

# THE Round Table

Winter 2017

"...a path from where we are to where we should be." --Peter Maurin

ALL LIVES MATTER  
ALL LIVES MATTER  
ALL LIVES MATTER  
WHAT ABOUT BLACK ON BLACK CRIME?  
THEY SHOULD SPEAK TO THEIR ELECTED OFFICIALS  
THEY NEED A LEADER  
THEY SHOULD VOTE  
I'm afraid the protests will be violent  
BLUE LIVES MATTER  
Thug.  
ALL LIVES MATTER  
THEY ARE HURTING THEMSELVES  
THEY DON'T RESPECT THEMSELVES  
THEY ARE OUTSIDE AGITATORS/Paid protesters  
WHY ARE THEY SO ANGRY?  
BLUE LIVES MATTER  
THEY ARE OVER-REACTING  
WHY CAN'T THEY BE MORE PEACEFUL?  
ALL LIVES MATTER  
ALL LIVES MATTER  
THEY WON'T SAY 'FTP' WHEN THEY NEED THE POLICE  
GET A JOB  
MLK WOULDN'T BLOCK A HIGHWAY!  
I'm not racist, but...  
Jamar Clark  
Kejame Powell  
TANISHA ANDERSON  
EZELL FORD  
Kayla Moore  
GARY BALL JR  
REKIA BOYD  
NATASHA MCKENNA  
FREDDIE GRAY  
LAQUAN McDONALD  
WALTER SCOTT  
MIRIAM CASTILE  
YVETTE SMITH  
MICHAEL BROWN, JR.  
KIWI HERRING  
MIRIAM CAREY  
TAMIR RICE  
OSCAR GRANT  
SEAN BELL  
ALTON STERLING  
VONDERRIT MEYERS  
SANDRA BLAND  
AMADOU DIALLO  
AIYANA STANLEY-JONES  
ERIC GARNER  
Amadou Diallo  
AIYANA STANLEY-JONES  
Jamar Clark  
Kejame Powell  
TANISHA ANDERSON  
EZELL FORD  
Kayla Moore

# Why This Issue?

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On Tuesday, August 29, seventeen days before Judge Timothy Wilson ruled that former St. Louis police officer Jason Stockley was not guilty of the 2011 murder of Anthony Lamar Smith, St. Louis police erected barricades around court buildings and the police headquarters downtown. Although the verdict would not be announced until almost three weeks later, for many of us in St. Louis, the barricades were a physical sign of what was to come. Facebook statuses and tweets of the barricades were paired with laments of “we know what this means” and “our system is broken.” As we waited in anxious anticipation of what would unfold, I wanted to hope that this time, there would be justice. I wanted to hope that this time, the courts would affirm that Black Lives Matter. I wanted to hope that this time, we would celebrate in the streets. I wanted to hope, but deep down, I knew that I knew better.

It has been over three years since the death of Michael Brown and subsequent Ferguson Uprising sparked local, national, and global conversations about the systemic issues of racial profiling, police brutality, and the militarization of police forces. For three years now, the Black Lives Matter movement has confronted our country with the truth of our past, forced us to wrestle with the reality of our present, and offered us a vision for a more justice-oriented future.

In this issue of the *Round Table*, we look at the current movement-moment unfolding in St. Louis and beyond. The title, “Stop Killing Us,” is the simple, compelling demand from both local organizers and activists as well as the larger national movement. It is the answer to the always-asked question, “What do the protesters want?” In the first article, Michael McPhearson gives us some important context about the Civil Rights movement, noting that it is unfortunate, and even historically inaccurate, that “the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is more closely associated with nonviolence than justice.” He reminds us that “Dr. King’s primary focus was on justice, not nonviolence.”

Megan Conn writes an important piece exploring the increasingly militarized police response to protesters as well as the recent introduction of the “Blue Lives Matter” law in Missouri. Karen House’s own Mary Waters explores “the subtle moral difference between harsh language, property damage, [and] vandalism,” especially as it relates to her identity as a Catholic Worker who deeply values the ideal of pacifism. We reprinted a one-page handout about white people engaging in racial justice work from the Anti-Racism Collective, a group of white anti-racist activists and organizers in St. Louis. Using local photographer Richard Reilly’s work, the spectacular centerfold shows the countless different ways folks have resisted racism and white supremacy in St. Louis in the months following the verdict.

Alexis Tardy writes an article centering on the intersection of her Christian faith and the Black Lives Matter movement, noting that while “[her] faith has compelled [her] to support the movement...the more accurate statement would be that the movement has birthed [her] faith.” Devonn Thomas shares with us a deeply personal piece about her journey to resistance and why she fights for liberation. Acknowledging that there is often a black-white binary regarding race in St. Louis, Christina Meneses writes a powerful piece about being an Asian person in this work, stating that “as an Asian person, and an outsider, it would be so easy just to stay out of race issues altogether here. But I think we can be an important part of the conversation.” And closing out this issue of the *Round Table*, we reprint a fascinating article from *Yes! Magazine* written by Geroge Lakey, who argues that Nordic models suggest that “in each instance of breakthrough on the path toward progressive government, [there] was an apparently necessary time of extreme and painful polarization.”

We hope that as you read this issue, you will join us as we continue to deepen our understanding of resistance to white supremacy and to discern our personal and collective responsibility “to create a new society within the shell of the old.”



- Sarah Nash

Cover: Jenny Truax  
Centerfold: Gregory Fister and Sarah Nash

*The Round Table* is the quarterly journal of Catholic Worker life and thought in St. Louis. Subscriptions are free. Please write to *The Round Table*, 1840 Hogan, St. Louis, MO. 63106. Donations are gladly accepted to help us continue our work. People working on this issue include: Mary Waters, Sarah Nash, Jenny Truax, Gregory Fister, and Haley Shoaf. As always, letters to the editor are welcomed.

# What Would MLK Do? Why Do You Ask?

by Michael McPhearson

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement is often lifted up as the gold standard for U.S. non-violent civil disobedience. As a result, since that period, protests are often compared to the protests of the sixties. Recently, the Movement for Black Lives has especially been scrutinized in this light. People criticize the various tactics and actions activists take today by claiming that Dr. King would never do or approve of this or that. I would like to challenge us to think a bit differently about what MLK may or may not do.

Before we begin to examine what King's tradition of resistance, let us first recognize that Dr. King was not the only effective leader of that era, and that the King-led Southern Christian Leadership Council (SCLC) was not the only effective organization. It takes more than one organization, leader, tactic, and strategy to make a movement. The SCLC was not going to appeal to the same constituents as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) or the people who chose to express their activism as members of the Nation of Islam (NOI) or the Black Panther Party (BPP). Founded in 1957, the SCLC could not match the deep roots and national coverage of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), founded in 1909, or the Urban League, founded in 1910. Keep in mind, I am citing the most well-known organizations. There are many more large and small that made up the Civil Rights Movement. This is extremely important to remember because it took all these groups, with their varied tactics and positions along the Black political spectrum, to make the social and political changes that many of us take for granted today. For example, we rarely hear about the work of the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE) or the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR). Both played central roles in forwarding the broad goals of the Civil Rights Movement.

There are far too many important leaders to cite;



According to the King Center, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was arrested and went to jail twenty-nine times during his life.  
Photo by Charles Moore (September 4, 1958)

however, I will attempt to name a few people who were pivotal to the success of the Movement. Obviously, Malcolm X was central to motivating unknown numbers of Black people to find a new sense of pride whether they joined the Nation of Islam or not. Additionally, like no other, he struck fear in many White people while capturing the imagination of others, leading them to expose their racism or examine their role in supporting a racist society. Like King, Malcolm died in the struggle.

A group that struck fear and captured the imagination enough to be targeted by the U.S. government was the Black Panther Party, and in particular, Fred Hampton. It is hard to overstate the contributions of the Black Panther



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Party during the Civil Rights Movement and Hampton is an example of why. His organizing across racial boundaries and building an expectation of shared power horrified those who wished to maintain racial and economic inequality. Animosity between social groups is the only way to maintain it. He was gunned down in his own home during a night raid by the Chicago police and the FBI.

Though MLK was the SCLC's founding president, the organization was not his idea. Bayard Rustin, a key advisor to MLK and a mainstay figure of the Movement, imagined creating an organization to support and coordinate nonviolent direct action as a method to desegregate bus systems across the South. He began organizing to establish such an organization and at the behest of Rev. K.C. Steel, approached MLK to head the effort.

