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<ti> “The Laws Have Hurt Me”

<subti> Violence, Violation, and Black Women’s Struggles for Civil Rights

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On August 26, 1965, Henrietta Wright drove to the Winona, Mississippi courthouse and registered to vote. A few hours later, she was facing the barrel of a shotgun. The Voting Rights Act had passed a scant three weeks earlier, making it illegal to “deny or abridge the right of any citizen of the United States to vote on account of race or color.”<sup>1</sup> But after Wright registered, Deputy Wayne Miller rode up to the Last Chance Café, the restaurant and service station she owned with her husband, C. W., and jumped out of his car so fast that he left his door hanging open. Blackjack in hand, he declared that Wright was under arrest for running a stop sign. As C. W. Wright stepped in to pay his wife’s fine and call the matter finished, Wright headed toward her living quarters in the back of the restaurant. She figured Miller and her husband “would settle the matter between them.”<sup>2</sup>

For Deputy Miller and the sheriff’s department, however, the matter was far from settled. Standing in the yard of the Last Chance Café, Miller and the Wrights played out a drama that was at once local and national. Local, because the players had grown up alongside one another in the neighborly tension and intimacy that marked life in the Black Belt. “Mr. Miller, you have been knowing me all your life,” C. W. Wright reminded the deputy as he again asked to let his wife off with just a ticket.<sup>3</sup> National, because the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), and other organizations had made it harder for white Mississippians to pretend that they lived beyond the reach of the US Constitution. Calls for civil rights mobilized local African Americans, boosted white liberal sympathies nationwide, and galvanized segregationists to defend tooth and nail what Mississippi Speaker of the House Walter

Sillers, once called “the white democracy of the South.”<sup>4</sup> If the Voting Rights Act portended change “every bit as momentous” as the Emancipation Proclamation or Brown decision—to quote John Lewis of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC)—that change proved every bit as hard fought.<sup>5</sup> Clear on the stakes, Wright had gone to the courthouse as an act of self-assertion; registering to vote would give substance to civil rights guaranteed her in the abstract by the Fifteenth and Nineteenth Amendments.<sup>6</sup> Just as clear on the stakes, local law enforcement officers gave what they viewed as a proportionate response, drawing on powerful reserves of state and sexualized violence to stop her.

Deputy Miller and Sheriff Emery Wages, who soon arrived with another deputy in tow, targeted Wright for her civil rights activism. They meant to signal that there was no Black space or person who lay beyond white power’s reach. When Wright walked away from the conversation with Miller, she saw herself as just going on about her business, but the sheriff and his men viewed her as defiant. Sheriff Wages moved quickly to reassert the balance of power. Upon arriving at the café, he strode into her home, leveled a gun at her face, and commanded her to “shut up [her] damn mouth.” He moved the shotgun to her back and used it to prod her out the door.

The cruel scenes that followed underscored how fully white southerners soldered together sexual violation and criminalization as weapons for Jim Crow’s arsenal. Although prosecuting attorneys would later describe her as violent, claiming that she “threw a wild fit and started fighting like an Indian,” Wright described herself as compliant. She was not a small woman—she carried two hundred pounds on her 5'7" frame—but she knew when she was outmatched. Facing the rage of three armed men, she “played shut-mouth” to keep the violence at bay, but it did little good.<sup>7</sup> As she emerged from the restaurant, deputies Miller and Donald Cross twisted and cuffed her hands behind her, grabbed her by the upper arms, and shoved her in the back of a police car. Cross sat in the backseat beating her while she remained cuffed. Wages drove toward the jail, shotgun across his lap.<sup>8</sup> At the jail, Wages molested her in the booking room, fondling her

breasts, rear, and thighs while telling her, “I want to see if you have any weapons.” He had his wife administer a second search while he, Miller, and Cross stood by. When they were done, they carried her into a jail cell and removed her restraints. When she asked for a doctor, Miller laughed at her.

At once egregious and typical, Henrietta Wright’s ordeal offers a useful entry into a consideration of violence and the civil rights struggle. Her experience mirrors the abuse of countless women throughout Mississippi and across the South.<sup>9</sup> The Black Belt was littered with men like Emery Wages who used sexual violation to crush Black women’s freedom dreams—and Black women themselves. Wages had mastered his playbook. As with his other claims about Wright, his account of the booking flipped the roles of aggressor and victim. Drawing on longstanding racist tropes of Black women as hyper-sexual, he maintained that the still-handcuffed Wright took his hand and placed it on her groin while suggesting he “feel some hard black titties” and “ask like a man” for what he wanted.<sup>10</sup> She asked for it, he insisted. Wages’s retelling of the incident—and his brazen certainty that it would be believed—layered narrative violence upon his physical assault; to him, it didn’t matter who Henrietta Wright was or wished to be, only who she would become by his hand.

The next day brought still worse as the lawmen augmented their assault with a new form of carcerality. That morning, Wages came into the cell with his deputies, pinned Wright down on her cot and tried to put handcuffs back on her. As she struggled to keep a hand free, they dragged her from the bed and began knocking her “against the floor, backwards and forwards against the floor.” Testifying years later, she recalled, “They jumped in my stomach and started pounding me with their knees.” She bore the scars for years: the beating knocked out two of her front teeth and left her gums permanently bruised; her hands ended up so damaged that most days C. W. would have to tie her shoes for her—“blood clots,” she explained, along with the bumps and knots that had sprung up in the places where Wages and his men ripped the skin from her wrists. Wright understood that they were terrorizing her. Holding her tight, “they twisted, they torped, they

gripped, they brought the grip down,” and “printed their fingers into my flesh.” When finished, they left her lying on the floor of her cell. In case she had missed the point of the beating, Wages told her, “You’re crazy if you think you can vote.” He resolved to send her to the state mental hospital in Whitfield.<sup>11</sup>

Wright was by no means the only African American person whose resistance to white supremacy was pathologized. Whitfield held Black inmates committed after challenging Jim Crow; and throughout the 1960s, the national discourse around Black protest increasingly took on the language of psychiatry to frame militancy as dysfunction—a crack in the Black psyche rather than a reasoned response to racism. Labeling Wright insane was even more potent than painting her as a whore—and Wages put the imprimatur of Mississippi behind his claim. He filed an “Application for the Adjudication of Henrietta Wright as a Lunatic” and called in two local doctors to examine her.<sup>12</sup> They found Wright on the ground, still unable to pull herself up twenty minutes after her thrashing. “The laws have hurt me,” she appealed to them, only to have a doctor retort, “If you was acting right, they wouldn’t have to manhandle you.” One of the doctors instructed several of Wages’ men to grab hold of her while he pulled out a hypodermic needle. When she resisted, insisting that she did not “need no shot,” they slammed her head back against the wall and forcibly administered the sedative. Eyes glazed from the drugs and head trauma, Wright boarded a transport truck. Wages’s men shackled her to the floor and used belts strapped to opposite walls to hold her in place for the one hundred-mile drive to Whitfield. Although doctors found no sign of mental illness, they kept her at Whitfield for two months before they released her.<sup>13</sup>

