking him six times.[20] The controversial shooting death of Brown resulted in public outrage and calls for a national conversation about discriminatory policing, police brutality, and a culture of militarization within police departments.

Brown's death was a galvanizing force for activists in part because the aftermath of his death was so public (his body was left in the street for four hours after his shooting and was widely photographed). In the artwork presented below, Ti-Rock Moore relives the shock of seeing Brown's dead body in her art installation piece, "Confronting Truths: Wake Up." Here, Moore presents a life-size sculptural rendering of a lifeless Brown lying facedown behind police tape. Moore, who is white, marks her identity as the starting point of her work and has been quoted as saying, "Honestly and frankly, I explore white privilege through my acute awareness of the unearned advantage my white skin holds." [21] With this work she seeks to mark herself as an ally to the black community and notes that this is her attempt to participate in social activism by challenging white racism and the general public's casual acceptance of police violence against ethnic minorities. She continues:

Art has always been a platform for addressing difficult truths. Sometimes it is only through abject imagery that truths are revealed...It's risky to make art about black suffering when I'm white, but I'm in a delicate position to push forward these truths... too many white Americans [avoid] the truth...The installation overtly reflects on Brown's brutal murder, an acknowledgment of the event that ignited the modern-day civil rights movement in the United States. It is the result of my desire to mark the tragedy as one of great historical significance, commemorate this young man, and call attention to the racial injustices that remain so devastatingly relevant today. I wanted to be sensitive to the family members before I presented this work so I sought and received Brown's mother's approval.[22]



“Confronting Truths: Wake Up” by Ti-Rock Moore (2015).

Notably, Brown’s death also came in the midst of a series of high-profile cases wherein white Americans fatally shot unarmed African Americans. Most prominently, the shooting of Brown followed the death of 17-year-old Jordan Davis, a black teenager who was shot in his car by Michael Dunn, a 47-year-old who killed Davis over the loud “thug music” emanating from his car.[23] Additionally, Brown’s death followed the murder of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin who was killed by George Zimmerman, a neighborhood watchman who shot Martin after initiating a physical fight with Martin. His killer was acquitted of second-degree murder and manslaughter.[24] Further still, Brown followed the death of Eric Garner who died after NYPD officer Daniel Pantaleo placed him in an illegal chokehold. The incident was recorded on video and the death was ruled a homicide by the medical examiner. Despite this, a grand jury decided not to indict Pantaleo, which sparked a wave of protests inspired by Garner's last words, “I can’t breathe.”[25]

Another phase of protests erupted across the country after a grand jury decided not to charge Ferguson police officer Darren Wilson for Brown’s death. In the city of Ferguson, protests were largely peaceful until an aggressive and militarized police response infuriated many marchers. In fact, Missouri Governor Jay Nixon said that the police were “over-militarized” and that by “rolling up[in] heavily armored vehicles and pointing guns at folks made it impossible to have a dialogue.”[26] Thus, what started out as a demonstration *against* police brutality and racism became a demonstration *of* police brutality. Shocked by the actions of the police in Ferguson, social justice groups across the country joined together in a grassroots effort (now broadly known as the BlackLivesMatterMovement) to draw attention to police violence, staging “die-in” protests in public spaces in an effort to spread awareness of extrajudicial police killings and aggressive police tactics.



“Police Shooting” by Cleon Peterson (2015).

Recently, the movement has grown larger with additional and well-publicized incidents of questionable, and in many cases illegal, incidents of police violence (e.g., the killing of Tamir Rice[27], John Crawford III[28], Walter Scott[29], and the brutalization of Freddy Grey[30]), and artists have taken note.

For example, Cleon Peterson (whose drawing is pictured above) was inspired and angered by the growing number of persons “shot down” by the police. He took to his Instagram account, writing: “I have a little drawing printed in the New York Times in response to another tragic police shooting. If you are part of any social order that finds itself on the wrong side of the police you know this shits been going down forever ...just now they are getting caught. The law being above the law has got to stop.”[31]

Similarly, artist Nicholas Herrera creates work that he says “holds up a mirror to[a] socially troubled land.”[32] The carving below, a work in progress, depicts two police officers pointing their handguns at a teenager. The teen represents a boy named Victor Villapando, who was shot and killed by the police in the summer of 2014. Ultimately while his death appears to be the result of “suicide by cop,” Herrera, nonetheless argues:

While kids need to think about what they're doing, because it's not a game, I also want police officers to think before they shoot.... Because people who are different based on ethnicity or attitude[are often viewed] as crazy by the police[and are more likely to be abused].[33]



“Police Shooting” (Work in Progress) by Nicholas Herrera (2015).

These revelations of police violence have also inspired a chain of protests not seen since the Civil Rights Movement. Moving beyond Ferguson, the movement has found expression in dozens of cities as activists have marched onto highways to disrupt traffic; linked arms across railroad tracks to stop trains; sat down in urban intersections; delayed sporting events; temporarily occupied shopping malls, major retail stores, police departments, and city halls; and interrupted presidential campaign speeches.

Activists have concluded en masse that violence against Blacks is a systemic problem that should be confronted through the disruption of work, commuter travel, commerce, and other circuits of the daily functioning of US society. Indeed we are witnessing the dawn of a new movement and it is time for us to take stock. I choose to do so through the artistic images that, as Treva Lindsey stated link, “the terror lineage from Emmett Till to Michael Brown and other recent victims of state violence.”[34]

The Historical Roots (and Visual Antecedents) of the Movement, or History Repeating

As scholars of art and activism, we must consider a history that stretches back to the 1960s to understand today’s events. While the police killing of Michael Brown and the Ferguson protests were “sparks” that ignited a fire of Black protest, the fuel for the fire was stoked in a decades-long backlash against the Black revolt of the 1960s. In 1968, a federal commission pointed to institutional racism as the explanation for the explosion of Black rebellions and riots in cities across the country. The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders charged that the country faced a “system of apartheid” in its cities and famously concluded, “Our nation is moving toward two societies—one Black and one White—separate and unequal.”[35] But as Khury Petersen-Smith writes, many of the structural gains of the era of civil rights and Black power have come under attack and have been rolled back recently.

