

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE MILITARIZATION OF EVERYTHING

THE VIDEO DOESN'T SHOW YOU WHERE THE PROTEST BEGAN, OR give any indication as to what it was about. It begins with a close-up shot of slim-armed white girls in tank tops, surrounded by blue-shirted police. The title of the video tells you that they are NYPD. The girls are pinned behind orange webbing being held up by the line of officers, who are pushing the girls back onto the sidewalk just south of an overpriced sushi restaurant.

One version of the video has been slowed down to draw the viewer's attention to an arm in the white shirt of a high-ranking officer, reaching out from the top, right-hand side of the frame, bearing a spray canister. And then you see a girl crying. The protesters, still penned in by police officers turning their faces away from the pepper spray, crumple to the ground, wailing. The original clip has been viewed over 1.6 million times since it was first uploaded on September 24, 2011.¹

The officer was identified as Deputy Inspector Anthony Bologna, a twenty-nine-year veteran of the force. For pepper-spraying unarmed, penned-in protesters in the face, he was docked ten vacation days and reassigned to Staten Island. District attorneys refused to press charges. But his actions helped the protest known as Occupy Wall Street go viral.

The clip spread like lightning via social media, and people who had mostly ignored the encampment in New York's financial district up to that point reacted viscerally. The police mishandling of the protests managed to draw even more attention and people to Occupy. According to sociologist Ruth Milkman, "they made a series of errors that blew it up in a big way."

One of those important mistakes was the NYPD's decision to arrest seven hundred protesters after allowing them to walk into traffic lanes on the Brooklyn Bridge. My colleague Kristen Gwynne was covering the march and Tweeting until the protest was halted by a line of police. "People started screaming 'Fall back!' The police kept pushing, and suddenly we were crushed, slammed up against each other and corralled on both sides by police. It was so tight my feet were barely touching the ground," she reported. "A girl shouted, 'It's the police doing this! No one is pushing back!' Other people yelled to them, 'Stop it! Why are you doing this?'" She noted, "In the time it took them to arrest hundreds of us, we could have crossed the bridge four times."²

The viral spread of these incidents demonstrated the importance of social media, and particularly the new live-streaming technology, which allowed anyone with a smartphone to become her own broadcast media outlet. Americans who had thrilled to video broadcasts from Egypt's revolution were now producing their own. The police, Milkman said, "had no clue what they had blundered into."

Violent conflicts with the police were common at Occupy encampments. In Oakland, California, where police in riot gear cracked down quickly on protesters, reporter Susie Cagle described repeated experiences of being teargassed and threatened by a wall of riot-masked officers brandishing clubs, faceless black-clad versions of Star Wars Stormtroopers. The protesters were evicted on October 25 from the plaza they had renamed after Oscar Grant, a young black man killed by Bay Area Rapid Transit Police on New Year's Day 2009. They regrouped and called for the city's workers to join them in a general strike November 2.³

Cagle was due to write an article for me on the strike day, but the next morning I woke to the news that she'd been arrested overnight. I called the police department and was shuffled around repeatedly as I tried to find out where she was being held. My repeated insistence that she was a working journalist had little effect—a potent reminder that the First

Amendment rights of journalists, too, are limited, particularly in the police crackdown zone.

So-called “less lethal” rounds were fired at the Oakland protesters; occupier Scott Campbell filmed the rubber bullet that hit him as he panned his camera down a line of riot police standing quietly along the edge of the plaza—quietly, until the pop and flash of the shot and Campbell’s scream as he fell. Cagle was arrested after sprinting from a tear-gas canister; her video showed legal observers in lime-green hats with their hands raised, standing between her and what looked like a war zone, complete with clouds of gas and the bright flashes of “flashbang” grenades. Once in jail, she reported being forced to take a pregnancy test, groped, and commanded to shake her breasts in front of a line of male inmates. All for a misdemeanor charge of “failure to leave scene of riot.”⁴

Cagle’s story was not the worst to come out of Occupy Oakland. That honor likely belongs to twenty-four-year-old Marine Corps veteran Scott Olsen, who was hit in the head October 25 by a police officer firing a beanbag bullet, made of birdshot wrapped in cloth, out of a shotgun. As Olsen lay on the ground, Oakland police threw a flashbang grenade toward the protesters who rushed to aid him. “You can’t safely fire beanbags into a crowd after you deploy those flashbangs,” Olsen said later. “You can’t hit the target, because people are going to be running.”⁵

The two-tour Iraq veteran had joined the Marines in 2006 as a staunch supporter of the war. His first tour of duty, he said, gave him “perspective, empathy for people’s struggles around the world, against occupiers, against imperialism.” He joined Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW) upon his return, then took part in the Capitol occupation in Madison, Wisconsin, in 2011. After he moved to San Francisco for a job at a software company, Olsen accompanied IVAW colleagues to Occupy San Francisco and Occupy Oakland. “I think people are getting able to see the way the system works, and I think people see the connecting dots of exploitation around the world that’s enabled by the military and keeps our American interests flying,” he said.⁶

Two years after he was shot, Olsen joined protesters in Oakland at Urban Shield, a Department of Homeland Security–funded convention, where the companies that make weapons and surveillance equipment display their wares to police departments. “We’re seeing continued

training in scenarios that paint the public as an enemy,” Olsen said. “The police forces right in this building are buying the same weapons that they used to shoot me.”⁷

Olsen won a \$4.5 million settlement from the City of Oakland in 2014, much of which went to cover medical bills. “Whatever the amount is, it’s certainly not enough to make up for a part of my brain that is dead and will forever be dead,” he said.⁸

In Los Angeles, when the police came to evict one of the last remaining occupations, they wore hazardous materials suits, the type used to protect against biological contaminants, chemical spills, or radiation. “When those white-suited hazmat people came running from a corner of the police station we weren’t aware of, it was apocalyptic,” the Reverend Peter Laarman, part of Occupy LA’s Interfaith Sanctuary Support Network, told me. “An audible gasp went up from people who were observing.” Protesters who were arrested said they were swabbed for DNA, a practice that Michael Ratner, president of the Center for Constitutional Rights, told me was probably illegal. “It paints the protesters as a dangerous infection in America that has to be cut out,” Ratner explained. The city of Los Angeles later settled with protesters for \$2.45 million for what an attorney for the occupiers called “unconstitutional” arrests.⁹

Brutal crackdowns like these were designed to contain and deter protesters, and they were widespread and coordinated. Documents released to media outlet Truthout and to the Partnership for Civil Justice Fund revealed widespread monitoring of the Occupy protests by the FBI and the US Department of Homeland Security; Joint Terrorism Task Forces in multiple cities were involved at various times. FBI officials shared information with private businesses that might be targets of the movement’s actions, including the New York Stock Exchange. Naval Criminal Investigative Services (NCIS) was also involved in monitoring actions at the ports in Oakland.¹⁰

A report issued by the Global Justice Clinic at New York University’s School of Law and the Walter Leitner International Human Rights Clinic at Fordham Law School documented extensive police abuses at Occupy in New York that added up to “a complex mapping of protest suppression.” Violent actions included “hard kicks to the face, overhead baton swings, [and] intentionally applying very hard force to the broken

clave of a handcuffed and compliant individual.” The white plastic flex-cuffs used by officers at protests, which function like zip-ties, clicking tighter but impossible to loosen, caused injuries. Police repeatedly denied medical care to protesters. Legal observers faced assault and arrest, and video surveillance of protesters was constant.¹¹

“For protesters who previously had little interaction with police, these abusive practices have radically altered worldviews about the role of police in protecting citizens,” the report noted. “For others who had long experienced official discrimination and abuse, especially those from minority and economically disadvantaged communities, protest experiences have simply reinforced existing negative perceptions.” The concerns about overly aggressive, militarized policing, the report continued, came alongside a backdrop of “disproportionate and well-documented abusive policing practices in poor and minority communities outside of the protest context.”¹²

What was new at Occupy, in other words, was not routinized police abuses and violation of the civil rights of Americans. That had been happening for a long time, something that the occupiers in Oakland acknowledged with their decision to name their encampment after Oscar Grant. What was new was that it was happening on a large scale, to white people, in front of cameras and legal observers. White activists might have been terrified and outraged at their first experiences being brutalized by the police. Some of them did tire of the abuse and give up; others probably stayed home altogether. But when militarized cops rolled into a neighborhood that had been saturated in dehumanizing treatment from the cops on a daily basis, the residents didn’t simply get angry. They rose up.