Vicious as the violence in the Montgomery County jail was, it was neither arbitrary nor isolated. Wright knew this. As she charged in a federal damages suit filed not long after she was released from Whitfield, the lawmen in Winona “unduly harassed” her because she was a “Negro female citizen who had been active in encouraging Negroes to secure their civil rights.”<sup>14</sup> Not just a Negro citizen, but a Negro *female* citizen. Segregationist violence took many forms and

spawned myriad responses, but sexualized violence stood out as a vilely efficient means of disciplining African Americans and asserting white men's dominance. It showcased the logic of white supremacy: in a system that rested on white patriarchal power, Black women's sexual vulnerability announced and bolstered white men's rights and prerogatives. Much changed over the course of the freedom struggle in how African Americans pursued rights and how segregationists defended white democracy, but sexual violence remained central to asserting white power. If anything, white men simply grew more skilled at rendering Black women's violability so unsurprising as to be unremarkable, and thus making their subjection an expected part of the natural order for white southerners and a source of ongoing terror for their Black neighbors.<sup>15</sup>

One of the many insults of white supremacists' sexualized violence was that, for all the ways the victim took the visceral brunt of the trauma, her attacker meant for the violation to be communal, what historian Gerda Lerner called a "weapon of terror," aimed at "the entire black community" and intended to break both bodies and spirits. In the century following Emancipation, assaults and the rituals of humiliation that often accompanied them established gender as a key terrain for fighting out deeply political questions of domination and subordination, authority and autonomy. "A black woman's body was never hers alone," civil rights activist Fannie Lou Hamer famously observed.<sup>16</sup>

The attack on Henrietta Wright lobbed another volley in the long and bloody battle that white supremacists had been waging against Black activism, Black women, and Black suffrage for a century. In the post-Civil War Memphis Riot of 1866, for example, white policemen and rioters repeatedly invaded African American families' homes and raped freedwomen in front of their loved ones—a graphic demonstration that freedom had not given Black folks the same protections of the state. African American women did defend themselves, however, by calling out their assailants—and naming their actions as criminal—in the courts of the Freedman's Bureau.<sup>17</sup>

As white supremacy consolidated into an organized system of political economy at the turn of the twentieth century, Black women remained potent symbols and potentially disruptive actors; and sexualized violence and humiliation continued to serve as Jim Crow's bulwark. No place or period had a monopoly on such violence. In World War I-era Texas, deputies in the Ellis County sheriff's department mocked the notion of a war for democracy by swapping stories about arresting Black schoolteachers on false charges, taking them to a park, and raping them. When the deputies abducted yet another three women in the fall of 1917, a local African American man challenged the forty-odd bystanders to do more than lament. "If you don't have guts enough to fight," he told the crowd, "you don't need no Democracy." That same year, south of Ellis County, in Houston, a city policeman sparked the deadly Houston Mutiny by dragging a half-naked Black woman out of her house, roughing her up on the sidewalk, and then pistol-whipping two Black soldiers who tried to intervene. During the Second World War, police officers in Montgomery, Alabama, dragged college student Ella Jones by her hair, tearing her clothes and beating her within an inch of her life for refusing to give her seat to a white man.<sup>18</sup>

Youth offered little protection. During her childhood in 1940s northern Louisiana, Bertha Smith and her friends would have to skirt the levee on their way to grammar school to put space between them and the white men who made a morning habit of standing on the levee shaking their genitals at the Black schoolgirls passing by. Ferdie Walker of Fort Worth, Texas, had similar encounters as an eleven-year-old in the 1940s with a white police officer who repeatedly exposed himself to her while she waited at a bus stop. Long before sexual abuse became one of the preferred weapons against women civil rights workers, it was an "everyday occurrence," as historian Danielle L. McGuire has written, for women and girls across the South.<sup>19</sup>

White supremacists intended their performance of Black women's violability to teach Black discipline. Segregationists meant such scenes to demonstrate the continuation of white patriarchal power; to make Black men and women see themselves as dishonored and debased; and to frighten African Americans into focusing on their labor responsibilities rather than their

citizenship rights. As with the assault on Henrietta Wright, narrative violence often accompanied and sustained bodily violence. When discussing lynching, assaults, and rape, white authorities made a discursive feint, redirecting the public conversation toward Black-on-white sexual violence. Both word and deed, then, served as performances of white men's mastery and the powerlessness of African Americans.

Yet narrative and performance can do much work at once, not always impacting audiences as intended. African Americans often took very different lessons from fraught encounters—about the nature and tactics of resistance, who they were as a people, and the burning need for change. Indeed, the very stridency and frequency of white demonstrations of violence signaled that many segregationists feared that political dominance did not secure their hold on power. The Black freedom struggle continually threatened white supremacist notions of place and power, and the struggle's evolution into a mass social movement with fledgling federal support made the threat all the more immediate and intense.

Southern civil rights activists in the postwar era took on a system in which violence saturated southern life. This is not simply to point out that white Americans insulted, attacked, and murdered African American women and men with distressing frequency and impunity—although that is certainly true. Nor is it only to underscore that, for all the popular focus on nonviolence, African American traditions of armed resistance and self-defense had deep roots and ongoing currency—although this is also true.<sup>20</sup> Rather, highlighting the ubiquity of violence reveals it as “routine,” in the words of historian Gyanendra Pandey, a social phenomenon with far-reaching psychic and material implications.<sup>21</sup>

Framing violence as embedded in everyday life, as Pandey does, captures violence at its most “explosive” and visible, but it also accounts for the quotidian violence that structures daily behavior, asserts boundaries between community and outsider, and conditions how people interpret the world around them. As a “complex social fact,” violence structures everyday life. Although Pandey writes of colonial and post-colonial India, he builds on philosopher Achille

Mbembe's characterization of colonies as places "where an experience of violence and upheaval is lived, where violence is built into structures and institutions."<sup>22</sup> The southern United States was not colonial Africa or Asia, but in the US, too, caste and class made a subordinated population more vulnerable and exploitable.<sup>23</sup> In the segregated South, as in the colonial world described by Pandey, "violence insinuate[d] itself into economy, domestic life, language, consciousness" through the daily work of policemen, politicians, and bureaucrats. Pernicious in its mundanity, routine violence reinforced the "thingification" of subject peoples, to borrow a term from Reverend King and Aimé Césaire, and made spectacular acts of violence not only conceivable but regularly practicable, morally acceptable, and politically useful.<sup>24</sup> Black women, guarding against and subject to sexual violation, offer one window on how violence worked in service to white supremacy, but their experiences bespoke and buttressed a system more endemic and far-reaching.<sup>25</sup>

Historians of the southern Civil Rights Movement have written about how white supremacy imposed itself through "racial terrorism" both systematic and systemic.<sup>26</sup> Yet, despite historians' best efforts, American popular memory of the movement too often equates civil rights and nonviolence, prioritizing Martin Luther King Jr.'s eloquence over Black women's activism, and understating protesters' militancy while highlighting their willingness to turn the other cheek. Nonviolence did matter, but it derived its moral impact from the ubiquity of violence: white racial terror helped erect Jim Crow, enforced its strictures, and rallied to its defense. The success of African Americans in defeating Jim Crow came from those women and men courageous enough to organize with their lives on the line, ready to embrace direct action, both nonviolent and violent. Peaceable and armed resistance played indispensable roles in the crusade for freedom.