Among these[roll-backs] is the racial re-segregation of the country. This has meant a reversal on one of the key initiatives of the civil rights movement: the desegregation of schools. In 2011, 40 percent of Black students attended what radical education activist Jonathan Kozol calls “apartheid schools,” whose students of color comprise a majority of 90 percent or greater. This figure is up from 35 percent in 1991. Affirmative action in hiring and higher education—an institutional remedy to structural discrimination and another key gain of the movement in the 1960s—continues to suffer defeats. The latest of these came in April of last year when the Supreme Court upheld a ban on the practice in Michigan’s public universities. Between 2006—when the ban was passed—and 2012, African American enrollment at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor plummeted by 33 percent while overall student enrollment increased by 10 percent.[36]

Beyond these institutional factors, I should also note that major facets and protections of the Voting Rights Act[37] have been gutted and the Fair Housing Act has not been enforced as it should be[38] which disproportionately affect racial minorities. Further, the project of dismantling and demonizing welfare has a profound influence on recent Black mobilization.[39] While the virtual elimination of welfare has had a disproportionate and disastrous impact on poor Black people, it has also been devastating for poor White people, who actually comprise the majority of welfare recipients.[40] Yet, welfare reform has been based on the caricaturizing of Black women as “welfare queens”[41] and on black men as “lazy thugs.”[42]

This in turn has led to a societal dehumanization of and cultural belief in the inherent “otherness” of various subaltern populations.[43] Combine this with historical antecedents that have militarized the police in weapon and attitude (due to the war on drugs), and we have created a decades-long war on the poor and minority populations where crime was believed to reside.[44] Finally, it is also worth stating that that protestive gains made by activists against the policies of police aggression (i.e., race-based profiling and militarization) was broadly undone by the terrorist attacks of 9/11.

A mass challenge to rampant police killing of Black people emerged in New York City in the late 1990s...These protests made an impact. In 1999, 59 percent of Americans said they believed that police used racial profiling, and 81 percent thought that the practice was wrong.[Yet] this trajectory was dramatically halted in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terror attacks. The NYPD...became the most popular police force in the country overnight. With the launching of its War on Terror, the United States rehabilitated the legitimacy of racial profiling with a vengeance, targeting Arabs and Muslims with impunity. The effect was a reinvigoration of racist policing against Arabs, Muslims, and South Asians, as well as against Blacks and Latinos. It was also in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks that Washington took the opportunity to arm local police departments with billions of dollars worth of military grade weaponry—a program whose bitter fruits were on full display in Ferguson. [45]



Mash-up between a detail of the painting “Selma” (1965) by Barbara Pennington and photograph (photographer unknown) (2014) of the Ferguson Protests.

Because of these social and cultural factors, research consistently shows that minorities are more likely than whites to view law enforcement with suspicion and distrust—and data show that whites hold the police in higher regard than do minorities.[46] Minorities frequently report that the police disproportionately single them out because of their race or ethnicity.

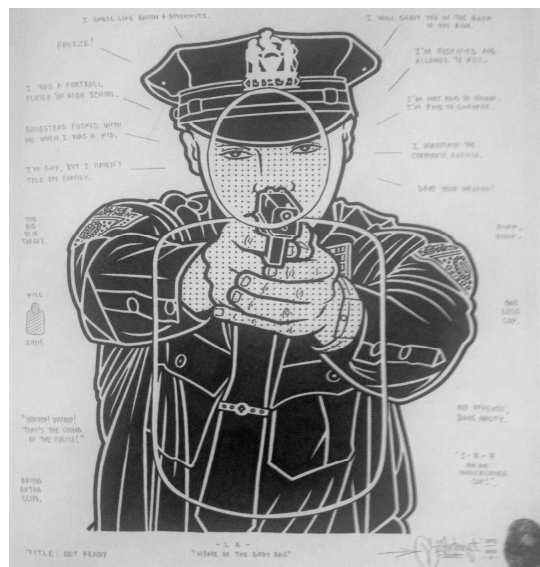
In turn, racial and ethnic minority populations are also more likely to be viewed by police as lacking lawfulness. [47][48]



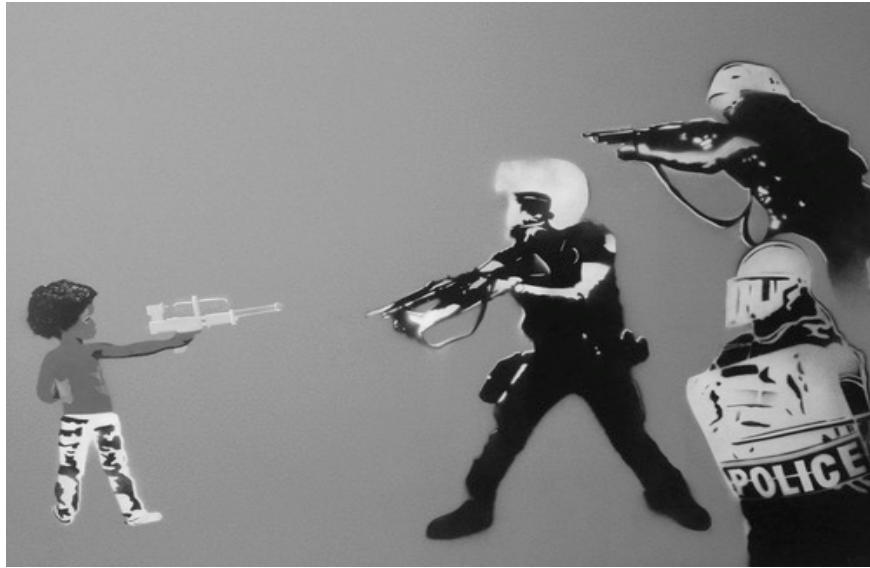
“¡ YaBasta! Unite to End Police Brutality” by the People’s Painters (1973)

To express this graphically, please consider the images above and below. In the first image, the mural *Unite to End Police Brutality*, was painted by student activists as a reply to an incident of perceived racial profiling and brutality by police officers against two Puerto Rican students on the college campus of Livingston, NJ. The mural survived three days before it was defaced and painted over. Yet, the effort of painting the mural, according to its artists, Eva Cockcroft, John Weber, and James Cockcroft, was successful in solidifying student groups to rally against racism and brutality on campus.[49]

More contemporary works representing suspicion and distrust of the police include: “Get Ready” (2013) by famed graffiti writer/artist Mike Giant and “Don’t Shoot” (2015) by Mike Lroy. In “Get Ready,” Giant alters a shooting-range target by turning it into a white police officer with his weapon drawn. The work is confrontational and creates a feeling of unease as the viewer is forced to imagine “shooting down” a police officer. However, this forced unease is purposive as Giant uses his art to “flip” perspectives and remind the viewer that young men of color are often viewed as targets and routinely shot down as “criminal offenders.”[50][51] In a telling 2015 example of this, the North Miami Beach police department was found to be using mug shots of Black men for sniper practice at a firing range.[52] Obviously this revelation came at a sensitive time with relations between police and African Americans nationally being strained as a result of the highly publicized killings of unarmed Black citizens at the hands of white officers.