Sometime in the summer of 2014, Diamond Latchison remembered, her father asked her if she thought her generation (she’s twenty-one, a much-maligned “millennial”) would rise up in protest if something happened. He had his doubts, and to be honest, so did she. But that all changed later that summer. On August 9, 2014, Latchison was at work at a local movie theater and checked Twitter on her break. “I saw a picture of a boy lying down on the ground. I thought, ‘That’s evil, why would you take that picture and put it on social media?’” She quickly realized that it must be nearby, as it was all over her timeline, and then saw the word “Ferguson.” She thought, “Ferguson like right down the street, like

ten minutes away from me Ferguson?” She kept checking her Twitter feed throughout her shift. “He was still there, on the ground.”

Michael Brown Jr. was eighteen years old when he was shot by police officer Darren Wilson outside his apartment in Ferguson, a suburb of St. Louis. As his body lay in the street, residents of the Canfield Green Apartments began to gather along the police tape that roped off the street. He lay there for four and a half hours as the grief and anger built among his neighbors. Brown’s mother, Lesley McSpadden, identified her son from a cellphone video.¹³

When Latchison got home, she wanted to go to Ferguson and see what was happening for herself, but her parents stopped her. She tried then to find a TV news broadcast, but there was nothing. “My only news was Twitter,” she said. Even when local news began to cover it, the news she was getting from Twitter was better.

Rasheen Aldridge worked at a car rental outlet by the airport, northwest of both St. Louis and Ferguson. He, too, was at work on August 9 and saw a mention on Facebook of a young man who had been killed at the Canfield Apartments. “Honestly, I didn’t think too much of it, sadly, because it just was another young man in St. Louis being gunned down, nothing’s going to happen,” he said. “But once I went on Twitter, I saw the details and the response of community people reporting instead of the news reporting on it, you got a different idea of what was actually going on.”

Aldridge began to notice police cars flying down the highway, back toward the city and Ferguson. He called a colleague of his from the Show Me \$15 organizing campaign, who worked at a McDonald’s off of West Florissant, the main street that the protesters had gathered on, and she filled him in on details. They decided to go down there the next day to put the organizing and mobilizing skills they had from the labor campaign to work.

At Canfield Green, they spoke with people who had been there the previous day. “It was very emotional, to see people out there still crying, telling the story of what happened,” Aldridge said. “And then after we had visited the memorial, we went down to West Florissant, where a lot of people were gathering, and started slowly protesting, walking up and down the street. The skills went out the window and the emotion took over real quick.”

Seeing the approach of the police in armored vehicles, aiming weapons from the tops of trucks, shook him. Residents, he said, were just trying to grieve, to process their emotions. “The reaction was just way, way uncalled for.”

Latchison, too, joined the protests, but at first kept just missing the worst of the police overreaction, including the tear gas and the rubber bullets. She would leave Ferguson and check Twitter when she got home to find out that her friends were fleeing tear gas. School was canceled as the protests intensified. In addition to the 94 percent white Ferguson police force, the St. Louis County Police and the Missouri Highway Patrol joined the fray. The governor of Missouri declared a state of emergency on August 16 and instituted a curfew, but the curfew was different in different towns. Aldridge recalled announcing through a bullhorn that the curfew for Ferguson was approaching, but that in municipalities just minutes away on either side of them, the curfew had already been in place for an hour or two. “No one knew what was going to happen in those early days. It came 11:00, they didn’t do anything, we didn’t do anything, 11:10, 11:20, then 11:30, that’s when they came with the trucks and the tear gas, they just started shooting it at us.”¹⁴

The National Guard was called in on the 18th, though the curfew was lifted. Documents revealed by CNN after a Freedom of Information Act request found that the National Guard used language such as “enemy forces” and “adversaries” to describe the protesters and grouped them along with the Ku Klux Klan as enemies; meanwhile, the Ferguson mayor fretted that the National Guard didn’t show up soon enough to “save all of our businesses.” Saving Michael Brown, apparently, was less of a priority.¹⁵

The images of the tanks shocked the nation. Technically, they’re Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected vehicles, or MRAPs, but “tanks” is what both reporters and protesters called them. Tef Poe, a local rapper who was on the scene early on, said, “I saw some people I’ve been knowing all of my life—for 15 years or better—standing there by armored trucks with M-16s pointed at their chests. They don’t have guns. They have their hands up. I feel like the police force is mocking us. I feel like, you know, we’re assembling in peace and they’re mocking the fact that we can’t fight back with weaponry. I’ve seen pictures where they aim

guns at people and another officer stands to the side with their hands in the air, mocking the chant that we've been chanting. The 'Hands up, don't shoot,' chant."¹⁶

The chant came from reports by witnesses that Brown was shot with his hands in the air. "Hands up, don't shoot," would have been a powerful message for protesters facing normal police, armed with pistols and Tasers. Surrounded by MRAPs, breathing tear gas, it became something else entirely.

Weapons used on the unarmed protesters in Ferguson included flashbang grenades, rubber bullets, pepper balls (which were banned in Boston after a woman was killed by one in 2004), wooden pellets (developed by the British for control in Hong Kong and Northern Ireland in the 1960s), beanbags (like the one that had given Scott Olsen permanent brain damage), and the LRAD "sound cannon" (which can produce "pain-inducing 'deterrent' tones" and cause "permanent hearing loss"). Journalists Robin Jacks and Joanne Stocker tracked the munitions from Ferguson and traced most of them to two "less-lethal contractors," Combined Systems, Inc., and Defense Technology, a division of the Safariland Group. They also uncovered the use of two tear-gas canisters that most likely date back to the Cold War.¹⁷

Latchison was arrested for the first time on September 28, zip-cuffed and left in a police van by herself. She has delicate hands that she gestures with when she talks; telling this story, she demonstrated how they cuffed her, and how the cuffs got tighter and tighter. That first time, she was held for five hours; her second arrest kept her in for fifteen hours, alongside people who reported being denied asthma and heart medication. Bail, too, began to be hiked for protesters, sometimes ranging to thousands of dollars for people who were simply standing on a sidewalk when arrested, as videos attested.¹⁸

"Even in August, a lot of the police weren't wearing badges, a lot of them weren't wearing nametags, [and] media didn't question it," said Kennard Williams, another participant in the protests. "The people who are supposed to be a part of this 'protect and serve' system have their faces covered. Why do you need concealment?" he asked. "The 1033 program," he said, referring to the US government's program to transfer military equipment to local law enforcement agencies, ". . . training isn't required for the stuff that they give them. Police officers think that

they are military in an occupied country. Because people who've proven irresponsibility without the use of weapons, it's probably a good idea to give them weapons, right?"

Afghanistan veteran Paul Szoldra wrote of the scene: "In Afghanistan, we patrolled in big, armored trucks. We wore uniforms that conveyed the message, 'We are a military force, and we are in control right now.' Many Afghans saw us as occupiers. And now we see some of our police officers in this same way. . . . If there's one thing I learned in Afghanistan, it's this: You can't win a person's heart and mind when you are pointing a rifle at his or her chest."¹⁹

The message being sent to protesters in Ferguson was that they were the enemy, that they were not people worthy of the protection the police were supposed to provide. The protesters saw the divide between themselves and the people who were considered worthy, and they faced down a fully armed military force in order to challenge it.