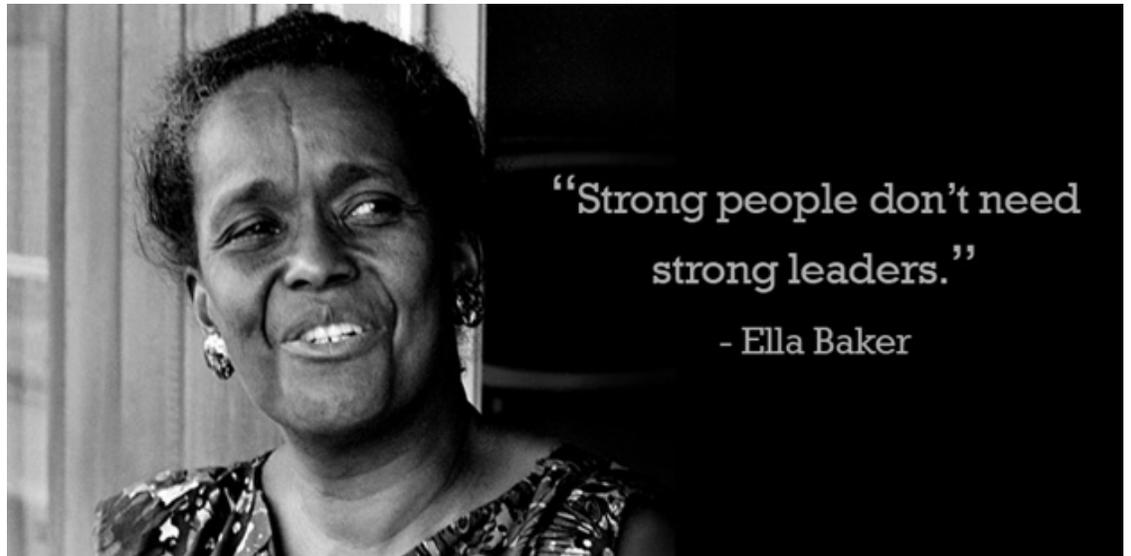
Some of the people most important to the Civil Rights Movement, to the SCLC itself, and perhaps in turn to King's own success, were women who are seldom, if ever, mentioned. It is important for us today to recognize the patriarchal structure of the Civil Rights Movement and work hard and with great intention not to duplicate it. Fortunately, we have many great women as leaders in the Movement for Black Lives. They stand on awesome shoulders. Rosa Parks' refusal to give up her seat to a white patron in Montgomery, Alabama is well known, but the backstory of her activism and preparation for the moment is seldom told. A nearly unknown name today, Septima Poinsette Clark is part of that story. She met Parks shortly before she refused to give up her seat and encouraged her to do so. They met at the Highlander Folk School, an organization committed to training activists. Alumni include MLK, Anne Braden, Ralph Abernathy, and Congressmen John Lewis. Clark was an educator who later joined the school's staff and established a model of education called Citizenship Schools. These schools were a cornerstone of mobilizing the Black vote in the South where many people had to pass a literacy test and a Constitution comprehension test. The school's effort became so

large, it was transferred to the SCLC. With more resources and money available to her, the school taught thousands of teachers who then in turn, helped hundreds of thousands of Black people register to vote.

Another figure central to the forming of the SCLC was Ella Baker. I hope you will go learn more about her on your own, but here are few nuggets to start. Baker worked with W. E. B. Du Bois, Thurgood Marshall, A. Philip Randolph, and Martin Luther King, Jr. She mentored many emerging activists, such as Diane Nash, Stokely Carmichael, Rosa Parks and Bob Moses. Baker, Fannie Lou Hamer and Bob Moses founded the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party to challenge institutionalized racism in the Mississippi Democratic Party.

Even though my list of organizations and leaders is short and incomplete, we can see that it took varied leadership styles and philosophies for the Movement to find success. It makes little sense to use one standard to determine the best course; there is no one, "right" way.

Now let's get back to King. MLK is an important role model for me when it comes to activism. I do often ask myself, what would King do? But I never ask myself, would King approve of this or that act of resistance to injustice? When people do pose that question, I first wonder why they are asking. Dr. King's primary focus was on justice, not nonviolence. If the question is asked in good faith by a person who is committed to justice and concerned about effectiveness, then we can energetically discuss tactics and strategy. But if it is asked in an attempt to change the



In 1960, while serving as the Executive Secretary for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), Ella Baker organized and founded the Student Nonviolence Coordinating Committee (SNCC).  
Source: The Center for Constitutional Rights

subject or turn a negative spotlight on the people who are demanding justice, rather than focus on the immorality of all forms of bigotry, the ravages of poverty, the depravity of war and the self-destructive foolishness of ecological devastation, I reference King's words:

***Letter from a Birmingham Jail – 1963***

You deplore the demonstrations taking place in Birmingham. But your statement, I am sorry to say, fails to express a similar concern for the conditions that brought about the demonstrations. I am sure that none of you would want to rest content with the superficial kind of social analysis that deals merely with effects and does not grapple with underlying causes. It is unfortunate that demonstrations are taking place in Birmingham, but it is even more unfortunate that the city's white power structure left the Negro community with no alternative.

***The Other America - Aurora Forum, Stanford University, April 14, 1967***

So these conditions, existence of widespread poverty, slums, and of tragic conniptions in schools and other areas of life, all of these things have brought about a great deal of despair, and a great deal of desperation. A great deal of disappointment and even bitterness in the Negro communities. And today all of our cities confront huge problems. All of our cities are potentially powder kegs as a result of the continued existence of these conditions. Many in moments of anger, many in moments of deep bitterness engage in riots.

Let me say as I've always said, and I will always continue to say, that riots are socially destructive and self-defeating. I'm still convinced that nonviolence is the most potent weapon available to oppressed people in their struggle for freedom and justice. I feel that violence will only create more social problems than they will solve. That in a real sense it is impracticable for the Negro to even think of mounting a violent revolution in the United States. So I will continue to condemn riots, and continue to say to my brothers and sisters that this is not the way. And continue to affirm that there is another way.

But at the same time, it is as necessary for me to be as vigorous in condemning the conditions which cause persons to feel that they must engage in riotous activities as it is for me to condemn riots. I think America must see that riots do not develop out of thin air. Certain conditions continue to exist in our society which must be condemned as vigorously as

we condemn riots. But in the final analysis, a riot is the language of the unheard. And what is it that America has failed to hear? It has failed to hear that the plight of the Negro poor has worsened over the last few 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, equality, and humanity. And so in a real sense our nation's summers of riots are caused by our nation's winters of delay. And as long as America postpones justice, we stand in the position of having these recurrences of violence and riots over and over again. Social justice and progress are the absolute guarantors of riot prevention.

When MLK was criticized for his tactics of nonviolent resistance, and when confronted with violent reactions to injustice, he challenged the critics to address the conditions that call for protests and compel people to lash out in violent frustration. He challenged their priorities, inconsistent morality, and hypocrisy. Dr. King saw nonviolence as the moral and most effective tool to bring about justice and to create the Beloved Community. He saw the use of violence as a tool for social change as immoral and self-defeating for all, the oppressed and the oppressor, because it caused more profound problems than it solved. He condemned the violent act of resistance, but not the person. King felt this Victor Hugo quote was a profound judgement on rioting: "If a soul is left in the darkness, sins will be committed. The guilty one is not he who commits the sin, but he who causes the darkness."

It is unfortunate that today, the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. is more closely associated with nonviolence than justice. The popular way to remember MLK is to celebrate his choice to take a path of love and nonviolence to advocate for change rather than to focus on the unfinished change he sacrificed his life to bring about. But his real revolutionary legacy lives in those who take the time to learn about it. Please do so. You will find a radical MLK you may not know existed.



# The Militarization of Police and the Criminalization of Protesters

by Megan Conn

Looking back on his department's heavy-handed response to massive protests, retired Police Chief Norm Stamper called it the worst mistake of his career. "We gassed fellow Americans engaging in civil disobedience," he said, "We set a number of precedents, most of them bad. And police departments across the country learned all the wrong lessons from us...we played a part in making that sort of thing so common, so easy to do now." Stamper referred not to the protests in Ferguson, but to the 1999 World Trade Organization protests in Seattle that sparked his resignation. As Stamper acknowledges, the debacle foretold the evolving role of police in suppressing protest in the 21st century, a narrative in which St. Louis is now writing its own infamous chapter.

Since Officer Darren Wilson shot and killed Michael Brown on Canfield Drive on August 9, 2014, police across the region have cracked down on St. Louisans protesting police killings of black people. Officers in military gear regularly use tear gas and mass arrests to shut down protests. Stamper attributes this approach to the flawed precedent set in Seattle: "Going forward 'control' would be the operative word in how police handled protests... the 'Darth Vader' look would become the standard...Cities and police officials would commit mass violations of civil and constitutional rights, and deal with the consequences later. There would be violent, pre-emptive SWAT raids, mass arrests, and sweeping use of police powers that would ensnare violent protesters, peaceful protesters, and people who had nothing to do with protest at all." To justify such actions, St. Louis police arrest protesters on a shortlist of charges: failure to disperse, trespassing, interfering with an officer, obstructing a roadway, resisting arrest, failure to comply.