“Get Ready” by Mike Giant (2013).



“Don’t Shoot” by Mike Lroy (2015).

In another image that similarly startles, the artist Lroy depicts three police officers in riot gear confronting (responding with disproportionate force to) a black child with a water gun. Of the image he writes:

While many white people have the privilege of ignoring racial disparities and the killing of unarmed black men, this is a reality for countless black communities around the U.S....The aim of my piece “Don’t Shoot” is twofold. For those who have had the privilege of ignoring these gross injustices, I hope to startle, shock, and interrupt your reality. By visually representing the militarization of police through a painting, one cannot keep scrolling through a timeline or find another news station to watch; I will not allow this reality to escape without stirring emotion and provoking reflection. My second aim is to empower black individuals who are feeling angry, forgotten, and demonized by the mainstream narrative. Art is a positive outlet for expression, emotion, and activism. When viewing my piece, I challenge you to reflect on your identity and engage in meaningful, critical, and genuine dialogue with others about the social and political *causes* that have led to actions like the one depicted in “Don’t Shoot.”[53]

These works are designed in part to challenge the ease with which persons of color are seen and treated as “dangerous creatures,” necessitating aggressive social control. And yet they do mirror current reality. For instance, during the protests in Ferguson, journalists captured numerous images of police officers pointing rifles at peacefully assembled protesters and persons going about their daily affairs.



“Arms Raised, Ferguson” by Whitney Curtis (2014).

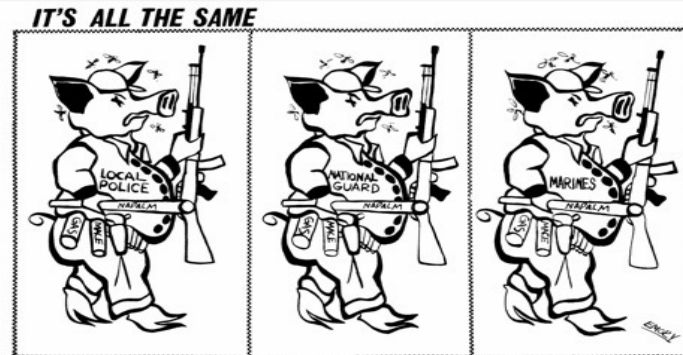
Other images and videos taken in Ferguson captured officers walking in the street yelling at citizens, "I'll fucking kill you," and "Bring it, all you fucking animals! Bring it!"[54] Scholars of history know that Black people have often been linked to animals and other beasts of the non-human realm.[55][56] For instance, noted scholar Henry Louis Gates writes that turn-of-the-century America was particularly flooded with "images of black people devoid of reason, simian or satanic in appearance, and slothful, lustful or lascivious in nature." [57] And he and other scholars continue to note that that this historical legacy has contemporary social ramifications:

Social psychologists [for example] have found that a 'black-animal association influences the extent to which people condone and justify violence against Black people'...[and in Ferguson] we need only look to the transcripts of the grand jury trial of officer Wilson to see the effects of this phenomenon. Officer Wilson [justified his shooting of Brown] saying he was scared for his life describing 18-year-old Michael Brown as a cross between a demon and Hulk Hogan.[58]

To this, scholar Dexter Thomas writes:

Watching foreign news treatment of Michael Brown is particularly illuminating. In Japan, newscasters call him "Brown-san", using the honorific suffix "-san" out of respect. In Mexican coverage, he's referred to as a "joven", in Brazil, a "jovem", in Taiwan, a "xiaonian" - all words for a "young man". In other words, he is treated as a person. But in the US, we are warned that Brown... was quite tall (just as tall as his killer), and a bit overweight (this part makes him scary)... Any facade of humanity that Brown might have had has been stripped away, all the better to show us the terrifying monster within. In his testimony, Officer Darren Wilson, did say of the victim that "it look[ed] like a demon". That is, not only was Brown a 'demon', but an 'it.' [59]

In the end, "Black people are not *people*," Blacks are apparently nothing more than fantasy creatures, or "demons, savages, comic book characters." [60] Indeed, the use of animals in word and image to dehumanize others has a long history in relation to race and policing—and in another instance of flipping this perspective, Emory Douglas (the official artist of the Black Panther Party) is famed for creating the legendary (and somewhat notorious) icon of police as "pigs." Or in the words of activist Bobby Seale, an image of anyone who became "fat on power" and acted "low down and dirty" or "swine-like" in their abuse of power.[61]



"It's all the Same" by Emory Douglas (C. 1970).

Indeed, Douglas's use of the icon of "pig" was three-fold. First, it was used to dehumanize agents of power in the minds of those who had experienced surveillance, harassment, and brutality at the hands of the police. The goal was to empower said victims to eradicate their fear of the police and stand up for their rights to exist free of police harassment—for as Douglas said, "We are powerless or we are not." [62] Second, the image of the armed pig was also a challenge to the legitimacy of the police as an armed militancy who had the legal authority to carry weapons and act as though they were soldiers at war—especially when the contemporary idea of public policing was to protect civil rights and citizen sovereignty.[63] Third, the pig was used more directly as a system of checks and balances to local power. In fact, Douglas tells a story of a local cop who was notorious for harassing people in the community. When Douglas drew him as a pig, he included his badge number in the drawing. As Ross writes:

This worked to warn the community of these bad cops but also to expose the police and let them know that people were watching them. After this, Douglas's pig character took on a life of its own...these anthropomorphic pig illustrations became the iconic figure of "The Pig" still used in anti-police and revolutionary rhetoric, music, and art today.[64]

Another work that makes use of Emory Douglas's notion of "fatness" or largeness as a symbolic rendering of the abuse of power is Chris Burden's LAPD uniforms. Here, Burden's work is an edition of thirty Los Angeles Police Department uniforms designed to fit a seven foot four inch officer.



"L.A.P.D. Uniforms" by Chris Burden (1992).

The uniforms, fully equipped with regulation gun and badge are installed with the outstretched sleeve of one uniform almost touching the next, circling viewers. In this manner, persons are engulfed by the physical presence of these symbols of authority and power. Burden proposed this project soon after the Los Angeles riots of 1992, which were precipitated by the acquittal of Los Angeles police officers accused of unnecessarily beating Rodney King—an event captured on videotape and played repeatedly on news stations throughout the world. While *L.A.P.D. Uniforms* offers commentary on a specific event in recent American history, it also provides a vehicle for more general questioning about the nature of police authority.