THE COMPARISON TO AFGHANISTAN WASN'T A COINCIDENCE. THE ATTACKS of September 11, 2001, ushered in a new era of war in the United States, one that had no borders or boundaries. Like the Cold War, the War on Terror is a battle conceived of by its initiators as a global conflict over ideas: a clash of ideologies. "We're moving into the era of the Cold War on Terror," journalist Jeremy Scahill, author of *Dirty Wars: The World Is a Battlefield*, told me. For our supposed allies in the Cold War, the key to unlocking funds and weaponry was to oppose Soviet communism; once the War on Terror began, the code shifted from anticommunist to antiterrorist language. Just like during the Cold War, battles abroad justified a ramp-up in domestic policing.²⁰

"Instead of the Communist Menace lurking in every corner, now it's the Terrorist Menace lurking in every corner," Scahill said. Terrorism gave Americans an identity to defend; Glenn Beck's Tea Party-linked project, we should remember, was called the "9/12" project in an attempt to recall a moment of supposed national unity. It also offered the possibility of traitors within to be fought. "We're militarizing our response to any perceived problem," Scahill said. "It's a War on Drugs—so there's a militarized solution to it. We have a War on Crime—so we're para-militarizing law enforcement in the US."²¹

The ramped-up militarization at home seemed to inspire militarized antigovernment sentiment, too. After Obama's election, the rise of the Tea Party brought along with it escalated rhetoric about arming in the face of a tyrannical state, from open-carry protests to the comment from Texas gubernatorial candidate Debra Medina, at a pro-Texas-secession rally, that "the tree of freedom is occasionally watered with the blood of tyrants and patriots." Sharron Angle, who challenged Democratic Senate leader Harry Reid in 2010, liked to refer to "Second Amendment remedies" and hint that she might be packing heat during interviews.²²

The Obama years also saw a revival of the kind of armed militias that had arisen in the 1990s. Perhaps the most dramatic example took place in the winter of 2016, when armed militia members occupied an Oregon wildlife refuge in protest over the long prison sentences given to ranchers who had burned brush on federal lands. Dwight and Steve Hammond were charged under the Clinton-era Federal Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act and given mandatory minimum sentences of five years, whereupon Ammon and Ryan Bundy, already famous within the militia movement for a similar standoff at their father's ranch in 2014, led a protest that they insisted was peaceful. Nevertheless, their nearly month-long occupation ended in arrests and the death of one of the occupiers at the hands of police. They drew support from several militant and "patriot" groups, including the Oath Keepers.

The Oath Keepers were a group of largely current and former military personnel and police officers who had vowed to protect the Constitution of the United States—even from "unconstitutional" orders that might be issued by higher-ups. Sam Andrews, who grew up in St. Louis County and spent thirty years working in private security and weapons training, had found the Oath Keepers a couple of years before the uprising in Ferguson. He was dismayed by the "gradual erosion of our rights" that he saw under both Bush and Obama, citing the PATRIOT Act, the National Security Agency surveillance programs, and Hillary Clinton's private email server as examples of "both parties of this country violating our rights, acting like an elite ruling class that can functionally ignore laws at the expense of people."²³

When the protests began in Ferguson, Andrews was disturbed by the police response, both the use of militarized weapons on a civilian population and the failure of the police to protect local businesses. He

criticized the governor's use of the National Guard to protect "his rich friends' assets in Clayton" rather than the people and small businesses in Ferguson.

Along with a group of friends, military veterans, police, and Oath Keepers, Andrews went out to do what the police were not. He wound up working security for some reporters, and he began to hear the same refrain over and over, both from protesters and from black reporters: that if they carried a gun openly, as Andrews and his friends were that day, they'd be shot dead by police. To Andrews, this was a clear violation of their rights in an open carry state, and he reached out to the leadership of the Oath Keepers about planning an open carry march with black residents of the county. He was disappointed in the response, which he blamed on the fact that many on the Oath Keepers' board were police. Their reluctance to hold a march with black protesters, he said, led him to leave the organization.

What was happening in Ferguson should have been horrifying to people like the Oath Keepers—a militarized state bearing down on its own people with the weapons of war. Andrews chalked the split up to racism. Justin King, a reporter who has spent a lot of time around the Oath Keepers, considered Ferguson the first major test for the organization, and it cracked along a fault line between police and military. "Most people in the military will tell you flat out, 'I didn't fight in Iraq to come home and have MRAPs rolling down my street,'" he said. "They're very against police militarization. Meanwhile cops are on the other side. I think the split was inevitable." He knew of three different Oath Keepers groups that left the organization.

It was Andrews's training that made him angry at police violence, especially the killings of Tamir Rice and John Crawford III in Ohio. In those cases, he said, the police officers violated clear safety guidelines, instead operating by the maxim, "Comply or die." He held his open carry march in November 2015, but entrenched fears, he said, still kept many black supporters at home. About a dozen people joined him, most of them, though not all, white.²⁴

The Oath Keepers were not wrong to note the increase in militarization at home; indeed, the average local police department has enough firepower to make an attempt to out-armed-force the government a laughable proposition. The US government is, quite simply, better armed than

any other force in the world, and an increasing number of those high-tech weapons are being placed in the hands of police departments—not just in major cities like New York that might be obvious targets for terrorism, but in suburbs and small towns. The founding of the Department of Homeland Security provided both funding and an excuse to beef up as towns launched new SWAT teams and acquired MRAPs, guns, armor, aircraft, and other tools of war. Between 2001 and 2011, Homeland Security had given out over \$34 billion in “anti-terror grants” to towns across America, including Fargo, North Dakota (pop. 105,925), and Fon du Lac, Wisconsin (pop. 43,021). The grants expanded under the 2009 post-financial crisis stimulus program.²⁵

Some of the military equipment seen on the streets of Ferguson dated back further. “The drug war certainly laid the foundation for all sorts of mechanisms through which law enforcement works with the Feds to obtain both power and money,” said Kade Crockford of the Massachusetts ACLU. “We saw that those foundations were massively expanded upon in the years after 9/11 and through the present.” The 1033 program Kennard Williams spoke of came from a post-Cold War 1990s National Defense Authorization Act, which aimed to move weapons from areas where they were supposedly no longer needed (the military) to places where they were needed (American cities, where crime and drugs had replaced communism as the fears du jour). Section 1208 of that act allowed the military to transfer weapons and gear to law enforcement agencies that were “suitable for use by such agencies in counter-drug activities.” Whether armored vehicles were actually suitable was not, apparently, up for debate. In 1996, Section 1208 became 1033, and it continued to send Humvees and grenade launchers to small towns. The companies that make these military weapons thrilled to this new market for their goods and began to target their products specifically at domestic police agencies at conferences like Urban Shield, where Scott Olsen joined the protests.²⁶

In fact, Ferguson and Occupy were not the first time these weapons had been used against protesters at home. The protests at the G-20 economic summit in 2009 were Mary Clinton’s first encounter with heavily militarized police. “That was the first time that the LRAD sound cannon was used on US soil,” she said. “I would see our civil rights and our rights to protest and assemble totally violated in a way that didn’t make sense. It’s actually the militarization of police and the state apparatus of protecting capitalism.”