However, a U.S. District Court ruled in November that many of these tactics violate the First Amendment "right of the people to peaceably assemble." In order for police to declare an "unlawful assembly" and break up a gathering of people engaged in "expressive, non-violent activity," Judge Catherine Perry ruled that those "persons [must

be] acting in concert to pose an imminent threat to use force or violence or to violate a criminal law with force or violence." If citizens are merely exercising their rights to freedom of speech and assembly, police cannot threaten them with chemical agents as punishment for doing so, nor declare an "unlawful assembly." Further, when ordering protesters to disperse, police must specify what area they are to leave and what chemical agent will be used, and must allow people the time and route to leave the area. Before using chemical agents on a protester, police must have probable cause to arrest them, provide them with "clear and unambiguous warnings" that they are subject to arrest and that chemical agents will be used, and give them the opportunity to comply with directions. By these standards, many of the actions taken by St. Louis area police during protests over the past few years clearly violate citizens' constitutional rights.

Until the Ferguson protests, local police had little experience with large-scale, organic protests—which their improvised, inconsistent response quickly made apparent. The first skirmish erupted after a peaceful candlelight vigil the day after Brown's death, when a number of people began breaking the windows of local businesses and stealing goods. A QuikTrip gas station soon went up in flames. Local media rushed to cover the chaotic scene convulsing a half-mile stretch of West Florissant Boulevard. Caught off guard, police hastened to seize control of the streets, making no distinction between those protesting peacefully and those damaging property. This response quickly reinforced the narrative of the police versus the people—regardless of whether they were protesters, looters, or observers.

But after the first night of violence was over, the police failed to adjust their strategy for the continuing protests. Rather than safeguarding citizens' right to protest peacefully, their goal appeared to be preventing groups of people from congregating at all. The next night, officers used tear gas to disperse people standing near the site of the QuikTrip. Without specifying a reason, Ferguson Po-



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lice Chief Tom Jackson reported: “Officers were brought in to quell the hostilities. Tear gas was deployed.” In the days that followed, police in riot gear continued escalating their response, firing tear gas and rubber bullets at protesters, placing snipers atop armored vehicles, while some in the crowd of protesters hurled bottles and rocks at officers.

On the fourth night of protests, 70 SWAT officers arrived to clear the streets, deploying tear gas, smoke bombs, and stun grenades indiscriminately, and arresting dozens of citizens, including Alderman Antonio French and members of the press. Wesley Lowery of the Washington Post and Ryan Reilly of the Huffington Post were arrested inside a McDonald’s on West Florissant when police judged they weren’t leaving quickly enough. Officers tear-gassed a video crew from Al-Jazeera America, ordered them to stop recording, and dismantled their camera equipment. Within a few days, media were confined to a press pen away from the action; a photographer who left this area was promptly arrested, though never charged. A no-fly order was imposed over Ferguson airspace, which conversations revealed through a Freedom of Information Act request showed was intended to prevent news helicopters from capturing footage of the unrest.

As protests continued, officers sporadically implemented a controversial “five-second rule” as grounds to arrest anyone standing still for more than five seconds. In the weeks that followed, the distinction between permitted protesting and prohibited protesting appeared arbitrary; police would allow protesters to march for a few hours, then suddenly decide their time for free expression was up and swoop in to reclaim an area. Officers advanced in formation to clear streets and parking lots, ordering protesters to “go home” while blocking off neighborhood access routes. In October, Judge Perry, who also issued the recent judgement, ruled that the “five second rule” was an unconstitutional violation of protesters’ rights.

Despite public criticism and this judicial rebuke, area police displayed a similarly repressive approach this fall when faced with widespread protests of the acquittal of Jason Stockley, a former St. Louis Police Officer who shot and killed Anthony Lamar Smith in 2011. In September, 123 people protesting downtown were caught inside a



Militarized St. Louis police officers wearing riot gear and clutching batons at protests following the not-guilty verdict of Jason Stockley.

Photo by Richard Reilly

ring of advancing officers, a controversial tactic known as “kettling.” Video showed that the protest was peaceful in the moments before the arrests, with much of the crowd having already gone home. Seemingly unprompted, police declared an “unlawful assembly” and ordered protesters to disperse, while simultaneously cutting off all exit routes using their bodies and bicycles. Peaceful protesters and bystanders alike were arrested, and many were injured by police or sprayed with pepper spray, even after they had been taken into custody. Among those arrested and injured were a journalist from the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, a patron exiting a bar, a photographer previously arrested in Ferguson, and even a black SLMPD officer working undercover. Having cleared the streets, officers co-opted a familiar protest cry, chanting, “Whose streets? Our streets!” At a press conference, Interim Chief O’Toole spoke to their tactical approach by announcing “we owned tonight.”

The St. Louis County police’s response to protests at the Galleria shopping mall was similarly harsh. A shocking photo of an officer with his hand pressed across a

grandmother's neck made front page news. She was later charged with assault on an officer, which was upgraded to a Class D felony because police are now, by law, considered to be special victims. The "Blue Lives Matter" law, signed by Governor Greitens in July, extends the range of crimes for which police are special victims, thus enabling prosecutors to seek upgraded charges and harsher sentences.

Judge Perry's recent ruling affirms the rights of protesters and makes clear that area police must fundamentally change their response in order to pass constitutional muster. Considering that police recently repeated the mistakes of 2014, there is considerable doubt as

to whether this will happen. The task will fall largely to whoever Mayor Krewson selects as the city's next Chief of Police, as well as to St. Louis County Chief of Police, Jon Belmar. The courts will remain a key instrument of accountability. An upcoming court ruling may provide further guidance on the extent of protesters' rights. After being arrested at a protest on the one-year anniversary of Brown's death, two women sued St. Louis County on the grounds that the ordinance against "interfering with an officer" is sufficiently vague as to be unconstitutional. The trial-level circuit court dismissed their suit and they appealed to the U.S. District Court. The case was argued in October and there is no timeline for the decision.



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# White Violence and White Silence

by Mary Waters

During the protests that erupted in the aftermath of the Jason Stockley verdict, many St. Louisans were concerned because of what they considered to be violence during the protests. But their point of view was often very black-and-white: they used umbrella terms like "violence," "unrest," "chaos," and "riots," instead of focusing on the subtle moral differences between harsh language, property damage, vandalism, acts intended to startle but not truly harm, and acts meant to physically harm. Sometimes those who oppose the views of the protestors use this broad language to make the protestors' cause seem less noble: they are painted as "thugs" with no respect for law enforcement, who show up not to promote justice but just to cause trouble. But sometimes, in part because of that broad language, even those who believe Jason Stockley should have been convicted will say they can't support the protestors because of their "violent" tactics.

As a Catholic Worker, I deeply value the ideal of pacifism. The role that nonviolent tactics have played in protest movements – like that we see in the work of

Gandhi and Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. – are foundational for my understanding of how we can work for justice. But I've never been a strict pacifist: for example, I believe that it is morally permissible to practice self-defense, though I believe you should try to take down an attacker with the minimal amount of force. So my views on the protest movements here in St. Louis have also been complicated. For instance, during the Ferguson protests, there was a particularly powerful moment when protestors burned down a QuikTrip on West Florissant. I was torn about it: I knew I wouldn't have joined in if I'd been there, but I couldn't condemn them either. I knew that the people who'd torched the QuikTrip were angry, and I felt like they had every right to be angry: their lives and the lives of their loved ones weren't (and aren't) being valued by the police and the courts. Rev. King might not have approved of burning a QuikTrip, but he too may have understood why they did it, since, as he once said, "The riot is the language of the unheard," and no one was hearing their cry for justice.

But that's a pretty extreme example. It's clear to me



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"If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor." -Archbishop Desmond Tutu  
Photo by Jenny Truax

that, if they had asked me for my opinion, I would have said, "Don't commit arson," even if I believe they truly did it in the pursuit of justice. But the image of Palestinians throwing rocks at Israeli tanks is an enduring vision of justice for me. So what about throwing rocks at a cop in riot gear? Throwing a rock at somebody isn't generally something I approve of, but what's the likelihood of small rock hurting someone in armor? And more importantly, do these actions make it immoral for me to stand alongside protest movements where those things sometimes happen? I don't think they do. These actions weren't planned by the leadership of the movements, they were done by individuals acting out of their own experience. I think they can serve an excuse to remain neutral in the face of oppression – but as Desmond Tutu warns us, "If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality." Even when I might not condone the actions of some of the people protesting alongside me, staying home means siding with those who believe that cops shouldn't be held accountable for murder. I could not use the questionable tactics of a few protestors as an excuse; I knew I had to stand in solidarity with my siblings of color in their pursuit for justice in the face of racist police.

So everyone has to decide for themselves where their personal line is. At what point has a protest movement embraced tactics that I cannot endorse with my pres-

ence? Answering that question can be complicated. To start with, we need to acknowledge that on the whole, this movement has beautifully and creatively embodied nonviolent strategies and tactics. Second, white people need to recognize that racism can limit traditional "from the inside" change efforts for many people of color. And third, protesting is usually just one of many things that people are doing to resist racism.

