

BLACK & BLUE

THE BRUISING OF BLACK AMERICA (AN ANALYSIS OF POLICE OVERREACH)

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INTRODUCTION

Nearly a full decade ago, I was heading home late one Saturday night from my uncle's home in Boynton Beach, Florida. After a full day that involved family fellowship and valuable time spent with friends and family, I was ready to retire for the evening. The drive back to my Boca Raton home typically took between 25-35 minutes, depending on traffic and other environmental conditions, and I had been well-accustomed to taking the Interstate 95 south to Boca Raton, then Palmetto Park Road west to my home near the Everglades.

Everything seemed normal as I began my trek west to where I lived, but then suddenly, without warning, flashing lights appeared behind me. It was the police. At the time, I was in between car ownership, so my uncle let me borrow his 1995 BMW (which had no air conditioning—a cardinal sin in South Florida, but I digress) for the time being. As a reference, Boca Raton tends to lean more along the affluent, retirement-oriented side of Floridian society, meaning that demographics tended to be more white than anything.

As he approached my car, I noticed that the officer assigned to this encounter, after flashing a light and noticing my afro, gently placed his hand on his weapon. That was peculiar to me. He went through the basic procedure—"license and registration, please," which I—being raised by two conscious Black parents—immediately obliged. He took my information, evaluated it, then returned it to me, then asking me where I was headed this time of night. Here is the part where this encounter could have either gone well or not. My driver's license has my address on it. I had no obligation to answer a question that my identification already provided.

But I wasn't stupid. Long story short, I was pulled over because of a "messed-up taillight," which, after checking, was a complete crock. I was a Black man driving a BMW through an affluent part of town after midnight, and that, according to some, suggested that I either didn't

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belong there or was up to no good. Despite this troubling experience, I know for a fact that, based on what we've all witnessed in the last few years, it could have ended much, much worse than simply being "let go with a warning." In this day and age, there was a real chance that I could have been killed that night, meaning that you, the reader, would not be reading this right now.

This is a result of an ongoing culturally-based epidemic that has gone untreated in the United States of America for the last few centuries—the specter of police brutality and overreach. At first glance, one might think that police brutality is a rare occurrence that arises when a “few bad apples” in any respective police department lose their temper and go too far in their physical or mental treatment of citizens and/or suspected perpetrators in the street.

In reality, police brutality is defined as “the use of excessive physical assault or verbal assault during police procedures, such as apprehending or interrogating a suspect. Deadly force is not always excessive force. However, when deadly force exceeds the force that is necessary to create a safe environment, it is considered police brutality.”¹ The World Health Organization classifies police brutality as “the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation.”²

In this analysis, we will discuss the following three relevant topics: the origin of police brutality against Blacks and other communities of color in the United States, dating back to the establishment of slave-catching troupes and the sown seeds of racial discontent and bias; the state of police brutality as we currently see it today in the United States, including the effects of centuries of antagonistic law enforcement activity against Black and other communities of color throughout

¹ HG.org (Ed.). (4AD). The History of Police Brutality, and What it Means for You. Retrieved 2020, from <https://www.hg.org/legal-articles/the-history-of-police-brutality-and-what-it-means-for-you-40344>

² Hannah LF Cooper (2015) War on Drugs Policing and Police Brutality, Substance Use & Misuse, 50:8-9, 1188-1194, DOI: [10.3109/10826084.2015.1007669](https://doi.org/10.3109/10826084.2015.1007669)

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the country; and an exploration of a proposed solution to the epidemic of police brutality throughout the United States.

THE BEGINNING OF BRUTALITY

In order to understand where we are today and where we can potentially go, we must first understand where we've been all this time and how we got here. With police brutality acting as a serious socio-political issue desperately in need of political solutions, it would be an insult to the collective memory of Black America and other communities of color to assume that these issues only recently began to be a problem in recent years.

As we've seen, "Police brutality is sometimes motivated by racial stereotypes. Law enforcement officers may believe that blacks are more violent than others, and this image is often replicated in media."³ Social anxiety has developed as a result of this, and "law enforcement officers who are already concerned about their safety on the job may be even more anxious when confronting individuals who they prematurely perceive as violent or criminal. These stereotypes are rooted in the sordid history of enslavement, genocide and segregation."⁴

In fact, police brutality as we know it has actually spanned the centuries, dating back to the days of physical enslavement of human beings of African descent, initially widespread throughout what was originally known as the 13 British Colonies, the United States of America, and then the United States which lay north of the Mason-Dixon Line⁵. Racism and slavery each have a major

³ HG.org (2020).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Mason and Dixon draw a line, dividing the colonies. (2009, November 13). Retrieved May 1, 2020, from <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/mason-and-dixon-draw-a-line>

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role in the establishment of police brutality as we know it, and we must first explain what that distinct connection is next.

