



SAY HER NAME

RESISTING POLICE BRUTALITY AGAINST BLACK WOMEN

 AFRICAN AMERICAN
POLICY FORUM

 Center for Intersectionality
and Social Policy Studies

Towards a Gender-Inclusive Analysis of Racialized State Violence

JULY 2015 UPDATE

#SAYHERNAME

A VIGIL IN REMEMBRANCE OF BLACK WOMEN AND GIRLS KILLED BY THE POLICE
NEW YORK CITY | MAY 20, 2015



#SAYHERNAME
REKIA BOYD
March 21, 2012 | Chicago, IL

#SAYHERNAME
KAYLA MOORE
February 12, 2013 | Berkeley, CA

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This document is dedicated to Black women who have lost their lives to police violence, and to their families who must go on without them. We are greatly indebted to the family members who have bravely spoken out to shed light on their loved ones' stories. We would like to thank each and every family member we spoke to, along with all family members who have lost loved ones to police violence.

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SAY HER NAME

RESISTING POLICE BRUTALITY AGAINST BLACK WOMEN

The August 9th 2014 police killing of 18-year-old Michael Brown sparked a smoldering nationwide movement against police violence and, more broadly, against anti-Black racism. As Mike Brown, Eric Garner, and Tamir Rice have become household names and faces, their stories have become an impetus for public policy debates on the future of policing in America.

However, 2014 also marked the unjust police killings of a number of Black women,¹ including Gabriella Nevarez, Aura Rosser, Michelle Cusseaux, and Tanisha Anderson. The body count of Black women killed by the police continued to rise in 2015 with the killings of Alexia Christian, Meagan Hockaday, Mya Hall, Janisha Fonville, and Natasha McKenna.

The lack of meaningful accountability for the deaths of unarmed Black men also extended to deaths of unarmed Black women and girls in 2015. Just as the officers who killed Mike Brown and Eric Garner escaped punishment for these homicides, officers who killed Black women and girls were not held accountable for their actions. Joseph Weekley, who killed a sleeping, seven-year-old Aiyana Stanley-Jones, escaped prosecution after a jury failed to convict him in his second trial. Dante Servin, an off-duty officer who shot Rekia Boyd in the back of the head, was cleared by a judge of all charges. Other officers faced no charges whatsoever, such as those who killed Mya Hall, a Black transgender woman.

None of these killings of Black women, nor the lack of accountability for them, have been widely elevated as exemplars of the systemic police brutality that is currently the focal point of mass protest and policy reform efforts. The failure to highlight and demand accountability for the countless Black women killed by police over

the past two decades, including Eleanor Bumpurs, Tyisha Miller, LaTanya Haggerty, Margaret Mitchell, Kayla Moore, and Tarika Wilson, to name just a few among scores, leaves Black women unnamed and thus underprotected in the face of their continued vulnerability to racialized police violence.

The resurgent racial justice movement in the United States has developed a clear frame to understand the police killings of Black men and boys, theorizing the ways in which they are systematically criminalized and feared across disparate class backgrounds and irrespective of circumstance. Yet Black women who are profiled, beaten, sexually assaulted, and killed by law enforcement officials are conspicuously absent from this frame even when their experiences are identical. When their experiences with police violence are distinct—uniquely informed by race, gender, gender identity, and sexual orientation—Black women remain invisible.

Say Her Name sheds light on Black women's experiences of police violence in an effort to support a gender-inclusive approach to racial justice that centers all Black lives equally.

Despite their marginalization in contemporary efforts to challenge anti-Black racism and police brutality, Black women and girls continue to lose their lives to racially motivated violence. The nation has been left reeling in the wake of the June 17th shooting in which a white gunman murdered nine Black parishioners at a historically Black church in Charleston in an explicit act of racial terror. Six of the nine people killed were women—the oldest, Susie Jackson, was an 87-year-old grandmother—demonstrating clearly that Black women also face the lethal risk of white supremacist violence.²

Black women and girls' vulnerability to state violence has likewise been exposed in shocking footage that has surfaced in recent months. Viewers were stunned to see Marlene Pinnock pummeled in the face by a California Highway Patrol Officer and Keyarika Diggles beaten in a Texas police precinct. And on June 6, 2015, as this report was being updated for printing, a video emerged showing a police officer in McKinney, Texas pulling out his gun, pinning down Dejerria Becton, an unarmed Black teenage girl at a pool party, as she sobbed and asked for her mother.³ In the context of the constantly evolving conversation around anti-Black police violence unfolding in this country, these images of police abuse demonstrate concretely that Black women and girls are, like Black men and boys, subject to police abuse that runs the gamut from profiling to excessive force to murder.

Say Her Name sheds light on Black women's experiences of police violence in an effort to support a gender-inclusive approach to racial justice that centers all Black lives equally. It is our hope that this document will serve as a tool for the resurgent racial justice movement to mobilize around the stories of Black women who have lost their lives to police violence.





BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

BUILDING ON THE WORK OF SCHOLARS AND ACTIVISTS WHO HAVE, OVER THE PAST TWO DECADES, CALLED FOR INCREASED ATTENTION TO BLACK WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES OF POLICING,⁴ *SAY HER NAME* OFFERS A NUMBER OF STORIES THAT REVEAL THE WAYS GENDER, RACE, AND SEXUALITY CAN OPERATE TOGETHER TO INFORM POLICE ABUSE OF BLACK WOMEN.⁵

Our goal is not to offer a comprehensive catalog of police violence against Black women— indeed, it would be impossible to do so as there is currently no accurate data collection on police killings nationwide, no readily available database compiling a complete list of Black women's lives lost at the hands of police, and no data collection on sexual or other forms of gender- and sexuality- based police violence. Moreover, the media's exclusive focus on police violence against Black men makes finding information about Black women of all gender identities and sexualities much more difficult. Given these limitations, our goal is simply to illustrate the reality that Black women are killed and violated by police with alarming regularity. Equally important, our hope is to call attention to the ways in which this reality is erased from our demonstrations, our discourse, and our demands to broaden our vision of social justice.

As a result of the paucity of data, the stories of police violence included in this document are essentially either gathered through online research or cases that have come to the attention of the report's authors. Many cases have never seen the light of day, and even those that have surfaced momentarily have received little sustained national or local attention. Significantly more women who have been killed by the police are missing from these pages, but their lives are certainly no less valuable.

The erasure of Black women is not purely a matter of missing facts. Even where women and girls are present in the data, narratives framing police profiling and lethal force as exclusively male experiences lead researchers, the media, and advocates to exclude them. For example, although racial profiling data are rarely, if ever, disaggregated by gender and race, when race and gender are considered together, researchers find that “for both men and women there is an identical pattern of stops by race/ethnicity.”⁶ In New York City—one of the jurisdictions with the most extensive data collection on police stops—the rates of racial disparities in stops, frisks, and arrests are identical for Black men and Black women.⁷ However, the media, researchers, and advocates tend to focus only on how profiling impacts Black men.



Similarly, a 2012 Malcolm X Grassroots Movement (MXGM) report, Operation Ghetto Storm, revealed that police, security guards, and vigilantes killed 313 Black people that year, which represents a Black person being killed every 28 hours.⁸ The cases cited in Operation Ghetto Storm explicitly include Black people of all genders, but the report is often cited to support the premise that a Black man is killed every 28 hours, thereby erasing the killings of Black women.⁹

Our hope is that this document will honor the intention of the #BlackLivesMatter movement to lift up the intrinsic value of all Black lives by serving as a resource to answer the increasingly persistent call for attention to Black women killed by police.¹⁰ This document offers preliminary information about police killings of Black women that have not galvanized national attention or driven our discourse.

The information presented here is organized around two themes. First, we seek to highlight the fact that many killings of Black women could be understood within the existing frames surrounding racial profiling and the use of lethal force. The solution to their absence is not complex; Black women can be lifted up across the movement through a collective commitment to recognize what is right in front of us. Second, we present cases that highlight the forms of police violence against Black women that are invisible within the current focus on police killings and excessive force. The challenge here is to expand the existing frames so that this violence too is legible to activists, policy makers and the media.

Addressing Black women's experiences of police violence requires a broadening of the public conversation, informed by robust research, analysis, and advocacy. Toward this end, we will offer a more detailed analysis of Black women's experiences of policing in a forthcoming research report. In the meantime, we hope that this document will be used by the media and policymakers, advocates and organizers, to begin to break the silence around Black women's experiences of police violence. But the first step in breaking this silence is within reach now. We need only answer the simple call to #SayHerName.



WHY WE MUST SAY HER NAME: THE URGENT NEED FOR A GENDER- INCLUSIVE MOVEMENT TO END STATE VIOLENCE

THERE ARE SEVERAL REASONS WHY THE RESURGENT RACIAL JUSTICE MOVEMENT MUST PRIORITIZE THE DEVELOPMENT OF A GENDER INCLUSIVE LENS.