That apparatus, Crockford said, has been very visible in the so-called fusion centers, where private and public security converge. “There is a fusion center in New York called the Lower Manhattan Security Initiative, which is staffed by security operatives who work for the major financial firms that were the targets of the Occupy protests,” she said. “You literally have members of law enforcement paid by the public sitting next to security officials who are employees of the largest financial firms in the country monitoring protests outside directed at those financial firms.” Crockford is correct about this: the Department of Homeland Security even describes the fusion centers on its public website, and its description is consistent with Crockford’s. There are over seventy federally funded fusion centers around the country.²⁷

Inside the United States, particularly after 9/11—and then again after the Paris attacks in November 2015—immigrants bore the brunt of Americans’ suspicions and fears. This is not new—immigrants had been targets of the anticommunist witch hunts. But in the post-2008 age, fears of terrorism merged with a fear much closer to home for many people—the fear of losing one’s job to a migrant worker who would do it for less. Donald Trump played skillfully on these fears in his 2016 campaign and early presidency. The militarization of the US–Mexico border (notably, not the border with Canada), and the increase in power granted to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), reflected these fears. A huge chunk of Homeland Security’s budget went to “border enforcement,” even before Trump, featuring Predator drones that, according to one report, cost more than \$12,000 an hour to operate. The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) has its own SWAT teams, which crash into homes and businesses and round up undocumented immigrants, many of whom are then sent to private detention centers owned by corporations that spend hundreds of thousands of dollars lobbying for “enforcement-first” immigration policy. Surveillance of Muslim immigrants and Muslim Americans ramped up significantly after 9/11 and was carried out by many different agencies, from the NYPD’s Intelligence Division to the FBI to the Transportation Security Administration (TSA), which was created in 2001 and then moved to the Department of Homeland Security in 2003.²⁸

But policies directed at people who are designated as “other” to American society, from recent immigrants to communists to African

Americans, almost always wind up hitting the broader population. In 2015, the news broke that Chicago's police were operating a facility that lawyers compared to a CIA "black site," where arrestees were reportedly held incommunicado, kept out of official booking data, and subject to abuses that mirrored those in "War on Terror" interrogation sites. Brian Jacob Church, who was in Chicago to protest the 2012 NATO summit, was held there for twelve hours. He told reporter Spencer Ackerman of *The Guardian*, "I had essentially figured, 'All right, well, they disappeared us and so we're probably never going to see the light of day again.'" He was found not guilty, eventually, of terrorism charges.²⁹

The War on Terror rhetoric is not so different from the Cold War rhetoric—the enemy is everywhere and could be anyone, and we must watch you for your own good. And that rhetoric has been used to justify massive surveillance of pretty much everyone. When former National Security Agency (NSA) contractor Edward Snowden leaked a massive trove of documents detailing the NSA's program of data collection, many Americans were shocked to realize just how big the surveillance dragnet had become. Cellphone companies were passing on customer data to the NSA; Internet companies allowed the NSA access to communications data from their servers; software allowed the NSA to search, with no prior authorization, databases containing chats, emails, and browsing histories of millions of people. And that was only the beginning.³⁰

"Surveillance is secret. It is not like a tank," the ACLU's Crockford said. "A tank comes out into the street and there are heavily armed military-clad guys standing in the gun turret pointing a weapon at a crowd of unarmed protestors. That is quite an image." Surveillance programs, such as electronic monitoring, don't provide such dramatic visuals when exposed. Alongside the MRAPs, Sam Andrews, the Oath Keeper who had split off from the organization, heard reports of stingrays—devices that allow law enforcement to eavesdrop on cellphone calls and track people by their phone signals—and other electronic surveillance devices on the ground in Ferguson. Crockford noted that license-plate readers had also been used to track protesters. "It is really difficult to identify that kind of surveillance, because it is really only effective for law enforcement if they can keep the existence of those operations secret from the public."³¹

State agencies' response to questions about such devices is usually a version of, "If you're not doing anything wrong, you don't have anything

to fear,” or, “We need this for national security.” National security, it should be clear by now, is a mostly meaningless term; this argument is the equivalent of telling protesters “because I say so.”

As political scientist Corey Robin wrote, the idea of “balancing” freedom and security requires one to assume “that security is a transparent concept, unsullied by ideology and self-interest.” It is nothing of the sort if you are a protester on the street in Ferguson, blinking through tear gas at the armed police pointing guns at you in the name of security. Most of us are not able to balance freedom and security within our own lives—instead, some people get freedom and security, and others get neither. “What a fuller analysis of the metaphor reveals,” Robin wrote, “is that the items being balanced on the scale are not freedom and security but power and powerlessness.”³²

THE HISTORY OF POLICING IN THE UNITED STATES IS A HISTORY OF inequality; certain groups, defined by race, ethnicity, or political views, must be controlled, while others quite literally get away with murder.

The very first SWAT raid in the United States came in December 1969 in Los Angeles, when the tactical squad attempted to raid the headquarters of the Black Panthers using, among other weapons, a grenade launcher. Inspired by the Watts riots and strikes by farmworkers organizing with what would become the United Farm Workers, LAPD chief Daryl Gates had created the squad, which he had wanted to call “Special Weapons Attack Team”—SWAT. “Attack” was vetoed, so it became “Special Weapons and Tactics.” The members were supposed to be trained in crowd control, sniping, riot response, and those special weapons. None of that training stopped their first raid from being a disaster from start to finish.³³

Angela Davis, who was outside the headquarters when the raid occurred, described it in her autobiography. Awakened in the middle of the night by a phone call informing her that police “had tried to break into the office,” she rushed to the scene to find a standoff between the armed Panthers within and the SWAT team without. The street surrounding the office, she wrote, was cordoned off for blocks. Armed figures in black jumpsuits were “creeping snakelike along the ground or hiding behind telephone poles and cars parked along the avenue,”

firing weapons. “A helicopter hovered overhead. A bomb had just been dropped on the roof of the Panther office,” she wrote. “They were like robots. The assault was too efficient to have been spontaneous.”³⁴

That first raid on the Panthers failed in its immediate objectives, but it succeeded in spreading the idea that police departments might be justified in using military-style tactics against radical political activists at home—particularly black activists.³⁵

Police forces go back farther than that, but not nearly as far as most of us might think. The first official police department was established in Boston in 1838; before that, cities relied on night watch systems made up of volunteers. The NYPD was founded in 1845. Early police forces started off unarmed, careful to avoid appearing too much like an army; officers came from the wards they policed and were part of the political machine. They were nominated by ward leaders and appointed by the mayor, which gave them an incentive to remain popular in the neighborhoods they policed. Some of them even ran soup kitchens.³⁶

Elsewhere, police were less interested in winning people over and more overtly interested in controlling particular sets of people. The police in St. Louis began as a force to protect settlers from Native Americans. In the South, white slaveholders feared slave revolts, and so, many decades before northern cities were hiring police departments, the South had institutionalized, uniformed, armed patrols with broad powers to arrest slaves and search their residences.³⁷

For those departments, the idea that the people being policed were a dangerous alien population was there from the beginning. This notion is still at the root of the problems with the modern police force. Meanwhile, the job of policing has actually grown much safer—among the jobs more dangerous than being a police officer are driving a truck or a taxicab, roofing, and trash collecting. The inequality at the heart of the policing issue is perhaps most obvious when you consider that we have reliable statistics for how many officers are killed on the job, and yet no federal agency reliably collects numbers on how many people are killed by police. The first official attempt by the Bureau of Justice Statistics to calculate such a number, carried out following the protests in Ferguson and around the country, wound up with 928 per year, on average, over a period of eight years—or about one person every nine and a half hours. *The Guardian* tracked killings in 2015 and came up with 1,139.³⁸

From the Haymarket hangings in 1886, to the surveillance of labor organizers and other troublemakers during much of the twentieth century, to the infamous beatings outside of the Chicago Democratic National Convention in 1968, to Ferguson, the full brute force of the police and of the judicial system has often been turned on those who have challenged the distribution of wealth and power in society. “Red Squads” and “Un-American details” intervened in meetings armed with tear gas and machine guns; police sometimes released people into the hands of vigilante lynch mobs to be killed or horsewhipped. Such police complicity with mob violence extended well into the civil rights movement.³⁹