Indeed, this critical artistic projection of the LAPD is important to understanding our contemporary situation. As Hayes writes:

In the 60s it was the iron-fisted police Chief Bill Parker who built the LAPD into a white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant apparatus of organized male chauvinism that, in judgment-call situations, had a license to kill. Significantly, the introduction of Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) teams in 1966 set in motion the increasing militarization of the LA police force....Taking over as police commissar in 1978, Gates continued and expanded the essential Parker philosophy of 'Give no slack and take no shit from anyone. Confront and command. Control the streets at all times. Always be aggressive. Stop crimes before they happen. Seek them out. Shake them down. Make that arrest. Never admit that the department has done anything wrong.' As LA's cultural, racial, and class transformation occurred after the 1960s, the LAPD's code of (mis)conduct took on an increasingly militaristic, racist, and repressive character...and became the model for policing across the US. It is against this background that we need to view the present and mounting incidents of cop brutality and murder of urban black and brown residents throughout the USA.[65]

Moving from Burden's symbolic commentary of police violence, I turn to the *Trophy Collection* series by Carl Pope. Using police incident reports, Pope creates actual trophies that "commemorate" the killing of Black men in police encounters and in police custody. In these works, Pope engraves the name of the officer accused as well as the name of the citizen killed, and then "awards" the police department and the particular officer for the action of killing minority citizens. Ultimately, Pope is using shaming techniques and making strong and critical commentary on what he perceives as the inherent flaw of racial-based policing and an abuse of power, namely: it turns police work into a dehumanizing activity and a "hunting sport." [66]



Detail of “Trophy Collection.” The description reads: “First Place to Officer...for the Police action Killing of...” by Carl Pope (1992).

In connecting this idea of racially based policing to an act of dehumanization, I note a 2015 report on the Ferguson Police Department by the Department of Justice. Here the DOJ found racial bias and evidence of racially based policing. Among evidence the investigation found was racist email correspondence between employees of Ferguson’s justice system, which joked that the abortion of Black children was a “means of crime control.”[67] These attitudes translated into a disproportionate amount of stops, searches and arrests targeting the city’s Black community, the report said. More concretely, although African-Americans make up 67 percent of Ferguson’s population, they accounted for 92 percent of arrests from 2012 to 2014.[68]

These findings have also influenced the debate on a national level. For example, New York’s “stop & frisk” (an institutionalized practice in which police officers may stop and question a pedestrian, then frisk them for weapons and other contraband) disproportionately targets minorities. [69] Over the last decade the number of people who were stopped and interrogated by the NYPD had increased by more than 600 percent - the majority of them were black and Hispanic. In fact, in 2011 the number of times African Americans were stopped was greater than the actual number of African Americans who lived in the entire city. [70]

Beyond being racially biased policy, it has also been shown to be ineffective in controlling crime. While violent crime in New York did drop by 24 percent between 2002 - when the stop and frisk policy was introduced - and 2010, bigger decreases were recorded in cities without the policy; in Los Angeles it was down by 58 percent during the same period, in Dallas by 46 percent and in Baltimore by 32 percent. Further in NYC, while it led to millions of stops, there has only been a conviction rate of three percent. [71] Ultimately, the policy has as Libero Della Piana, a senior organizer at Alliance for a Just Society, writes:

Created aggressive law enforcement, exacerbated by racist thinking and increasing militarization [that thinks of itself] as a system of hammers... so when people keep getting pounded into the dirt, it’s not a surprise... If we can remove one of these elements... racialized encounters or militarization... then you also reduce the incidence of these small things becoming killings. [72]

Finally, before moving on to the visual imagery produced in the Brown and Ferguson era I wish to identify the case of Amadou Diallo. In February 1999, four plain-clothed police officers approached New York resident Amadou Diallo on his doorstep because he matched the description of a serial rapist. When the Guinean immigrant reached for his wallet to identify himself, because he felt his English would be poorly understood (or because he believed he was being robbed by the un-uniformed men), the four officers responded by firing 41 bullets at him, hitting him 19 times. The officers claimed they loudly identified themselves as NYPD officers and that Diallo ran up the outside steps toward his apartment house doorway as they approached, ignoring their orders to stop and “show his hands.”[73]

However, the post-shooting investigation found no weapons on Diallo's body, only a black rectangular wallet. Three of the officers had been involved in shootings before, which is unusual in a department where more than 90 percent of all officers never fire their weapons in the line of duty.[74] All four officers were charged with second-degree murder, and all were later acquitted at trial. His death and subsequent acquittal of the officers, sparked protests over police brutality and racial profiling in New York City’s poor, working class neighborhoods.



“Amadou Diallo” by Malcah Zeldis, (2002) and protestors carrying a painted door depicting Diallo killing, photo by AP/Wide World Photos (2000).

Here, two works depict Diallo at his door while being gunned down. In Zeldis’s work on the left, tiny windows in the building show neighbors going about their daily activities as the tragedy unfolds. Further, in her work, Diallo’s body also assumes a cruciform pose and suggests the death of a martyr (in this case, due to excessive and violent policing actions). Likewise, the image on the right is a folk art piece created and displayed outside the courthouse where the officers’ trial took place. In this photographic display, the image becomes particularly powerful, as the painted door resembles a gurney or a stretcher on which a dead body is being carried away. At the time of Diallo’s killing, these artworks had the goal of critiquing and condemning not only police excess but also the associated societal policies (stop and frisk, racial profiling, the war on drugs, etc.) that helped encourage such violence.

Ultimately these artworks and activist-artists are charged with the responsibility of helping to identify actions that will lead to change. So what then do these works, and the social commentary within, suggest? By and large, the social and artistic observations speak to the need to fix distortions in thinking regarding the constructed (and largely false) dramas of crime and race—for the problem of crime, and its attributions to racial minorities, is smaller than society makes it out to be. Further these works also call out the weaponized and warrior police forces that are trained to be “trigger happy” and who view crime and potential criminal actors as enemies that need to be obliterated. Unfortunately, these earlier calls for demilitarization have been largely ignored institutionally, and similar messages of activism and change are repeated in the artistic mediums created since the death of Michael Brown.