First, including Black women and girls in the narrative broadens the scope of the debate, enhancing our overall understanding of the structural relationship between Black communities and law enforcement agencies. In order to comprehend the root causes and full scope of state violence against Black communities, we must consider and illuminate all the ways in which Black people in the US are routinely targeted for state violence. Acknowledging and analyzing the connections between anti-Black violence against Black men, women, transgender, and gender-nonconforming people reveals systemic realities that go unnoticed when the focus is limited exclusively to cases involving Black non-transgender men.¹²

Second, both the incidence and consequences of state violence against Black women are often informed by their roles as primary caretakers of people of all ages in their communities. As a result, violence against them has ripple effects throughout families and neighborhoods. Black women are positioned at the center of the domestic sphere and of community life. Yet their marginal position with respect to economic and social power relations creates the isolating and vulnerable context in which their struggle against police violence, mass incarceration, and economic marginalization occurs. In order to ensure safe and healthy Black communities, we must address police violence against Black women with equal outrage and commitment.

Third, centering the lives of all segments of our communities will permit us to step away from the idea that to address police violence we must “fix” individual Black men and bad police officers. Moving beyond these narrow concepts is critical if we are to embrace a framework that focuses on the complex structural dimensions that are actually at play. Through inclusion it becomes clear that the problem is not a matter of whether a young man’s hands were held up over his head, whether he had a mentor, or whether the police officers in question were wearing cameras or had been exposed to implicit bias trainings. A comprehensive approach reveals that the epidemic of police violence across the country is about how police relations reinforce the structural marginality of all members of Black communities in myriad ways.

Fourth, including Black women and girls in this discourse sends the powerful message that, indeed, all Black lives do matter. If our collective outrage is meant to warn the state that its agents cannot kill Black men and boys with impunity, then our silence around the killing of Black women and girls sends the message that their deaths are acceptable and do not merit repercussions.

Our failure to rally around Black women’s stories represents a broader failure to demand accountability for all Black lives targeted by the state. Families who lose Black women to police violence are not regularly invited to speak at rallies and do not receive the same level of community support or media and political attention as families who lose Black men. This leaves the families of Black women killed by the police not only to suffer the loss of their loved ones but also to confront the fact that no one seems to care. Yet the killings of Black women and girls are no less troubling than the killings of their male counterparts. Their families mourn no less for their lost loved ones, and they should not be left to suffer in solitude and silence.

Black women have consistently played a leadership role in struggles against state violence—from the Underground Railroad to the anti-lynching movement to the Civil Rights and Black Power movements to the current Black Lives Matter movement—yet the forms of victimization they face at the hands of police are consistently left out of social movement demands. Black women leaders are often asked to speak only about their fears of losing their sons, brothers, partners, and comrades. Yet as the tragedies that have befallen many Black women who have died at the hands of the police reveal, Black women and girls also face real risks of lethal police violence, which must be contested along with those facing Black men and boys.



RE-FRAMING STATE VIOLENCE: PATTERNS OF POLICE KILLINGS AGAINST BLACK WOMEN

What follows are several brief frames that highlight Black women’s experiences within commonly understood narratives of racial profiling and police violence, and illuminate Black women’s unique experiences of police violence in gender- and sexuality-specific contexts and forms. Each is illustrated by several cases intended to demonstrate how race, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, and class can work in conjunction with racial stereotypes to inform violent responses to Black women from law enforcement officials. While in many cases Black women killed by police were alleged to be armed or dangerous, witness accounts often dispute officers’ versions of the facts, and suggest that less lethal force could have been employed—particularly in cases where Black women were experiencing mental health crises, or in the context of responses to domestic disputes. Yet perceptions of Black women as menacing and their bodies as “superhuman”—and, therefore, not susceptible to pain or shame—inform police interactions with them in much the same way as they do those with Black men. These fears are often perceived to be reasonable no matter how vulnerable or in need of assistance these women might be. That so many of these cases have been justified by official government representatives reflects unique forms of discrimination faced by women who are Black. All too often problematic perceptions are further amplified and reinforced when the Black woman in question is poor, transgender, gender-nonconforming, or alleged to be engaged in criminalized activity.

DRIVING WHILE BLACK

All Black people experience racial profiling while driving. Black women as well as men are commonly stopped as minor traffic violations serve as a pretext for criminal investigations. In the worst-case scenarios, the perception or reality of more serious traffic violations—speeding, failing to pull over, or driving a stolen car—can turn deadly when race-based perceptions of Black drivers as inherently dangerous lead the police to use unwarranted lethal force. Victims of such deadly encounters are typically imagined to be men, but Black women also pay the ultimate penalty for driving offenses committed while Black.

Alexia Christian

April 30, 2015 / Atlanta, Georgia



The details of this case are still emerging. However, what is known is that police officers in Atlanta were investigating a stolen vehicle call and found 26-year-old Alexia Christian inside the vehicle. The officers arrested Christian and placed her in the back seat of their patrol car. At some point they fatally shot her in the car. They claim that she escaped from her handcuffs and shot at the officers with a stolen gun. The officers report that they failed to fully search her while putting her in the car.¹³

Mya Hall

March 30, 2015 / Baltimore, Maryland



Mya Hall was a Black transgender woman killed by National Security Agency (NSA) police just weeks before Freddie Gray's case garnered national headlines. Alleged to be driving a stolen car, she took a wrong turn onto NSA property and was shot to death by officers after the car crashed into the security gate and a police cruiser. No effort to use non-lethal force was made even though there was no threat to the facility, and no one in the vehicle was armed. Friends remembered Hall as a kind and caring woman struggling to make ends meet in the face of entrenched structural discrimination against Black transgender women.¹⁴

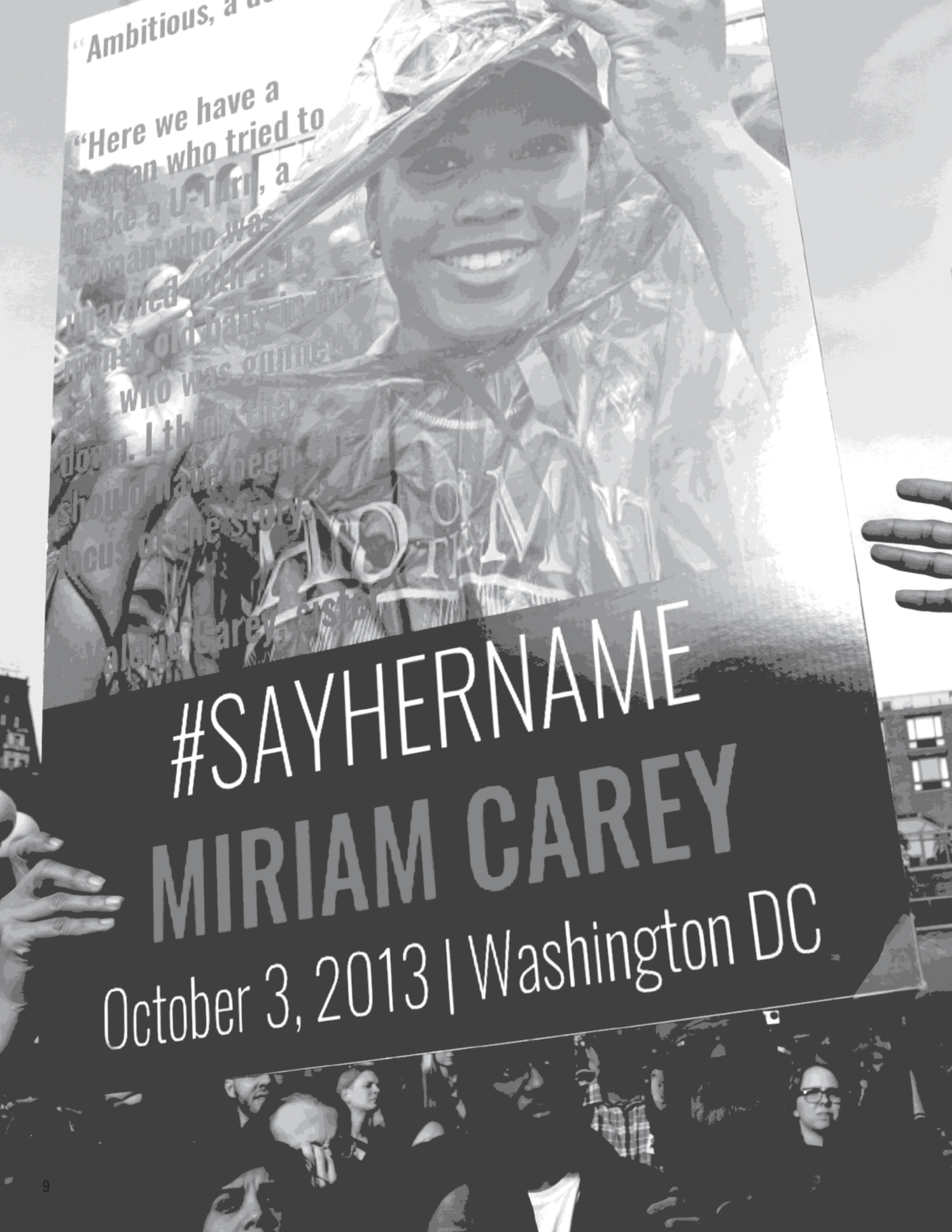
“Ambitious, a

“Here we have a woman who tried to make a U-Turn, a woman who was married with a 13-month old baby in the car who was going down. I think that should have been the focus of the story.”
Valerie Carey, 2013

#SAYHERNAME

MIRIAM CAREY

October 3, 2013 | Washington DC



Gabriella Nevarez

March 2, 2014 / Sacramento, California



Police killed 22-year-old Gabriella Nevarez after her grandmother called the police because Nevarez had taken her car after an argument. Officers at the scene claimed that after they tried to apprehend her, she led them on a high-speed chase and attempted to ram her car into their vehicle. The officers claimed they opened fire in self-defense, but passengers reported that Nevarez lost control of the car and crashed after she was shot. Since her death, many have questioned why the police failed to use nonlethal force to subdue her.¹⁵

Miriam Carey

October 3, 2013 / Washington D.C.