Many activists struggled with how to divorce racial terror from state power and the role of violence and nonviolence in their own efforts. For some, like the Reverend King's advisor Bayard Rustin and King's speechwriter the Reverend Vincent Harding, nonviolence was a philosophy and a practice, adapted from Mohandas Gandhi and intended to transform self and

society. Far from passive, nonviolence undercut white supremacy by highlighting and denormalizing violence both routine and spectacular. Even more, nonviolence weakened white supremacy's psychic assault—offering African Americans means to set new terms and measures of their humanity distinct from physical dominance. “Our struggle was not just against something,” explained Vincent Harding. It “was trying to bring something into being:” King’s beloved community – a just, multi-racial society rooted in love and compassion rather than exploitation and militarism. Generative and redemptive, Harding long argued, nonviolence opened to its adherents “the possibility of what could be.”<sup>27</sup>

For many Black women, nonviolence seemed more pragmatic than transcendent. Although folks like SNCC’s Diane Nash joined King and Harding in seeing transformative nonviolence as the key to creating the beloved community, others viewed it as a discrete strategy rather than a holistic practice. Common expressions of black militancy—soldiering, for the veterans and potential draftees, for example, or defense of family and home—did not foreground women as agents. Nonviolence, by contrast, drew power from the imagery of Black women’s direct action: when women and girls put their bodies on the line in public protests, they flagged the violence unleashed on them as horrific and immoral. Activists intended the contrasts between black women’s restraint and segregationists’ brutality to provoke crises of legitimacy for local and national authorities, while allaying the fears of white potential allies who sympathized with Black suffering but feared Black rage.<sup>28</sup> For volunteers and local people whose work on the ground put them in constant physical jeopardy, however, white discomfort seemed a minor concern and nonviolence sometimes untenable. Some adherents of nonviolence as a tactic still saw utility in being ready to stave off white terrorists with the barrel of a gun.

Indeed, Black women understood themselves as protectors, and they sometimes relied on arms to do the protecting. Activist Mabel Williams, for example, drove her sons to a protest in her hometown of Monroe, North Carolina, but stayed “in the car with guns.” As she explained in an oral history years later, “We had to protect the kids.” Other black women in Monroe shared

Williams' logic, training with her in a rifle club "all for the protection of our homes and ourselves" from the Klan, police, or any other "rabble rouser" who threatened their neighborhoods.<sup>29</sup> Across the South, guns had a crucial, if not always prominent, place in fortifying the movement. Black veterans and hunters repurposed their service revolvers and shotguns to protect civil rights workers, and those on the front lines matter-of-factly took up arms in self-defense. In a 1959 debate with Martin Luther King, Mabel's husband and president of the local NAACP branch, Robert Williams, did not mince words: "Nonviolence is no repellent for a sadist."<sup>30</sup>

In his rebuttal to King, Robert Williams had Mabel in his ear and Black women on his mind. As an eleven-year-old, he watched Monroe's sheriff, "Big Jesse" Helms, drag a woman down the sidewalk toward the jail, "her dress up over her head, the same way a cave man would club and drag his sexual prey." As the woman hollered, white onlookers stood laughing while Black onlookers scurried off in shame. Williams would point to that "cruelly bizarre sight" as central to his dawning conviction that nonviolence could never adequately counter white racial terrorism. His 1962 book, *Negroes with Guns*, announced the lesson he had learned.<sup>31</sup> Advocating for a "flexibility" in tactics, Williams conceded that "massive civil disobedience is a powerful weapon under civilized conditions" where "the law serves as a deterrent" to those who "would destroy the democratic process." But with those civilized conditions scarce in the United States, "the individual citizen has a right to protect his person," family, home, and property.<sup>32</sup>

Whereas Williams's argument was a masculinist one—focused on a man's right to protect his home—Black activist Mae Mallory understood that Black women's anger and advocacy often fueled the politics male organizers expressed as their own. Visiting Robert and Mabel Williams to help them host the interracial Freedom Riders as the nonviolent protestors passed through Monroe to test interstate desegregation laws in 1961, Mallory saw firsthand Mabel's pragmatic militancy. Anticipating how the Freedom Riders' protest might go, Mabel Williams told Mallory that the Riders would picket nonviolently but armed allies in Monroe

would “always [protect] their community with guns.”<sup>33</sup> During her stay, Mallory also encountered Black domestic workers from Monroe enraged over a white man’s raping of a pregnant Black woman and a patron’s physical assault on a Black maid in a local hotel. Making vows to reject such treatment, they also “moved Robert Williams to declare that there . . . was no other alternative but to ‘counter mob-violence violently.’”<sup>34</sup> Robert became famous for the statement, but as historian Ashley Farmer points out, working-class black women like Mae Mallory and the domestic workers in Monroe theorized through their experiences and drove the conversation about self-defense.<sup>35</sup> Trained to listen to and learn from locals, activists across the Black Belt wrestled with how flexible they should be in accommodating, even embracing, alternatives to nonviolence.

Black women made calculations about when to submit, when to organize, and when to fight always in the context of terror and always cognizant of what racialized violence portended for them. In Monroe, Mae Mallory and the Williamses fled a potential lynching after a white mob responded to the Freedom Riders’ nonviolent protest by attacking black residents. The Williams went into exile while Mallory was captured and spent four years in jail. Likewise, Henrietta Wright in Winona had to have known the danger in which she put herself and whence the worst of it would come. Officers’ suppression of civil rights work was nothing new. Local law enforcement had come after Wright’s neighbors, the Hopkinses, for integrating the local schools, and, like Wright, they had endured home invasions from Sheriff Wages and Deputy Miller, who had come at them with guns blazing.<sup>36</sup> Winona had garnered national notoriety in 1963, two years before the assault on Wright, when Montgomery County law enforcement attacked a group of organizers that included local SNCC field secretary Fannie Lou Hamer and SCLC organizer Annelle Ponder. Vicious and retributive, the attack sent an ominous message about the consequences of civil rights activism.

