



# a short reader on police, protests, racism, and riots

*edited by CUNY Struggle,  
a collective of students and teachers*

## **To our students, the young, and the enraged:**

As protests verge on rebellion, we are all called on to reckon with the crisis and crossroads at which we find ourselves, a process that requires placing today's events within a long and uneven historical frame of struggle against white supremacy in America. However, from Fox News to the New York Times, the corporate media insist on the same fundamental message: lawful protests are the only acceptable form of resistance to incessant police violence. Their "both sides"-liberalism gives equal space to white supremacists and Democratic Party elites and equates the rebellious destruction by protestors with the violence of police brutality under capitalism. So we turn instead to the rich canon of radical Black activists and writers, whose work we have excerpted in the hope that it will be helpful and illuminating to you—our fellow protester, activist, organizer, and comrade.

June 2020



# Frederick Douglass

## **"Reconstruction" (1866)**

**S**lavery, like all other great systems of wrong, founded in the depths of human selfishness, and existing for ages, has not neglected its own conservation. It has steadily exerted an influence upon all around it favorable to its own continuance. And to-day it is so strong that it could exist, not only without law, but even against law. Custom, manners, morals, religion, are all on its side everywhere in the South [...]

One of the invaluable compensations of the late Rebellion is the highly instructive disclosure it made of the true source of danger to republican government. Whatever may be tolerated in monarchical and despotic governments, no republic is safe that tolerates a privileged class, or denies to any of its citizens equal rights and equal means to maintain them. What was theory before the war has been made fact by the war. There is cause to be thankful even for rebellion. It is an impressive teacher, though a stern and terrible one. In both characters it has come to us, and it was perhaps needed in both. It is an instructor never a day before its time, for it

comes only when all other means of progress and enlightenment have failed. Whether the oppressed and despairing bondman, no longer able to repress his deep yearnings for manhood, or the tyrant, in his pride and impatience, takes the initiative, and strikes the blow for a firmer hold and a longer lease of oppression, the result is the same,—society is instructed, or may be. [...]

Spite of the eloquence of the earnest Abolitionists,—poured out against slavery during thirty years,—even they must confess, that, in all the probabilities of the case, that system of barbarism would have continued its horrors far beyond the limits of the nineteenth century but for the Rebellion, and perhaps only have disappeared at last in a fiery conflict, even more fierce and bloody than that which has now been suppressed.

*war begins  
where reason  
ends*

It is no disparagement to truth, that it can only prevail where reason prevails. War begins where reason ends. The thing worse than rebellion is the thing that causes rebellion. What that thing is, we have been taught to our cost. It remains now to be seen whether we have the needed courage to have that cause entirely removed from the Republic. At any rate, to this grand work of national regeneration and entire purification Congress must now address itself, with full purpose that the work shall this time be thoroughly done. The deadly upas, root and branch, leaf and fibre, body and sap, must be utterly destroyed. The country is evidently not in a condition to listen patiently to pleas for postponement, however, plausible, nor will it permit the responsibility to be shifted to other shoulders. Authority and power are here commensurate with the duty imposed. There are no cloudflung shadows to obscure the way. Truth shines with brighter light and intenser heat at every moment, and a country torn and rent and bleeding implores relief from its distress and agony.



HARRIET TUBMAN.

Woodcut of Harriet Tubman in Civil War attire,  
from *Scenes in the Life of Harriet Tubman* (1869) by Sarah H. Bradford

# Ida B. Wells



## **"Lynch Law in All Its Phases" (1893)**

**O**n the morning of March 9, the bodies of three of our best young men were found in an old field horribly shot to pieces. [...] I have no power to describe the feeling of horror that possessed every member of the race in Memphis when the truth dawned upon us that the protection of the law which we had so long enjoyed was no longer ours; all this had been destroyed in a night, and the barriers of the law had been thrown down, and the guardians of the public peace and confidence scoffed away into the shadows, and all authority given into the hands of the mob, and innocent men cut down as if they were brutes—the first feeling was one of dismay, then intense indignation. Vengeance was whispered from ear to ear, but sober reflection brought the conviction that it would be extreme folly to seek vengeance when such action meant certain death for the men, and horrible slaughter for the women and children, as one of the evening papers took care to remind us.