Federal agents killed Miriam Carey, a 34-year-old dental hygienist and suburban mother, after she allegedly sped away from a White House checkpoint. Secret Service officers claimed that they approached her and told her to stop at the checkpoint site and that she refused to do so. Valarie Carey, Miriam's sister, and her attorney, Eric Sanders, claim that the official report of the incident shows that the altercation actually started when an undercover agent moved a large object into Carey's path, and she swerved to avoid him, hitting a barricade instead. They say that Carey likely tried to drive off from the scene out of fear, and became increasingly frantic as officers chased and shot at her from behind.¹⁶ Officers fired several shots as they pursued her, and they continued to fire even after her car had stopped. She was hit in the back of her head, three times in the back, and once on her left arm. Her one-year-old baby

was in the car with her. Carey's lawyer claims that the narrative presented by the police is false, and that the media's failure to interrogate official accounts of the incident helped to justify her senseless killing. No charges have been filed against the officers.¹⁷

Shantel Davis

June 14, 2012 / Brooklyn, New York



Phillip Atkins, a plainclothes detective, fatally shot Shantel Davis, an unarmed 23-year-old woman, in East Flatbush, Brooklyn. Police say they noticed her driving erratically and followed her. The car chase came to a halt when she collided with a minivan. Atkins then fatally shot Davis in the chest. Atkins later claimed that he had accidentally fired his gun as he struggled with her to shift the car into "park." Witnesses contradicted his statements. Davis was pronounced dead at the hospital following the incident.¹⁸

Malissa Williams

November 29, 2012 / Cleveland, Ohio



30-year-old Malissa Williams was a passenger in the front seat of Timothy Russell's car when he refused to pull over for police after Russell's car backfired and the officers mistook the sound for a gunshot. The police followed Russell's car in a high-speed chase across Cleveland, which ended with police opening fire on the car. Williams and Russell were killed when Officer Michael Brelo climbed up onto the hood of the car and fired several rounds at them. Neither Russell nor Williams were armed. Brelo's use of deadly force has been widely criticized by civil rights groups.¹⁹ Brelo

was charged with manslaughter but was acquitted on May 23, 2015 when the judge ruled that he “acted reasonably” in climbing onto the hood of the car because it was “Brelo’s perception of a threat that matters.”²⁰

Sharmel Edwards

April 21, 2012 / Las Vegas, Nevada

Police followed Sharmel Edwards on the suspicion that she was driving a stolen car. They claimed that when she finally stopped driving and exited the car, she pointed a gun at them, and they opened fire in self-defense.²¹ At least three witnesses disputed the account that she pointed a gun at the officers, and two claimed that Edwards had no weapon.²² The Clark County District Attorney’s Office disregarded this eyewitness testimony and ruled that the officers who had killed Edwards had acted reasonably and lawfully.²³

Kendra James

May 5, 2003 / Portland, Oregon



Three police officers stopped the car Kendra James was riding in and removed the driver after they found he had an outstanding warrant. After her friend was arrested, James moved up to the driver’s seat. Although James was not under arrest herself, Officer Scott McCollister began struggling with James to remove her from the vehicle. He later claimed that he tried to use nonlethal methods to subdue James, including pepper spray, but that these methods had failed to work. At some point McCollister held a gun to James’ head and fired a single, fatal shot. Subsequently, he claimed he shot James in self-defense because the vehicle was moving while his body was partially inside the car. He was cleared of all charges related to her death by a federal grand jury but found liable in the civil case James’ family filed against him.²⁴

LaTanya Haggerty

June 4, 1999 / Chicago, Illinois



LaTanya Haggerty was shot by Chicago Police Officer Serena Daniels after the car in which she was a passenger failed to stop when police asked the driver to pull over. The officer claimed she thought Haggerty pulled a gun, but no weapon was found at the scene. The young computer analyst was speaking on her cell phone at the time she was gunned down. Three of the officers were fired, one was suspended, and the family was awarded \$18 million in a settlement by the City of Chicago.²⁵

Sandra Bland

July 13, 2015 / Waller County, Texas



On July 10, 28-year-old Sandra Bland was pulled over for failing to signal a lane change, and, as a video of her arrest shows, was pinned to the ground and surrounded by police officers. Bland was heard questioning the officers about why they had slammed her head to the ground, and complaining that she could not hear. Officers charged her with assault and held her in the Waller County Jail. Bland was found dead in her cell three days later. Bland had recently driven from suburban Chicago to Texas to begin a new job at her alma mater, Texas Prairie View A & M. Officials maintain that her death was a suicide, but Bland’s friends and family members adamantly reject this explanation and suspect foul play.²⁶

POLICING POVERTY: POLICE BRUTALITY AT THE INTERSECTIONS OF GENDER, RACE AND CLASS

Black women's encounters with police often take place against a backdrop of disproportionate poverty. Overall, Black women are poorer than Black men and white women, and many confront desperate conditions while attempting to keep themselves and their families afloat. Black women continue to face grave socioeconomic disparities even in the face of the economic recovery that others in America have enjoyed. They are the only group whose unemployment rate failed to decrease in 2014.²⁷ Many Black women who are abused and killed by police are among the low-income and homeless people increasingly targeted by the policing of poverty and "broken windows"²⁸ policing practices. The criminalization of poor people, when coupled with negative stereotypes about Black women, may result not only in police harassment but also in police killings.

Shelly Frey

December 6, 2012 / Houston, Texas



Louis Campbell, an off-duty sheriff and Houston area minister, shot and killed Shelly Frey in an attempt to apprehend her friend whom

he suspected to be shoplifting from a Walmart store. After Campbell failed to stop the group from leaving the store, Frey and her friend got into a car and attempted to drive away. Campbell fired shots into the car, hitting Frey twice in the neck.²⁹ He later claimed that he fired shots in self-defense because the driver had attempted to run him over. Sharon Wilkerson, Frey's mother, explained that after her daughter was shot, neither the driver nor the police sought medical attention for Frey. Her body was left in the car for eight hours.³⁰

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE



Margaret LaVerne Mitchell

May 21, 1999 / Los Angeles, California



Described by Amnesty International as “a frail, mentally ill, homeless African American woman in her 50s,” Margaret LaVerne Mitchell was shot dead by an LAPD police officer on the streets where she lived.³¹ Mitchell was well known in the area, and local residents, who affectionately called her “Mom,” described her as sweet and harmless.³² Based on eyewitness accounts, officers stopped Mitchell as she was pushing a shopping cart down the street.³³ When an eyewitness sought to intervene to protect her from police harassment, Mitchell walked away from the officers, who then shot her in the back.³⁴ The officers later claimed that Mitchell—who was 54 years old, weighed 102 pounds, and was a diminutive five foot one—lunged at them with a screwdriver, causing them to fear for their lives.³⁵ The shooting was found to have violated LAPD rules, but the officer who shot Mitchell was acquitted of all criminal charges.

Eleanor Bumpurs

October 29, 1984 / Bronx, New York



Police arrived at the Bronx home of Eleanor Bumpurs, a 66-year-old grandmother, in response to a city-ordered eviction notice. She was four months behind on her monthly rent of \$98.65. When she refused to open the door for the police, the officers broke into her apartment. In the struggle to subdue her, an officer fatally shot Bumpurs twice with a 12-gauge shotgun. In March 1990, the city of New York, as part of a settlement agreement, agreed to pay \$200,000 to Bumpurs’ estate.³⁶ Bumpurs was one of the first Black women whose deaths prompted protests, but her case never served to drive our collective analysis of the causes and contexts of police violence.

CASUALTIES OF THE WAR ON DRUGS: BLACK WOMEN AS DRUG “MULES”

Some are familiar with the impact of the war on drugs on Black women through stories such as those of Kemba Smith and Dorothy Gaines—women who were given long prison sentences under mandatory minimum guidelines despite their peripheral involvement in the drug trade.³⁷ Yet there has been relatively little attention to the law enforcement interactions that drive these phenomena—interactions informed by perceptions of Black women’s bodies as vessels for drugs ingested, swallowed, or concealed—or of their homes as drug factories or dens of danger and violence. These perceptions have fueled interactions that have taken the lives of Black girls as young as 7 and Black women as old as 92.