For instance, I've heard some people object that rather than disruptive protests out in the streets, black people concerned with racism in the police force should run for office, or join the police themselves. But this ignores several realities. First off, there are black elected representatives who also participate in these protests, bringing their activism from the halls of government to the streets. Secondly, racism in the electoral process is a barrier for black candidates for office, both in terms of the coverage they receive in the media and a legacy of racially-biased polling practices and laws that limit the ability of their supporters to actually cast their vote on election day. And finally, racism within the police force makes it difficult to enact change from within – the racial tensions here in St. Louis specifically have led to the creation of a separate police union to represent the interests of black officers, the Ethical Society of Police. They have been trying to end racial injustice in policing since 1972, and they have made great strides.

There is still more work to be done, and protests are a great way to bring attention to an issue. But then why, some people might ask, can't these protests be "normal" and peaceful? Why march without a permit? Why stand in the street, or on a highway? Again, this is ignoring a powerful barrier: the way that the media tends to ignore non-disruptive protests generally, and especially those led by people of color. Causing a disruption gets media attention, and if these issues don't get increased attention then no change will occur. Disruption has been a key tactic in protest movements that have been praised by history, such as when Gandhi called for the boycott of British textiles and disrupted the colonial economy, or during the Greensboro sit-ins when four students (Joseph McNeil, Franklin McCain, Ezell Blair Jr., and David Richmond) organized a non-violent but very disruptive mass refusal to leave restaurants where black patrons weren't being served. Disruptive tactics are one of the only ways to get the media coverage needed to energize people around this crucial issue. A disruptive protest may not be the most comfortable idea for many white people, but white discomfort should not limit the ways in which black people can engage in the fight for justice.

White discomfort doesn't just affect how you view disruptive tactics, it also changes what you might label



Members of the St. Louis Anti-Racism Collective (ARC) at the 2017 Women's March Photo by Jenny Truax

as a violent tactic. Just like a fish might have a hard time even seeing water, let alone understanding it and imagining life outside of it, white people often don't even realize that we have a set of cultural assumptions that aren't necessarily shared by people of color, and we can have a hard time understanding what values we've been raised with and imagining how perfectly good, moral people can exist outside that culture. When we don't recognize that many of our values are tied to a culture of whiteness, we confuse that culture for the way things ought to be for everyone.

Let's make this concrete. I recently heard a young white Jesuit say that he could not go to the protests because they would chant "Fuck the police," and he saw that as violence. It may not be obvious, but that sentiment is racist, because it's based on white culture and serves as an excuse to maintain neutrality and silence in the face of oppression. We have been raised in white culture to show deference to authority, and to never let our anger show in a conflict. Upper-class white culture teaches us to avoid conflict when at all possible, and to put on an attitude of politeness even when we are in conflict. In that kind of culture, someone angrily yelling "Fuck you!" would be emotionally jarring; it might cause genuine distress to hear that kind of language if a person has been raised to never use it, it could shock that person so much that I could even imagine someone calling it violence. But that's not violence; it might not be polite, it might not be nice, but the complete absence of rude remarks isn't a moral principle, it's a cultural norm. And focusing on this individual response ignores the systemic cause of this kind of jarring speech: 400 years of

lynchings, beatings, and rapes and the utter failure of the justice systems of our country to bring justice to its black citizens. Using a cultural norm to judge these individuals while ignoring the systemic context that brings their anger about is racist. It's racist because it uses white values to justify white silence in the face of grave injustice, and to paraphrase Tutu's quote from above, in the face of oppression, white silence is white violence.

So when I faced the reality that my whiteness can have an unfair impact on what I'd define as "violent," and when I accepted that people of color have every reason to express their anger and to use disruptive tactics in the face of the oppression they face, a strict view of pacifism and non-violence no longer served to help me understand what is acceptable in the struggle toward justice. Ultimately, while I can't throw my hands up in the air and completely refuse to decide when something doesn't fit with my morality, I've decided to trust the leadership of people of color, because I know that they aren't a bunch of "thugs," they're activists devoted to the cause of righteousness. They are doing the work of God, and if I can accept that God works in mysterious ways, maybe I can be humble enough to accept that I'm not the final authority on what oppressed people should and should not do to fight for their liberation. It is not my duty as a white person to maintain the status quo and promote white standards of behavior. It is my duty to join the fight for their freedom. It is my duty to help them win. I must love and support my siblings of color. In the fight against racism, I have nothing to lose but my chains.



IT IS OUR DUTY TO FIGHT FOR OUR FREEDOM.  
IT IS OUR DUTY TO WIN.  
WE MUST LOVE EACH OTHER AND SUPPORT EACH OTHER.  
WE HAVE NOTHING TO LOSE BUT OUR CHAINS.

ASSATA SHAKUR, ASSATA: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

## On Showing Up, Staying in our Lane, and Doing the Work that is Ours: 8 Guideposts for White People Supporting Black Lives Matter

*"...Solidarity is not meant to be comfortable. It is not shining light on yourself as ally at the expense of the oppressed who are demanding their counter-narratives be centralized. It is understanding that your whiteness protects you from certain things which in turn prohibits you from participation in others, because at the end of the day, when you get tired of marching and chanting, you can put your hands down and go home... Some of us simply don't have that luxury." - [www.frequency.strikingly.com](http://www.frequency.strikingly.com)*

**1. Remember, you are good and you are racist:** We were handed racism, and didn't choose it. White supremacy is foundational to our society and from a young age, we are all socialized by it as individuals; no amount of analysis makes us immune. Sitting with, and moving through the defensiveness, guilt and shame that arises when we talk about racism is part of our important work of unlearning and growing.

**2. Listen, follow the lead, and elevate the voices of those who are most affected:** As white people, it is not our place to decide what a community response should be to the murder of a black person. We should be lifting up voices of those who are directly affected by state violence in our social media, newsletters and events, rather than centering our own voices. This is a movement led by Black folks, and our actions should support this leadership. White people shouldn't be running the all meetings, grabbing the megaphones, or being spokespeople for the movement.

**3. Learn about your areas of unawareness:** Just as a fish has a hard time discerning and explaining water, white people have a hard time noticing white privilege and white supremacy. It is our responsibility as individuals and communities to learn about these areas of unawareness. A big one is our tendency to dictate and take over, and then wonder why no people of color are involved. The personal work of undoing our racism is essential to working with other people.

**4. Be accountable and build relationships:** Take criticism. Getting called out is uncomfortable, but it is how we grow. Be okay with making mistakes (rather than defensively focusing on how you were called out) and then make up for them. Since part of socialization for white folks is avoiding conflict, normalizing discomfort can be liberating. Build relationships with other white people where you are giving and receiving feedback about your white privilege and cross racial relationships to connect across difference.

**5. Stay focused:** By focusing their attention on vandalism, white folks are silencing a more important narrative: the state has taken yet another Black life. White people critiquing how people of color respond to oppression continues a pattern of marginalization and control. Keep the conversation focused on why we protest, not how we do it.

**6. Work to better understand your white privilege:** White privilege means that you are not targeted by systems of racial oppression; it is white privilege in action to deplore violence on both sides and to remain silent or neutral. For people of color, being silent, remaining calm or staying out of it means that the next person to be murdered may be their loved one. On the streets and in groups, we can feel entitled to take on leadership roles (another illustration of white privilege). We need to stay in our lane, let go of control, take support roles, and be flexible. We can use our access to other white people to talk about to friends, family members and co-workers.

**7. Make the connections:** The systemic state violence towards people of color includes the disproportionate imprisoning of people of color, the militarization of police, and racial profiling (and much more). The militarization of the police is directly related to our war-making abroad. Anti-immigrant legislation, policies targeting Muslims, and hate crimes towards other targeted groups all keep the status quo in place. Making these connections is essential.

**8. Acknowledge that you are not "better" than other white people:** A common distancing behavior for white folks, especially in progressive circles, is to applaud themselves for "getting it" and disparaging those who don't. This pattern is part of our socialization in a capitalist system that encourages rugged individualism and competition. Instead, we need to draw near other white people, embracing the idea of collective liberation, personal responsibility and accountability.