While some historians have noted that police violence served as the primary means to terrorize civil rights protestors during the 1960s, others have observed that sexual assaults on

women protestors became a staple of anti-civil rights police violence. The ordeal of Hamer and the others bore out both claims. The trouble began after members of their party sat down at the bus terminal's segregated lunch counter as they waited for their bus to take them to Greenwood, Mississippi. Although they had the law on their side, police officers swooped in to arrest them for disorderly conduct and bring them to the Montgomery County jail—"far enough out," Fannie Lou Hamer noted, that "wasn't nobody gon'" to hear them scream.<sup>37</sup> Sheriff Wages' predecessor, Earl Wayne Patridge, welcomed them to the jail: "I been hearing about you black sons of bitches over at Greenwood, raising all that hell—you come over to Winona, you get the hell whipped out of you."<sup>38</sup>

Mixing sadism with sexual abuse, Patridge enacted his rage at the Civil Rights Movement onto the protestors' bodies. Patridge struck teenager June Johnson in the face and stomach before he and three more men threw her to the ground and "stomped" her. They struck her head with a blackjack, then forced her to get up. By the time they finished, Johnson recalled, "My dress was torn off and my slip was coming off." As she came back to the cell block, her dress blood-soaked, with still more blood streaming down the back of her head, the officers called in Annelle Ponder and battered her, too.<sup>39</sup> The policemen came at Ponder with blackjacks, belts, and fists, demanding that she call them "sir" and ramping up their beating when she refused. Over in her cell, Hamer "could hear awful sounds and licks and screams" coming from the room where they had Ponder. When Ponder emerged some time later, Hamer noted that "her eyes were like blood, and her mouth was swollen." Like Johnson, "Her clothes were torn. It was horrifying."<sup>40</sup>

Hamer's own experience was even more so—"the mos' horrifying experience I would ever have in my life," she maintained ever after.<sup>41</sup> With Hamer and her fellow activist James West, the officers made Black prisoners do the beating. They paid two men one and a half pints of corn liquor as bounty on West and threatened others—"You know what we'll do to you"—if they did not attack Hamer.<sup>42</sup> Calling her a "bitch," one of the white men promised her that "we gon' make you wish you was dead." They forced her to lay on a cot while the inmates took a

blackjack to her back, battering her so badly that it gave her permanent kidney damage. When she tried to cover her back, “they beat my hands till they turned blue,” and when she screamed one of the white men struck her on the back of the head to silence her.<sup>43</sup> The harm done to Hamer was grievous: in addition to kidney damage, parts of her body remained “hard as bone” for days afterwards, and the vision in her left eye permanently dimmed from a blood clot. “A person don’t know what can happen to they body if they was beat like I was beat,” Hamer later reflected.<sup>44</sup>

The psychological and sexual humiliation presaged the violence Sheriff Patridge’s successor would visit upon Henrietta Wright in that same jail. Hamer’s dress kept riding up, she would recall afterward, and she felt the gathered men trying “to feel under my clothes.” Finally, one of the officers just yanked the dress off of her, “leaving my body exposed to five men.” Hamer’s colleague Lawrence Guyot got caught in a similar furor. When he came down to the jail to look into the arrests, officers beat him for failing to say “sir” to Earl Patridge and forced him to disrobe. Waving burning sticks, they threatened to sear his genitals.<sup>45</sup> As with the others, torturing Guyot and Hamer served to punish them for challenging white supremacy. Segregationists used activists’ bodies to punish them just for “*being*,” explains religious studies scholar Charles Marsh, being Black folks “with a voice.” Two summers later, Henrietta Wright bore the same punishment for a similar crime.<sup>46</sup>

Had they opted to, Sheriff Patridge or Wages could have moved to silence Hamer or Wright under cover of night. Certainly, defenders of white supremacy still relied heavily on extralegal—or, given frequent police complicity and lack of prosecution, semilegal—violence. As in previous acts of terror, neither age, status, nor gender offered any protection, and Black women received continual reminders that neither they nor their loved ones nor their heroes were safe. Just days after the attack on the SNCC workers in June 1963, a sniper gunned down Mississippi civil rights leader Medgar Evers in front of his wife and children; and on a September Sunday morning in Birmingham, Alabama, terrorists blew up a Black Baptist church, killing four girls, aged eleven to fourteen. Mississippi would explode the following year as activists overwhelmed the

state for 1964's Freedom Summer, and segregationists responded by attacking volunteers, most notoriously lynching white northerners Mickey Schwerner and Andy Goodman, and Black Mississippian James Chaney. Segregationists kept up their retaliatory violence after Freedom Summer, murdering white housewife Viola Liuzzo for her interracial civil rights work in Alabama in spring 1965, and, of course, assassinating Martin Luther King Jr. in Memphis, Tennessee, in spring 1968, as he worked for the economic strength of Black garbage collectors. Some of these murders made national news, but in those places in the Black Belt where victims were less camera-ready, activists faced what historian Hasan Jeffries has called an even more "relentless wave of terror": houses sprayed with gunfire, meeting places hit with Molotov cocktails, volunteers shot. Everywhere activists turned, SNCC volunteer Stokely Carmichael noted, "the violence kept cropping up."<sup>47</sup>

The passage of the Civil Rights Acts in 1964 and the Voting Rights Act the following year led to an escalation of semi-sanctioned terror, but to unintended effect. Such violence might target and punish certain activists, but it did not derail the movement altogether. For one thing, the murders of national figures like Evers or white volunteers like Liuzzo, Schwerner, and Goodman captured public attention and put pressure on the federal government to rein in white racial terror. Assassinations and attacks on women painted the South as beyond the pale and drove home how much violence undergirded and constituted Jim Crow. The Kennedy and Johnson administrations, fighting an ideological war with the Soviet Union, could ill afford to have a race war showcase the relationship between white supremacy and American democracy. Even less could they afford to have allies and rivals see a lawless South as representative of the US abroad. African American activists in the Civil Rights Congress had already stood up in the United Nations during the early years of the postwar movement and declared Jim Crow a human rights violation. Penned by radical lawyer William Patterson, their 1951 petition, "We Charge Genocide: The Crime of Government Against the Negro People," pronounced "the wanton killing of innocent Negroes" a national crisis that resulted in "the emasculation of democracy" in

the United States.<sup>48</sup> A decade later, with the Cold War on a low boil, the federal government wished the defenders of white democracy to be, if nothing else, more circumspect.<sup>49</sup>