Kathryn Johnston

November 21, 2006 / Atlanta, Georgia



Undercover police shot and killed 92-year-old Kathryn Johnston in her home during a botched drug raid. When officers arrived unannounced at her home and attempted to enter, Johnston fired a shot in self-defense. It went through the screen door but it hit no one. In response, the police opened fire and released 39 bullets, several of which hit Johnston. Afterward, the three Atlanta police officers tried to cover up the fact that the incident was based on an inaccurate report of drug activity in Johnston’s home. One officer planted marijuana in Johnston’s house and cocaine in the evidence file. All three officers were sentenced to prison terms ranging from 5 to 10 years for conspiracy to violate civil rights resulting in death. Two of the officers were further charged with voluntary manslaughter and making false statements. The city of Atlanta paid a \$4.8 million settlement to Johnston’s family.³⁸

Alberta Spruill

May 16, 2003 / Harlem, New York

Fifty-seven-year-old Alberta Spruill, described by her niece Cynthia Howell as a devout, long-

time city worker, died of a heart attack after the police broke down her door and threw a concussion grenade into her apartment. The police were acting on misinformation about drugs and guns inside her apartment. Spruill’s family filed a wrongful death lawsuit, which the city ultimately settled for \$1.6 million.³⁹

Danette Daniels

June 8, 1997 / Newark, New Jersey

Danette Daniels, a pregnant Black woman, was arrested for dealing drugs by New Jersey police officers. Daniels was then fatally shot in the neck by a police officer as she sat in the police squad car after an alleged “scuffle.” Witnesses deny that Daniels was involved in any drug transaction at the time of her death.⁴⁰

Frankie Ann Perkins

March 22, 1997 / Chicago, Illinois

Frankie Ann Perkins, the mother of three daughters, aged 4, 6, and 16, was walking home one evening when the police stopped her. They claimed they observed her swallowing drugs and tried to get her to spit the drugs out. Witnesses state that the officers strangled her to death, a claim consistent with the medical examiner’s findings and autopsy photos that showed bruises on her face and rib cage, and eyes that were swollen shut. No drugs were ever found. Perkins’ mother reported that police subsequently harassed young men in the neighborhood to prevent them from speaking out about her case. The police Office of Professional Standards found “no criminal wrongdoing” by the officers. The City of Chicago settled a lawsuit with the family for \$637,000.⁴¹



#SAYHERNAME
ALBERTA SPRUIL
May 10, 2003 | Harlem, NY

**Black
Women &
Girls Lives
Matter**
Facebook: International Working
Women's Day Coalition

**End
Racist
Police
Murder!**

STOP MURDER
For a list of names and photos of the deceased

VIOLENCE INSTEAD OF TREATMENT: POLICE KILLINGS OF BLACK WOMEN IN MENTAL HEALTH CRISES

In the absence of adequate mental health resources for the vast majority of Black communities, law enforcement officers often serve as the first and only responders to mental health crises experienced by Black women. Police officers, however, are not mental health professionals, and often lack the skills and training necessary to handle these situations. This lack of training, compounded with a take-charge-at-all-costs attitude on the part of some officers, has led to the loss of life of those whom the police were called to serve. In several tragic instances, police officers have perceived Black women who are experiencing mental health crises as dangerous or as individuals who possess “superhuman” strength no matter how vulnerable, fragile, or in distress they might be. Instead of offering the compassionate support these women needed, police criminalized them and responded with deadly force.

Tanisha Anderson

November 13, 2014 / Cleveland, Ohio



The family of 37-year-old Tanisha Anderson reached out for assistance to calm their daughter during a mental health crisis. Anderson grew increasingly agitated when the police separated her from her family and attempted to place her in the confined space of the police vehicle. During the struggle, a police officer performed a “takedown” move on her, slamming her against the concrete sidewalk. He placed his knee on her back and handcuffed her as she lay face-down on the pavement. The officers refused to allow Anderson’s family to comfort her as she lay dying and exposed on the snow-covered street. She was pronounced dead upon arrival at the hospital. The Cuyahoga County medical examiner ruled her death a homicide.⁴² Anderson’s family has filed a wrongful death lawsuit against the City of Cleveland and two of its police officers. Anderson suffered from bipolar disorder, but her mother, Cassandra Johnson, explained that as long as she was on her medication, “you

wouldn’t know anything was wrong with her.”⁴³ Johnson indicated that despite media narratives, Anderson was not violent, and that it was the behavior of the police in isolating her from her family that made her panic.

Michelle Cusseaux

August 13, 2014 / Phoenix, Arizona



Police shot Michelle Cusseaux to death in her home while they were attempting to take her to a mental health facility. Cusseaux refused to let the police in her home, prompting Officer Percy Dupra to break through the screen door to gain entry. Dupra encountered Cusseaux holding a hammer and shot her in the heart. Dupra claimed that although Cusseaux said nothing to threaten him, “she had that anger in her face like she was going to hit someone with that hammer.” Cusseaux’s mother, Frances Garrett wondered, “What did the police officer see when he pried open the door? A Black woman? A lesbian?”⁴⁴ Cusseaux’s mother further explained

that Cusseaux was changing the lock on the door when the police arrived, and that was why she had tools out.⁴⁵ Moreover, the police knew when they arrived at her home that Cusseaux suffered from mental illness, but they were ill-prepared to manage the situation and ended her life instead of protecting it.⁴⁶ In February 2015, Cusseaux's mother filed a lawsuit against the City of Phoenix, arguing that the police sergeant either ignored Michelle's condition, or was inadequately trained to respond to it.

Pearlie Golden

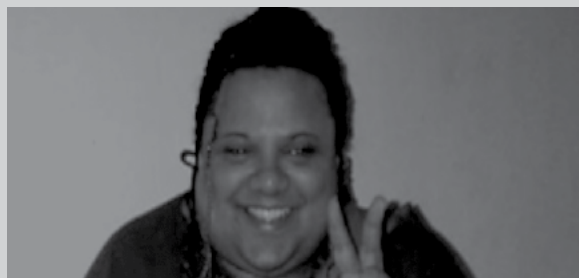
May 7, 2014 / Hearne, Texas



Police officer Stephen Stem fatally shot Pearlle Golden, a 93-year-old woman, after her nephew called to report that she was waving a gun. Her nephew said that Golden was upset because he had taken her car keys after she failed a driving test. When Stem saw the elderly woman waving the gun around, he fired 4-5 rounds at her, hitting her at least twice. Four days later he was fired from the police department. A grand jury failed to indict him for Golden's killing.⁴⁷

Kayla Moore

February 12, 2013 / Berkeley, California



Kayla Moore, a Black transgender woman, was killed by Berkeley police who came to her home in response to a call for help from her roommate because Moore was experiencing a mental health crisis. Instead of escorting Moore to a medical facility as requested, the officers attempted to arrest her on a warrant for a man 20 years her senior, who had the same name Moore was given at birth. Several officers overpowered Moore in her own bedroom, suffocating her to death in the process. Afterward, officers delayed monitoring her vital signs, referred to her using transgender slurs, and failed to administer adequate life-saving treatment. Moore's body was also exposed during

and after the police assault. Activists in Berkeley have organized to publicize her case, and her family has filed a lawsuit against the Berkeley police officers responsible for her death.⁴⁸

Shereese Francis

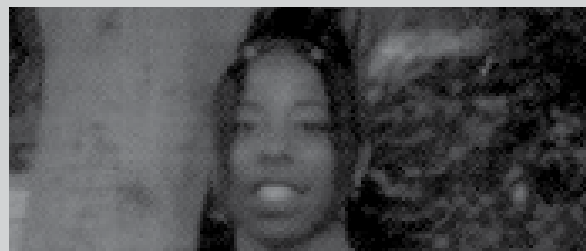
March 15, 2012 / Queens, New York



Shereese Francis' family called for an ambulance after she became emotionally distraught following an argument with her mother. Francis was schizophrenic and at the time was not taking her medication. Four police officers arrived at their home in Queens and tried to convince Francis to go to the hospital, but she refused. The officers reported that she was uncooperative and that she lunged at them. In response, all four officers pinned her down and attempted to handcuff her. Francis stopped breathing during this altercation, and the hospital pronounced her dead shortly afterward. The coroner's report concluded Francis had died due to the "compression of [her] trunk during agitated violent behavior." Her family has filed a wrongful death lawsuit, and the police department has yet to release its records in response to a Freedom of Information Act request.⁴⁹

Tyisha Miller

December 28, 1998 / Riverside, California



Three days after Christmas, police officers fatally shot 19-year-old Tyisha Miller after finding her unconscious in a car that had broken down. A gun rested on Tyisha's lap as she lay unconscious. Friends said the gun was likely displayed for protection because a man had been harassing her when they left to get help. Police arrived and broke a side window of the car, rousing Miller. As she regained consciousness, officers fired 24 shots at her, striking her with 12 bullets. Following the shooting the officers were placed on administrative leave, but no one was charged with the shooting.⁵⁰