An Origin of Oppression

Since the dawn of U.S. history, this country—as claimed by Europeans—has always been one primarily settled by individuals of European descent. With deep, abiding respect to the original inhabitants of the Americas⁶—the Native Americans (or Amerindians), of course—European settlements would mark the beginning of the modern land known as the United States of America. As Europeans would continue to colonize the continent, their colonial influence would continue to spread further and further west, bringing with it disease and unmitigated violence. In order to develop this land according to their desires, European colonizers would then turn their attention to western Africa, kidnapping and enslaving⁷ millions of native Africans and forcibly transporting them across the Atlantic Ocean to various colonies throughout the continents.

This desire to expand—misremembered and justified by Eurocentric historians as *Manifest Destiny*⁸—would essentially be treated as a European colonial birthright, and anyone (or anything) bold enough to stand in their way would be met with violence, whether or not they had an original right to the land to begin with. Essentially, European authority over land and other property would be enforced with violence, and this would extend to physical dominion over actual human beings. This is the culture that would develop and be perpetuated throughout the Americas and the remainder of the Western World, and evolved instances of this cultural cancer remain alive and well today in a variety of different forms.

⁶ And the original victims of European expansionism, of course.

⁷ Jr, H. L. G. (2017, January 12). How Many Slaves Landed in the US? Retrieved from <https://www.theroot.com/how-many-slaves-landed-in-the-us-1790873989>.

⁸ Chittenden, H. M. (2017, May 26). Manifest Destiny in America. Retrieved May 1, 2020, from <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1916/01/manifest-destiny-in-america/528369/>

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The Hateful Games: Catching Slaves

The performance of European violence against subjugated natives of the African and American continents would continue throughout the centuries, beginning with the Age of Exploration⁹ at the end of the 1400s through today. This would be demonstrated through warfare, physical and mental abuse, sexual violence, social conditioning, and the use of firearms. It would be through these acts that would allow European colonizers and slaveholders to successfully secure population control—an impressive feat considering the numbers of enslaved Africans in the Americas would rapidly outnumber them by a considerable margin.

In those days, war, violence, and lawlessness would be an even more common element of life, and with knowledge of having been subjugated themselves on a much less extreme level, slaveholders in the United States were well-aware of the potential of rebellion among the enslaved Africans in their midst. During the Colonial Era, there was no clearly-defined police force beyond that of stationed British troops. “Policing in Colonial America had been very informal, based on a for-profit, privately funded system that employed people part-time.”¹⁰ These privately-funded groups would eventually evolve into many departments we know today.

Enslaved conditions were terrible, essentially turning millions of Africans in the Americas into faceless cogs on the economic wheel of the colonies. While free, white plantation workers also often worked from sunrise to sunset, they were able to manage their own time and had more control over their own affairs than their to-be-mentioned enslaved counterparts. Enslaved Africans, however, “had no such control and they worked under constant supervision and the threat of physical punishment by their overseers. Indeed, no matter how kindly a slave owner might have

⁹ Exploration. (2018, August 21). Retrieved May 1, 2020, from <https://www.history.com/topics/exploration>

¹⁰ Waxman, O. B. (2019, March 6). The History of Police in America and the First Force. Retrieved May 1, 2020, from <https://time.com/4779112/police-history-origins/>

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been, the slaves did not possess that which Americans most prized—their freedom.”¹¹ This absence of freedom would naturally develop resentment among some enslaved Africans, and this would eventually bubble over into physical manifestations of desire.

As such with the human spirit, runaways were common, causing slave owners to organize slave-catching parties, often made up of the overseers that already worked on the various plantations scattered throughout the south. This would eventually develop a community-based effort, not unlike neighborhood watches in suburban neighborhoods today.