For activists all too aware that presidential consternation over segregationists' terror would not lead quickly to Black lives saved, armed self-defense provided a counter both material and psychic. Women, either victimized by sexual violence or ever-vigilant to its threats, continued to weigh nonviolence and armed self-defense as options. In the early 1960s, Fannie Lou Hamer handed Stokely Carmichael a revolver when he came to stay with her in Ruleville, Mississippi; mothers in Holmes County, Mississippi, patrolled their houses at night carrying shotguns; in the early 1970s in Monroe, Louisiana, teacher Bertha Smith, terrorized by white men on her way to school after integrating the faculty of a formerly white elementary school, carried a pistol in her purse. The weapon, she confided to a nervous neighbor, kept her from feeling afraid. For Smith, as for others, good sense outweighed good intentions.<sup>50</sup>

The intensification of white racial terror after the passage of the Voting Rights Act proved to some that nonviolence was a too-quick route to heaven. Armed resistance could not keep everyone safe, but it did protect the movement by preserving space for activists to implement the changes promised by the Civil Rights and Voting Acts. Stating it baldly, an unnamed resident of Lowndes County, Alabama, chastised an organizer for neglecting to see how in local communities away from the public eye, “you can’t come here talking that nonviolence shit.” Nonviolence “would get yourself killed, and a lot of other people, too.”<sup>51</sup> Even more, nonviolence required more emotional labor than some women were willing to do. “My mind wasn’t nonviolent,” SCLC’s Septima Clark recalled when discussing her reaction to the men who had assaulted Fannie Lou Hamer and Annette Ponder. “I wished that chandelier would drop on their heads and kill them.” Even years after working with disciples of nonviolence, Clark continued to “have feelings at times that I’d like to do something violently to stop people.”<sup>52</sup>

Clark was not alone in viewing violence against women as a particularly outrageous example of segregationists run amok, nor in finding some appeal in violence. The most prominent

public advocates of armed self-defense in the mid-1960s—Louisiana’s paramilitary Deacons for Defense or their migrant kin in California, the Black Panthers—bore witness to how little protection African American women received from the authorities, federal legislation notwithstanding. As Black women could readily attest and as the Deacons and countless others vociferously noted, authorities themselves were often the problem. It was police violence against a Black woman that first politicized the head of the Bogalusa chapter of the Deacons, Charlie Sims, after he viewed news coverage of a policeman dragging a woman protestor “like she was a piece of wood.” The spring before the passage of the Voting Rights Act, Bogalusa saw local law enforcement put its weight behind white racial terror : Klan members had police escort as they pulled guns on women activists driving to church on a Sunday morning. Both the Klan and police took off when the Deacons arrived. In his hometown of Jonesboro, Louisiana, Deacon member Earnest Thomas watched the assistant chief of police accompany hooded members of the Klan into the Black neighborhood to intimidate them out of movement activity. “I figured if the power structure would do that for the Klan,” he explained to an *Ebony* reporter, “we’d better do something for ourselves.”<sup>53</sup>

Earnest Thomas realized what Black women had long known and historians would later contend. Lawmen, not just unnamed bad apples, waged war on the Civil Rights Movement. Whether they assaulted young women organizers, supplied marauders with information on activists’ locations, offered up men and matériel to help out with attacks, or gave terrorists sanction by refusing to apprehend or convict them, the power structure played a starring role. What the activists at the UN had framed as “genocide” involved the semilegal violence of vigilantes evolving with state power to perfect new forms of racial discipline. In framing armed self-defense as counter-terrorism, its proponents shone a light on police violence as the mortar of white supremacy’s infrastructure. Male protestors did not always foreground Black women’s experiences when they articulated their critiques, but women protestors knew that their

experiences with violence and violation provided the template for the broader practice of state-based oppression.

Following another template often seen in women's experiences, state and local authorities flipped victim and aggressor when addressing a white public. Newspapers warned white audiences that Black militancy "could open the door to aggressive terrorism by Negroes." The Deacons did not pose the only threat, a reporter for the *New York Times* mused, "since occasional talk of anti-white terrorism can be heard in the Negro community and in the civil rights movement."<sup>54</sup> Fanning this fear, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, perpetually reluctant to act on *behalf* of civil rights activists, began using its counter intelligence program (COINTELPRO) to "disrupt" or "otherwise neutralize" what they called "black nationalist, hate-type" groups "and their propensity for violence and disorder." So-called extremists, according to COINTELPRO, ranged from the Southern Christian Leadership Conference to the Deacons for Defense.<sup>55</sup>

Uprisings in cities from Los Angeles (1965) to Baltimore (1968) added to popular concern as news and television started featuring Black rioters rather than white terrorists—implying either an equivalency between the two or context-free one-sided aggression from Black militants.<sup>56</sup> White Americans across the political spectrum began linking armed self-defense to the fury expressed by urban rioters, and they started seeing individual women and men, bearing witness more than they were bearing arms, as amalgamated teeming masses. These masses, editorials said, practiced "extremism" on par with white supremacist violence.<sup>57</sup> In a *New York Times* editorial decrying the "spirit of lawlessness" that "pervades the American scene," for example, the writer conceded that "a long history of discrimination" might "explain but not justify" African American militancy and "'black power' zealots." Nonetheless, the *Times* warned, there could "be no compromise with lawlessness."<sup>58</sup>

White Americans' rejection of Black militancy—and with it, the downplaying of women's roles in shaping popular protest—demonstrated a preference for order over justice.

Hysteria over Black lawlessness revived narratives of Black folks as inherently criminal, a trope that dated back to a turn-of-the-century focus on “bad Negroes” and “colored Amazons,” and foregrounded Black criminality rather than white supremacy as the cause of racial violence.<sup>59</sup> Segregationists like Alabama’s George Wallace and South Carolina’s Strom Thurmond had been linking civil rights protest to Black criminality for well over a decade, and Arizona’s Barry Goldwater had trumpeted the racialized rhetoric in his presidential campaign against Lyndon Johnson. Although initially viewed as extreme, public discourse followed them to the fringe. In the wake of riots in Philadelphia in late summer 1964, the *New York Times* decried the “racial hoodlumism” that found “chaotic expression” in “bloodshed, street-fighting, and the oppression of the law-abiding,” just as it would fret the following summer about African Americans’ penchant for anti-white terrorism.<sup>60</sup> By the fall of 1966, when the editors of the *Saturday Evening Post* felt comfortable enough to confess having grown weary of African Americans’ “howling need” for the bread-and-butter issues that fueled many Black women’s protests—“schools, jobs, housing and all the other minimum rights of the American system”—they announced their position by writing, “We are all, let us face it, Mississippians.”<sup>61</sup>