DEATH IN CUSTODY: BLACK WOMEN AS “SUPERHUMAN” AND INCAPABLE OF FEELING PAIN

A 2014 study in *Social Psychological and Personality Science* found that white people were more likely to “implicitly and explicitly superhumanize” Black people.⁵¹ In the context of law enforcement interactions, this “superhuman” trope can lead Black women to be treated punitively, denied help, and left to suffer in unbearable circumstances while in police custody. This cruelty that would be difficult to imagine were a middle-class white woman involved is no doubt informed by narratives that frame Black women as somehow “superhuman” and, therefore, incapable of feeling pain in the same ways as their white counterparts.⁵²

Natasha McKenna

February 8, 2015 / Fairfax County, Virginia



37-year-old Natasha McKenna died in the hospital several days after she was Tased by officers in the Fairfax County Jail. McKenna, who weighed 130 pounds, was already restrained with handcuffs behind her back, leg shackles, and a hood when a sheriff’s deputy shocked her four times. She suffered from mental illness and officers used a Taser on her even though its use is not recommended on people in mental health crisis. Officers claimed she was being uncooperative, which led them to restrain and then Tase her. Within minutes of being Tased McKenna stopped breathing. When her mother visited her in the hospital her body was covered in bruises, both of her eyes were blackened, and one of her fingers was missing. She died a few days later.⁵³

Kyam Livingston

July 24, 2013 / Brooklyn, New York

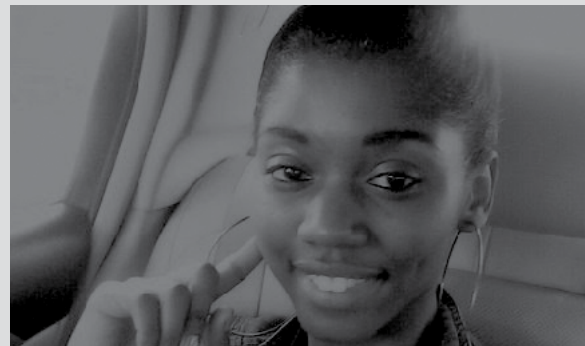


NYPD officers left Kyam Livingston in a holding cell after they arrested her for fighting with her grandmother. While in custody, Livingston

complained of cramps and diarrhea, but officers ignored her pleas for help, and those of people held in the cell with her, for hours. After Livingston spent 20 hours in the cell, police finally called for medical assistance when they claimed to notice that she was suffering from “apparent seizures.” She was pronounced dead upon arrival at the hospital. A medical examiner found that the cause of death was an alcohol-induced seizure. She was 37-years-old and a mother of two.⁵⁴ In 2013, Livingston’s family filed a wrongful death lawsuit in Brooklyn Federal Court.

Sheneque Proctor

November 1, 2014 / Bessemer, Alabama



Eighteen-year-old Sheneque Proctor was arrested for disorderly conduct, and was taken to the Bessemer City Jail. When Proctor—who suffered from asthma—called her mother from the jail she indicated that the police had treated her roughly. She had informed the police that she was ill, but they had ignored her requests for medical attention. She was found dead in her cell the next morning. Her cell was videotaped during this entire period, but the police department has refused to release the footage to her family. The family’s lawyer, Hank Sherrod, told *The Guardian* that “this young woman was denied medical treatment while being recorded on videotape right before police eyes. The fact that they won’t hand the film over makes us wonder what they have to hide.”⁵⁵ Proctor was the mother of an infant boy.



#SAYHERNAME

KYAM LIVINGSTON

July 24th, 2013 | Brooklyn, New York

GUILT BY ASSOCIATION: BLACK WOMEN AS “COLLATERAL DAMAGE”

In the age of mass incarceration and the “war on drugs,” Black women are often killed even when they are not the main targets of police action. The notion of “collateral damage,” which frames virtually all police violence against Black women as the product of simply being next to the “real target”—Black men—is by no means the only or even primary way in which Black women experience state-sanctioned violence. Nevertheless, the vulnerability of Black women and girls to being killed alongside Black men no matter what they were doing at the time is a damning indicator of the impacts of the distribution of deadly police force in Black communities.

Rekia Boyd

March 21, 2012 / Chicago, Illinois



Off-duty Chicago police detective Dante Servin fatally shot 22-year-old Rekia Boyd as she was standing in an alley with friends. When Servin told them to quiet down, words were exchanged with one of Boyd’s friends. Servin, seated in his car, then fired five rounds from his gun into the group, whose backs were turned to him at the time, hitting Boyd in the back of the head. A friend who rushed to hold and comfort the bleeding young woman was threatened with arrest and forced to step away from the mortally wounded Boyd as she lay in the street. Boyd was removed from life support two days later. Servin continued to work for the Chicago Police Department until he was officially charged with involuntary manslaughter and the reckless discharge of a firearm.⁵⁶ His trial was held in April 2015, and the judge issued a directed verdict effectively clearing Servin of all charges. The legal reasoning for the judge’s decision – that Servin’s actions were intentional rather than reckless, and, therefore, he could not be convicted of involuntary manslaughter – has been critiqued by legal scholars on all sides of the bar. In 2013, the City of Chicago awarded Boyd’s family a \$4.5 million wrongful death settlement.⁵⁷

Aiyana Stanley-Jones

May 16, 2010 / Detroit, Michigan



Detroit police officer Joseph Weekley shot and killed seven-year-old Aiyana Stanley-Jones in her sleep during a raid on her grandmother’s home. Weekly claimed that he pulled the trigger accidentally during a struggle with the girl’s grandmother, Mertilla Jones. Jones reported that she was reaching out to protect her granddaughter and another officer testified that there was no struggle over the weapon.⁵⁸ Weekley was tried twice and cleared of all charges, most recently in January 2015. He returned to work in April 2015.⁵⁹

Tarika Wilson

January 4, 2008 / Lima, Ohio



Police conducted a SWAT Team raid of 26-year-old Tarika Wilson’s home in search of Wilson’s boyfriend—a suspected drug dealer. Moments after entering her home, a police officer opened fire on Wilson and her 14-month-old son, killing her and wounding her baby. Wilson was not involved in the illicit drug trade. Sergeant Joe Chavalia, who killed Wilson, was acquitted of two misdemeanors: negligent homicide and negligent assault. Wilson’s family received a \$2.5 million wrongful death settlement.⁶⁰



EXPANDING THE FRAME: GENDER SPECIFIC FORMS AND CONTEXTS OF POLICE VIOLENCE

As the frames and cases described above demonstrate, Black women are killed by police in ways and situations that are very similar to those in which Black men are killed. Yet Black women are also killed in gender-specific contexts—such as responses to domestic disturbances. Moreover, Black women are less likely to be protected by police when they are being murdered, beaten, and/or abused by their partners and community members. A fuller exploration of the nonresponse to violence against Black women is beyond the scope of this report, but it is clear that police involvement in the death of Black women involves not only action but also inaction.

Expanding the analysis of police violence beyond lethal and excessive force to include sexual harassment and assault, policing of gender and sexuality, and profiling and targeted enforcement in the context of prostitution-related offenses brings the breadth of Black women’s interactions with law enforcement into sharper focus. In order to conceptualize and act on Black women’s experiences of policing and achieve accountability for all forms of state violence, our attention must turn to police violence that takes gender-specific forms or occurs in gender-specific contexts.

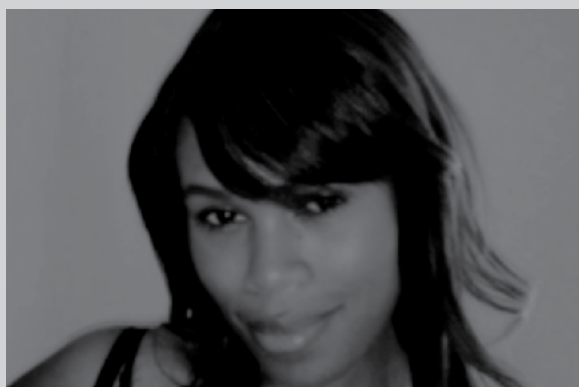
POLICE KILLINGS IN THE CONTEXT OF RESPONSES TO VIOLENCE

Black women are disproportionately at risk for domestic violence, sexual abuse, and death at the hands of family members, partners, and people they know. A 2014 Time magazine article revealed that they are almost three times more likely to experience death as a result of domestic violence than are white women. While they comprise only 7 percent of the population, Black women make up 22 percent of domestic violence homicides.⁶¹ In fact, a leading cause of death of African American women ages 15-34 is homicide at the hands of a current or former intimate partner.⁶²

Even when Black women do turn to the police for support, they often fail to secure safety from their abusive partners. More disturbingly, an alarming number of police killings of Black women take place in the context of police responses to domestic violence situations.⁶³ Similarly, Black women's experiences of sexual or homophobic and transphobic violence—leading to the deaths of at least 10 transgender women nationally in the first few months of 2015 alone and a total of at least 12 deaths in 2014 – have failed to result in protection or prevention.⁶⁴

The reflexive criminalization of Black women seems at times to heighten the perception that they are threatening, foreclosing the possibility in police officers' minds that they are simply survivors of violence. Black women survivors of violence—and particularly poor, lesbian, gender-nonconforming, and transgender Black women—find that police responses to violence all too often result in further, and sometimes deadly, violence against them.