The power of the State, country and city, and civil authorities and the strong arm of the military power were all on the



side of the mob and of lawlessness. Few of our men possessed firearms, our only company guns were confiscated, and the only white man who sell a colored man a gun, was himself jailed, and his store closed. We were helpless in our great strength. It was our first object lesson in the doctrine of white supremacy; and illustration of the South's cardinal principle no matter what the attainments, character or standing of an Afro-American, the laws of the South will not protect him against a white man. [...]

The general government is willingly powerless to send troops to protect the lives of its black citizens, but the state governments are free to use state troops to shoot them down like cattle, when in desperation the black men attempt to defend themselves, and then tell the world that it was necessary to put down a "race war."

Persons unfamiliar with the condition of affairs in the Southern States do not credit the truth when it is told them. [...] In a former generation the ancestors of these same people refused to believe that slav-

ery was the "league with death and the covenant with hell" William Lloyd Garrison declared it to be, until he was thrown into a dungeon in Baltimore, until the signal

## ***slavery under a new name and guise***

lights of Nat Turner lit the dull skies of Northampton County, and until sturdy old John Brown made his attack on Harper's Ferry. When freedom of speech was martyred in the person of Elijah Lovejoy at Alton, when the liberty of free-discussion in the Senate in the Nation's Congress was struck down in the person of the fearless Charles Sumner, the Nation was at last convinced that slavery was not only a monster but a tyrant.

That same tyrant is at work under a new name and guise. The lawlessness which has been here described is like unto that which prevailed under slavery. *The very same forces are at work now as then.*

# **NEGROES BEWARE DO NOT ATTEND COMMUNIST MEETINGS**

Paid organizers for the communists are only trying to get negroes in trouble. Alabama is a good place for good negroes to live in, but it is a bad place for negroes who believe in SOCIAL EQUALITY.

## **The Ku Klux Klan Is Watching You.**

### **TAKE HEED**

Tell the communist leaders to leave.  
Report all communist meetings to the

### **Ku Klux Klan**

**Post Office Box 651, Birmingham, Alabama.**

White supremacy has always required casting Black rebellion as the work of outside agitators, as seen in this 1930s flier



# W. E. B. Du Bois



## ***The Souls of Black Folk (1903)***

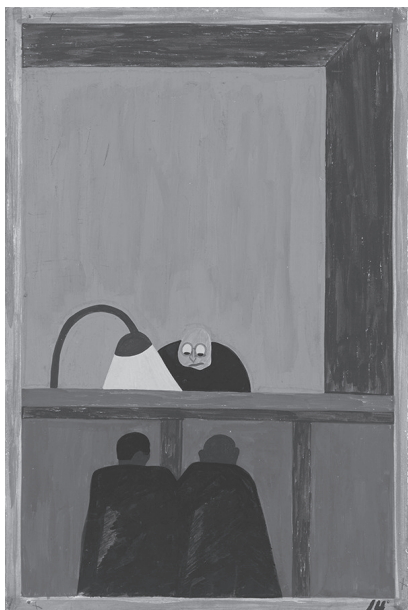
**I**t is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife,—this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face. [...]

To-day the black man of the South has almost nothing to say as to how much he shall be taxed, or how those taxes shall

be expended; as to who shall execute the laws, and how they shall do it; as to who shall make the laws, and how they shall be made. It is pitiable that frantic efforts must be made at critical times to get law-makers in some States even to listen to the respectful presentation of the black man's side of a current controversy. Daily the Negro is coming more and more to look upon law and justice, not as protecting safeguards, but as sources of humiliation and oppression. The laws are made by men who have little interest in him; they are executed by men who have absolutely no motive for treating the black people with courtesy or consideration; and, finally, the accused law-breaker is tried, not by his peers, but too often by men who would rather punish ten innocent Negroes than let one guilty one escape. [...]