Under J. Edgar Hoover, FBI surveillance of suspected communists evolved into COINTELPRO actively infiltrating and undermining the efforts of civil rights and New Left groups. Hoover had a special hatred for the Black Panthers, a group he called “the greatest single threat to the internal security of the country.” Notably, it was not their guns, but the Panthers’ free breakfast program that Hoover considered the greatest threat. An FBI informant supplied the map used by the Chicago police in the raid that killed twenty-one-year-old Fred Hampton, leader of the Chicago Black Panther Party. More than eighty shots were fired, all but one from the police. Hampton’s pregnant fiancée reported hearing two bullets pumped into his head at point-blank range, and the police saying, “He’s good and dead now.”⁴⁰

In the 1990s, with the Cold War threat gone, the target of “counterterrorism” legislation and militarized policing was, for a time, the right. In Ruby Ridge, Idaho, and then Waco, Texas, federal agencies participated in disastrous shootouts with separatist groups that fueled fears among the militia movement that the federal government was, in fact, coming after them. The six-week siege of the Branch Davidian compound in Waco ended with tear gas, grenade launchers, a massive fire, and seventy-six dead Branch Davidians, including twenty-six children.⁴¹

In Seattle in 1999, the protests at the World Trade Organization summit were remembered for their success in disrupting the event, but perhaps they should be remembered more for what they taught police about handling large urban marches and rallies. “The real story behind the WTO is that the police created a riot,” said David Goldstein, who was there at the time. “My daughter was in preschool. There were families there that were marching that day, and their three-year-olds

got teargassed. Just totally indiscriminate.” The city wound up settling lawsuits with protesters, including one for \$1 million in 2007.⁴²

Nothing has shaped modern American policing more, though, than the War on Drugs. That war was first launched in the 1950s to combat “Red” as well as black threats. Richard Nixon inflated it, bringing together all the fears of the 1960s and 1970s into one big policy package designed to appease the “Silent Majority”: the drug war targeted hippies and radicals alongside black people and sold it all as a crackdown on violent crime. The drug war turned the right to security from violence into an excuse to pump money into federal law enforcement and saw both major political parties decide that fighting nonviolent drug users with weaponry and harsh prison sentences was the way to go.⁴³

In New York, Governor Nelson Rockefeller, who, theoretically, was a liberal Republican, proposed mandatory minimum sentences for drug possession, sending people to prison for fifteen years for possession of more than an ounce of marijuana. Mandatory minimums quickly spread, and most of the people who went to jail were black or Latino. Under Ronald Reagan, with drugs designated as a national security threat, the military and local police were pairing up more and more often, using military spy planes to search for marijuana crops, and sharing in the spoils through new asset forfeiture policies—local cops would get a cut of whatever was confiscated from crime suspects. The drug war could pay for itself—meaning new toys for new SWAT teams to use in going after more drug users. And liberals like Joe Biden drafted bills that made most of these powers possible.⁴⁴

While hyper-militarized policing provided dramatic visuals, the criminal justice theories of the time also gave us a much less spectacular policy that ruined the lives of countless individuals, forcing mostly black and Latino low-income people into daily conflicts with the police. This philosophy was “broken windows,” or so-called quality-of-life policing. Broken windows made its debut in an *Atlantic Monthly* article in 1982, in which criminologist George L. Kelling and political scientist James Q. Wilson theorized that cracking down on petty crimes and small disturbances in predominantly black inner-city neighborhoods would prevent larger crimes. Despite no proof that this strategy worked, it remains popular to this day, defended even by officials who claim to be police reformers.

As journalist Raven Rakia wrote, broken-windows theory relies on an imperfect analogy between a broken window and a person, an assumption that the equivalent to fixing a broken window is writing a ticket for riding a bicycle on the sidewalk or selling loose cigarettes. Broken windows, and its stepchild, stop and frisk, are impossible to separate from the racist outcomes they produce. The policies harken back to the “Black Codes” passed after the end of slavery, which criminalized vagrancy, absence from work, and other minor offenses, pushing the newly freed back into forced labor in prison. An ACLU study found that between 2002 and 2011, close to 90 percent of the people stopped in New York were black or Latino, and about 88 percent of the time, the person stopped had done nothing illegal. In total, that was more than 3.8 million stops of people who didn’t even have a joint in their pocket. The new mayor, Bill de Blasio, vowed to end stop and frisk when he took office in 2014, but over his first seven months in office, the police made more misdemeanor arrests than they had the previous year. The disparity remained stark: 86 percent of those arrests were of people of color.⁴⁵

Those misdemeanor arrests can often escalate. Some 55,000 arrests were made over the past decade in New York for which the top charge was resisting arrest, meaning that the original “crime” was a low-level offense. Shortly before Michael Brown was killed in Ferguson, a Staten Island man, Eric Garner, was stopped by a police officer, ostensibly for selling loose cigarettes. Garner refused to submit, complaining of constant harassment. “It ends today!” he said. The officer, Daniel Pantaleo, placed Garner in a chokehold. The disturbing video captured by a bystander features Garner repeatedly wheezing, “I can’t breathe.” They were his last words.⁴⁶

This kind of policing divides society into the protected and those whom they need protection from—into those who are policed and those who are not. Those effects snowball. As Rakia noted, “The person selling items on the street without a permit may not be able to get traditional employment because they have a record—and is the same person targeted by police in the name of ‘maintaining order.’”⁴⁷

When New Yorkers protested after the death of Eric Garner, when Ferguson rose up after the death of Michael Brown, such overwhelming force was deployed in order to protect against “violence” from protesters, “violence” that was almost entirely conceived of as—literally—broken

windows and other vandalism. “When things move beyond just routine poverty policing, and black people start demanding a better life for themselves and their communities,” Crockford said, that’s when we see the full force of the domestic military police state. It is hard not to reach the conclusion that American society values windows more than it does black lives.

As sociologists and organizers Mariame Kaba and Tamara K. Nopper wrote, “for blacks, the ‘war on terror’ hasn’t ‘come home.’ It’s always been here.”⁴⁸

INEQUALITY HAS LONG BEEN A RECIPE FOR INSECURITY; MAINTAINING order in a deeply unequal country has necessitated heavy-handed policing. “Guard labor” in the United States—police officers, private security guards, prison and court officials, and weapons manufacturers, among others—has risen hand in hand with rising inequality. A justice system that cracks down hard on the Michael Browns of this world while letting their killers off is only going to solidify the beliefs of many Americans that the system is there to control them, not protect them.⁴⁹

Part of the outrage that led to the protests and to the destruction of buildings came from day-to-day humiliations at the hands of the police. It also came from the knowledge that for municipalities like Ferguson, the constant harassment had a financial motive. Standing in front of a burned QuikTrip, Ferguson resident DeAndre Smith told reporters, “This is how they eat here, this is how they receive money, businesses, the taxes, police stopping people, giving them tickets, taking them to court, locking them up. That’s how they make money in St. Louis. Traffic. Everything is all about money in St. Louis.” Stopping the flow of income, he said, might serve to make those in power take notice.⁵⁰

The Department of Justice report on policing and court practices in the area released in March 2015 backed up at least one of Smith’s points: “Ferguson’s law enforcement practices are shaped by the City’s focus on revenue rather than by public safety needs,” it read. “Further, Ferguson’s police and municipal court practices both reflect and exacerbate existing racial bias, including racial stereotypes.” Court fees and fines pile up quickly for people ticketed for minor violations like illegal parking—one woman, who had been experiencing homelessness, did

not pay a \$151 fine, which multiplied to over \$1,000 and six days in jail. Ferguson is 67 percent black, but 93 percent of its arrests were of black people between 2012 and 2014.⁵¹

Racial disparities in arrests are a nationwide problem, but the convoluted municipal court system is somewhat unique to St. Louis County, which has a population of around 1 million people divided into ninety municipalities. While poor black residents find themselves locked up, the wealthy and well-connected—like the teenage daughter of a wealthy oilman who helped an attorney get into a posh golf club, who saw her charge on illegal possession of alcohol mysteriously disappear—get off easy. Some attorneys served as a judge for one town and prosecutor in others, while at the same time working cases as a private practice defense attorney. The municipal court gigs were typically part-time—and lawyers sometimes advertised their muni court positions when soliciting for clients. Ronald Brockmeyer, named in the Department of Justice report, was paid \$600 per session as judge in Ferguson and Breckenridge Hills, and, until he stepped down, was also prosecutor in Florissant, Vinita Park, and Dellwood. “If you look at some of these people and their connections and everything, the numbers indicate that some of them are perpetuating racism,” protester Kennard Williams said.⁵²

The combination of the denial of rights by a judicial system gone berserk, on the one hand, and the extraction of money from already-poor people, on the other, created a system for exacerbating inequality. And it was built on top of a long-existing system of inequality: segregation.