Protesting Police and Social Brutality: Art since Brown



“Makeshift Michael Brown Memorial” Photo by Author (2014)

One of the more potent and lasting images of Brown's death was the makeshift memorial crafted after his shooting. The memorial was a simple collection of candles, flowers, notes and other mementos left at the site where Brown died. Ultimately this memorial serves three functions. First, it is a sign of remembrance; a place intended to preserve the memory of a person taken too early (Brown was 18 years old when he was killed). Second, it is a place of sorrow and collective suffering. In their *seven functions of art*, de Botton and Armstrong indicate that memorial sites such as this serve as a place that do not deny us our troubles. They write:

It doesn't tell us to cheer up. It tells us that sorrow is written into the contract of life...many sad things become worse because we feel we are alone in our suffering...We need help finding honor in some of our worst experiences, and art is there to lend them a social expression.[75]

Third, it is also a site of performance and cultural competition [76]—this is to say that Michael Brown's place of death has become a living monument to resiliency and has become a contested public place for what should be remembered and what others want forgotten. To this end the memorial has been destroyed or dismantled several times. In September 2014, the memorial was set on fire prompting hundreds of local supporters to take to the streets in protest. Police said the fire could have been started accidentally as the memorial contained candles, but area residents reported that they had smelled gasoline and believed the fire was intentional. The rebuilt memorial was then run over with a car on the night of December 25, 2014. By the next morning, supporters who saw social media photos of the damaged memorial had gathered to repair it. They said the car had intentionally hit the memorial. When asked if the vandalism would be investigated, a Missouri police spokesman reportedly called the memorial "a pile of trash" and said no investigation of the incident was planned.[77]. Indeed, it is important to highlight how the rebuilding of the memorial conveys a powerful message, and how sites of tragedy can be transformed into sites of cultural and educational significance—in this case, the refusal to let the mark of violence fade into history until community suffering has eased and better police-community relations have been realized.



The permanent Michael Brown memorial—a plaque of a dove stamped in concrete on the sidewalk adjacent to where he died photos by Whitney Curtis (2014).

Moving to another level of analysis, the Brown memorial and the “Names” performance piece below are similar to the Holocaust memorial “yadvashem” (meaning, a place specifically to memorialize) which conveys the idea of establishing a national repository for the names of victims who have no one to carry their name after death. In part, the goal of both the Brown memorial and the “Names” piece (discussed below) is to name and remember those killed in police shootings. Currently there is no national database that records police-citizen shootings and current statistics are considered flawed and largely incomplete because killings are self-reported by law enforcement. Further not all police departments participate so the database undercounts the actual number of deaths. Additionally, the numbers are not audited after they are submitted to the FBI and the statistics on “justifiable” homicides have conflicted with independent measures of fatalities at the hands of police.[78]. Given this fact, there is no reliable forum from which to review racial and ethnic realities (and disparities) in police related shootings—this is also part of the larger concerns mirrored by the “Names” performance.



Keith Wallace “Call us by our Names” (2014).

In 2014, Philadelphia artist Keith Wallace staged a performance in front of Robert Indiana's iconic *LOVE* sculpture (which itself had been adopted as a symbol of 1960s countercultural love-ins and peace protests).[79] Here he lay as a dead man with a bullet ridden bloody shirt. His decision to position himself in front of the *LOVE* sculpture highlights the contradictory juxtaposition of love, peace, and murder. Further, by being at the feet of the iconic sculpture, he guaranteed that the performance piece would be viewed by vacationers, travelers, and selfie-takers. Of these latter groups, Davis writes:

Some were too eager to snap a picture with LOVE to be bothered with Wallace's statement, willfully ignoring the protest—and unintentionally reinforcing its message about how the reality of police brutality is often ignored by society. As Wallace reported, One of the most hurtful things[was when] a group of friends wanted to take a picture, and one guy said, 'I don't want to be a part of this,' and their friend said 'What's the big deal? He's already dead.' The people who were assisting me said one girl stepped over the body to get closer to the statue to take a picture, and the wind blew at that moment and wrapped the caution tape around her foot.[She had] no reverence for, no acknowledgement of, what's right in front of her.[80]

In a second aspect of the piece, Wallace had associates stand nearby holding a sign that read "Call Us By Our Names" –a reference, Wallace said, in a statement distributed to observers, to how the media and authorities distort the reality of police violence against people of color: “Pay attention as ‘teen’ becomes ‘man,’ ‘community’ becomes ‘mob,’ and ‘murder’ becomes ‘alleged shooting.’ CALL US BY OUR NAMES!!! We are Michael Brown, Trayvon Martin...Eric Garner... AmadouDiallo...”

Hands Up, Don't Shoot

In this penultimate section, the popular artistic and protest meme of “Hands Up, Don't Shoot” is examined. This has become an indelible image in people's mind for “hands up” mirrors the belief (supported by numerous eyewitness testimonies) that Michael Brown, an unarmed 18-year-old African-American, with hands raised in surrender was nonetheless killed by a white police officer.[81] Brown's final moments were adopted as a symbol of injustice: placards depicting two hands, palms out; hands-raised T-shirts; mass hand-raising at demonstrations; and a chant heard at protests that goes, “I've got my hands on my head, please don't shoot me dead.” While a St. Louis County grand jury ultimately concluded that it lacked probable cause to believe that officer Darren Wilson was criminally liable for Brown's death, it has since been revealed that St. Louis County District Attorney Bob McCulloch was aware that several witnesses were lying under oath (allowing supportive testimony to officer Wilson's version of events) and that he allowed them to testify before the grand jury anyway. This further fueled the “Hands Up” meme as a call for justice. [82]



Banner and Protest Meme, Ferguson Missouri (2014) and
 “Hands Up, Don’t Shoot” By Eric Drooker (2014).

In addition to these perceptions of injustice, the artist Eric Drooker (above right) drew inspiration for his painting from the media images of armed, combative postures the police took against protesters in Ferguson. After the fatal shooting of Michael Brown, police met protestors in full body armor. As Apuzzo from the New York Times writes, “viewers witnessed a sniper riding an armored tank like vehicle. [They] saw police point assault rifles at unarmed protesters and witnessed them fire tear gas into crowds.”[83] Additionally:

When the protesters refused to retreat from the streets, threw firebombs or walked too close to a police officer, the response was swift and unrelenting: tear gas and rubber bullets. To the rest of the world, the images of explosions, billowing tear gas and armored vehicles made this city look as if it belonged in a chaos-stricken corner of Eastern Europe, not in the heart of America. [84]

In response to these images, Drooker writes, “the painting is a Dantean depiction of silhouettes raising their arms in the ‘hands up, don’t shoot’ position through a miasma of tear gas while the headlights of a police vehicle burn in the background like the eyes of a ‘wild animal.’”[85] Drooker goes on to state that his work mirrors the concerns of many and argues that while the police need to regain the trust of the local community, the deployment of military equipment and vehicles sends a conflicting message.