***law and  
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humiliation  
& oppression***

[The South's] police system was arranged to deal with blacks alone, and tacitly assumed that every white man was *ipso facto* a member of that police. Thus grew up a double system of justice, which erred on the white side by undue leniency and the practical immunity of red-handed criminals, and erred on the black side by undue severity, injustice, and lack of discrimination. For, as I have said, the police system of the South was originally designed to keep track of all Negroes, not simply of criminals; and when the Negroes were freed and the whole South was convinced of the impossibility of free Negro labor, the first and almost universal device was to use the courts as a means of reënsaving the blacks. It was not then a question of crime, but rather one of color, that settled a man's conviction on almost any charge. Thus Negroes came to look upon courts as instruments of injustice and oppression, and upon those convicted in them as martyrs and victims.



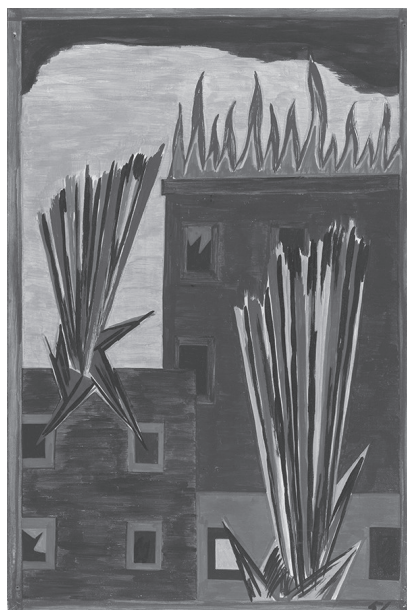
14. For African Americans there was no justice in southern courts.



42. To make it difficult for the migrants to leave, they were arrested en masse. They often missed their trains.



49. They found discrimination in the North. It was a different kind.



51. African Americans seeking to find better housing attempted to move into new areas. This resulted in the bombing of their new homes.



C. L. R.  
James

## 1. **"The Revolution and the Negro" (1939)**

**T**he Negro's revolutionary history is rich, inspiring, and unknown. Negroes revolted against the slave raiders in Africa; they revolted against the slave traders on the Atlantic passage. They revolted on the plantations.

The docile Negro is a myth. Slaves on slave ships jumped overboard, went on vast hunger strikes, attacked the crews. There are records of slaves overcoming the crew and taking the ship into harbor, a feat of tremendous revolutionary daring. In British Guiana during the eighteenth century the Negro slaves revolted, seized the Dutch colony, and held it for years. They withdrew to the interior, forced the whites to sign a treaty of peace, and have remained free to this day. Every West Indian colony, particularly Jamaica and San Domingo and Cuba, the largest islands, had its settlements of maroons, bold Negroes who had fled into the wilds and organized themselves to defend their freedom. In Jamaica the British government, after vainly trying to suppress them, accepted their existence by treaties of peace, scrupulously ob-

served by both sides over many years, and then broken by British treachery. In America the Negroes made nearly 150 distinct revolts against slavery. The only place where Negroes did not revolt is in the pages of capitalist historians. All this revolutionary history can come as a surprise only to those who, whatever International they belong to, whether Second, Third, or Fourth, have not yet ejected from their systems the pertinacious lies of Anglo-Saxon capitalism. It is not strange that the Negroes revolted. It would have been strange if they had not.

## **2. "A History of Pan-African Revolt: The United States" (1969)**

**O**n February 1, 1960 four students from a North Carolina college started a sit-in movement at Greensboro, North Carolina, in a five and dime store. By February 10 the movement had spread to fifteen Southern cities in five states. In March, one thousand Alabama State students marched on the State Capitol and held a protest meeting. In April the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee was organized on the Shaw University campus.