St. Louis remains the sixth-most-segregated city in the United States; its metropolitan area, among the fifty “with the largest black populations,” is the ninth most segregated. “There’s a big division, it’s called the Delmar Divide,” protester Rasheen Aldridge explained. “North of Delmar is where a majority of African Americans live, even in North County, where the incident happened in Ferguson. There’s a lack of opportunities on the north side, there’s not the same jobs. If you drive up on Delmar and look to one side and the other you’ll see it.” Job segregation had deep roots; until the 1940s, when labor activists protested, even government-job offices were split into “white” and “colored,” which meant that different applicants were funneled to different jobs (and black workers were screened for sexually transmitted infections). White flight sent the suburban residents of St. Louis County over the Missouri River into

St. Charles County when black people arrived in formerly white suburbs like Ferguson. Redlining and restrictive covenants all played a part in St. Louis, as did urban renewal policies that flattened historically black neighborhoods to build industry—or simply to put up monuments. Only about half the black St. Louisans displaced by urban renewal were offered any relocation assistance at all, let alone new homes. The subprime crisis hit the area hard as well; at the time of Michael Brown's death, half of the homes in Ferguson were underwater on mortgages. After the protests, former Oath Keeper Sam Andrews said, many small businesses in Ferguson could no longer get insurance, forcing them to sell out and leave. The spaces became cheap, making them ripe for developers. "Greed is driving all of this," Andrews said.⁵³

White residents of the area, when pressed, can point to plenty of incidents that helped create the racial boundaries that now exist. The Reverend David Gerth, director of Metropolitan Congregations United (MCU) in St. Louis, watched his community connect the dots. Some of the members of MCU, he told me, remembered urban renewal, while others pointed to the Jefferson Bank protests in 1963 as a turning point. The protesters in that case were demonstrating against a bank that made much of its money in the black community, but hired almost no one from it.⁵⁴

While some white residents joined in the Ferguson protests in 2014, others proclaimed support for officer Darren Wilson and the other police. Kennard Williams compared the reaction of some to the protests to "a brand of McCarthyism." Instead of fearmongering about communists, he said, emails and pro-police Facebook pages referred to the protesters as "terrorists."

The nakedness of the police brutality the protesters faced, to Williams, revealed the force that lurked behind everyday injustices. For people in St. Louis's black neighborhoods and suburbs, there was almost no social safety net—the positive side of government power; instead, their interactions with the state were almost all coercive. Meanwhile, the wealthy, even those who committed the massive fraud that led to the financial crisis, rarely faced criminal penalties.

Many people who have been exposed to the criminal legal system, according to political scientist Vesla Weaver, "don't believe the state will respond to their needs. Such people do not think they have an equal

chance to succeed and see themselves having little influence over political decisions that affect them.” When looking at the numbers in Ferguson, where so many were ground under the heel of the state, it is a wonder that anyone stood up to protest at all.⁵⁵

And yet they did—some inspired by prior movements, others because they had simply had enough—and many of them found the movement more fulfilling than anything else they had ever done. “I’ve never liked nine to five but really being in this, being so conscious of everything, now I can see the reason why I don’t like it,” protester Diamond Latchison told me. “You work these ten-, twelve-hour shifts only to get the bare minimum, you barely have enough to pay rent still. Once summer hits, I may have to quit my job again and be like ‘All right! Protest full-time!’”

ON MARCH 14, 2015, I SAT ON A FOLDING CHAIR IN THE GYMNASIUM at Greater St. Mark’s Family Church, just a short drive from the memorial to Michael Brown in the street where he had died. I was there with a few dozen people, a mixed black and white crowd, for the People’s Movement Assembly. The assembly had been called by the Organization for Black Struggle (OBS), a thirty-five-year-old group based in the area that has had new life (and funding) breathed into it by the movement. We went over the hand signals to use to show agreement or disagreement; unlike at Occupy Wall Street, there was no “block,” and the meeting would not demand that people come to consensus. Instead, the large group made a list of topics that would be discussed in order to create action plans. It was yet another step in taking the movement from simply protesting and clashing with police to building the structures that would allow for the kinds of major changes the people in that room wanted to see.

The topics written on the sheets of paper on the wall in front of us ranged from ending the drug war to raising wages; from fighting restrictions on the right to vote to creating alternatives to the police. Abortion access was raised as an issue, as was access to healthy food. The group divided the issues into several overarching topics, and participants broke out into several different rooms to come up with plans.

I followed the group that tackled policing and the courts. In that room, participants introduced themselves and where they came from;

some were union members and organizers, while others were longtime anti-prison activists. One was a member of Socialist Alternative. Kennard Williams was in the room, wearing a bright green Ferguson October T-shirt. At one point, he spoke up to politely remind people of the rules of discussion and to let others who hadn't been heard yet take a turn speaking. At the end of the day, the groups came back together to share what they had come up with. I stepped outside with Montague Simmons, the director of OBS, to talk.

The movement assembly model, he explained, had been inspired by the work of organizers in Jackson, Mississippi, who eventually put one of their own, Chokwe Lumumba, in the mayor's office. "This is a moment where we've had more people get engaged, in and around activism, period, let alone the issue of state violence or policing, than we've seen in a very, very long time," he said. "We've had a lot of folks get activated who don't know exactly where their place is." The assemblies, he said, were designed to build a movement that had intersections, that could work on a variety of issues at once and link victories in one struggle to others that remain.

Over the five days I was in the area, there were rallies outside of the Ferguson Police Department and a silent march downtown; there was "Black Brunch," where protesters from the group Millennial Activists United disrupted brunch in a mostly white, affluent part of town to ask people to consider the violence visited upon black communities with their tax dollars; and there was "Monday Mourning," where protesters awakened Ferguson mayor James Knowles III early, holding fake tombstones bearing the names of people killed by the police, and delivered a letter asking him to resign.

Everyone I met just called it "the movement." There was only one, and everyone knew what it was. It was a movement for justice for Mike Brown and a class-conscious economic justice movement and a movement to dismantle structures of inequality wherever they existed.

There were plenty of experienced leaders and community organizers involved, but they deferred to the protesters much of the time—to the young people who provided moral leadership. There were specific, narrow demands and broad calls to awareness and action. There were new organizations and an "Action Council," a structure that allowed groups to plan separately and then come together to support each other and to

share the burdens. There were skills being shared and learned. There was incredibly positive energy, and a lot of trauma from repeated clashes with police.

Rev. Gerth struggled with finding his role in the movement, at first, but toward the end of September, he committed to going out to the protests. One September night, the row of clergy—many of them, like him, white—knelt in the street to pray. “All the protesters just flowed in and knelt there, and it completely disarmed the police,” said Rev. Gerth. “It was an amazing thing. There was this one guy at the front, who was still banging his nightstick in his hand; he was ready to crack heads. And now we were sitting there praying—‘I can’t hit them when they’re kneeling down praying!’”