The first formal slave patrol was created in the Carolina colonies in 1704 (Reichel 1992). Slave patrols had three primary functions: (1) to chase down, apprehend, and return to their owners, runaway slaves; (2) to provide a form of organized terror to deter slave revolts; and, (3) to maintain a form of discipline for slave-workers who were subject to summary justice, outside of the law, if they violated any plantation rules.¹²

Enslaved Africans in America, already subjected to subhuman treatment at the hands of their European overseers, would very quickly become additional victims of brutality at their hands. “Certain people, granted power, can be counted on to abuse those under their authority just because they can; one imagines moreover that gratuitous beatings relieved the tedium and fatigue of nightlong patrols and served to reinforce the notion of who was boss.”¹³

“Members of slave patrols could forcefully enter anyone’s home, regardless of their race or ethnicity, based on suspicions that they were sheltering people who had escaped bondage ... the first police forces were overwhelmingly white, male, and more focused on responding to disorder

¹¹ Library of Congress (Ed.). (n.d.). Pre-Civil War African-American Slavery - American Memory Timeline-Classroom Presentation: Teacher Resources. Retrieved May 1, 2020, from <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/timeline/expref/slavery/>

¹² Potter, G. (2013, July). The history of policing in the United States. Retrieved from <http://www.plsonline.eku.edu/insidelook/history-policing-united-states-part-1>

¹³ Fountain, B. (2018, September 17). Slavery and the Origins of the American Police State. Retrieved May 1, 2020, from <https://medium.com/s/story/slavery-and-the-origins-of-the-american-police-state-ec318f5ff05b>

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than crime.”¹⁴ This social conditioning of dehumanization would render it easier than expected to horrifically mistreat Africans seeking freedom from enslavement, something that has often repeated itself throughout history, well beyond the Emancipation Proclamation¹⁵.

Burning Black Wall Street

Remarkably, Black interactions with law enforcement *en masse* would continue well into the 20th Century, as the slave-catching groups of old would evolve over time into the police forces of both then and now. Yet, in spite of a series of socioeconomic injustices that managed to not only survive, but thrive after the Civil War, the Black community in the United States managed to thrive right alongside it, in terms of cultural richness and resilience. But this did not hide the fact that economic injustice remained a dark mark of shame in American history. “The period that followed the Civil War was one of economic terror and wealth-stripping that has left black people at lasting economic disadvantage,”¹⁶ resulting in “families hav[ing] a fraction of the wealth of white families, leaving them more economically insecure and with far fewer opportunities for economic mobility.”¹⁷

But this wasn’t the case for a unique economic enclave of Black Americans living in Tulsa, Oklahoma. “In 1921, Tulsa, Oklahoma’s Greenwood District, known as Black Wall Street, was one of the most prosperous African-American communities in the United States.”¹⁸ This was a

¹⁴ Hassett-Walker, C. (2020, March 6). The racist roots of American policing: From slave patrols to traffic stops. Retrieved May 1, 2020, from <https://theconversation.com/the-racist-roots-of-american-policing-from-slave-patrols-to-traffic-stops-112816>

¹⁵ Emancipation Proclamation. (n.d.). Retrieved May 1, 2020, from <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4h1549.html>

¹⁶ Lee, T. (2019, August 14). How America's Vast Racial Wealth Gap Grew: By Plunder. Retrieved May 1, 2020, from <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/racial-wealth-gap.html>

¹⁷ Hanks, A., Solomon, D., & Weller, C. E. (n.d.). Systematic Inequality. Retrieved May 1, 2020, from <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/race/reports/2018/02/21/447051/systematic-inequality/>

¹⁸ Fain, K. (2017, July 5). The Devastation of Black Wall Street. Retrieved May 1, 2020, from <https://daily.jstor.org/the-devastation-of-black-wall-street/>

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shining beacon of economic opportunity and prosperity for Black Americans, as segregation actually managed to work in Black Wall Street's favor.

“The average income of black families in the area exceeded ‘what minimum wage is today.’ As a result of segregation, a “dollar circulated 36 to 100 times” and remained in Greenwood “almost a year before leaving.’ Even more impressive, at that time, the “state of Oklahoma had only two airports,” yet ‘six black families owned their own planes.’”¹⁹ But this period of prosperity would not last long.

As a result of a Tulsa Tribune-reported accusation of rape²⁰ levied against a Black man by a white woman, a series of race riots²¹ exploded throughout the city before an investigation came to a close. “Thirty-five city blocks went up in flames, 300 people died, and 800 were injured. Defense of white female virtue was the expressed motivation for the collective racial violence.”²² These riots were all performed by the whites of Tulsa, primarily members of the Klu Klux Klan. As though the carnage were not enough, “when the smoke cleared, the area lay in ruins. Many blacks left and never returned. The National Guard rounded up thousands of others and held them at various locations around the city.”²³

Police brutality reached an extreme level, with officers themselves partaking in the carnage. As author and historian Hannibal Johnson would explain: “the police and law enforcement, generally, during the riot, we know, deputized some of the white men who invaded the Greenwood community. And they generally did not fulfill their role of protecting and serving

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Many of these false accusations happened often in those days, much to the detriment of Black life. Emmitt Till serves as an example.