Meagan Hockaday
March 28, 2015 / Oxnard, California



A police officer fatally shot 26-year-old mother Meagan Hockaday when responding to a domestic dispute. Within 20 seconds of entering her home, the officer fatally shot Hockaday, who he claimed was advancing toward him with a knife drawn. Hockaday had three young children who were all in the house when the incident occurred. The official investigation into this case is ongoing.⁶⁵

Janisha Fonville
February 18, 2015 / Charlotte, North Carolina



Janisha Fonville was shot to death by a Charlotte police officer who was responding to a domestic violence complaint involving Fonville and her girlfriend. The officer, who had previously been involved in questionable shootings, claimed that Fonville lunged at him with a knife.⁶⁶ Her girlfriend, the only other person on the scene, maintains that Fonville was over six feet away from officers, and stood a mere five feet tall, posing no direct threat to the

POLICE KILLINGS IN THE CONTEXT OF POLICE PROFILES

officer who shot her. Neighbors questioned why officers could not have used nonlethal force to subdue her.⁶⁷

Aura Rosser

November 9, 2014 / Ann Arbor, Michigan



When Aura Rosser's boyfriend called the police to his apartment over a domestic dispute, Rosser was fatally shot upon their arrival. Police later claimed she had attacked them with a knife, compelling them to use deadly force. Her boyfriend contradicted them, telling reporters, "It doesn't make any sense ... me and her, we had an argument. Glass was being broke, so I called the police to escort her out ... the police said 'police,' so I stopped. She walked towards them. They said 'freeze' and the next thing I know I heard [gunshots]." One officer shot Rosser while the other attempted to use a Taser to subdue her. Rosser suffered from addiction and mental health issues, but her sister disputes that she was a threat to the police.

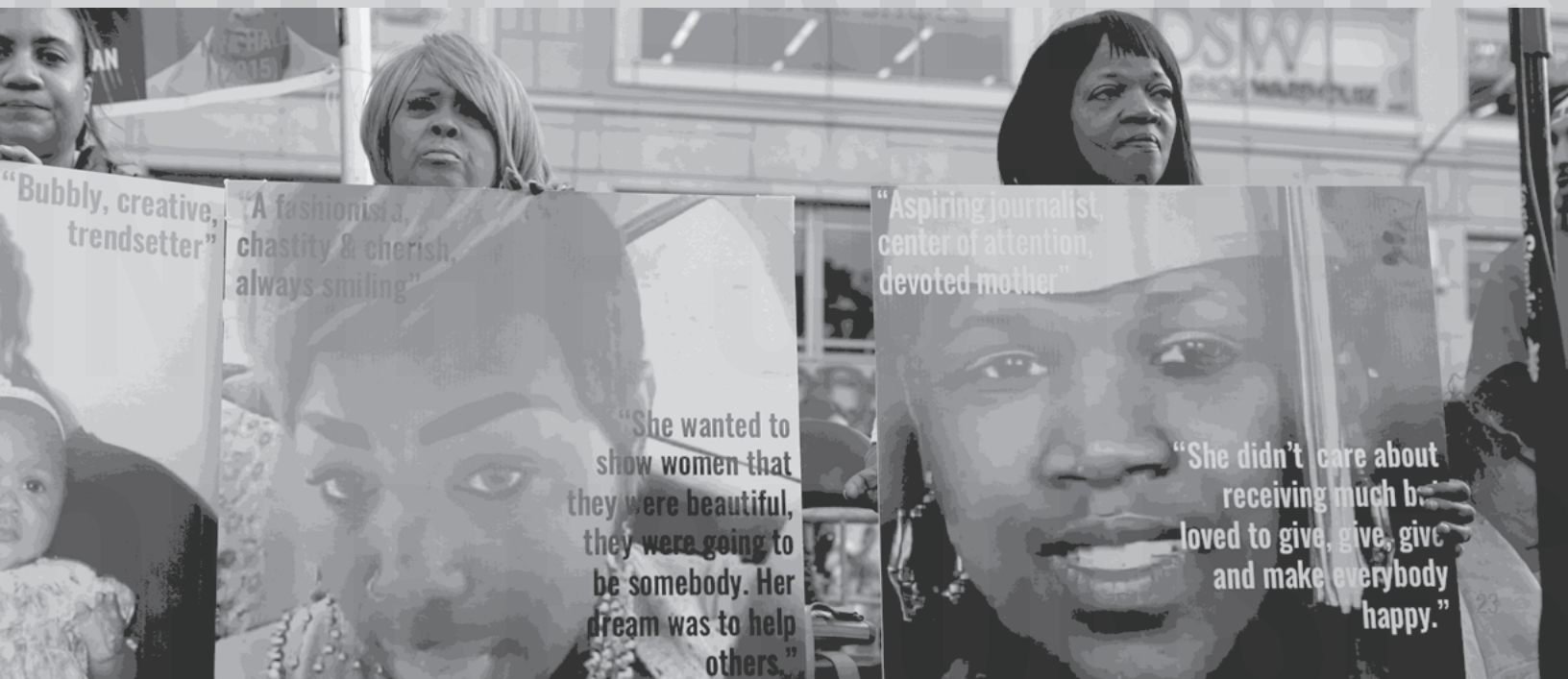
"She would have fainted at the sight of the gun being drawn on her. She would have been extremely docile, no aggression whatsoever towards police." The officer who shot Rosser was not charged with her death, but her family is moving forward with a civil suit.⁶⁸

Yvette Smith

February 16, 2014 / Bastrop County, Texas



Police officers arrived at 47-year-old Yvette Smith's home in response to a domestic disturbance complaint between two men in the household. Smith, a single mother of two, opened the door for the officers and was shot almost immediately in the head and the stomach. The officers first alleged that Smith had a gun, but that claim was retracted the next day. Deputy Daniel Willis, who fatally shot Smith, has been indicted for murder.⁶⁹



"Bubbly, creative, trendsetter"

"A fashionista, chastity & cherish, always smiling"

"Aspiring journalist, center of attention, devoted mother"

"She wanted to show women that they were beautiful, they were going to be somebody. Her dream was to help others."

"She didn't care about receiving much but loved to give, give, give and make everybody happy."

GENDER AND SEXUALITY POLICING

Along with cisgender and heterosexual Black women, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and gender-nonconforming Black women have been largely absent from the discourse around racist state violence. The overlap of sexism, racism, homophobia, and transphobia place Black LGBTQ and gender-nonconforming people in a precarious position at the intersection of constructs around gender, race, and sexuality, fueling police violence against them.⁷⁰

For instance, police often punish actual or perceived sexual or gender nonconformity with physical and sexual violence. These acts are sometimes accompanied by homophobic, transphobic, and/or misogynist slurs like “dyke ass bitch,” or assertions that if they want to “act like a man” they will be “treated like a man,” or threats to “rape them straight.”⁷¹ In one particularly egregious case, a Black lesbian in Atlanta reported being raped by a police officer who told her that the world needed “one less dyke.”⁷² Profiling of Black transgender women, along with Black non-transgender women for prostitution-related offenses is rampant, sometimes based on the mere presence or possession of a condom.⁷³ Black transgender women and gender-nonconforming women are also routinely subjected to transphobic verbal harassment and abuse, unlawful and degrading searches to assign gender based on anatomical features, and dangerous placement in police custody. According to the National Transgender Discrimination Survey, 38 percent of Black transgender people who had interactions with police reported harassment, 14 percent reported physical assault, and 6 percent reported sexual assault.⁷⁴

Duanna Johnson February 12, 2008 / Memphis, Tennessee



Duanna Johnson was a Black woman living in Memphis who had been turned away from jobs, drug treatment, and every shelter in the city because she was transgen-

der. Johnson was profiled and arrested for prostitution as she walked down the street one night, even though there was no alleged client and no documented exchange of money for sex. Booking Officer Bridges McRae called her “faggot” and “he-she”. When she refused to answer to the slurs, McRae put on gloves, wrapped a pair of handcuffs around his knuckles and savagely beat her about the face and head while Officer James Swain held her down. McRae then pepper-sprayed her, pushed her to the floor and handcuffed her. Security video captured the entire incident.⁷⁵ McCrae was federally prosecuted, pled to a single count of violating Johnson’s civil rights after a mistrial, and sentenced to two years in prison for both Johnson’s beating and tax evasion.⁷⁶ Johnson was later found dead, shot execution style, the third Black transgender woman to be killed in Memphis in two years.⁷⁷ Her killing remains unsolved.⁷⁸

Nizah Morris

December 24, 2002 / Philadelphia, Pennsylvania



Nizah Morris, a Black transgender woman, was found injured and unconscious a few minutes after three Philadelphia police officers gave her a ride home. One of the officers, Thomas Berry, returned to the scene where she was reported to be bleeding and unconscious. Instead of helping her or reporting that a crime had taken place, he covered “her face while she was still alive.”⁷⁹ She was left at the scene of the crime for 40 minutes before finally being taken to a hospital where she died two days later of a severe head injury. The police claimed they had no idea what happened. Their disclaimer remains highly suspect given that Morris had been beaten with the butt of a gun, and the officers were the last ones to see her prior to the incident. Her death remains unsolved.