In May, President Eisenhower signed the Civil Rights Act of 1960, but that was insignificant in comparison with the tremendous movement that now began among blacks: the masses of the population in city after city; the groups of "Freedom Riders"—black young men and women who faced the bombs, bullets, whips and prisons of the South, official and unofficial; the black students on the campuses; black youths in the schools. Let it not be forgotten that both the New Left and the revolutionary defiance of campus authority by white students began to take shape as a direct result of the black students turning from protests by asking for reforms to protests by revolutionary action.

It would be a mistake here to attempt to give details about either events or personalities. Even to name some is to omit



and thereby discriminate against others. It may be said, however, that names such as LeRoi Jones, Stokely Carmichael, Eldridge Cleaver, Rap Brown, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, the Black Panthers, are household names not only among young people in the United States but among white populations all over the world.

Summer after summer has seen tremendous struggles by the black masses, led by unknown, obscure, local leaders. Perhaps the most significant was that which followed the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, the world-famous black leader. The American government placed a cordon of troops around the White House and

*the defeat  
of the black  
struggle will  
involve the  
destruction  
of the U.S.*

government buildings and areas in Washington. They then abandoned the city, the capital of the United States, to the embittered and insurgent blacks, who constitute a majority of the Washington population. The question to be asked: what else could the government have done?

One can only record the question most often and most seriously asked: can any government mobilize the white population, or a great majority of it, in defense of white racism against militant blacks? The only legitimate answer lies in the continuing militancy or retreat of the black population. This population is at least 30 million in number, strategically situated in the heart of many of the most important cities in the United States. If the black population continues to resist racism, the militants and youth actively and the middle classes sympathetic or neutral, then the physical defeat of the black struggle against racism will involve the destruction of the United States as it has held together since 1776.



Louis Lozowick, "Strike Scene" (1935)

# Martin Luther King, Jr.



## 1. **"Letter from a Birmingham Jail" (1963)**

I must make two honest confessions to you, my Christian and Jewish brothers. First, I must confess that over the past few years I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate. I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen's Counciler or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to "order" than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says: "I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I cannot agree with your methods of direct action"; who paternalistically believes he can set the timetable for another man's freedom; who lives by a mythical concept of time and who constantly advises the Negro to wait for a "more convenient season." Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection.

I had hoped that the white moderate would understand that law and order exist for the purpose of establishing justice and that when they fail in this purpose they become the dangerously structured dams that block the flow of social progress. I had hoped that the white moderate would understand that the present tension in the South is a necessary phase of the transition from an obnoxious negative peace, in which the Negro passively accepted his unjust plight, to a substantive and positive peace, in which all men will respect the dignity and worth of human personality.

*the great  
stumbling  
block is  
the white  
moderate*

Actually, we who engage in nonviolent direct action are not the creators of tension. We merely bring to the surface the hidden tension that is already alive. We bring it out in the open, where it can be seen and dealt with. Like a boil that can never be cured so long as it is covered up but must be opened with all its ugliness to the natural medicines of air and light, injustice must be exposed, with all the tension its exposure creates, to the light of human conscience and the air of national opinion before it can be cured.

In your statement you assert that our actions, even though peaceful, must be condemned because they precipitate violence. But is this a logical assertion? Isn't this like condemning a robbed man because his possession of money precipitated the evil act of robbery? [...] We must come to see that, as the federal courts have consistently affirmed, it is wrong to urge an individual to cease his efforts to gain his basic constitutional rights because the quest may precipitate violence. Society must protect the robbed and punish the robber. [...]

More and more I feel that the people of ill will have used time much more effectively than have the people of good







THE JUDSON  
THREE



will. We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people but for the appalling silence of the good people. Human progress never rolls in on wheels of inevitability; it comes through the tireless efforts of men willing to be co-workers with God, and without this hard work, time itself becomes an ally of the forces of social stagnation. We must use time creatively, in the knowledge that the time is always ripe to do right. Now is the time to make real the promise of democracy and transform our pending national elegy into a creative psalm of brotherhood. Now is the time to lift our national policy from the quicksand of racial injustice to the solid rock of human dignity.