STATE OF MISSOURI

CITY OF ST. LOUIS

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CIRCUIT CLERK'S OFFICE

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Economic disruption

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RESIST

anti-racism  
workshops

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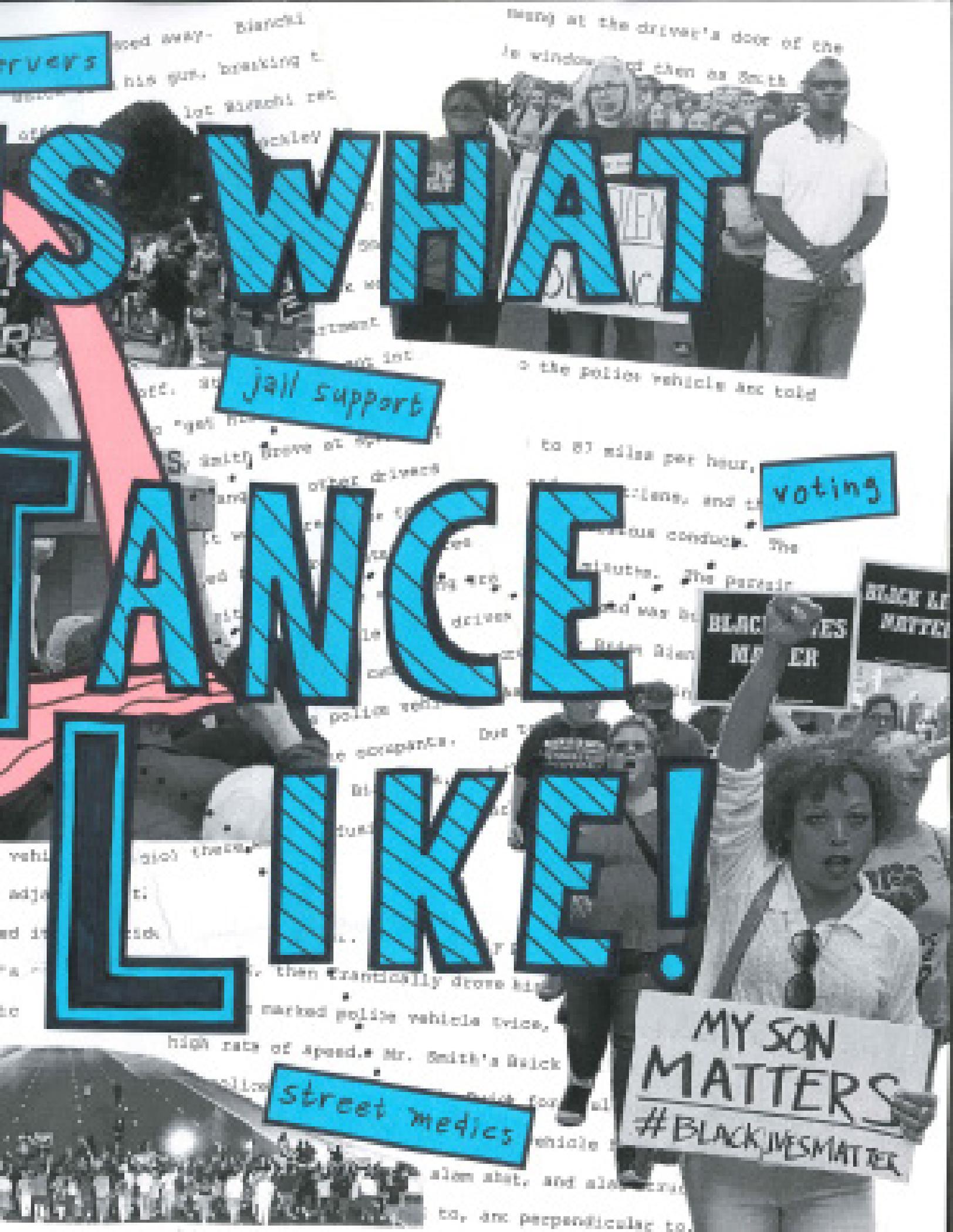


canvassing

town halls



All photos taken by Richard Ruffly, used with permission.



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street medics

MY SON MATTERS  
#BLACKLIVESMATTER

BLACK LIVES MATTER

BLACK LIVES MATTER

# A Call to Embodiment

by Alexis Tardy

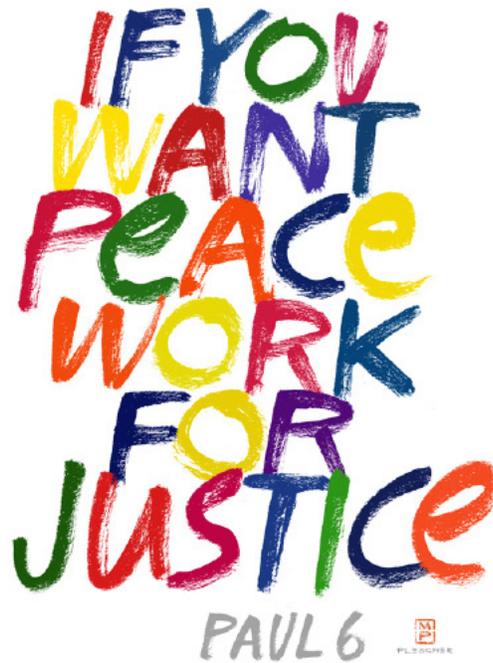
My faith has compelled me to support the movement, but I believe the more accurate statement would be that the movement has birthed my faith. I had never experienced being in the presence of God in such a powerful way before I went to Ferguson. In August 2015, the one-year anniversary of Michael Brown's death, I traveled with a faith-based organization to St. Louis, MO. I was going into my senior year of undergraduate at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, and had been involved with several actions and protests while in Indianapolis. However, this was an opportunity to go to the origins and beginnings of the Ferguson movement that had quickly spread and continues to spread throughout the nation and the world. When I arrived in August, there was a week-long schedule of events as a week of resistance organized by grassroots activist organizations. The moment that changed my life was the Moral Monday action that took place on August 10, 2015. The morning of August 10, which also happened to be my 22nd birthday, we prayed and went through another run of training. Clergy then led us from the church to the courthouse, marching and chanting as we made our way there. I remember feeling and believing that this is what Jesus would have done; this is what Jesus did.

The movement supported my faith, but the two have never been separate in black church history and tradition. In fact, the historic black church has been foundational to black culture and life, whether one professes to be a person of faith or not. The de-institutionalized nature of the black church is what made it radical. Salvation of the

soul was never separate from the here and now salvation of being saved from unjust institutions, particularly slavery and segregation. "Being saved" was wrapped up with the abolition movement. Richard Allen was the founder of the African Methodist Episcopal denomination, but before the church became institutionalized, protest was the foundation. Allen and several other black

members walked out of St. George's Methodist Episcopal Church, a congregation that had both white and black members, when their attempts at full inclusion and leadership in the church was consistently denied. Allen came from a legacy of embodiment of worship and living out what God was calling them to do outside of the realm of society. Perhaps what we could learn from the movement and young people, is how to "live, move, and have our being" outside of the view of a society that is not giving us life more abundantly, but instead has stolen, killed, and destroyed Black lives for centuries in this country. All while knowing that society has never chained our spirits. The fire and spirit of resistance that burned in the spirits of my ancestors, still burns in us.

When I went to Ferguson, MO, my faith was not only birthed, but embodied. Two things compelled me to join the Movement for Black Lives: my identity as a black woman, and my faith. In Ferguson, faith and social justice, once disembodied for me, became one. What I have learned and come to realize more fully in the two years since is that this was not just my faith and passion for justice and helping others becoming one, it was me fully living into the black church, tradition, and



Source: Matt Plescher



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ancestral lineage that had also birthed me, even if I did not have the full realization of how. In the brush arbor, enslaved Africans would steal away in the middle to late of the night to a swampy area away from the view of white slaveholders, and would join hands in a circle where they would turn counterclockwise to experience the Holy Spirit and presence of God. In the same way that the enslaved spun in a circle that was counterclockwise, so too is the movement a counter to the social sin that is police brutality and violence that is done to black and brown bodies.

As people of faith, we are called to embody what we believe, not simply state what we believe. Sometimes that calling brings us to the “frontlines” – the protests, the actions, the public meetings. But other times, and I believe this is just as important, it is a call to see your neighbor as *imago dei* – in the image of God – and eventually, you may come to love them as Christ loves us.



Alexis, the third from the left, "praying with her feet" in the streets during the Stockley verdict protests. Photo by Richard Reilly

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# My Soul Looks Black: My Journey to Resistance

by Devonn Thomas

“Be merciful to me, Lord, for I am in trouble; my eyes are tired from so much crying; I am completely worn out.” Psalms 31:9

If I could assign a soundtrack to my childhood, it would sound something like “How Great” by Chance the Rapper-- a dope beat, a hundred Black women singing in harmony, and a whole lot of Jesus. In elementary school I would pray at the table before eating. Hands clasped, whispering in quiet determination, I would thank God for the way that he’d blessed my family and ask Him to keep on loving me the way He promised to. More than normal, this felt necessary. I believed what I was telling myself, and I knew that I could depend on Him.

At that time, my father was the most religious man I knew. On Sunday mornings me, all four of my siblings and both my parents would prep and prime our bodies

for church before piling into a minivan and journeying forty-five minutes away from our town to Greater Grace Baptist Church in Ferguson, Missouri. There we would sing and stomp and sway to the gospel. Back then, gospel made my insides feel good. “God will do what he said we would do/ He’ll stand by His word/ He will come through,” the choir sang out. I remember looking up at my father-- his arms raised and his back straight and thinking that God must be just like my daddy. This tall man with skin the color of sand and a laugh that echoed off of the walls loved me in a way that felt like religion. To seven-year-old me, Jesus was one of the most captivating men who had ever lived, second only to my father. We were perfect and I was saved.

That was before my life was sent into overdrive with one simple sentence. “Your mom and I are getting a



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divorce,” my father said softly. I hadn’t seen him crying, but I knew he had been from the ways his eyes tinged red and his voice shook with a melancholy vibrato.

My grandmother moved into our family home during the height of my father’s grief in order to take up all the space his withering body had left behind and remind my brother and I what home was supposed to feel like. Debra was her name, an older woman with hair that stood up on all sides and the Bible built into her backbone. She was the anchor that held my father inside of his own skin.