Narratives of chaos and criminality brought white Mississippians, actual and figurative, back into the fold. Ironically, reconciliation only proved possible because civil rights activists made the South palatable to white moderates. African American protesters—militant, nonviolent, and all the folks between—had taken the jagged edge off police violence. In varied confrontations, activists had fought with segregationists over what constituted legitimate violence; and, in important ways, they had won out. Outright racial terrorism no longer set the boundaries of place and possibility by the end of the 1960s, and police violence no longer served as an unassailable instrument of racial terror. No mean feat, this change stemmed not only from the unyielding audacity of men with shotguns but also from the formidable courage of women like Fannie Lou Hamer and Henrietta Wright who built on longer traditions of Black women’s testimony to speak out about the violence visited upon them—Hamer at the 1964 Democratic

National Convention, among other places, and Wright in 1969, when she finally got her trial against the police and doctors who confined her.<sup>62</sup>

Yet, even if local authorities could no longer brazenly assault civil rights activists, police powers to name and run down criminals had expanded. The federal government withdrew its sanction from extralegal violence even as federal and state governments began toughening criminal laws in response to civil rights agitation—extending police power without reckoning with how police had previously abused women with that power. Thus, politicians, judges, and policy wonks made vigilantes redundant but never rooted out sexual violation as a useful tool; they overwhelmed it rather than displaced it. The discourse of law and order not only rehabilitated southern public safety officers, it rooted their legitimacy in more constitution-friendly, color-blind terms. One no longer needed to call out “race” to carry out the work of racial discipline.<sup>63</sup>

The experiences of Henrietta Wright and her sisters in the civil rights struggle reveal how supremacists sought to silence black women’s voices, and how those women fought back. Their experiences also augured things to come: black folks who could be dismissed as criminals need not have their needs addressed. In other words, local authorities’ most effective blow came not from assaulting someone like Henrietta Wright but in declaring her a lunatic and locking her up. There was nothing new about the conjoining of racialized and sexualized police brutality: law enforcement officers had been doing it, and civil rights activists decrying it, for decades. Nor did Sheriff Wages innovate much by imposing labels on Wright that she did not choose for herself—hussy, troublemaker, madwoman. After all, attacking people’s self-understanding was also part and parcel of white supremacist rule. Yet even as Wages drew on and intensified old methods of controlling Black women’s bodies, he anticipated the ways in which white supremacy would reconstitute itself by criminalizing Blackness at an extraordinary rate and on an astronomical scale. As white liberals and conservatives classified militant struggle as something distinct from

civil rights, and actually delinquent, this aggressive incarceration of African Americans, which legal scholar Michelle Alexander has dubbed the “new Jim Crow,” went unchecked.<sup>64</sup>

Unchecked but not unquestioned. By speaking out about the officers’ and doctors’ violations—physical, psychological, ethical—Henrietta Wright won a moral victory even when a legal one eluded her. She went to court, supported by the American Civil Liberties Union’s southern civil rights arm, the Lawyers Constitutional Defense Committee. Her lawyer, Martin Garbus, had defended the comedian Lenny Bruce and successfully taken on the state of Alabama over its welfare regulations, and he brought the same moxie, skill, and energy to the Wright case. But even he understood, as he warned the Wrights, that Henrietta had no hope of winning. Nonetheless, after taking the witness stand, Garbus would later recall, Henrietta Wright was “exhausted but relaxed.” Testimony had long been a cornerstone of Black women’s resistance to white supremacy, an assertion that violence and violation would damage but not destroy them. Although the jury ruled against her, “Sheriff Wages,” Wright’s husband declared, “[had] been stood up to.”<sup>65</sup> This was not sufficient for defeating white supremacy, but it was necessary for the striving to carry on.

As Black women argued throughout the twentieth century and continue to argue into the twenty-first, sexualized violence shapes the contours of the Black freedom struggle. The vote, hard-fought and tenuous though it turned out to be, did not untether violence from white supremacy nor white supremacy from state power. The schoolgirls harassed by policemen in the 1940s would have recognized the trauma born by Dajerria Becton, the McKinney, Texas teenager who sobbed for her mother as a police officer straddled her backside and slammed her head against the concrete at a pool party in 2015. The ordeal of activist Sandra Bland, found hanging in a Texas prison after an officer escalated a 2015 traffic stop, bore echoes of Henrietta Wright’s detention in Mississippi. Fifty years on, violence and violation remained extensive, pervasive, and horrifically routine. It is little wonder that Black Lives Matter, the most visible (and vilified) Black freedom movement of the contemporary era, was founded by three women who describe

themselves as the “progeny” of both the Deacons and anti-lynching activist Ida B. Wells. We might see them as the heirs to Henrietta Wright and Fannie Lou Hamer as well. Historical precedent and the recent deaths of young women like Renisha McBride, Rekia Boyd, Mya Hall, Ataiana Jefferson, and Breonna Taylor make stark what BLM cofounders Patrisse Khan-Cullors, Opal Tometi, and Alicia Garza knew from advocating for domestic workers, transwomen, and other marginalized populations, that only by analyzing at the intersections of race, gender, class, and sexual orientation can we understand the reach and devastation of antiblack state violence. Popular coverage of Black protest still tends to “talk about men,” Khan-Cullors observed, but “it has been the sisters who are there” enduring and calling for an end to police violence.<sup>66</sup>

We remain in a long, still-bloody battle. African American women now find the discourse of self-defense turned against them and the rhetoric of law and order wielded as a cudgel. The language of colorblindness and criminality function as narrative weapons, denying the steady viciousness with which authorities violated Black women’s bodies and rights. This framing forestalls conversation about white supremacy’s place in law, politics, and bureaucracy—the kinds of institutions that held Henrietta Wright and thousands of others in their thrall. Denials of ongoing everyday violence make it difficult to process moments of explosive violence and warp the contemporary conversation about all Black bodies imperiled in public space. As thousands of Americans have taken to the streets in 2020, reeling from the pain of Black death broadcast over and over, commentators repeatedly refer to the protests as unprecedented. Yet there is little happening that lacks precedent. Foregrounding Black women’s struggles—their trauma, their testimony, and their political vision—gives us perspective on the present and a guide for the future. The way forward will not prove easy, but the terrain is not uncharted. Black women have long led the way; it is time for us to follow them.

**<not> Notes**

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<sup>1</sup> “An Act to Enforce the Fifteenth Amendment of the United States and for Other Purposes,” August 6, 1965, *Enrolled Acts and Resolutions of Congress, 1789–*, General Records of the United States Government, RG 11, National Archives.

<sup>2</sup> Testimony of Henrietta Wright, *State of Mississippi v. Henrietta Wright*, Circuit Court of Montgomery County Mississippi, Regular October Term, 1967 in Supreme Court Number 45012, *Henrietta Wright v. State of Mississippi*, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

<sup>3</sup> Testimony of C. W. Wright, *State of Mississippi v. Henrietta Wright*, Circuit Court of Montgomery County Mississippi, Regular October Term, 1967 in Supreme Court Number 45012, *Henrietta Wright v. State of Mississippi*, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

<sup>4</sup> Walter F. Sillers to James O. Eastland, February 5, 1943, quoted in Jason Morgan Ward, *Defending White Democracy: The Making of a Segregationist Movement and the Remaking of Radical Politics, 1936-1965* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> John Lewis quoted in James T. Patterson, *The Eve of Destruction: How 1965 Transformed America* (New York: Basic Books, 2012), 155–156.