## 2. "The Other America" (1968)

Most of the poverty stricken people of America are persons who are working every day and they end up getting part-time wages for full-time work. So the vast majority of negroes in America find themselves perishing on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. This has caused a great deal of bitterness. It has caused a great deal of agony. It has caused ache and anguish. It has caused great despair, and we have seen the angered expressions of this despair and this bitterness in the violent rebellions that have taken place in cities all over our country. Now I think my views on non-violence are pretty generally known. I still believe that non-violence is the most potent weapon available to the negro in his struggle for justice and freedom in the U.S.

Now I wanted to say something about the fact that we have lived over these last two or three summers with agony and we have seen our cities going up in flames. And I would be the first to say that I am still committed to militant, powerful, massive, non-violence as the most potent weapon in grappling with the problem from a direct action point of view. I'm absolutely convinced that a riot merely intensifies the fears of

the white community while relieving the guilt. And I feel that we must always work with an effective, powerful weapon and method that brings about tangible results.

But it is not enough for me to stand before you tonight and condemn riots. It would be morally irresponsible for me to do that without, at the same time, condemning the contingent, intolerable conditions that exist in our society. These conditions are the things that cause individuals to

*a riot is the  
language of  
the unheard*

feel that they have no other alternative than to engage in violent rebellions to get attention. And I must say tonight that a riot is the language of the unheard. And what

is it America has failed to hear? It has failed to hear that the plight of the negro poor has worsened over the last twelve or fifteen years. It has failed to hear that the promises of freedom and justice have not been met. And it has failed to hear that large segments of white society are more concerned about tranquility and the status quo than about justice and humanity.

Now every year about this time, our newspapers and our televisions and people generally start talking about the long hot summer ahead. What always bothers me is that the long hot summer has always been preceded by a long cold winter. And the great problem is that the nation has not used its winters creatively enough to develop the program, to develop the kind of massive acts of concern that will bring about a solution to the problem. And so we must still face the fact that our nation's summers of riots are caused by our nation's winters of delay. As long as justice is postponed we always stand on the verge of these darker nights of social disruption. The question now, is whether America is prepared to do something massively, affirmatively and forthrightly about the great problem we face in the area of race and the problem which can bring the curtain of doom down on American civilization if it is not solved.



## Malcolm X

### **"The Ballot or the Bullet" (1964)**

**A**nd now you're facing a situation where the young Negro's coming up. They don't want to hear that "turn the-other-cheek" stuff, no. In Jacksonville, those were teenagers, they were throwing Molotov cocktails. Negroes have never done that before. But it shows you there's a new deal coming in. There's new thinking coming in. There's new strategy coming in. It'll be Molotov cocktails this month, hand grenades next month, and something else next month. It'll be ballots, or it'll be bullets. It'll be liberty, or it will be death. [...]

A segregationist is a criminal. You can't label him as anything other than that. And when you demonstrate against segregation, the law is on your side. The Supreme Court is on your side. Now, who is it that opposes you in carrying out the law? The police department itself. With police dogs and clubs. Whenever you demonstrate against segregation, whether it is segregated education, segregated housing, or anything else, the law is on your side, and anyone who stands in the way is not the law any longer. They are breaking the law; they are not representatives of the law. Any time you demon-

strate against segregation and a man has the audacity to put a police dog on you, kill that dog, kill him, I'm telling you, kill that dog. I say it, if they put me in jail tomorrow, kill that dog. Then you'll put a stop to it. Now, if these white people in here don't want to see that kind of action, get down and tell the mayor to tell the police department to pull the dogs in. That's all you have to do. If you don't do it, someone else will.

If you don't take this kind of stand, your little children will grow up and look at you and think "shame." If you don't take an uncompromising stand, I don't mean go out and get violent; but at the same time you should never be nonviolent unless you run into some nonviolence. I'm nonviolent with those who are nonviolent with me. But when you drop that violence on me, then you've made me go insane, and I'm not responsible for what I do. And that's the way every Negro should get. Any time you know you're within the law, within your legal rights, within your moral rights, in accord with justice, then die for what you believe in. But don't die alone. Let your dying be reciprocal. This is what is meant by equality. [...]