One afternoon, my father, grandmother, brother and I rode down the highway toward our home. The air in the car was still and secular music played through the radio so quietly that I had to strain my ears to hear it. I recalled the past when my father’s music played so loudly in the car that the bass in the car bumped against my back with a booming beat that kept tempo with my heart. My grandmother’s voice broke through the almost-silence, “You really need to get life insurance, Vincent.” She spoke with an air of dominance that reverted my father from man to boy. “What do you mean, Ma.” She paused for a moment before hesitantly responding, “Do it for your kids.”

My parents announced their divorce in August of 2008 and it wasn’t until November that I saw my father smile again. One night, he pulled my brother and I out of bed and forced us to sit up and watch CNN with him. “One day you’ll be happy I made you watch this; this is our history,” he said as I sleepily rested my head on the arm of the couch. Election results were coming in and after hours of waiting it was announced that Barack Obama would be our country’s next president. In that moment, my father was joy personified. He laughed and smiled at the television clapping loudly enough to wake the entire neighborhood. At eleven, I wasn’t aware of the significance of that night or the reason why Daddy loved the man on television so much. All I knew was that my father loved Barack Obama, and I loved my father. Later that night, for the first time in months, I prayed.

After the fleeting moment, my father settled back into depression so quickly it was like he’d never left.

He started listening to religious music again except now it didn’t sound like the same upbeat praise that I had grown up with. Instead, slow, heartbroken gospel poured out of the speakers and permeated my psyche. “I come to the garden alone/ While the dew is still on the roses/ And the voice I hear falling on my ear/The Son of God discloses.” God no longer laughed or spoke too loudly at church or danced; he covered under the weight of uncertainty.

On January 20th, 2009, three notable things happened: Barack Obama was sworn into office, millions of people all over the world praised the name of America’s first Black president, and my father committed suicide. The day started like any other, the weather was warmer than it had been in the days leading up to his death. Upon entering the house, I was greeted by my glowing grandmother, the smell of food cooking on the stovetop and the sounds of President Obama’s inauguration speech on the television. Daddy wasn’t at home, which struck me as odd as he’d spent the past several weeks lying stoically on the living room floor as my grandmother painstakingly tried to push him out of his slump.

It was late in the night when my father appeared in the doorway for the last time. He wore all black as if he had a funeral to attend. The burly, statuesque man who raised me looked like nothing more than a wisp of himself. “Be good,” he told me before picking me up with trembling hands and kissing my chin as

a final goodbye. I laid awake in my bed that night I heard my grandmother on the phone with the police, “Did you say you heard a gunshot.” She spoke breathlessly and even in the dark I could see the strain in her face. Moments later I heard a breathless scream pierce the air and I knew he was gone.

It is for Him that I resist.



Barack Obama's 2008 campaign slogan was "Change We Can Believe In." Original poster design by Shepard Fairey

# Disrupting White Supremacy: Reflections from an Asian American

by Christina Meneses

I moved to St. Louis from Takoma Park, Maryland, a DC suburb. My parents immigrated to the U.S. from the Philippines in the 70's, and the area where I grew up had a lot of immigrant families like my own, from all parts of the world. I was surrounded by this racial and ethnic diversity in my neighborhood, school, and church growing up.

I moved to St. Louis for even more school, and like many, stayed. When I first moved here twenty years ago, I didn't quite understand the black-white nature of St. Louis. Being neither black nor white in St. Louis means that it's easy to become invisible. People have told me they "forget" that I'm not white; racial discussion groups I've attended have had to be reorganized because they were set up for a black-white binary. On the one hand, there's not an obvious place for folks like me here; on the other, there's also no expectation that I am or want to be part of the community, and part of the race conversation. As an Asian person, and an outsider, it would be so easy just to stay out of race issues altogether here. But I think we can be an important part of the conversation.

In order to find a place in this movement, I've had to understand the unique role my Asianness has in colluding with as well as disrupting white supremacy. If you look at almost all measures of health and success in the U.S., Asians rank as high (and sometimes higher) than whites. Access to resources (e.g., education, money, health care) and freedom from hardship (e.g., poverty, violent neighborhoods) is something that many Asians enjoy at the same rates as white people. This could be explained by the same narrative that is often told about whites in the U.S. – that we enjoy these privileges because we earned them. In our individualistic, pull-up-your-bootstraps society, Asian success is attributed to "family values" and "teaching our children respect" and "valuing education."

That, of course, is not the real story. Because this is the deal white supremacy gave me and many other



Check out Asian American solidarity statements and articles in support of #BlackLivesMatter at [www.seedling-change.org/asiansforblacklives](http://www.seedling-change.org/asiansforblacklives).  
Source: Seeding Change

(but not all) Asians in the US: keep quiet about race and racism, and we'll reward you by not targeting you. You can be our model minority, and we will spare you. This tactic, while not unique to us, is nonetheless effective. This is not to say that Asians are never targeted, discriminated against, or oppressed by individuals. However, we have different experiences systemically than our brown and black siblings.

We have many of the same stories of hard work and struggle as other people of color who came to the U.S., except we were allowed to succeed. The hard work of my parents and others was allowed to come to fruition, at close to the same rates as white people. Since many of us are more recent immigrants, we were sometimes so busy just learning how to survive in a new culture that we didn't have time for issues that didn't concern us. And we were told that racial politics in the U.S. did not concern us.

We were told that we were not like those "other"



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minorities, that we were better than them. We were told to ignore the fact that most groups value family, teach respect, and value education. And we were told to ignore millions of other people of color who were working just as hard as we were, but with boots on their necks.

It takes a while to unlearn all of that. It takes a while to realize that we have higher average levels of education because some U.S. immigration laws cherry-pick highly-educated professionals from our countries. It takes a while to realize that while we may have worked hard, we did not earn our place in the U.S., any more than any other racial group did. It takes a while to realize that being ignored is just another facet of oppression, and that we have been and are being used as a tool by white supremacy. It takes a while to realize we are being used to justify the mistreatment of other communities of color, especially blacks, Latinos/as/x, and Native folks. White supremacy holds us up as an example of the "good ones," telling our black and brown siblings that they could succeed, could live as long, could be respected, could prosper, if they were more like us. White supremacy uses us to say the problem lies in black and brown people who don't try hard enough, not in white supremacy itself. White supremacy needs us as tokens to justify its own racism and convince everyone that the system isn't rigged.

It takes a while to realize why we align with both white people and people of color. It takes a while to realize why we may not feel comfortable with either, or ourselves. It takes a while to realize that our silence is also violence.

So this is my work, as an Asian person. First, build and strengthen relationships with other Asians, and other people of color. As a member of APIs4BlackLives, I am forming relationships and talking with other Asians about the roles we have been given, what we have internalized about not being as good as white people but being better than other people of color, and how we are going to unlearn these messages and do better.

Our work is also with other Asians – both those who are already part of the movement, and need support/solidarity, as well as those who are not, like many of our family members. We must engage our families and other Asians to help them understand how this is their fight also. Recently I posted on Facebook an invitation to my family, none of whom live in St. Louis, to learn about the Black Lives Matter movement and to be more vocal against white supremacy. Doing so made me feel vulnerable and nervous. None of my family members responded directly, but I noticed that several have begun posting more race-related content than before, so I'm going to call that a win.

Giving Asians a higher status than blacks, Latinos/as/x, and Native folks is meant to keep us from joining our efforts, and to foster resentment and distrust among those groups towards us. We are stronger when we fight for liberation together, so I am working on forming genuine relationships with folks from those groups, finding connections, earning trust, listening to their stories, and telling my own.

As Asians, white people may be more likely to listen to us because we are perceived as more

similar to them. It is my work to determine how to use this access on behalf of other folks of color who haven't been heard, to share their truth and also share the mic. I take leadership from other folks of color, join their movements, walk in solidarity when invited, and step in as an ally when needed.

I am part of this movement because justice needs our voices. In this fight against white supremacy, we must choose to fight for love and justice. If we don't do it for other people of color, then we must do it for ourselves. Because while our status is complicated, it is also temporary, and there will be a time when once again white supremacy sees us as targets rather than tokens.



"Asians in Solidarity with Black Lives" sign at a Black Lives Matter Toronto Protest on March 26, 2016.

Source: Pacinthe Mattar/Twitter

# The Hopeful Thing about our Ugly, Painful Polarization

by George Lakey

*Reprinted from Yes! Magazine, November 14, 2016*

An artist's drawing of the American body politic in 2016 might picture furrowed brow, hand-wringing, hunched shoulders. Anxiety abounds, when not overridden by anger. Our extreme polarization is political, economic, social—but individuals feel it on a personal level. Small wonder if we seek relief in the hope that the social fracturing might be healed by one candidate or another.

Certainly, polarization in the U.S. pre-dates the Donald Trump candidacy. Our gridlocked federal government has for years struggled to guarantee that it will stay open for business and pay its bills, much less address the urgent climate crisis. An increasing number of state governments are going into dysfunction as well.