Additional work that plays with this iconic gesture includes art by Hank Willis Thomas and the community art/activism of Damon Davis. I begin first with the art of Thomas. In 2014, Thomas posted a picture of one of his more recent works to instagram with the hash tag #hands up don’t shoot. Here, Thomas created a bronze sculpture titled *Raise Up* (2013) that depicts a row of heads and arms raised in the hands-up “don’t shoot” gesture.



“Raise Up” by Hank Willis Thomas (2013).

Raise Up was completed before Michael Brown was shot and was inspired by South African apartheid-era photos. However, since Brown, the sculpture has gathered new layers of meaning, changing it into a symbol of contemporary mass resistance and a symbol of Black power and Black pride.[86] Thomas himself has stated that the image is one of resistance, but is open to the viewer, “and the hands may be symbolic of a church gathering, a prayer circle, or a protest rally.”[87]

To conclude this section, I present the work of Damon Davis, an artist from St. Louis, Missouri who created the *All Hands on Deck* street art project within the context of protesting police violence. The project was initiated and installed in the lead-up to the St. Louis County grand jury decision not to indict Officer Wilson in the death of Michael Brown. Further, the project was inspired by Missouri Governor Jay Nixon’s decision to call in National Guard troops to police protesters. In response many local shop fronts boarded up their windows, leaving blank canvases upon which to make art.[88]

All Hands on Deck involved photographing the hands of local community activists involved in organizing the protests against police violence and militarization, then reproducing their hands in large scale and pasting the images onto the boarded up shops.



Artist Damon Davis putting up images from his
“All Hands on Deck” Project, Ferguson, Missouri (2014).

Davis states:

The hands you see are images I have captured of people who have shaped and upheld this movement.... around the growing movement against police violence and impunity in the US[as well as] being a form of African-American artistic expression in giving voice to struggles for freedom and liberation.... Further, I want to let my neighbors know they were loved and not alone and that we can stand together.[89]

Ultimately, Davis reminds us that the problem of police militarization and violence “is a problem that is going to take everyone to fix. It is all hands on deck.”[90].

Conclusion

In this work I collected and analyzed art that calls attention to police violence in American society. In particular, my goals were: (1) to organize, in one place, a record of visual protest against excessive policing for the purpose of collectively reading these images for what they say about the use of state violence; (2) to explore the various ways these images have been used to generate commentary and suggest explanations (as well as alternatives) to police violence; and (3) to explore the “who, how, and what” of BlackLivesMatter through the images, performances, and iconography that have become associated with the movement.

I first reiterate what BlackLivesMatter is and what my “mode of entry” was into the movement. While BlackLivesMatter started as a rallying cry and a digital tool to question police violence and militarization, it has since grown into a movement of thousands of citizens working to make real change in the area of police accountability. And though there are numerous ways to study this movement, I chose to investigate it through the art created within the movement as well as via the art appropriated from associated protestive cultures and the broader Civil Rights Movement.

But again, why is art worthy of investigation? As Jesse Clarke, editor of the journal *Race, Poverty and the Environment*, writes:

Art is an essential element in building the movements for social change.... From the civil rights movement in the United States to the antiapartheid struggle in Africa...art has been used as a symbol to frame the message, to attract resources, to communicate information and to foster emotions. [91]

Further, according to sociologist Jacqueline Adams, the art of a social movement helps communicate a coherent identity, mark membership, and cement commitment to the cause.[92]. Finally, McGarvey, notes that art is a “catalyst for change as it shapes the dreams, aspirations, and problems of people, inspiring them to work with activist/organizers to develop their collective authority and ability to build their community.”[93] This said, what is the collective message of the art of the BlackLivesMatter movement, and how are these images being used?

Art as Protest and Reformation

Most notably, the art within this paper clearly expresses a sense of anger and disgust at the fact that the shooting of unarmed persons by police appears routine. At a collective level, the art highlights inequities of justice (both real and perceived) and shows the mistrust and suspicion that minority communities have traditionally held of law enforcement. Unfortunately, it also shows that little has been done over the last several decades to improve police-community relations.



“Checkmate: Series I Prototype” by Yuko Suga (2015).

For example, Yuko Suga’s work *Checkmate* depicts a chess set with the police “at war” with community activists. In this particular work of art, bullet holes are added to the chessboard as new incidences of police violence become public. Symbolically, these bullet wounds represent acts that further fray the foundation of community and represent realities that make it more difficult for members of either side to move towards one another in peace-making. In this way, Suga like all the artists within this paper, challenge the normality of police violence and make it a matter of concern to all who view these art pieces. In related fashion, these works also call out the militarized police presence that dominates American society as well as the mandate to declare war against crime (and the poor and minority populations where crime is believed to reside).

Bridging the above, the critical observations issued by the art within this paper too highlight the largely exaggerated attributions of crime as well as the social and cultural attitudes the police seem to have toward particular citizens. This is mirrored in the words of Cassandra Morrison, a former police officer and current advocate for police reform. She writes:

It’s almost as though police are socialized to be cynical about civilians.... We are taught to almost dehumanize citizens...It just got to the point where it’s, like, they’re a piece of shit. We don’t care if you raped a baby or were speeding in traffic—everybody’s a piece of shit.[94]

These works also remind us in a critical and reflexive way that the police are also victims of these social arrangements and policies of militarized policing. To reiterate the words of sociologist Roy, “We can’t look at policing and policing functions without looking at the total society... the men and women in blue[are also victims] of politicians who convinced... citizens...of the need for draconian protections.”[95].

But, beyond calling out police violence and militarization as a social problem, these works offer few solutions. It is important to remember however that the movement is still emerging and that it is in the initial stages of formulating strategies of protest and identifying models and policies of reform. Thus, it may be a bit unfair to critique the movement’s art for failing to issue a full field of policy recommendations. Yet, there are exceptions: first, there is a perception that police citizen interactions (specifically police-minority relations) need reform. While the art does not and cannot suggest the specific reform that is required, research suggests a model of community policing: a strategy that encourages officers to embed themselves and get to know the actual people in the communities they serve. For as Gilbert Najar, a police training expert, notes “otherwise, the people the cops approach and arrest in the community are usually strangers. Officers approach people in the community with all their fears and biases and prejudices.”[96]

Additionally, a second powerful form of art associated with the BlackLivesMatter movement, is the visual and performative art that seeks to refocus societal attention to naming and remembering those killed by the police—as well as art that demands greater public transparency on such killings (and highlights the reality that no national database on police-citizen killings exists for critical review and study). As Jeffrey Fagan, a law professor at Columbia University writes, “law-enforcement experts long have lamented the lack of information about killings by police. When cops are killed, there is a very careful account and there’s a national database.... Why not the other side of the ledger?”[97] Indeed, police can use data about killings to improve tactics and examine the decisions made by police and their supervisors that led to shootings. Further, the numbers of officer-involved killings can be a red flag about problems inside a police department and can be an aid to rooting out poor leadership and problems with accountability.