²¹ Fain, (2017).

²² Ibid.

²³ Tulsa Still Faces Historical Trauma from 1921 Riot That Left 300 Dead on Black Wall Street. (n.d.). Retrieved May 1, 2020, from https://www.democracynow.org/2016/9/22/tulsa_still_faces_historical_trauma_from

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the African-American citizenry in Tulsa.”²⁴ Imagine a society where the police themselves were involved in the terrorization of whole populations, just because of who they happened to be? As the entertainer Childish Gambino himself would say in a well-received record from 2018, “This Is America,”²⁵ and this sort of behavior was as much a part of the culture as apple pies.

Complicity in Black victimhood was not an isolated incident, however. Examples of vigilante racial violence would not only be performed, but allowed by law enforcement in the United States. Lynchings were often a common outlet for this sort of criminal overreach of authority, as seen during the turn of the century.

Vigilantism constantly threatened black movement beyond accepted bounds. In *U.S. v. Shipp*, the Supreme Court intervened to attempt to save the life of Ed Johnson, a black man falsely accused of raping a white woman in Chattanooga, Tennessee, in 1906. The sheriff, Joseph Shipp, allowed a vigilante crowd to enter the jail housing Ed Johnson. The lynch mob hung him from a bridge after shooting him several times. Before he was murdered, Johnson told the mob he was innocent. A note was pinned to his dead body with a message directed to the Supreme Court: “To Justice Harlan: Come get your nigger now.”²⁶

Horrific, but not surprising. How could one feel safe in society when the oppressor wore the same hat? How could one believe in the rule of law when the very parties tasked with its enforcement are complicit in your oppression? As we will see later on, these would have catastrophic social and mental effects within the Black community.

Protecting the Badge: Law, Order, and Television

Throughout U.S. history, law enforcement has had a negative relationship with Black America. Normally when divides like this exist in the Western World, there’s a general cultural

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Gambino, C. (2018, May 5). This Is America. Retrieved May 1, 2020, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VYOjWnS4cMY>

²⁶ Browne-Marshall, Gloria J. (2013) "Stop and Frisk: From Slave-Catchers to NYPD, A Legal Commentary," Trotter Review: Vol. 21: Iss. 1, Article 9, Page 107. Available at: http://scholarworks.umb.edu/trotter_review/vol21/iss1/9

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desire to rectify those problems, especially on a national level. But what happens when a culture develops within the country suggesting that law enforcement is a combination of infallible and self-protecting (with justifiable reasons)? What happens when the culture itself encourages this belief on a national scale? You have a society that adopts a desire to “protect the badge.”

Since radio and television media have developed in the United States after the end of World War II, we have seen a multitude of police procedural dramas that have offered the national viewing audience a glimpse into the everyday adventures of law enforcement as they struggle to keep the streets of a major city safe from crime. “Television crime dramas are fictional, but may be based on true stories at times, and depict law enforcement officers in a positive light. In some of these shows, law enforcement officers act as vigilantes and violate civil liberties and laws to pursue justice.”²⁷

Many of these fictional television crime dramas have been produced over the years: The Law & Order²⁸ franchise, Miami Vice, Rizzoli & Isles, Blue Bloods, Criminal Minds, Fargo, NCIS²⁹, NYPD Blue, Castle, and Hill Street Blues, to name a few. If the police are treated as heroes in society and much of America is blocked off from many Black population centers, it is hard to transmit the lived experiences of Black Americans at the hands of law enforcement into the understanding of most suburban, white-majority neighborhoods and communities.

Any fan of the long-running Law & Order series would know that the Internal Affairs Bureau (also known as IAB), is a common foil and antagonist for the main characters—the detectives—throughout the show. IAB is often portrayed as rather difficult to work with,

²⁷ Franklin, Sheldon, A., Perkins, Kelvin, R., & Kirby. (2019, August 22). The Influence of Police Related Media, Victimization, and Satisfaction on African American College Students' Perceptions of Police. Retrieved May 1, 2020, from <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fsoc.2019.00065/full#B6>

²⁸ Arguably the widest television universe, with spin-off shows like Criminal Intent, Conviction, Los Angeles, and Special Victims Unit dating back to the early-1990s. Law & Order. (1990, September 13). Retrieved May 1, 2020, from <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0098844/>

²⁹ Which has, itself, expanded into spin-off shows set in New Orleans and elsewhere.