*the police  
are not  
representatives  
of the law*

Don't change the white man's mind—you can't change his mind, and that whole thing about appealing to the moral conscience of America—America's conscience is bankrupt. She lost all conscience a long time ago. Uncle Sam has no conscience. They don't know what morals are. They don't try and eliminate an evil because it's evil, or because it's illegal, or because it's immoral; they eliminate it only when it threatens their existence. So you're wasting your time appealing to the moral conscience of a bankrupt man like Uncle Sam. If he had a conscience, he'd straighten this thing out with no more pressure being put upon him.



# Fannie Lou Hamer



## Speech in Harlem (1964)

**W**e have made an appeal for the president of the United States and the attorney general to please protect us in Mississippi. And I can't understand how it's out of their power to protect people in Mississippi. They can't do that, but when a white man is killed in the Congo, they send people there.

And you can always hear this long sob story: "You know it takes time." For three hundred years, we've given them time. And I've been tired so long, now I am sick and tired of being sick and tired, and we want a change. We want a change in this society in America because, you see, we can no longer ignore the facts and getting our children to sing, "Oh say can you see, by the dawn's early light, what so proudly we hailed." What do we have to hail here? The truth is the only thing going to free us. And you know this whole society is sick. [...]

Yes, a lot of people will roll their eyes at me today but I'm going to tell you just like it is, you see, it's time—you see, this is what got all this like this—there's so much hypocrisy in this society and if we want America to be a free society

we have to stop telling lies, that's all. Because we're not free and you know we're not free. You're not free here in Harlem. I've gone to a lot of big cities and I've got my first city to go to where this man wasn't standing with his feet on this black man's neck.

## Interview (1968)

**M**ississippi is still a very rough place, you know, people is not just walking up like they used to in the past, walking out, shooting a man down or getting maybe two or three hundred people and carrying you out and lynching you, but it's in a more subtle way, they let you starve to death by not giving you jobs. These are some of the things that are happening now in Mississippi. You see Mississippi isn't really Mississippi's problem, Mississippi is America's problem. Because if America wanted to do something about what has been going on in Mississippi, it could've stopped by now. It wouldn't have been in the past few years, between forty and fifty churches bombed and burned.

## *Mississippi is America's problem*

And you see this leads me to say, all of the burning and bombing that was done to us, in the houses, nobody never said too much about that and nothing was done. But let something be burned by a black man, and then my god, you know? You see, the flag is drenched with our blood. Because so many of our ancestors was killed because we have never accepted slavery. We had to live under it, but we never wanted it. So we know that this flag is drenched with our blood. So what the young people are saying now, is give us a chance to be young men, respected as a man, as we know this country was built on the black backs of black people across this country, and that if we don't have it, you ain't gonna have it either, because we're going to tear it up. That's what they're saying. And people ought to understand that.



# Angela Y. Davis



## **"Political Prisoners, Prisons and Black Liberation" (1971)**

**H**aving been taught by bitter experience, we know that there is a glaring incongruity between democracy and the capitalist economy which is the source of our ills. Regardless of all rhetoric to the contrary, the people are not the ultimate matrix of the laws and the system which govern them—certainly not Black people and other nationally oppressed people, but not even the mass of whites. The people do not exercise decisive control over the determining factors of their lives.

Official assertions that meaningful dissent is always welcome, provided it falls within the boundaries of legality, are frequently a smokescreen obscuring the invitation to acquiesce in oppression. [...] Throughout the era of slavery, Blacks as well as progressive whites recurrently discovered that their commitment to the anti-slavery cause frequently entailed the overt violation of the laws of the land. [...] During the era of intense activity around civil rights issues, systematic disobedience of oppressive laws was a primary tactic. The sit-ins were organized transgressions of racist legislation. [...]