Finally, while these are not reformation themes suggested by the art, I feel it necessary to note other strategies of change as rooted in the academic literature. These include: mandating that all officers use body cameras (for increased accountability); that specialized units, including for instance SWAT and riot teams, clearly document and justify their activities; that departments establish committees (with citizen and scholarly oversight) that develop new policies for responding to minority and underclass populations like the chronically homeless or mentally ill; and channel the documentation and review of police misconduct through citizen review boards.[98][99][100]

Suggestions for Future Research

In closing, this work is a small review of the art created around the issue of extrajudicial police killings—and it suggests the continued power of the visual image to explore and contextualize social concerns. But there is more in this particular realm that can and should be studied for its social and graphic power. These potential future paths of study include: (1) the role of fashion, and in particular the political, ethnic, and class meaning associated with the wearing of the “hoodie” (i.e., how wearing the hood has become a symbol associated with the shooting of Trayvon Martin); (2) the role of citizens and professional and publicized amateur athletes wearing “I can’t breathe” shirts as a performative and protective gesture in the wake of a grand jury’s decision not to indict a New York police officer whose chokehold led to the death of an unarmed Black man, Eric Garner; (3) the effigies and attempts to discredit and criminalize the victims of police shootings, and (4) the more recent movement to remove confederate imagery from local and state government agencies. Perhaps further research and further proliferation of these critical images will hasten needed change in police behavior, militarization, and in the way racial and ethnic minorities are treated by these social and legal systems of social control. For now, however, these images make clear that equal protection under the law does not exist for all Americans.



“Atlanta Prison Farm” by Sever (2013)

Notes

1. A social movement organization (SMO) is a formally organized component of a social movement – but a SMO may only make up a part of a particular social movement. For instance, the organization BlackLivesMatters advocates for the end of police brutality. But BlackLivesMatter is not the only group to campaign for this; there are numerous other groups actively engaged toward this end (e.g., Campaign Zero, Hands Up United, All Hands United, the NAACP, and Occupy). But what should we call this new social movement? Despite the fact that BlackLivesMatter is but a part of the larger whole that works to combat the dehumanization of the underclass, as well as work against anti-Black racism and state violence in American society, I feel that its name should classify the larger movement. Because of its broad name recognition, strong social media competence, and ability to organize mass protest, I advocate that BlackLivesMatter be the rallying cry and name of this contemporary social justice movement.
2. Floyd Hayes III, “War Against the People: Killer Cops and Community Terrorism,” *Critical Sociology*, first published online before print on June 8, 2015 as doi: 10.1177/0896920515589725, (2015),1.
3. View the movement’s website at: <http://blacklivesmatter.com/>.
4. T.V. Reed, *The Art of Protest: Culture and Activism from the Civil Rights Movement to the Streets of Seattle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), xiii.
5. Alicia Garza, “A Herstory of the #BlackLivesMatter Social Movement by Alicia Garza” *The Feminist Wire*, October 7, 2014, accessed July 22, 2015, <http://www.thefeministwire.com/2014/10/blacklivesmatter-2/>.
6. National Safety Council, *Injury Facts* (National Safety Council; 1 edition March 30, 2012).
7. Malcolm X GrassrootsMovement, *Operation Ghetto Storm*, 2012, accessed July 22, 2015, <https://mxgm.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Operation-Ghetto-Storm.pdf>
8. Treva Lindsey, “Post-Ferguson: A ‘Herstorical’ Approach to Black Violability,” *Feminist Studies* 41(1) (2015), 233.
9. David G. Embrick, “Two Nations, Revisited: The Lynching of Black and Brown Bodies, Police Brutality, and Racial Control in ‘Post-Racial’ Amerikkka,” *Critical Sociology*, first published online before print, June 26, 2015 as doi:10.1177/0896920515591950, (2015), 2.

10. Alicia Garza, "A Herstory of the #BlackLivesMatter Social Movement by Alicia Garza," *The Feminist Wire*, October 7, 2014, accessed July 22, 2015, <http://www.thefeministwire.com/2014/10/blacklivesmatter-2/>.
11. AshokaJegroo, "New Collective Injects Performance Art Into Black Lives Mitter In New York," *Waging Nonviolence: People Powered News & Analysis*, March 11, 2015, accessed July 28, 2015, <http://wagingnonviolence.org/2015/03/new-collective-injects-performance-art-black-lives-matter-new-york/>
12. Personal communication with various community activists in Ferguson and St. Louis Missouri, (2014-2015).
13. Personal communication, BlackLivesMatter Movement Activist. Name withheld upon request. While this activist was a protester "in the streets" and is one on social media, he is also a student-athlete at a regional university. He is concerned about his name being revealed and having his coaches find out. The fear is that he will be stripped of his scholarship by a staff that will view him as a "troublemaker" and not a "team player."
14. Jenna Barnett, "10 Artists of the Black Lives Matter Movement," *Soujourners*, April, 2015, accessed July 23, 2015, <https://sojo.net/magazine/april-2015/10-artists-black-lives-matter-movement>.
15. James M. Jasper, "Emotions and Social Movements: Twenty Years of Theory and Research," *Annual Review of Sociology*, 37 (2015), 285-303.
16. Jennifer Miles and Laura Dawson, "The Art of Social Justice," *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations*, 34 (2012), 2.
17. Charles Hersch, *Democratic Artworks* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998),7
18. James M Jasper. *Art of Moral Protest*, (Chicago, IL:University of Chicago Press, 1999).
19. Murry Edelman, *Art to Politics: How Artistic Creations Shape Political Conceptions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 6.
20. For a detailed report of the shooting of Michael Brown, please read: Jake Halpern, "The Cop" *The New Yorker*, August 10, 2015, accessed, August 10, 2015, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/08/10/the-cop>.
21. Scott Indrisek, "Ti-Rock Moore On White Privilege, Michael Brown, and Her Controversial Chicago Exhibition," *Blouinartinfo*, July 15, 2015, accessed July 15, 2015, <http://www.blouinartinfo.com/news/story/1199162/ti-rock-moore-on-white-privilege-michael-brown-and-her#>
22. Ibid.
23. Juia Dahl, "'Loud Music' Shooter Michael Dunn Gets Life in Prison." *CBS News*, Oct 17, 2014, accessed December 12, 2014, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/michael-dunn-loud-music-shooter-gets-life-in-prison/>.
24. AnnelieSchmittel and Jimmy Sanderson, "Talking About Trayvon in 140 Characters: Exploring NFL Players' Tweets About the George Zimmerman Verdict," *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*, 39(4)332-345 (2015).
25. Dana Ford, Greg Botelho and Ben Brumfield, "Protests erupt in wake of chokehold death decision." *CNN*. December 4, 2014, accessed December 30, 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/2014/12/04/justice/new-york-grand-jury-chokehold/>.
26. Leigh Ann Caldwell, "Ferguson police were 'aggressive,' a critical Missouri governor says," August 18, 2014, accessed July 29, 2015, <http://www.cnn.com/2014/08/17/politics/missouri-governor-nixon-ferguson/>.
27. Tamir Rice was a 12-year-old Cleveland resident who was shot and killed by a rookie police officer. The officer shot Tamir after responding to reports of a person waving a gun. A 911 caller told police that the person was probably a child and that the gun was "probably fake," but that information was not relayed to the rookie officer. The officer fired two shots from the passenger side of the vehicle, before the car came to a halt within two seconds of arriving on the scene. In the aftermath of the shooting, it was reported that the officer, in his previous job as a policeman had been deemed an emotionally unstable recruit and unfit for duty.
28. Crawford was a 22-year-old African-American man shot to death in a Walmart store near Dayton, Ohio, while holding a toy BB gun. Crawford picked up the un-packaged BB/pellet air rifle inside the store's sporting goods section and continued shopping. Another customer, called 911 about a man (Crawford) carrying a weapon in the store. Crawford's death was captured by the store's security video camera. Crawford was talking on his cell-phone while holding the BB/pellet air rifle, when he was killed by police officers responding to the 911 call. The video appears to show that the officers fired immediately without giving any verbal commands and without giving Crawford any time to drop the toy. Further, the video suggests that Crawford had not even noticed the officers' presence.
29. Walter Scott was a middle aged black man, who was fatally shot by a white North Charleston police officer following a daytime traffic stop for a non-functioning brake light. Dash cam video from that stop shows the