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interfering with detectives that are just trying to do their jobs in apprehending suspected criminals. What most viewers won't automatically realize is that the Internal Affairs Bureau is "dedicated to preserving integrity ... detecting, investigating, and bringing to justice the ... police officers and civilians who engage in misconduct and corruption."³⁰

IAB is the very police bureau designed to keep police officers accountable for their actions, especially when they step out of line. There exists an internal political structure that, when conditioned into the general culture over time, will cause viewers to sympathize with police officers, viewing IAB as a negative impediment to police activity. Police officers that have attempted to report other law enforcement have found themselves subjected to the same kind of whistleblower treatment³¹ seen elsewhere. Bad cops are afforded the opportunity to continue being bad cops, as even the judicial system, a part of law enforcement in itself, must be aware of the fact that the police themselves are the ones bringing suspected malefactors before justice.

This same era, spanning between 1980-2010, would be matched by both legislative and executive affirmation by the United States Congress and The White House.

The Community, Crime Bill, and Clinton

Police brutality would see a considerable rise in occurrences between 1980 and 2010, as the War on Drugs would continue to escalate in the inner city and the militarization of the police would continue to take place. "Police forces and funding increased dramatically to support the War

³⁰ Internal Affairs. (n.d.). Retrieved May 1, 2020, from <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/nypd/bureaus/investigative/internal-affairs.page>

³¹ e.V., T. I. (n.d.). Police whistleblowers. Retrieved May 1, 2020, from https://www.transparency.org/news/story/police_whistleblowers

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on Drugs. For example, between 1992 and 2008, state and local expenditures on police doubled, from \$131/per capita to \$260/per capita.”³²

This, in part because of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act (1994)³³, which was signed into law by President Bill Clinton, would result in more police officers patrolling the streets, as well as an inevitable escalation in police encounters with Blacks around the country. This would set the stage for the modern era—an era which has seen an unprecedented occurrence of police shootings of Black people in America.

CALL OF DUTY: MODERN OVERREACH

Tamir Rice. Trayvon Martin. Sandra Bland. Eric Garner. Freddie Gray. The list, to the author’s chagrin, goes on for a long time. Today, a disproportionate number of police brutality victims are Black Americans and other groups of color. “Racial minorities made up about 37.4 percent of the general population in the US and 46.6 percent of armed and unarmed victims, but they made up 62.7 percent of unarmed people killed by police.”³⁴

As mentioned earlier, life as a Black person in America has gotten increasingly more stressful. Microaggressions, where many well-intentioned whites who consciously believe in and profess equality unconsciously act in a racist manner, particularly in ambiguous circumstances,³⁵ are an additional stressor.

³² Hannah LF Cooper (2015) War on Drugs Policing and Police Brutality, *Substance Use & Misuse*, 50:8-9, 1188-1194, DOI: [10.3109/10826084.2015.1007669](https://doi.org/10.3109/10826084.2015.1007669).

³³ Ofer, U. (2019, June 4). How the 1994 Crime Bill Fed the Mass Incarceration Crisis. Retrieved May 1, 2020, from <https://www.aclu.org/blog/smart-justice/mass-incarceration/how-1994-crime-bill-fed-mass-incarceration-crisis>

³⁴ Lopez. (2016, August 13). There are huge racial disparities in how US police use force. Retrieved May 1, 2020, from <https://www.vox.com/identities/2016/8/13/17938186/police-shootings-killings-racism-racial-disparities>

³⁵ DeAngelis, T. (2009, February). Unmasking 'racial micro aggressions'. Retrieved May 1, 2020, from <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2009/02/microaggression>

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In a study relating to inner city medical patients, it was found that “among civilians, African American and Latino populations living in urban areas appear to be exposed to extreme amounts of trauma. For example, economically disadvantaged African Americans living within urban environments experience high levels of trauma and a very large amount of this exposure occurs during youth.”³⁶ Much of this is due to the violence that is often experienced in the inner city, especially the violence caused by law enforcement against Black residents of these neighborhoods.

This is not unlike the violence experienced by soldiers in war-torn regions. “A growing body of research shows that Americans with traumatic injuries develop PTSD at rates comparable to veterans of war. Just like veterans, civilians can suffer flashbacks, nightmares, paranoia, and social withdrawal.”³⁷ Black Americans are, on average, experiencing significantly more violence in their respective neighborhoods than their European or Asian-descended counterparts, and this has had an adverse effect on their collective development.