<sup>6</sup> Martin Garbus, Wright’s lawyer in the federal damages suit against Wages et al., describes Wright as “quietly defiant.” Martin Garbus, email message to author, February 22, 2014.

<sup>7</sup> Garbus, email.

<sup>8</sup> Testimony of Henrietta Wright, *State of Mississippi v. Henrietta Wright*; Martin Garbus, *Ready for the Defense* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1971), 4–5.

<sup>9</sup> For another example of sexual abuse as intimidation and diminishment, see Françoise N. Hamlin, *Crossroads at Clarksdale: The Black Freedom Struggle in the Mississippi Delta After World War II* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 95–97. On sexual violence as part the logic, tactic, culture, and practice of Jim Crow, see: Danielle L. McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance—A New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power* (New York: Knopf, 2010); Crystal N. Feimster, *Southern Horrors: Women and the Politics of Rape and Lynching* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009); and Stephen A. Berrey, *The Jim Crow Routine: Everyday Performance of Race, Civil Rights, and Segregation in Mississippi* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), esp. chap. 3.

<sup>10</sup> Garbus, *Ready for the Defense*, 5–6, 33.

<sup>11</sup> Garbus, *Ready for the Defense*, 37–38, 6.

<sup>12</sup> Testimony of Henrietta Wright, *State of Mississippi v. Henrietta Wright*. For a deeper exploration of narratives of racial aggression, militancy, and madness in Mississippi history, see Berrey, *Jim Crow Routine*, 106–113. On the association between African Americans, aggression, and psychosis, see Jonathan M. Metzler, *The Protest Psychosis: How Schizophrenia Became a Black Disease* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2009).

<sup>13</sup> Garbus, *Ready for the Defense*, 40, 7, 48–49.

<sup>14</sup> “Says Rights Work Branded Her ‘Lunatic’; Sues Lawmen, Medics,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, April 30, 1966, 13.

<sup>15</sup> On terror and white supremacy from Emancipation to *Brown*, see Hannah Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom: Citizenship, Sexual Violence, and the Meaning of Race in the Postemancipation South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); and Kidada E. Williams, *They Left Great Marks on Me: African American Testimonies of Racial Violence from Emancipation to World War I* (New York: New York University Press, 2012).

<sup>16</sup> Gerda Lerner, ed., *Black Women in White America: A Documentary History* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 149, 182–188; Fannie Lou Hamer, quoted in McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street*, 191.

<sup>17</sup> Hannah Rosen, “‘Not That Sort of Women’: Race, Gender, and Sexual Violence during the Memphis Riot of 1866,” in Martha Hodes, ed., *Sex, Love, Race: Crossing Boundaries in North American History* (New York: New York University, 1999), 267–293.

- <sup>18</sup> Adriane Lentz-Smith, *Freedom Struggles: African Americans and World War I* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 52–53; McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street*, 48–50.
- <sup>19</sup> Bertha Smith, in discussion with the author, March 2001; Ferdie Walker quoted in Danielle L. McGuire, “‘It Was like All of Us Had Been Raped’: Sexual Violence, Community Mobilization, and the African-American Freedom Struggle,” *Journal of American History* 91, no. 3 (December 2004): 909.
- <sup>20</sup> On armed resistance and the Civil Rights Movement, see Akinyele Omowale Umoja, *We Will Shoot Back: Armed Resistance in the Mississippi Freedom Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2013); Timothy B. Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Lance Hill, *The Deacons for Defense: Armed Resistance and the Civil Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Simon Wendt, *The Spirit and the Shotgun: Armed Resistance and the Struggle for Civil Rights* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007); and Charles E. Cobb Jr., *This Nonviolent Stuff’ll Get You Killed: How Guns Made the Civil Rights Movement Possible* (New York: Basic Books, 2014).
- <sup>21</sup> Gyanendra Pandey, *Routine Violence: Nations, Fragments, Histories* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005).
- <sup>22</sup> Mbembe’s quote comes from Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 174. Pandey cites Mbembe in *Routine Violence*, 11. Both authors are thinking through Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*.
- <sup>23</sup> Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, 174.
- <sup>24</sup> Martin Luther King Jr. quoted in Timothy B. Tyson, *Blood Done Sign My Name* (New York: Crown Books, 2004), 321.
- <sup>25</sup> The number of Jim Crow and civil rights histories that mention but do not center on sexual violence speak to its ubiquity. See, for example, Anne Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi* (New York: Doubleday, 1968); Chana Kai Lee, *For Freedom’s Sake: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999); Katherine Mellen Charron, *Freedom’s Teacher: The Life of Septima Clark* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); and Hamlin, *Crossroads at Clarksdale*.
- <sup>26</sup> Charles M. Payne, *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995). For a rich discussion of systemic racial violence in the Black Belt, see Hasan Kwame Jeffries, *Bloody Lowndes: Civil Rights and Black Power in Alabama’s Black Belt* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).
- <sup>27</sup> Harding quoted in Cobb Jr., *This Nonviolent Stuff’ll Get You Killed*, 4. For a nuanced exploration of “revolutionary” nonviolence and the debates it engendered among activists, see Wesley C. Hogan, *Many Minds, One Heart: SNCC’s Dream for a New America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).
- <sup>28</sup> On nonviolent action as coercion, see Wendt, *The Spirit and the Shotgun*, 4, 36–41.
- <sup>29</sup> Mabel Williams quoted in Pero Gaglo Dagbovie, “‘God Has Spared Me to Tell My Story’: Mabel Robinson Williams and the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement,” *The Black Scholar* 43 (Spring 2013),
- <sup>30</sup> Robert Williams quoted in Timothy B. Tyson, “Robert F. Williams, ‘Black Power,’ and the Roots of the African American Freedom Struggle,” *Journal of American History* 85, no. 2 (September 1998): 561.
- <sup>31</sup> Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie*, 2.
- <sup>32</sup> Robert F. Williams, *Negroes with Guns* (1962; repr., Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998), 4.
- <sup>33</sup> Mabel Williams quoted in Ashley D. Farmer, “‘All the Progress to Be Made Will Be Made by Maladjusted Negroes’: Mae Mallory, Black Women’s Activism, and the Making of the Black Radical Tradition,” *Journal of Social History* 53, no. 2 (Winter 2019): 515.
- <sup>34</sup> Mallory quoted in Farmer, “All the Progress to Be Made Will Be Made by Maladjusted Negroes,” 519.
- <sup>35</sup> See Ashley D. Farmer, *Remaking Black Power: How Black Women Transformed an Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), Chapter 1.
- <sup>36</sup> Garbus, *Ready for the Defense*, 47.
- <sup>37</sup> Charles Marsh, *God’s Long Summer: Stories of Faith and Civil Rights* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 18.
- <sup>38</sup> Patridge quoted in John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 171. See also “Jury Frees Officers,” *Student Voice*, December 9, 1963, 1.
- <sup>39</sup> Dittmer, *Local People*, 171–172.