New Jersey 7

August 18, 2006 / New York, New York



The New Jersey 7 are a group of 7 Black lesbian and gender-nonconforming women who were physically assaulted and threatened with rape by a man because they were lesbians, only to be arrested and charged by responding police officers with “gang assault” when they defended themselves—an outcome which would be unimaginable were they a group of straight, gender-conforming, wealthy white women.⁸⁰ Four of the women went to trial in the midst of a media circus characterizing them as a “seething sapphic septet” and “lesbian wolfpack.” The man who had ripped a handful of dreadlocks out of one woman’s head, burned another with a cigarette, and choked a third claimed to be a victim of a “heterosexual hate crime.” They were found guilty and sentenced to up to 11 years in prison until a campaign for justice won an acquittal, new trials, and shorter sentences.



UNSEEN AND UNSUPPORTED: BLACK WOMEN AS TARGETS OF SEXUAL ASSAULT

An entirely hidden dimension of police violence against Black women is reflected in victim reports of sexual abuse perpetrated by officers. The CATO Institute's 2010 Annual Report on police misconduct found that: "Sexual misconduct was the second most common form of misconduct reported throughout 2010 [after excessive force] with 618 officers involved in sexual misconduct complaints during that period, 354 of which were involved in complaints that involved forcible non-consensual sexual activity such as sexual assault or sexual battery."⁸¹ When the existing—though limited—data on police sexual assault are compared to FBI crime statistics, the results indicate that "sexual assault rates are significantly higher for police when compared to the general population."⁸²

The uneven power dynamic between an officer and his victim, combined with the officer's possible belief that since he is the law, he is above the law, have been hypothesized as root causes of this type of police abuse.⁸³ Black women are particularly vulnerable to sexual assault by police due to historically entrenched presumptions of promiscuity and sexual availability. Historically, the American legal system has not protected Black women from sexual assault, thereby creating opportunities for law enforcement officials to sexually abuse them with the knowledge that they are unlikely to suffer any penalties for their actions.

Unfortunately, there is no official data on how often police officers commit these crimes. Existing studies are largely based on media coverage, criminal convictions, and civil cases. The lack of data collection by police departments and civilian oversight bodies is compounded by the underreporting of sexual assaults in general. Victims are even less likely to report the crime if the assailant is a police officer. "The women are terrified," says Penny Harrington, the former police chief of Portland, Oregon. "Who are they going to call? It's the police who are abusing them."⁸⁴

Sexual harassment and assault have been reported to be particularly pervasive during traffic stops and interactions with minors.⁸⁵ It is also reported to take place with alarming frequency in the context of responses to requests for assistance or investigation of domestic violence or sexual assault.⁸⁶

Daniel Holtzclaw

Perpetrator

In Oklahoma, officer Daniel Holtzclaw stopped a 57-year-old grandmother on her way home from a game of dominoes with friends. He publicly strip-searched her, ostensibly looking for drugs, and then forced her to perform oral sex, prompting her to file a complaint. Further investigation uncovered allegations that he had raped and/or sexually assaulted at least 12 other Black women over a period of several years, often in the context of traffic stops. Holtzclaw generally preyed on women with criminal records or those who were caught with drug paraphernalia, which inhibited them from coming forward. A Facebook group in his defense has garnered hundreds of "likes," revealing how the widespread defense of abusive police officers

has converged with skepticism toward rape victims to generate sympathy for Holtzclaw instead of his many victims.⁸⁷ His trial is set for October 2015.

Ernest Marsalis

Perpetrator

Ernest Marsalis' abhorrent record of abusing women while serving as a Chicago police officer was known before he was accused of kidnapping and raping a 19-year-old African American woman during an arrest. Marsalis had previously been accused of violent or threatening behavior in more than 20 cases. Most of the charges were lodged by women, and two involved rape. Despite these multiple complaints, Marsalis was never prosecuted. He resigned after 16 months on the force.⁸⁸



ALL
BLACK LIVES MATTER
INCLUDING WOMEN

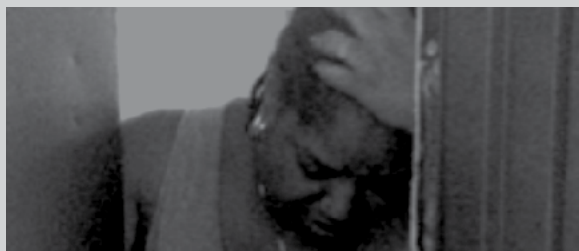
PERSONALIST
BLA

THE USE OF EXCESSIVE FORCE AGAINST BLACK MOTHERS AND THEIR CHILDREN

The presence of children does not necessarily prompt the police to proceed with caution where pregnant and mothering Black women are involved—even those holding their babies. This lack of concern is consistent with a longstanding historic pattern of devaluing Black motherhood and the loving bonds that tie mothers and children together. Damaging stereotypes that cast Black women as criminal and unfit mothers share a common genealogy with practices that deprive Black women of protections typically associated with motherhood during police encounters, sometimes leading to the use of lethal force.

Denise Stewart

August 1, 2014 / Brooklyn, New York



Denise Stewart, a 47-year-old grandmother, answered when the police knocked on the door of the wrong apartment in response to an allegation that a child was being harmed. She informed them that they had the wrong apartment and that she had just come out of the shower. Nonetheless, New York City police officers dragged her half naked, out of her towel and into a hallway, as she begged for her inhaler and later collapsed. Her neighbors protested and videotaped the behavior of the officers, to no avail. Police dragged Stewart's four children out into the hall and handcuffed them as well. Minutes passed as an officer held her naked in the hallway of her apartment building in utter disregard for her rights and dignity. Officers ultimately proceeded to the correct apartment and threw a towel over her.⁸⁹

Rosann Miller

July 26, 2014 / Brooklyn, New York



Just weeks after NYPD officers choked Eric Garner to death on camera, Rosann Miller, a Black woman who was seven months pregnant, was placed in a chokehold by officers who initially approached her to tell her she could not barbeque in front of her house. Community activists and politicians expressed outrage at the use of a prohibited chokehold on a visibly pregnant Black woman. Although the case received some attention, the officers involved have not been charged.⁹⁰

Alesia Thomas

July 22, 2012 / Los Angeles, California



Mother of two Alesia Thomas dropped off her children—ages 3 and 12—at a Los Angeles Police Station because she felt she was unable to care for them. In response, LAPD officers came to Thomas' apartment to arrest her for child abandonment. Officer Mary O'Callaghan was caught on tape repeatedly kicking Thomas as she attempted to arrest her and move her into the police vehicle. Thomas lost consciousness in the back of the police vehicle, went into cardiac arrest, and was pronounced dead at the hospital shortly afterward.⁹¹ Officer O'Callaghan was charged with assault under color of authority and was convicted on June 5, 2015.⁹²

Sonji Taylor

December 16, 1993 / Los Angeles, California

Police officers shot 27-year old Sonji Taylor in a rooftop parking lot where she had parked her car. Taylor was a college graduate and church choir member. She was returning from Christmas shopping with her three-year-old son. The officers claimed that she was holding her son hostage with a kitchen knife while repeating the words "the blood of Jesus." The officers charged Taylor, shooting her with pepper spray, and tearing her son away from her. They reported that they shot Taylor in self-defense after she "lunged" at them. According to her family, the officers surrounded Taylor for half an hour before she was killed. Her family stated that the knife was a Christmas present, her son was never harmed, and "the blood of Jesus" was a phrase Taylor had learned from her Pentecostal upbringing to repeat when in danger. The autopsy revealed that she was shot twice in the chest and several times in the back while lying face-down on the ground.⁹³ No officers were prosecuted for the shooting. In 1997, the city agreed to a \$2.45 million settlement.⁹⁴

NO SYMPATHY: POLICE TERRORIZE BLACK WOMEN WHO DEMAND JUSTICE FOR FAMILY MEMBERS

When Black women advocate for Black family members targeted by police, the police sometimes treat them inhumanely. These women, who may be victims of violence themselves, are sometimes subjected to brutal interrogations. The police have treated grieving women with little empathy and have offered no services to support them in the traumatic aftermath of the loss of a loved one.