Foreign Travel Advisories

These violent conditions, much like the protestors being hosed down and mauled by police dogs during the Civil Rights Movement, are no longer being internalized; foreign countries, themselves with Blacks living within their borders as citizens, have recently established actual travel advisories for those seeking to travel to the United States. Travel advisories, much like those given for countries where great civil unrest (or war) might be taking place. Not a country like

³⁶ Gillespie, C. F., Bradley, B., Mercer, K., Smith, A. K., Conneely, K., Gapen, M., ... Ressler, K. J. (2009). Trauma exposure and stress-related disorders in inner city primary care patients. Retrieved May 1, 2020, from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2785858/>

³⁷ Beckett, L. (2014, February 3). The PTSD Crisis That's Being Ignored: Americans Wounded in Their Own... Retrieved May 1, 2020, from https://www.propublica.org/article/the-ptsd-crisis-thats-being-ignored-americans-wounded-in-their-own-neighbor?utm_campaign=sprout

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Syria, Iraq, or even Sudan, where internal conflict is known all around the world for one reason or another, but the United States.

In July 2016, the Bahamas, a country with a majority population of Black citizens, actually issued a travel advisory for its male citizens, wishing to “advise all Bahamians traveling to the US but especially to the affected cities to exercise appropriate caution generally. In particular young males are asked to exercise extreme caution in affected cities in their interactions with the police. Do not be confrontational and cooperate.”³⁸ Police brutality has gotten, as recently as 2016, so problematic in American society that neighboring countries—even those from far away, like Bahrain—would warn its citizens to “exercise caution during large festivals or events.”³⁹ This would surely serve as an embarrassment to Americans both at home and abroad, as the U.S. has long since prided itself as the “land of the free.”⁴⁰ Not so much.

Resistance and Revolution: Black Lives and Activism

When neighborhood watchman George Zimmerman was found not guilty on the charges of second-degree murder and manslaughter in the killing of the aforementioned Trayvon Martin in Sanford, Florida on 13 July 2013, shockwaves rang out around the country. Martin was killed not long after he “was carrying iced tea and candy as he walked from a convenience store to the home of his father’s fiancée,”⁴¹ when Zimmerman “spotted the teenager and called 911 to report

³⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Immigration Issues Travel Advisory for Bahamians traveling to United States of America. (2018, May 15). Retrieved May 1, 2020, from <https://mofa.gov.bs/ministry-of-foreign-affairs-and-immigration-issues-travel-advisory-for-bahamians-traveling-to-united-states-of-america/>

³⁹ Kennedy, M. (2016, July 10). Bahamas Tells Young Men To Exercise Caution With U.S. Police. Retrieved May 1, 2020, from <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2016/07/10/485453110/bahamas-tells-young-male-citizens-to-exercise-extreme-caution-with-u-s-police?t=1588314238988>

⁴⁰ The Lyrics. (n.d.). Retrieved May 1, 2020, from <https://amhistory.si.edu/starspangledbanner/the-lyrics.aspx>

⁴¹ Manuel Roig-Franzia, ZIMMERMAN FOUND NOT GUILTY IN KILLING OF TRAYVON MARTIN, THE WASHINGTON POST (2013), https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/zimmerman-trial-jurors-request-clarification-on-manslaughterinstructions/2013/07/13/3a26dbbe-ec0c-11e2-aa9f-c03a72e2d342_story.html?utm_term=.088e0ccd86fa (last visited Dec 3, 2017).

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‘a suspicious person’ in his neighborhood,”⁴² eventually confronting, attacking, and killing the unarmed Black teenager. This death, like so many others, was an avoidable circumstance related to the association of law enforcement and local authority with the perception of a Black American as not worthy of humane treatment. This would not stand.