In the Spring of 1970, Los Angeles Panthers took up arms to defend themselves from an assault initiated by the local police force on their office and on their persons. They were charged with criminal assault. If one believed the official propaganda, they were bandits and rogues who pathologically found pleasure in attacking policemen. It was not mentioned that their community activities—educational work, services such as free breakfast and free medical programs—which had legitimized them in the Black community, were the immediate reason for which the wrath of the police had fallen upon them. In defending themselves from the attack waged by some 600 policemen (there were only 11 Panthers in the office) they were not only defending their lives, but even more important their accomplishments in the Black community surrounding them and in the broader thrust for Black Liberation.

## ***the political is defined as criminal to discredit movements***

Whenever Blacks in struggle have recourse to self-defense, particularly armed self-defense, it is twisted and distorted on official levels and ultimately rendered synonymous with criminal aggression. On the other hand, when policemen are clearly indulging in acts of criminal aggression, officially they are defending themselves through “justifiable assault” or “justifiable homicide.”

The ideological acrobatics characteristic of official attempts to explain away the existence of the political prisoner do not end with the equation of the individual political act with the individual criminal act. The political act is defined as criminal in order to discredit radical and revolutionary movements. A political event is reduced to a criminal event in order to affirm the absolute invulnerability of the existing order.





**Diana Davies, photograph of Sylvia Ray Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson at a 1973 rally for gay rights at City Hall.** Rivera and Johnson were among those who sparked the 1969 Stonewall Inn riot against police brutality. They went on to found the gay and trans advocacy organization S.T.A.R. (Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries).



# Assata Shakur

## **"Letter to My People" (1973)**

**T**hey call us murderers, but we did not murder over two hundred fifty unarmed Black men, women, and children, or wound thousands of others in the riots they provoked during the sixties. The rulers of this country have always considered their property more important than our lives. They call us murderers, but we were not responsible for the twenty-eight brother inmates and nine hostages murdered at attica. They call us murderers, but we did not murder and wound over thirty unarmed Black students at Jackson State—or Southern State, either.

They call us murderers, but we did not murder Martin Luther King, Jr., Emmett Till, Medgar Evers, Malcolm X, George Jackson, Nat Turner, James Chaney, and countless others. We did not murder, by shooting in the back, sixteen-year-old Rita Lloyd, eleven-year-old Rickie Bodden, or ten-year-old Clifford Glover. They call us murderers, but we do not control or enforce a system of racism and oppression that systematically murders Black and Third World people. Although Black people supposedly comprise about fifteen percent of the total amerikkkan population, at least sixty percent of murder vic-

tims are Black. For every pig that is killed in the so-called line of duty, there are at least fifty Black people murdered by the police. [...]

They call us thieves and bandits. They say we steal. But it was not we who stole millions of Black people from the continent of Africa. We were robbed of our language, of our Gods, of our culture, of our human dignity, of our labor, and of our lives. They call us thieves, yet it is not we who rip off billions of dollars every year through tax evasions, illegal price fixing, embezzlement, consumer fraud, bribes, kickbacks, and swindles. They call us bandits, yet every time most Black people pick up our paychecks we are being robbed. Every time we walk into a store in our neighborhood we are being held up. And every time we pay our rent the landlord sticks a gun into our ribs.

***the rulers  
consider their  
property  
more  
important  
than our lives***

They call us thieves, but we did not rob and murder millions of Indians by ripping off their homeland, then call ourselves pioneers. They call us bandits, but it is not we who are robbing Africa, Asia, and Latin America of their natural resources and freedom while the people who live there are sick and starving. The rulers of this country and their flunkies have committed some of the most brutal, vicious crimes in history. They are the bandits. They are the murderers. And they should be treated as such. These maniacs are not fit to judge me, Clark, or any other Black person on trial in amerika. Black people should and, inevitably, must determine our destinies. Every revolution in history has been accomplished by actions, although words are necessary. We must create shields that protect us and spears that penetrate our enemies. Black people must learn how to struggle by struggling.