Eighteen-year-old Vonderrit Myers was killed about a week later. “He lived in my neighborhood, and he was killed by an off-duty police officer who was paid for by my neighbors,” Rev. Gerth said. “The rich street in my neighborhood pays for off-duty security. We were there within forty-five minutes from when he was killed. I was with a group of clergy that prayed on the spot where he died, not long after his body was moved out.”

The next night, tensions were at their peak. Riot police occupied the intersection of Grand and Arsenal. “It was the first time that I had really been that close in front of the riot police. That’s walking distance from my house,” said Rev. Gerth. “I was standing next to the St. Louis Bread Company with the armored car behind me. The police department that I paid for had occupied the street where I get my Communion bread.” In those moments, the white clergy experienced the state violence from which their privilege normally protected them. Creating that kind of discomfort, Diamond Latchison said, was an express goal of the protests. In a strange way it is the police violence that can be the most deeply radicalizing; it can build the movement as much as it can eventually kill it.

Most of the media coverage zoomed in on the protests outside of the Ferguson Police Department, particularly at flashpoints like the non-indictment or the shootings of two police officers. Even the best coverage was tinged with riot porn, such as photos of burning buildings. Less featured were the creative actions aimed at challenging people in power to respond.

Kennard Williams recalled the takeover of St. Louis City Hall that the protesters staged for Moral Monday in October, just after the shooting of Vonderrit Myers. The original plan had been for a relatively small group to drop a banner inside. Instead, more than sixty people showed up, and they simply flowed in and took over. “I had a megaphone with me and I was calling to meet with the mayor,” Williams said. He was going to present the protesters’ list of demands, which included the removal of the city police from the 1033 program, independent investigations of officer-related shootings, and a civilian review board. But he was met by an aide to the mayor, who, he said, asked him if they were hungry and wanted pizza. “I looked at him and I asked, ‘Does it look like we came here for pizza?’”

The mayor’s chief of staff then came to meet with him and promised to open communications with the protesters within forty-eight hours. By 9:00 the next morning, the mayor’s office reached out to them, and shortly thereafter, Mayor Francis G. Slay came out in favor of body cameras on police.

“If there is any hope for American democracy, it is in the streets of Chicago and Baltimore and Ferguson,” said Kade Crockford of the ACLU. Because police crackdowns remain a large factor discouraging people from joining the actions, challenging the police is in some sense necessary for any future protests to stick; thus, the Ferguson movement became, in a way, the protest that made all other protests possible. But it took a lot of work to make those protests possible. Since the beginning of the protests, Kennard Williams had gone through legal observer training, street medic training, and nonviolent civil disobedience training. Those skills allowed him to play many different roles at different actions, from being prepared when the chemical weapons came out to keeping track of people who got snatched up to organizing actions like the one at City Hall.

The Ferguson protesters eventually won a court order preventing police from using tear gas without making a declaration of an illegal assembly and giving the protesters enough time to disperse—this came after the night when it was announced that Darren Wilson, the police officer who shot Brown, would not be indicted for the killing. On that night, Williams was at MoKaBe’s coffee shop, a neighborhood business that had become a hub for protesters and a safe space during protests. Police

fired tear gas that night right onto MoKaBe's patio. "People tried to go out through the back door, and they fired into the back alley at the exits of the building," Williams said. "I treated two kids like nine, ten [years old] for tear-gas exposure and flushed their eyes and everything."⁵⁶

Flexibility as well as symbolism were key to the actions in Ferguson. Diamond Latchison cited the work of artist-activist Elizabeth Vega, whose creative actions could evoke a deep emotional response. The "die-in," often timed to evoke the hours that Michael Brown's body lay in the street, became symbolically important, too, both as a gesture of mourning and as a way of holding space reminiscent of labor's sit-down strikes. St. Louis workers with Show Me \$15 held a die-in at a convenience store as part of a nationwide day of action in December; Carlos Robinson, a participant in that action, told me that they were "trying to show people the significance between injustice in our workplaces and injustice in our communities."

When Show Me \$15 first took off, OBS director Montague Simmons said, there was some resistance within the city to the strikes. But after Michael Brown's death, it became easier for people to understand struggle and disruption as a tactic. Fast-food workers elsewhere, such as Malcolm Cooper-Suggs in Seattle, also connected their struggle to the Ferguson movement. "Working minimum wage, you see that when you don't have money you do other things," said Cooper-Suggs. "If you don't have a legal job you do illegal things for the money, you do illegal things, you go to jail, after you go to jail you're branded as a felon for life, it's harder to get a job, you're doing even more illegal activities. . . . It's a cycle that people get stuck in, and we've got to do something to break it, because if we don't we're in trouble."

"Every facet of the movement is interconnected. You have the Fight for \$15—keeping people in a low-wage position is a locus of control, that's a method to control people," Kennard Williams said. "Using those same systems to deny people health care—that's used to control people; if you have an oppressive racist police force—that's obviously used to control people and keep the status quo. With the Occupy movement, power consolidated to just a small series of corporations that control other corporations—all of it is methods of control."

After August, many of the people involved in the movement formed their own affinity groups or organizations. One of the more visible groups,

Millennial Activists United, created popular T-shirts and hoodies paying homage to black liberation leader Assata Shakur. Latchison was a member of the Freedom Fighters, a group that began working together early on in the protests. “I think in the beginning it just started so people could remain close with people they came out there with,” she said. “And then it started to become, maybe we can make something out of this; since we’re all fighting for the same thing, why not make an organization?”

The different groups sometimes overlapped and often worked together to pull off big, dramatic actions. In addition to being part of Show Me \$15, Rasheen Aldridge was also director of Young Activists United and remained close to other organizations in the city, including Missouri Jobs with Justice. Williams, too, worked with different groups; to him, it was a good thing that different people took on different targets, and that the movement was nonhierarchical and not structured around charismatic leaders. “What a lot of us talk about with this movement is it’s not just one face, because a person can get killed,” he said. “You can get rid of a person, you can take a lot of steam away. We’re a community of people. And that’s a very powerful advantage to have.” For the young black men and women of this movement, the fear of being killed or otherwise targeted was real, not only because they were deeply aware of the history of leaders like Fred Hampton, Medgar Evers, and Assata Shakur, but because of the realities they faced (and still face) every day.

A variety of formal and informal Internet networks served to connect the protesters. “Twitter has been like the mecca,” Latchison said. Action alerts went out on Twitter as well as on a text-message service that anyone could opt into. FergusonAction.com listed actions around the country, and two participants, DeRay Mckesson and Johnetta Elzie, started an e-newsletter and website (wearethemovement.org). The in-person Action Council meetings allowed organizers to plan together with people they trusted.

It was also important, with all of the pressures protesters faced, for people to take some time to take care of themselves, to balance the rest of their lives with their ongoing commitment to the movement, and the different groups allowed for that. Still, it was hard, Latchison said, to step back, even if others were there to step into the gaps. People gave up jobs to dedicate themselves to the movement. “People have become dead-

end broke. They had money before, but they've used their savings—all that's gone," she added.

All this meant that dealing with trauma became a significant issue for many of the protesters. "To get teargassed is so far out of our realm of experience, to feel the burn, to deal with the grenades, to deal with cops in full tac gear rushing on you," Montague Simmons said. "I can't put into words what it's going to take to really process it. I know it's not going to be immediate." People stepped up to offer therapy and healing work, to create safe spaces as well as jail support networks and bail funds. Groups held self-care nights, where they spent time together to relax and be friends.