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- <sup>40</sup> Marsh, *God's Long Summer*, 18.
- <sup>41</sup> Hamer quoted in Chana Kai Lee, "Anger, Memory, and Personal Power: Fannie Lou Hamer and Civil Rights Leadership," in Bettye Collier-Thomas and V. P. Franklin, eds., *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights/Black Power Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 152.
- <sup>42</sup> "Jury Frees Officers," 2; Marsh, *God's Long Summer*, 19.
- <sup>43</sup> Lee, "Anger, Memory, and Personal Power," 151.
- <sup>44</sup> Marsh, *God's Long Summer*, 21.
- <sup>45</sup> McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street*, 194.
- <sup>46</sup> Marsh, *God's Long Summer*, 21.
- <sup>47</sup> Jeffries, *Bloody Lowndes*, 102. For examples of violence in off-camera places like Terrell County, Georgia, see "Night Riders Shoot Worker," *Student Voice*, December 9, 1963.
- <sup>48</sup> For more on the document "We Charge Genocide," see Carol Anderson, *Eyes off the Prize: The United Nations and the African American Struggle for Human Rights, 1944–1955* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); and Martha Biondi, *To Stand and Fight: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Postwar New York City* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 191.
- <sup>49</sup> On the ways in which the Cold War shaped the contours of the US Civil Rights Movement, see Anderson, *Eyes off the Prize*; Penny M. von Eschen, *Race against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937–1957* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997); Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); and Brenda Gayle Plummer, *In Search of Power: African Americans in the Era of Decolonization, 1956–1974* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).
- <sup>50</sup> Umoja, *We Will Shoot Back*, 108; Annelieke Dirks, "Between Threat and Reality: The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the Emergence of Armed Self-Defense in Clarksdale and Natchez, Mississippi, 1960–1965," *Journal of the Study of Radicalism* 1, no. 1 (2006): 72; Smith, discussion.
- <sup>51</sup> Jeffries, *Bloody Lowndes*, 104.
- <sup>52</sup> "'I Train People to Do Their Own Talking': Septima Clark and Women in the Civil Rights Movement," Katherine Mellen Charron and David Cline, eds., *Southern Cultures*, 16 (Summer 2010): 46.
- <sup>53</sup> Hill, *Deacons for Defense*, 112, 114–116. The Thomas quote comes from Hamilton Bims, "Deacons for Defense," *Ebony*, September 29, 1965, 26.
- <sup>54</sup> Roy Reed, "The Deacons, Too, Ride by Night," *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, August 15, 1965, 10.
- <sup>55</sup> "Counterintelligence Program, Black Nationalist – Hate Groups, Internal Security," Freedom of Information and Privacy Acts, Subject: (COINTELPRO), Black Extremist 100-448006, Section 1, FBI: The Vault, Federal Bureau of Investigation, August 25, 1967, 3, <http://vault.fbi.gov/cointel-pro/cointel-pro-black-extremists/cointelpro-black-extremists-part-01-of/view>.
- <sup>56</sup> Leigh Raiford, *Imprisoned in a Luminous Glare: Photography and the African American Freedom Struggle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 120.
- <sup>57</sup> "The Spirit of Lawlessness," *New York Times*, May 7, 1967, E10.
- <sup>58</sup> "Lawlessness."
- <sup>59</sup> On Gilded Age and Progressive Era constructions of Black criminality, see Kali N. Gross, *Colored Amazons: Crime, Violence, and Black Women in the City of Brotherly Love, 1880–1910* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006); and Khalil Gibran Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).
- <sup>60</sup> "Riots in Philadelphia," *New York Times*, August 31, 1964, 24.
- <sup>61</sup> Editorial quoted in "If Most White People Are 'Let's Face It, Mississippians,' Then God Help America!" *Philadelphia Tribune*, September 3, 1966, 7. Peniel E. Joseph includes the Mississippi line in his survey of the white backlash to Black Power in *Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America* (New York: Henry Holt, 2006), 146.
- <sup>62</sup> Frederick Douglass quoted in Hill, *Deacons for Defense*, 267.
- <sup>63</sup> Heather Ann Thompson, "Why Mass Incarceration Matters: Rethinking Crisis, Decline, and Transformation in Postwar American History," *Journal of American History* 97, no. 3 (December 2010): 719; Robert Perkinson, *Texas Tough: The Rise of America's Prison Empire* (New York: Metropolitan

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Books, 2010), 289–297; Anders Walker, *The Ghost of Jim Crow: How Southern Moderates Used Brown v. Board of Education to Stall Civil Rights* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>64</sup> The phrase the “new Jim Crow” comes from Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: New Press, 2010). Mass incarceration, Heather Thompson argues, arose from “a growing number of laws that regulated bodies and communities” of mostly people of color “in thoroughly new ways but also subjected violators to unprecedented time behind bars.” Thompson, “Why Mass Incarceration Matters,” 706.

<sup>65</sup> *People v. Bruce*, 64 Cal. 2d 55 (1968); *Smith v. King*, 392 U.S. 309 (1968); Garbus, *Ready for the Defense*, 72–73.

<sup>66</sup> Patrisse Khan-Cullors and Asha Bandele, *When They Call You a Terrorist: A Black Lives Matter Memoir* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2018), 186, 218; “Our Co-Founders,” Black Lives Matter, accessed June 10, 2020, <https://blacklivesmatter.com/our-co-founders/>. The murders of African American teenagers like Trayvon Martin (Sanford, Florida, 2012), Jordan Davis (Jacksonville, Florida, 2012), and Renisha McBride (Dearborn Heights, Michigan, 2013) highlight the oft-deadly consequences of narrating Blackness as criminality. In each case, the killers explained that they perceived the teens as threats—Martin for walking down the street, Davis for playing his radio loudly, and McBride for unexpectedly ringing a stranger’s doorbell. Martin’s and Davis’s killers were both acquitted on the grounds of self-defense. As scholar Jelani Cobb has noted, there is an irony that “African Americans are both the primary victims of violent crime” in the United States and “the primary victims of the fear of that crime.” Jelani Cobb, “The Killing of Renisha McBride,” *The New Yorker*, November 16, 2013, <http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/the-killing-of-renisha-mcbride>.