## June Jordan

### **"Poem about Police Violence" (1980)**

Tell me something  
what you think would happen if  
everytime they kill a black boy  
then we kill a cop  
everytime they kill a black man  
then we kill a cop

you think the accident rate would lower  
subsequently?

sometimes the feeling like amaze me baby  
comes back to my mouth and I am quiet  
like Olympian pools from the running the  
mountainous snows under the sun

sometimes thinking about the 12th House of the Cosmos  
or the way your ear ensnares the tip  
of my tongue or signs that I have never seen  
like DANGER WOMEN WORKING

I lose consciousness of ugly bestial rabid  
and repetitive affront as when they tell me  
18 cops in order to subdue one man  
18 strangled him to death in the ensuing scuffle (don't  
you idolize the diction of the powerful: *subdue* and  
*scuffle* my oh my) and that the murder  
that the killing of Arthur Miller on a Brooklyn  
street was just a "justifiable accident" again  
(again)

People been having accidents all over the globe  
so long like that I reckon that the only  
suitable insurance is a gun  
I'm saying war is not to understand or rerun  
war is to be fought and won

sometimes the feeling like amaze me baby  
blots it out/the bestial but  
not too often

tell me something  
what you think would happen if  
everytime they kill a black boy  
then we kill a cop  
everytime they kill a black man  
then we kill a cop

you think the accident rate would lower  
subsequently?



# Keeanga- Yamahtta Taylor



## **"From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation" (2016)**

Racism in the United States has never been just about abusing Black and Brown people just for the sake of doing so. It has always been a means by which the most powerful white men in the country have justified their rule, made their money, and kept the rest of us at bay. To that end, racism, capitalism, and class rule have always been tangled together in such a way that it is impossible to imagine one without the other.

Can there be Black liberation in the United States as the country is currently constituted? No. Capitalism is contingent on the absence of freedom and liberation for Black people and anyone else who does not directly benefit from its economic disorder. That, of course, does not mean there is nothing to do and no struggle worth waging. Building the struggles against racism, police violence, poverty, hunger, and all of the ways in which oppression and exploitation express themselves is critical to people's basic survival in this society. But it is also within those struggles for the basic rights of ex-

istence that people learn how to struggle, how to strategize, and build movements and organizations. It is also how our confidence develops to counter the insistence that this society, as it is currently constructed, is the best that we can hope to achieve. People engaged in struggle learn to fight for more by fighting for and winning something. But the day-to-day struggles in which many people are engaged today must be connected to a much larger vision of what a different world could look like. [...]

In the summer of 2014, the Black working class of Ferguson “caught a glimpse of freedom and tasted a bit of self-determination” when they stood down the police and National Guard and stayed in the streets for Mike Brown. Their local struggle inspired Black people around the country to take to the streets and stand down the police. What began as a narrowly conceived demand for justice for Mike Brown has erupted into a movement largely identified by the slogan “Black Lives Matter.” It reflects the political maturation of this stage of the movement. The next stage will involve progressing from protests aimed at raising awareness or drawing attention to the crisis of police violence to engaging with the social forces that have the capacity to shut down sectors of work and production until our demands to stop police terrorism are met.

***shut down  
work until  
police  
terrorism is  
stopped***

The movement has shown that violent policing does not exist in a vacuum: it is a product of the inequality in our society. The police exert their authority in a fundamentally disordered society. The clearer we can see these threads connecting police mayhem to the disorder in our society, the clearer we can express our need for a different kind of world.



Colin Kaepernick

@Kaepernick7

When civility leads to death, revolting is the only logical reaction.

The cries for peace will rain down, and when they do, they will land on deaf ears, because your violence has brought this resistance.

We have the right to fight back!

Rest in Power George Floyd



iamcardib

@iamcardib

They looting in Minnesota and as much as I don't like this type of violence it is what it is .Too much peaceful marches,too much trending hashtags and NO SOLUTIONS! The people are left with NO CHOICE .



Cornel West

@CornelWest

Beautiful to see people of all colors coming together, but we have a system unable to respond. Looting is wrong and murder is wrong, but their legalized forms are wrong too. Look at the wickedness in high places first, then at the least of these.