Patricia Hartley and Constance Malcolm

February 2, 2012 / Bronx, New York



Shortly after her unarmed grandson, Ramarley Graham, was shot to death by police in front of her, an officer threatened to shoot Patricia Hartley, when she asked why the officer had killed Graham. She was then taken to the police precinct and interrogated without an attorney for 7 hours. Constance Malcolm—Graham’s mother and Hartley’s daughter—went to the precinct to find Hartley. As she tried to ensure that Hartley was not questioned without counsel present, Constance Malcolm was violently pushed to the ground by police officers and insensitively informed of her son’s death.⁹⁵ In 2015, the family received a \$3.9 million settlement. Two grand juries failed to indict the officers responsible and the family is calling for an investigation by the Department of Justice.

Tajai Rice, Sister of Tamir Rice

November 22, 2014 / Cleveland, Ohio



In January 2015, Cleveland officials released extend-

ed video footage of the fatal shooting of 12-year-old Tamir Rice. The police killed him as he played with a toy gun in the park. This case has understandably caused a national outcry. Less well known is the fact that Rice’s 14-year-old sister also endured a violent confrontation with the officers who killed her brother. As she ran toward his side after he was shot, the police tackled the distraught girl, handcuffed her and forced her into the back seat of the police car.⁹⁶ The officers’ neglect of the dying child and their refusal to heed the cries of his sister reflect a profound devaluing of Black life and of the loving bonds that exist between Black people.

Tasha Thomas, Girlfriend of John Crawford III

August 5, 2014 / Beavercreek, Ohio



The police harshly interrogated Tasha Thomas on the same day they fatally shot and killed her boyfriend, John Crawford III, in an Ohio Walmart.⁹⁷ Crawford was talking to Thomas on the phone as police shot him while he held one of the store’s BB guns. Thomas was then taken into custody for questioning. The video of the interrogation shows that the officers first accused her of being under the influence of drugs and threatened her. Not until the “interview” had gone on for 90 minutes did the police inform Thomas that her boyfriend was dead. At that point, one of the officers curtly remarked that, “as a result of his actions, he is gone.”⁹⁸ Thomas will never see justice for the emotional injuries senselessly inflicted on her that day. She was killed in a car accident on New Year’s Day, 2015.

CONCLUSION

Our efforts to combat police violence must expand to address the experiences of all Black people. An intersectional, Black feminist perspective—one that recognizes that categories such as race, gender, gender identity, and sexual orientation are not mutually exclusive—demands the inclusion of Black women and girls, transgender and not transgender, lesbian, bisexual, and heterosexual in the dominant discourse around police violence. When the lives of marginalized Black women are centered, a clearer picture of structural oppressions emerges. No analysis of state violence against Black bodies can be complete without including all Black bodies within its frame.

Until we say the names and tell the stories of the entire Black community, we cannot truly claim to fight for all Black lives.

Recommendations: Building a Gender-Inclusive Agenda for Addressing Anti-Black State Violence

The frameworks and stories presented in Say Her Name point to specific actions community organizers, policy makers, researchers, and the media can take to build a comprehensive approach to fighting state-sanctioned violence—one that is inclusive of non-transgender, transgender, and gender-nonconforming Black women.

What follows are some initial recommendations for those involved in various aspects of the work to make all Black lives matter.

Recommendations:

- At protests, demonstrations, and other actions calling attention to state violence, include the faces, names, and stories of Black women alongside those of Black men.
- Local and national organizations and social movements must find ways to support all families who have lost a loved one to police violence and all surviving victims of state violence.
- Policy platforms should be developed using an intersectional gender and racial lens to ensure that comprehensive solutions to state violence are being built and that the myriad ways in which it impacts the lives of all Black people are addressed.
- Spaces must be created to discuss the ways in which patriarchy, homophobia, and transphobia impact Black communities as a whole, and to hold individuals and organizations accountable for addressing how our communities sometimes recreate systems of oppression.
- Skills to talk about the multiplicity of ways in which state violence affects all Black women and girls should be continuously developed. In so doing, stakeholders can move beyond a frame that highlights only killing. All Black women—transgender, non-transgender, and gender-nonconforming—must be included in this reconceptualization.
- As domestic violence is a leading cause of death for Black women aged 15-34, there is a need to

acknowledge that both public and private forms of violence are devastating the lives of Black women and girls.

Some examples of gender-specific and inclusive policy demands to address Black women's experiences of policing:⁹⁹

1. Calling for passage of the End Racial Profiling Act of 2015, which for the first time includes a ban on racial profiling based on gender, gender identity, and sexual orientation, and urging local police departments to adopt and enforce gender and sexuality-inclusive racial profiling bans;
 2. Calling for enactment and enforcement of “zero-tolerance” policies toward sexual harassment and assault of members of the public by police officers;
 3. Calling for a comprehensive ban on confiscation, use, or mere possession or presence of condoms as evidence of any prostitution-related offense;
 4. Calling for adoption and enforcement of police department policies explicitly banning officers from searching people to assign gender based on anatomical features, and requiring officers to respect gender identity and expression in all police interactions, searches, and placements in police custody;
 5. Calling for use-of-force policies to prohibit the use of Tasers or excessive force on pregnant women or children.
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RESOURCES:

Say Her Name: Sample Questions for a Community Conversation

Building a gender-inclusive frame for addressing state-sanctioned violence requires that communities come together with the purpose of focusing on this issue.

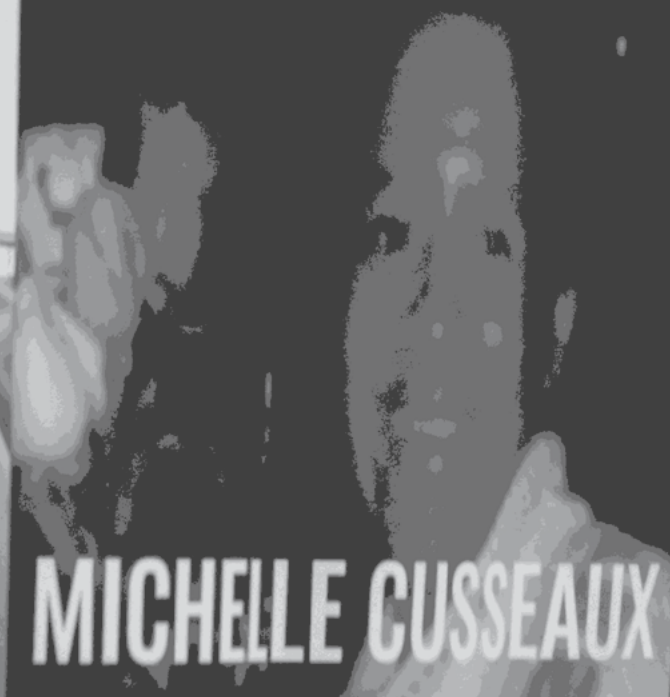
The following questions can serve as a starting place for communities interested in taking action.

1. Say Her Name articulated several frames to expand our analysis of state violence to include Black women and gender-nonconforming Black people. What frames and/or individual stories from Say Her Name stood out most to you and why?
2. What forms of state violence against women do we see playing out in our own community?
3. What forms of private violence do we see playing out in our community?
4. What can we do to draw attention and concern to the state and private violence Black women face?
5. How do we see a patriarchal mentality play out in our community organizing and within the media?
6. What impact would expanding our frame of state violence to include women and gender-nonconforming people have locally and nationally?
7. As we go about our daily work and conversations, what can each of us do to expand the frame on state violence to include Black women and girls?
8. Does anyone here want to share an experience they have had with police violence personally or through a loved one? Why is sharing these stories so important? *
9. How can we come together to support the families and surviving victims of state violence of all genders?
10. What steps can we take to pressure local law enforcement officials to collect data on police violence that are gender- and race-specific? And what about data on sexual assault and rape by law enforcement officials?
11. What concrete actions can we take to increase awareness around the issues raised in this discussion? Who is willing to commit to specific actions to further the concerns we raised? And, for those willing to make such a commitment, what will those actions be?

* Once this door is opened, those holding the conversation need to be prepared for what comes up, which is often deep trauma, including sexual violence. If this question is to be included in the dialogue, a trained professional should be on hand and prepared to offer survivors emotional supports and referrals to trauma care.



SAY HERE



MICHELLE CUSSEAU

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⁹⁷ Tom McKay, “Watch Cops Viciously Interrogate a Woman After Shooting Her Boyfriend Dead,” *NewsMic*, December 15, 2014, available at <http://mic.com/articles/106482/watch-police-viciously-interrogate-girlfriend-of-an-unarmed-black-man-police-shot-dead>.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ For more information on these and other policy recommendations to address women’s experiences of policing, see the President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing. *Final Report of the President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing* (Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2015), available at http://www.cops.usdoj.gov/pdf/taskforce/TaskForce_FinalReport.pdf, adopting several key recommendations that over 75 individuals, women’s, racial justice, and LGBT organizations offered in *Policy and Oversight: Women of Color’s Experience of Policing* (January 28 2015) available at <http://changethenypd.org/sites/default/files/docs/Women%27s%20Sign%20Letter%20on%20to%20Presidential%20Task%20Force%20-%20Policy%20and%20Oversight%20-%20FINAL.pdf>.



Millions March, December 13, 2014.



**Black
Women &
Girls lives**

**End
Racist
Police
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