two men talking before Scott gets out of the car and runs (it is believed for fear of being arrested for negligent child support payments). The officer gives chase running out of range of the dash cam. However, a video captured on a bystander's cell phone shows that the officer raises his gun and fires eight times, killing Scott, who was unarmed. Moments after the shooting, the officer reports on his radio: "Shots fired and the subject is down. He took my taser." The video then shows the officer drop an object (which appears to be the taser) near the body.

30. Freddie Grey was a 25-year-old Black man arrested by the Baltimore police who later died from injuries sustained while in their custody. Authorities can't say if there was a particularly good reason why police arrested Gray. According to the city, an officer made eye contact with Gray, and he took off running, so they pursued him. After chasing him down they found him in possession of what they alleged was an illegal switchblade, so they arrested him (city officials have since stated that the knife was in fact legal and that running from the police is not necessarily a crime). While being transported in a police van, Gray fell into a coma and later died. His death was ascribed to injuries to his spinal cord (records show that he had three fractured vertebrae and a crushed voice box). How the injury happened remains unknown, but it has been suggested that the possibility of a "rough ride"—an unsanctioned practice where a handcuffed prisoner is placed without a seatbelt in an erratically driven vehicle—was a contributing factor. Protests were organized after Gray's death became public knowledge, and spontaneous protests started after the funeral service, which included both peaceful acts of civil disobedience as well as prolonged episodes of civil unrest, hooliganism, and rioting.
31. Cleon Petterson, "A police shooting," @cleonpetterson, *Instagram*, April 18, 2015, accessed July 30, 2015, <https://instagram.com/cleonpetterson/?hl=en>.
32. John Burnett, "Jesus In A Lowrider: El Rito's Santero Carves Saints In Modern Clothing," *NPR*, July 18, 2015, accessed July 30, 2015, <http://www.npr.org/2015/07/18/423911417/jesus-in-a-lowrider-el-ritos-santero-carves-saints-in-modern-clothing>.
33. Smithsonian American Art Museum, "Meet the Artist: Nicholas Herrera," americanart.si.edu, December 3, 2012, accessed July 30, 2015, <http://americanart.si.edu/multimedia/video/meet/herrera/>.
34. Treva Lindsey, "Post-Ferguson: A 'Herstorical' Approach to Black Viability," *Feminist Studies* 41(1) (2015), 233.
35. Khury Petersen-Smith, "Black Lives Matter: A new movement takes shape." *International Socialist Review*, Summer 2015, accessed July 30, 2015, <http://isreview.org/issue/96/black-lives-matter>.
36. Ibid.
37. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 put states with a history of discriminatory voting practices on perpetual "probation" from the US Justice Department. In rough terms, the law required states to submit any changes in their electoral law to the Justice Department for preclearance to make sure that the changes didn't infringe on minority voting rights. Before 1965, states and municipalities could simply change their rules often disenfranchising minority voters. In 2013, the Supreme Court ruled that the preclearance requirement of the Voting Rights Act no longer applied. In the wake of the Court's decision, states were able to move forward with dramatic changes to voting and election law, including measures that had been previously blocked as discriminatory under the preclearance process. New voting legislation crafted since the ruling has been shown to disproportionately disenfranchise minority voters. See: Tomas Lopez, "'Shelby County': One Year Later," *Brennan Center for Justice*, June 14, 2014, accessed August 18, 2015, <http://www.brennancenter.org/analysis/shelby-county-one-year-later>.
38. Adopted in 1968, the Fair Housing Act says that it is illegal to "refuse to sell or rent... or to refuse to negotiate for the sale or rental of, or otherwise make unavailable or deny, a dwelling to any person because of race." Prior to the act, zoning laws and other housing restrictions functioned unfairly to exclude minorities from certain neighborhoods without any sufficient justification for their exclusion. In 2015, four U.S. Supreme court justices voted against key elements of the act, stating that even if data suggests that governmental housing practices have discriminatory effects (meaning the creation of racially segregated housing) — such practices would nonetheless be legal *if* it could not be proved to be the result of discriminatory intent. While the fair housing act survived a 5-4 decision, the narrow opinion suggests a tough fight ahead for civil-rights laws. See: Ira Glass, "512: House Rules," *This American Life*, November 11, 2013, accessed August 18, 2015, <http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/512/transcript>.

39. William J. Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy*, (Chicago, Ill: University Of Chicago Press, 2012).
40. William J. Wilson, *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor* (Chicago, Ill: University Of Chicago Press, 1997).
41. Herbert Gans, *The War Against The Poor: The Underclass and Anti-Poverty Policy*, (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1996).
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