Even if polarization is unlikely to go away soon, the good news is that if Americans can respond to this period creatively, it may be an opportunity for progress. If we look at the Nordic models, we will see that in each instance of breakthrough on the path toward progressive government was an apparently necessary time of extreme and painful polarization. A great fracturing allowed a strong and organized Left to move forward.

Before we reach for a better place we need to know how we got into such a tough spot. Political scientists Nolan McCarty, Keith T. Poole, and Howard Rosenthal researched polarization in the US. In [Polarized America](#) (MIT Press, 2006) we learn that, in the decades following World War II, Democrats and Republicans governed with a bipartisan spirit, and politics was known as the art of compromise. The scholars checked other measures in that era and found that economic

inequality was also relatively low.

In the 1970s and '80s, the income gap grew rapidly, and so did political polarization. In fact, the scholars found no other correlation matched so closely: political polarization seemed to be intimately linked to income inequality. So no surprise then that since the economic crash of 2007, inequality has accelerated right along with political polarization.

Especially with a Trump presidency and Republican controlled Congress, I see no policies in place or any likely to be passed that will substantially check inequality's growth. So polarization is likely to get worse, and uglier. To stay clear-headed in the years ahead, we need to accept the reality of our present situation.

Gandhi used to remind his people that the British Empire would not go away through denying its existence. To end the suffering brought by the Empire, he thought it necessary first to acknowledge its presence. The next step: a creative response.

And what does a creative response to polarization look like? In researching my book [Viking Economics](#), I dug into the history of Sweden's and Norway's intense polarization in the 1920s and '30s. I was interested because of the enormous achievements those countries had following their time of fracturing.

The Nordics managed an immense turnaround from the days when they experienced so much misery and oppression that they hemorrhaged population to the U.S. and Canada. Many Americans today trace their lineage to Scandinavian immigrants fleeing the hunger and lack of



Source: Pixabay

opportunity of their homelands. Now Sweden, Norway, Iceland, and Denmark are at the top of the international charts for economic well-being: high employment, debt-free grads of universities, paid parental leave, high wages, “best place to be an elder,” lack of poverty. They are even setting records for rapid response to the climate crisis.

It wasn't the oil. Only Norway found oil, and that country had its breakthrough before the oil flowed. Nor can we say it's easy to experience shared abundance if you're a small and homogeneous country: A century ago, the Scandinavians were small and homogeneous —and still had massive poverty and inequality.

To my surprise, I found that the decisive moment of breakthrough for the Swedes and Norwegians happened when their societies were at their most polarized. In the 1920s and '30s, Nazis openly paraded and spewed their anti-Semitism, embrace of violence, and hatred of democracy. At the same time, the Left had extreme opinions. Cities and towns were split. To live in that period was stressful and frightening.

Fortunately, a critical mass of people in Sweden and Norway chose a creative response. And that decision gave rise to the world's most progressive nations. That response had many dimensions, but four stand out: cooperative ownership models, wide agreement among the Left on a vision, inclusivity, and commitment to a nonviolent strategy.

Swedes and Danes first, with Norwegians following, built a large infrastructure of cooperatives: Farmers organized dairies, loggers built mills, fishers banded together to build larger boats and canneries. Together, families hired contractors and built apartment buildings. Consumers erected their own stores and banks.

Co-ops delivered tangible benefits, like retaining more wealth for workers and consumers. They promoted organizing skills and innovation, in that way increasing productivity. They developed a sense of power at the grassroots — a “can-do” spirit that was also once the hallmark of Americans' self-image. Co-ops showed that capitalism was not the most effective way to make an economy work. Most important, perhaps, was the

knitting together of networks of confidence when it seemed that the larger society was pulling apart.

Swedes and Norwegians achieved majority support for a vision of an alternative economy to the one that was failing them. That meant people could take action beyond angry protests; they could be for something as well as against something. Harnessing the positive energy that goes with an affirmative vision adds to the power of the movement.

Just as important, the broad unity of a positive vision makes it easier to mend the inevitable splits that come up in the life of a social movement. Feuding allies can be reminded that they need to mend their fences in order to achieve the vision that they hold in common.

At a difficult time when some Swedes and Norwegians were sharpening ideological differences, the creative responders valued inclusivity. An old fracture between town and country (industrial workers vs. farmers) was partially mended through coalition for shared goals. The Norwegian Labor Party, formerly restricted

to union members, opened its membership to middle class people. When the Great Depression increased joblessness, unions decided members could retain membership even after they lost their jobs.

And importantly, Swedes and Norwegians strongly preferred nonviolent struggle for their confrontations and campaigns. When they were attacked by Nazis at their demonstrations, for example, they didn't use those occasions to fight it out in the streets. When striking workers were repressed by government troops, they didn't assassinate soldiers or blow up barracks.

Instead, the usual pattern of response to repressive violence was to escalate the nonviolent tactics. In 1931, Swedish soldiers shot into a march of striking workers, killing five and injuring five more. The workers' response was to declare a general strike in the region, which then spread to the national level. That, in turn, led to a power shift from the governing economic elite to the workers and farmers who represented the democratic majority of the people.

In Norway workers and farmers used nonviolent tactics on such a large scale that they made their country



Source: Wikimedia Commons

ungovernable by the economic elite. The majority then took over, establishing democracy. They opened up the political space and invented what economists now call the Nordic model.

### U.S. History

The U.S. has its own past experiences with major polarizations: The 1930s and the 1960s. In the '30s Father Coughlin gave fascist rants on national radio broadcasts. The Ku Klux Klan grew in both the 1930s and 1960s, while extremist groups grew on the left as well. During the tension of the Vietnam war sons were disowned and pastors dismissed; even the Army reeled from the impact of division in the ranks.

Strikingly, those two periods also stand out in our history for progress. The former head of the American Sociological Association, Frances Fox Piven, lists gains that Americans take for granted that came out of those two eras in her book Challenging Authority: How Ordinary People Change America. Social Security, Medicare, limits on the length of the workweek, rights for people with different abilities, rights for Black people and others of color, rights for women and elders and children. Those gains were the results of creative responses at heights of polarization.

Three of the creative response ingredients were present: ideas of nonviolence, inclusivity, and cooperative models. I believe even more progress would have come out of those periods had there been the fourth, a wide agreement on a vision for a just and democratic alternative to the prevailing poverty, war, and racism.

Clearly, Americans do know a thing or two about how to navigate a period of raw conflict. So even though we are headed for more extreme polarization [with] Trump in the White House without the support of the popular vote, we know what to do. We know what the creative response needs to look like.

### Build More Cooperative Alternative Structures

Americans are increasingly turning to cooperative economic alternatives, as producers, consumers, and generators of services. The heightened climate crisis stimulates more of this trend, building skills, relationships, confidence in the grassroots, and a sense of power. As polarization deepens, co-ops and other civic groups need to proclaim themselves to be safe and reliable institutions to rally around. Such proactivity is more important now than even in the 1930s and 1960s because government and politicians are fast losing their legitimacy, heightening people's anxiety as climate and other crises grow. Alternative sources of social solidarity

need to drop old habits of modesty and brand themselves as reliable, robust nodes of the networks of goodwill that we need.

### Expand Inclusively

In a period of polarization, it is tempting to define oneself by a smaller and smaller circle, to retreat into a bubble, perhaps reinforced by Facebook and other social media. I suspect that during the 2016 presidential campaign there were many middle class liberals that did not have a single thoughtful conversation with a supporter of Donald Trump. That's the opposite of smart navigation of polarization, which is to expand the circle, to broaden our acquaintance, to engage in ongoing dialogue with those our fear might lead us to dismiss.

### Agree on a Vision

I doubt that the Scandinavians could have designed the most successful economic model in history for delivering equality, individual freedom, and shared abundance if they had not first created broad agreement among the Left on their vision. For them, agreeing

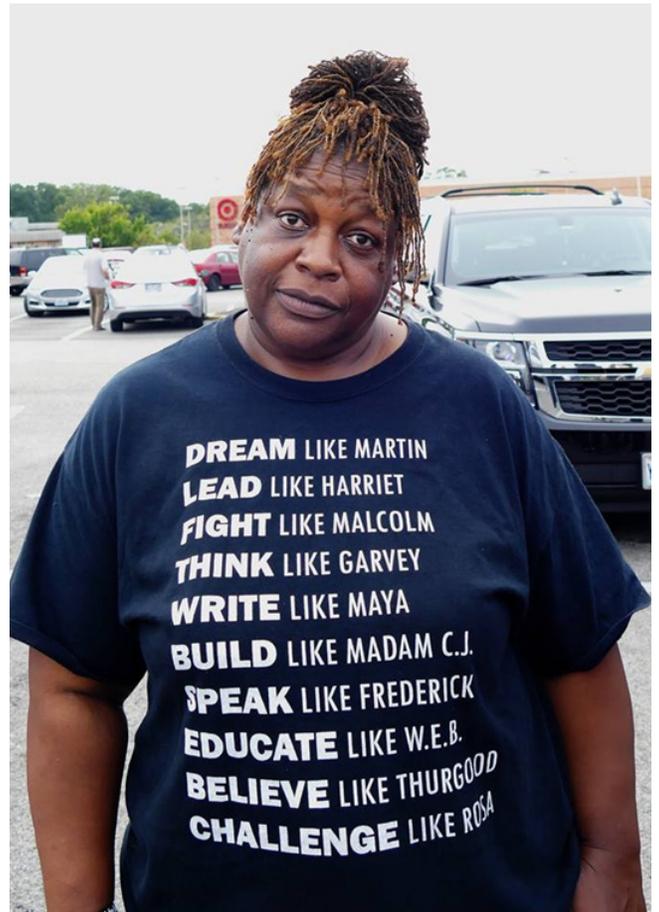


Photo by Richard Reilly

required study, research, compromise, intense dialogue, and willingness to pay attention to pragmatic results.