As a result of this now-landmark case, the Black Lives Matter movement would be born. Using the internet to organize, activists Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi began expressing their collective grievances about police brutality through social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, eventually establishing the Movement For Black Lives, a central movement designed to address grievances of injustice performed against Black Americans and all other communities of color, demanding “an end to the wars against Black people.”⁴³

All Lives Matter: Reactionary Privilege

As previously mentioned, a great divide exists in the United States today between white and Black approaches to police brutality and accountability. Privilege has a substantial role, as admitted by the United Methodist Church in 2016: “European Americans enjoy a broad range of privileges denied to persons of color in our society, privileges that often permit them to dominate others who do not enjoy such privileges.”⁴⁴

Ironically enough, it would be many outlets, influenced by other more conservative Christian organizations, that would resist the grievances being put forth by Black Lives Matter activists, as well as some liberal white American figures. Studies from 2018 would demonstrate

⁴² Darran Simon, FIVE YEARS AFTER TRAYVON MARTIN'S DEATH, A MOVEMENT LIVES ON CNN (2017), <http://www.cnn.com/2017/02/26/us/trayvon-martin-death-anniversary/index.html> (last visited Dec 3, 2017).

⁴³ The remainder of the platform is available at Policy Platform, THE MOVEMENT FOR BLACK LIVES, <https://policy.m4bl.org/> (last visited April 15, 2020).

⁴⁴ The United Methodist Church. (2016). White Privilege in the United States. Retrieved May 1, 2020, from <https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/white-privilege-in-the-united-states-3376>

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that “those most opposed to the Black Lives Matter movement were men, conservative or Republican individuals, and supporters of the death penalty,”⁴⁵ among whom would include the former Mayor of New York from 1994 to 2001, Rudy Giuliani.

Giuliani, currently acting as an attorney to current U.S. President Donald Trump, was not shy in his hostility to the Black Lives Matter movement when it first emerged, calling it “inherently racist because, number one, it divides us. ... All lives matter: White lives, black lives, all lives,” elaborating further with an equally baffling and tone-deaf analysis: “Number two: Black Lives Matter never protests when every 14 hours somebody is killed in Chicago, probably 70-80% of the time (by) a black person. Where are they then? Where are they when a young black child is killed,”⁴⁶ not realizing that the movement actively advocates against all forms of violence and “how it affects daily life in Black communities.”⁴⁷

Neoliberals were no better when the movement began, either. As we’ve since seen, the Democratic Party, a seemingly center-left party claiming progressive politics, would be exposed for its lukewarm support of the movement, inviting “Mothers of the Movement, a group of women who have lost children to police brutality and racialized vigilantism,”⁴⁸ to the 2016 Democratic National Convention, but describing Black Lives Matter activists as radical and instructing candidates and other party figures not to offer support for concrete policy positions⁴⁹ in since-released internal memos.

⁴⁵ Staples, G. B. (2018, November 13). This Life with Gracie: Red states, Black Lives Matter. Retrieved May 1, 2020, from <https://www.ajc.com/lifestyles/red-states-black-lives-matter/nchWGhX3KBw9iaNoDNHLuM/>

⁴⁶ Lim, N. (2016, July 11). Rudy Giuliani: Black Lives Matter ‘inherently racist’. Retrieved May 1, 2020, from <https://edition.cnn.com/2016/07/11/politics/rudy-giuliani-black-lives-matter-inherently-racist/index.html>

⁴⁷ L., A. (2018, August 9). Black Lives Matter is not a terrorist organisation. Retrieved May 1, 2020, from <https://www.economist.com/open-future/2018/08/09/black-lives-matter-is-not-a-terrorist-organisation>

⁴⁸ Massie, V. M. (2016, September 1). Democrats are embracing Black Lives Matter. But a leaked memo puts their motivations into question. Retrieved May 1, 2020, from <https://www.vox.com/2016/9/1/12750102/black-lives-matter-democrats-memo>

⁴⁹ Ibid.

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When Donald Trump was elected President of the United States, it wouldn't be long before the Women's March took place. Shaping themselves as symbols of "The Resistance"⁵⁰ to the Trump agenda, the Women's March was largely an assortment of neoliberal political figures troubled by the loss of Hillary Clinton the previous November. And yet, as it would turn out, there would be a systematic and gradual exclusion of Black Lives Matter activists over the years, even going as far as to exclude them from what would have been their annual march this year.

The Women's March had inspired controversy from the beginning, when early organizers, many of whom were white, called the event the "Million Women March" — a name that reminded many women of color of 1997's Million Woman March, an event designed to protest, in part, black women's exclusion from the white-dominated feminist movement. Many people wondered whether it made sense to have a march for all women when 53 percent of white female voters had cast their ballots for Trump. Some white women were offended by the criticisms, with some even canceling their trips to DC.⁵¹

The feeling of exclusion would not be an accident. "Attorney and writer S.T. Holloway, who is black, attended the 2017 march in Los Angeles and later wrote at HuffPost that 'the first and last time I heard 'Black Lives Matter' chanted was when my two girlfriends and I began the chant.'"⁵² Even as Black Americans attempted to rise up against the circumstances placed upon them as a result of police brutality and overreach, they would face opposition and resistance from both sides of the aisle, demonstrating that these issues were not limited to ideology but race and class, further compounding the issue. This would lead to the question: how then can we solve this issue of police brutality and overreach in a world where the cards are stacked against progress?