"PTSD is not a joke," Latchison said. As we sat in MoKaBe's, I watched her flinch when an ambulance passed outside, its siren on. Having been teargassed at the coffee shop, she said, she now felt more anxious being there, even though it was a second home for the protesters—she was greeted with hugs from four or five people as we sat and talked. "Some people don't sleep. I know I don't," she said. All the stress heightened tensions between protesters—"When you're like a family, of course there's going to be tension," as Latchison put it. But at the end of the day, they all knew they were "still fighting for each other."

Particularly important for Latchison was the support she felt from other women and other queer women in the movement. "I know that black lives matter, but what makes a black life? There's more factors than just the color of your skin. Do you have mental health issues? Are you going through the foster care system? If you are queer, if you are Christian or Muslim, what makes a black life valuable?" she said. "We fight for all of that. These women have been sexually abused, have been harassed, have been raped and killed by police; that's stuff that we go through, too, and for some reason we don't get that same discussion."

Within the movement, she said, they created a space specifically for women called Black Girl Magic, a periodic get-together for women to talk about their specific struggles within the movement. As a queer person of color, Latchison said, it was deeply important to her to see other queer people in leadership roles. "I came out, but not to everybody, until all this," she said. "Finally, I have a space where I can talk about my queerness and also my blackness as well. I don't have to keep being black

and being queer and being a woman in three different spaces. I can put them all together.”

The media depiction of the protests, OBS director Simmons said, “misses the fact that we’re not just on the streets. We are actually having discussions about policy.” He and others have testified in the state Capitol and in St. Louis City Hall on bills calling for civilian oversight of police. The movement counted the resignation of Ferguson police chief Thomas Jackson in March 2015 as a victory. Rasheen Aldridge pointed to the 2015 Ferguson City Council elections as another success: turnout was higher than in other recent elections, and three of the four candidates supported by the movement were elected. The Don’t Shoot Coalition, a collection of progressive groups that formed to push for legislation in the wake of the protests, was tracking more than one hundred bills in the state legislature aimed at reforming policing practices and the legal system, though only one of them passed in 2015.⁵⁷

President Obama announced, in May 2015, that he would modify the 1033 program in order to stop “tanks and other tracked armored vehicles, weaponized aircraft and vehicles, firearms and ammunition measuring .50-caliber and larger, grenade launchers and bayonets” from going to local police agencies. For many, it sounded like too little, too late, but they nonetheless saw it as a start to challenging the militarization of police. The response by conservatives like Representative Jeff Duncan (R-SC)—who posted on his Facebook page that he regretted having voted for a defense authorization bill that contributed to militarizing the police—was possibly more noteworthy, though Congress failed to take action.⁵⁸

Rasheen Aldridge himself played an inside-outside role in the movement. In late 2014, he became a member of the Ferguson commission that Governor Jay Nixon created to look into the conditions behind the unrest. Although several members of the commission participated in the protests, Aldridge was the youngest, and he was seen as a representative of the movement. Just twenty-one, he gave the impression of being older; soft-spoken, he smiled slowly and chose his words carefully. The decision to join the commission, he said, was not an easy one for him. His first reaction to the news was skepticism. “The governor, instead of coming down to Ferguson, talking to the residents, he just put together

a commission and the thing is people are tired of talks, that's why the young people aren't going anywhere."

But Aldridge sought out advice from mentors he trusted and then applied for the post. He had to go through a bit of background-checking, but eventually was told he had made it onto the commission. For the swearing-in ceremony, he arrived in a T-shirt reading "Demilitarize the Police." He then had to miss the first meeting because he was part of a delegation to meet with President Obama, alongside his fellow commissioner Brittany Packnett and members of Millennial Activists United, the Ohio Students Association, the Dream Defenders, and Make the Road New York. At subsequent meetings, the commission discussed the police, the municipal court system, and other local issues. They eventually, Aldridge said, managed to build some trust with the community, but he still pressed for more.

While on the commission, Aldridge continued to take part in actions, including an occupation at the police department. But he also began to consider how his actions would look—on both sides. "It's kinda hard to walk that line because it's like, am I selling out?"

Ultimately, though, the commission was just one of many ways to create change, and all of them overlapped. What originally was a movement in response to the death of one young man expanded not only to include other young black people killed by the police, but also low-wage work and shuttered schools and the economic depression in black communities. When the financial crisis hit, Aldridge noted, even people with college degrees weren't sheltered. But even as the nation was supposedly struggling, fast-food restaurants were popping up, creating more low-wage jobs selling cheap products. "Police brutality is the root of it, but we're trying to spread out and get to some of these other factors because those are also kicking our asses, too," Diamond Latchison said. "We can't just fight for one thing. You've got to take the system as a whole, not just part of it."

That systemic change, Kennard Williams said, would not come simply through voting. Taking direct action, remaining in the streets, challenging institutions that are oppressive, had to be part of the strategy for change. "I think that's one of the greatest lies that people in power have been able to pull off," he said, "fooling people that they legitimately cannot change things."

People who ask what the movement has accomplished, Latchison said, don't understand what they're saying. "Liberation is not quick, freedom is not quick, there's levels to this." Aldridge compared the Ferguson movement to the Montgomery bus boycott, which lasted 381 days—and was only part of the broader civil rights movement, just a part of the bigger freedom struggle.

The day after the OBS assembly, I drove to St. Louis University and joined a meeting under the aegis of "Sacred Conversations on Race (and Action)." Put together by Metropolitan Congregations United, the event was part consciousness-raising and part action planning. I had been invited by Rev. Gerth, and after the opening address and prayer ("God has asked us to get in this fight"), I followed him to the breakout group he facilitated.

The room was mostly older—a sign, perhaps, of the demographics of church membership—and mostly white. In the breakout groups, I watched Rev. Gerth ask a group of white men to articulate the ways it had benefited them to be white. "Michael Brown was stopped for walking in the street," said one man. "In my neighborhood, people walk and run in the street all the time." An older man said that he was able to buy a house when a black man would have been redlined out of it. Another couldn't explain it exactly, but said simply, "I'm probably here today because I want to understand."

Some of them bristled at the term "privilege," while others had been learning the language of social justice movements. A man in a Vietnam veteran hat explained the term "micro-aggression," and Rev. Gerth navigated the group through its own micro-aggression when a white woman began to explain to a black man that something he'd perceived as racism might not have been. More obvious examples of racism—everyone gasped when a younger black man related a tale of his college professor calling him "boy"—were easy for the group to understand, but they grappled with tougher questions of their own personal complicity in the system of white supremacy and of what could be done about it.

"My sense was that most of the people there were looking for a way to have some impact," Rev. Gerth told me afterward. "We also have found that if you're not taking some real risk, people leave and go, 'That was too nice. We need something that is harder than that.'" Part of the plan was to move people from the emotional reactions they were having to

the events in Ferguson to an understanding of the power they had to make change and the actions they could take.

At the end of the event, rather than asking for a conclusion, Rev. Gerth and the other facilitators simply asked people to identify the tension that they would hold onto going forward. It helped people immensely, Rev. Gerth said, to allow them to realize, “I don’t have to have an answer. I just have to be honest about where the tensions really are. And I have to take responsibility for paying attention to them and doing something in response to them.”

“One of the things we said early on is that you can’t go back to normal. There’s got to be a new normal, because the old normal was diseased,” Rev. Gerth said. In that space at St. Louis University, in the Organization for Black Struggle’s People’s Movement Assembly, in the streets of Ferguson, the protests were attempting to create a new normal. It is early yet—Montague Simmons said, “It’s not 1964, it’s 1954”—but that was the plan, even if, as one participant in the Sacred Conversations said, some of them will not be around to see it.

In the Christian church, said Rev. Gerth, he learned the concept of *kairos* time—God’s time, a special or opportune moment when the world might change. “It doesn’t work on the clock,” he said. “A lot of us have felt like there’s something *kairos* about this.”