The good news for us in the U.S. is that we do not need to start from scratch in generating a vision. We can take the Nordics' high-performance model and adapt it to our own needs and history.

Poll data indicate that majorities of Americans are already in agreement with many features of the Nordic model, including a narrower scale of income difference, single payer health care, free access to higher education, paid parental leave, and higher wages for workers. The overwhelming popularity of the Bernie Sanders campaign and the platform of his "Our Revolution" movement illustrates that.

So does the the release in August of the vision of the Movement for Black Lives, an organization that brings together some of the thinking of the grassroots phenomenon called Black Lives Matter. The economic dimension of the vision is remarkably in alignment with the Nordic model and is therefore an immediately available "rough draft" for progressives of all ethnicities to address. Many credible national groups have endorsed the vision of the Movement for Black Lives. It's not about word-for-word agreement; the task is to create shared understanding of a model that will decisively improve equality and democracy.

**Focus on an Effective Nonviolent Strategy**

Seeing through democratic pretense, which is what the Scandinavians did for themselves a century ago and we must do today, frees us to maximize power for change. Facing the truth that billionaire Warren Buffett acknowledged to the *New York Times* in 2006 empowers citizens for the task ahead. When asked by reporter Ben Stein about the speculation that there is class war

in the U.S., Buffett said, "There's class warfare, all right, but it's my class, the rich class, that's making war, and we're winning." One implication of Buffett's admission is that we need to shift from actions that make moral statements to nonviolent actions that exert actual power.

Social scientific research in recent decades suggests that our most powerful means, when an opponent is blocking change, is to organize a campaign. One-off protests make little if any difference. A nonviolent campaign, by contrast, makes a specific demand of a clearly identified target. It then organizes a series of escalating nonviolent actions, effectively clustered around a singular issue, until some or all of the demand is met.

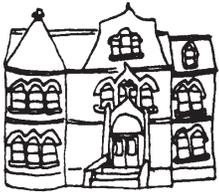
Americans have extensive experience with nonviolent campaigns. Consider the Civil Rights victories in the 1960s, and even recently, the halting of the KXL pipeline.

Currently we see grassroots nonviolent campaigns at the Standing Rock Sioux camps. This cluster of campaigns—aimed at corporations building the pipeline along with the federal government giving them the land to do it, aimed at the banks that invest

in fossil fuel infrastructure, aimed at politicians who favor oil infrastructure over indigenous rights-- for example, has become a full-blown movement.

The question is whether the many Americans who are deeply concerned for change will step up their strategic skills so more nonviolent campaigns will cluster into more movements and, as a whole, create an Era of Change. ✦





# From Karen House

by Gregory Fister

While trying to think of how to reflect on my first year at Karen House, and Karen House's first 40 years of existence, I thought of one of our time-honored traditions: sharing gratitudes. At the end of every meeting at Karen House, we close with naming someone or something that we are grateful for in our lives. Each person in the group—whether it's a core community or all-house meeting—is asked to share a few words so that we can close our meeting in a peaceful and loving way. And since I joined this community and gotten to know its many traditions, I have never learned of an easier way than this to step back and appreciate what lifts me up, and to re-orient myself towards giving and receiving love as we are all meant to do. It's become something I look forward to in every single meeting.

This past year of my life has not been easy. It has been hard to say goodbye to many community members and struggle with ushering in the future of Karen House while still getting to know how things work, and how I fit into them. At times I've felt lonely, confused, defeated, and frustrated. But still, my overwhelming feeling towards this place is one of gratitude. Living here and taking part in the work is a choice I still make daily, and it's one that I am incredibly proud of. And so, for my space in the Round Table, I'd like to share some of my personal gratitudes about Karen House with you all.

I am grateful for every person (and dog!) who lives at Karen House right now. Ask anybody at 1840 Hogan Street about their housemates, and you'll hear the same thing from each of them: we live with a truly fantastic bunch of individuals. Every Sunday morning, I am blown away by our fabulous in-house brunch crew cooking an enormous meal for our house and our neighborhood. I see the care and attention to detail that our house community consistently puts into every corner of the building—whether it's the cleaning supply closet or Halloween decorations in the dining room. I continue to learn so much about the importance of being hospitable and generous, but also firm and fair, from folks in the house who have endured more hardship than my white privileged self could ever imagine. I try to occupy my position of authority and (relative) experience in the house gracefully, and the best way I know to do that is to stay open to learning new things. And I am unbelievably grateful that every single day in this house, one (or two or three) of my housemates

teaches me a new, invaluable lesson on the ever-important topic of being human.

I am grateful for all of our donors and volunteers. This sounds like a cliché, but we really, really could not do it without them. The house is only a decent place to live because hundreds of people that I have never met make sure we have all that we need. The wonderful individuals who donate money to the house keep our lights and heat on, as we receive absolutely no government money or profits from our work. Dinner cook volunteers and grocery store workers keep our shelves and our bellies full every day—seriously, I have never felt like there wasn't enough food at Karen House. And of course, weekly, monthly, and occasional volunteers lift our spirits and honor the work we do by sharing in the labor of making the house a nice place to be.

I am grateful for our foundresses, and all of the former community members and past guests on whose shoulders we stand. In November, we celebrated the 40 year anniversary of Karen House's founding with a St. Louis Catholic Worker family reunion. Like most family reunions, I didn't know all of the people there, but I knew that we all had a lot in common. It was incredible to see the faces and hear the voices of the people who have kept this house so full of love for forty years. It was humbling to know that while I do take pride in the work I do, it is just one tiny piece of what has been going on in this neighborhood for decades. I saw myself in the other people at the celebration, and shared stories of my time that sounded very similar to stories that took place years before I was born. Karen House is not a place, it's a people.

Teka Childress gave me a tour of Karen House on the very first day that I came to volunteer in January of 2012, and her infectious spirit of joy and generosity very soon became synonymous with Karen House in my head. I have always felt that something special—something different—was happening at Karen House. I felt like the people here were creating a new world in the shell of the old, and it seemed to me like a very beautiful thing. And so I am so grateful for their hard work, their generosity, their openness to change. Because if I'm being honest, I feel like I've gotten so much more from Karen House than I have given. It has been for me a place to grow, to learn, to share, and simply to be. And I'm grateful every day that I am able to live here.



**Gregory Fister** enjoys long bike rides in Forest Park, catching rare Pokemon, and cooking vegan meals.

# The Round Table

Karen Catholic Worker House

1840 Hogan ■ St. Louis, MO. 63106

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Permit No. 495

## Volunteer Help Needed!

**Call us for more info 621-4052!**

### **Sunday Brunch**

We serve a large number of people Sunday brunch, and could use your help! Bring a carton of eggs, some butter or milk. Bring your cooking talent and help out in the kitchen. Bring a smile and a generous heart and help us serve food, take out dishes, or wash up.

### **Dorothy Day Dairy Delivery**

We have a large number of kids in the house who LOVE milk! Could you or a group host a regular (weekly or monthly) donation of milk? We can also use regular donations of laundry detergent and cleaning supplies.

### **Dinner Cooks**

Use our food our yours to provide a warm meal for our guests!

### **House Taking**

Get trained to answer the door and phone for a shift - a great way to get to know the house!

### **Karen House Needs**

- Winter clothes
- Hats, gloves, scarves
- Socks, underwear
- Blankets
- Money to pay the bills. Donations we receive around this time of year sustain us all year long!

*Beloved community is formed not by the eradication of difference but by its affirmation, by each of us claiming the identities and cultural legacies that shape who we are and how we live in the world.*

*-bell hooks*



We were so sad to learn of the death of our beloved Coco last month. Coco was a decades-old friend and volunteer at the house. He was ready with a joke or hug every time we saw him. For many years, he cooked lunch three times a week for the entire neighborhood. We pray for Coco, and for his family, including his dear wife Jaquie. Coco was a huge part of our lives, and the life of Karen House, and he will be greatly missed.

Check [KarenHouseCW.org](http://KarenHouseCW.org) for updates on Karen House, resources on the Catholic Worker, an archive of past Round Tables, and more! Our website has a HUGE trove of resources on racism, white privilege, and the Black Lives Matter movement!