⁵⁰ Chhor, K. (2018, May 31). Wonder who's fighting Trump? Meet the #Resistance. Retrieved May 1, 2020, from <https://www.france24.com/en/20180530-who-fighting-trump-opposition-meet-resistance-resist-twitter-hashtag-grassroots-usa>

⁵¹ North, A. (2020, January 17). The Women's Marches are shrinking. Their influence isn't. Retrieved May 1, 2020, from <https://www.vox.com/2020/1/17/21068870/2020-womens-march-washington-election-women-voting>

⁵² Ibid.

ERADICATING OVERREACH

In May 2015, President Barack Obama, the first African American ever elected President of the United States of America, released a final report from his task force dedicated to uncovering new solutions to the ongoing unrest in the country. “That group, the White House Task Force on 21st Century Policing, was created ... and ... released a lengthy report calling for more data on police-involved shootings, better assessments of community attitudes toward police, and the removal of incentives on police practices like arrests and convictions.”⁵³ This has been the most comprehensive executive action on policing since President Bill Clinton signed the ‘94 Crime Bill, and serves as a combination of police, activist, and legal recommendations in order to properly address the ongoing police brutality crisis in America.

President Obama’s report⁵⁴ addressed six different pillars: the building of trust and legitimacy, requiring the system itself to conduct governance, addressing matters of implicit bias and racial discrimination and peaceful police involvement in community affairs; policy and oversight, which requires real legislative and policy-oriented action around accountability in police departments and general law enforcement policy; technology and social media, addressing issues related to how technology can be used to improve the quality of law enforcement and police encounters with human beings (especially Blacks); community policing and crime reduction, specifying a collaboration with the neighborhood itself in order to promote better cultural understanding; improved training and education, in order for the police itself to be well-trained and well-informed on proper policing procedures to prevent loss-of-life; and officer wellness and

⁵³ Rhodan, M. (2016, July 8). Dallas Shooting: Why Police Reform Is a Work in Progress. Retrieved May 1, 2020, from <https://time.com/4398392/obama-police-reform-report-task-force-on-21st-century-policing/>

⁵⁴ COPS Office. 2015. President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing Implementation Guide: Moving from Recommendations to Action. Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services

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safety, which works to ensure that the health and wellbeing of police officers, who are still human beings doing their job every day, are preserved.

The ultimate objective of this report, which was to “identify ways to build trust between citizens and their law enforcement officers so that all components of a community treat one another fairly and justly and are invested in maintaining public safety in an atmosphere of mutual respect,” is far from being properly implemented throughout the country. As of 2016, “at least nine states and municipalities have taken significant steps to implement their recommendations and law enforcement agencies in every state have in some way grappled with reform.”⁵⁵ While 15 police departments have signed on, there remain “18,000 police departments in the U.S.”⁵⁶ that are outstanding in terms of implementation. This looks to be on hold as the current administration is more in favor of the “stop and frisk” policies that have created so much trouble in communities.

CONCLUSION

Police brutality is an epidemic that appears to have no known end in sight. The current administration encourages tougher police tactics⁵⁷, expressing no regard for the past and present grievances being offered up by the Black community in the United States. In order for change to be made, the United States, beginning with its leadership, must utilize President Obama’s approach to policing, while also continuing to listen to communities themselves as cultural norms and expectations evolve. There is no doubt that racism and white supremacy have had a role in the culture of police brutality around the country, beginning with slave-catching patrols in Colonial America and the pre-Civil War American South. Both liberal and conservative governments have

⁵⁵ Rhodan (2016).

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

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failed the Black community, and this has been bookended by a cultural bias towards all police officers, no matter what they've done. This has effectively stacked the deck against the Black community in the fight for justice and equal treatment under the law, but with the promise of a potential change in leadership in this election year, there remains hope for better days. In the meantime, legal organizations like the Southern Poverty Law Center, ACLU, and grassroots activist organizations like Black Lives Matter, the Democratic Socialists of America, the Dream Defenders, and many others require as much help as possible. A better world is possible, necessary, and inevitable, and the "arc of the moral universe" will finally bend when we refuse to.

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