Article

The Long Life of US Institutionalized White Supremacist Terror

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Abstract
Emerging as a racial formation under specific socio-historical conditions, white supremacy enacted racial projects that institutionalized terror as a function of its hegemonic rule. From the war capitalism of the settler colonialist period in North America to the racial capitalism of that same time frame, extermination of Native Americans and enslavement of people of African descent became instruments of institutionalized white supremacist terror. From colonial to contemporary times white supremacist savage war and white racial framing of policing reinforced institutionalized white supremacist terror. Nonetheless, resistance to and deconstructions of white supremacy contested and continues to contest those racial projects and that white racial frame.

Keywords
institutionalized terror, racial formation, racial projects, white racial frame, white racial frame policing, white supremacist savage war, white supremacy

Introduction

Born in the colonial past and bred into the foundational documents of the United States, white supremacy remains a persistent presence, albeit one that is dramatically different today than at its inception.[1] Although a white supremacist now resides in the White House, his vile utterances and vicious policies, as reprehensible as they are, do not rise to the level of terror and torture that marked the emergence and early existence of white supremacy. Certainly, Trump's language reflects "white supremacy in all of its truculent and sanctimonious power" (Coates, 2017).[2] Moreover, Trump's "immigration policy is a matter of white supremacist social engineering aimed at excluding and decimating poor, predominantly nonwhite immigrants" (Leonard, 2018). One can then see how Trump's constant references to "building a wall" could resonate with those anxious and resentful white voters, tapping into historical and contemporary expressions of white supremacist xenophobia (Coaston, 2018).[3]

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On the other hand, because of changed material conditions and the long history of resistances, the present iterations of white supremacy are more of a regression to an imagined past than resonant of a promising future. As argued in a recent study of Trump voters, "evidence points overwhelmingly to perceived status threat among high-status groups (i.e. whites, Christians, and men) as the key motivation underlying Trump support" (Mutz, 2018). Underlying this "perceived status threat" is a variety of racial resentments that appeal to "aggrieved whiteness" (King, 2017) and racialized nostalgia, tinged with restorative fantasies (Hochschild, 2016: 49). These racial resentments could also be understood as the kind of "morbid symptoms" that the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, writing from his prison cell in the midst of fascism and economic depression in 1930, attributes to a "crisis." According to Gramsci, that crisis (as relevant today as back then) "consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear" (Gramsci, 1971: 276).

If white supremacy remains a morbid symptom, examining its origins and development should provide an explanation for why and how it emerged and persists. As a socio-historical process of domination and control, white supremacy materialized as a "racial formation" that informed both the structures and subjectivities of the dominant and dominated.[4] In turn, white supremacy enacted "racial projects" connecting socio-economic power to a political culture that determined the value of "racialized others" (Omi and Winant, 2015). Although white supremacy, as a historicized racial project, achieved and perpetuated its hegemony through socio-economic, political, and cultural practices, that hegemony remained contested and unstable. Furthermore, while those hegemonic racial projects eroded, they nonetheless lived on in a kind of half-life because of recurrent and regressive patterns in the political culture of a "white racial frame" (Feagin, 2009).

What I want to trace in this short history of the long life of white supremacy in North America is how these racial projects were enacted through institutionalized terror. I need to account also for the ways in which the half-life of those racial projects of white supremacist terror endured beyond hegemonic moments, appearing often as regressions to the past even as a white racial frame persisted. Finally, I want to underscore the fact that the racial projects of white supremacy had and continue to have both covert and overt representations. Those representations embody certain metaphoric modalities, from an "iron first" in the overt form to an "invisible hand" in the covert form. It is the iron fist of institutionalized white supremacist terror that I intend to investigate over its long life in American history.

White Supremacist Racial Projects and Institutionalized Terror of Savage War

The first two emergent racial projects of white supremacy in North America were essentially coterminous. As hegemonic moments in the establishment of settler colonialism in the 16th and 17th centuries, these racial projects entailed the extermination of Indigenous people and the enslavement of people of African descent (Horne, 2018). These racial projects were extensions of war capitalism (Beckert, 2015: 29–82) and racial capitalism (Melamed, 2015), socio-economic systems that expanded the role of capital to appropriate resources and labor and to allocate hierarchical value on the basis of race. Once land accumulation supplanted trading with various Indigenous nations of North America as an economic motivation, the racial project of extermination shifted into high gear.[5] In turn, the cultivation of that land, especially in the southern colonies with the growth of cash crops like tobacco, rice, and later cotton, exploited enslaved Africans as chattel commodities (Sublette and Sublette, 2016). In effect, the Indigenous suffered dispossession by white settler accumulation while Africans were possessed, increasingly through torture and rape, in order to accumulate profit. In the midst of this socio-historical process and as a

consequence of conflicts between poor whites and the rich owner class, e.g. Bacon's Rebellion, white supremacy arose as a socio-cultural construction that helped suppress class conflict in favor of white solidarity against racialized others (Allen, 1994).[6]

As English settlers pushed inland from the Atlantic coast regions in the 17th century, they invariably confronted Native populations who had already been engaged in competition and conflict over trading routes. While enlisting different Native nations into alliances and promoting an "invisible hand" of encroachment on Indigenous territories, the settlers turned increasingly to the "iron fist" of warfare. The Pequot War (1636–1637), fought between English settlers and their Native American allies against the Pequot for control over fur trading and land, became emblematic of both the aggressive expansion of settler colonialists and the penchant for extermination against the Indigenous of North America. As one historian of this expansionist "iron fist" notes about the Pequot War's implications, "The war established the credibility of the English will to exterminate … and established a peace based on terror that lasted more or less for four decades" (Drinnon, 1997: 48).

Throughout the colonial period and right up to the War of Independence, violent conflicts ensued as settlers continued to push against Indigenous territory on the frontier, resulting in what one historian has labeled "race wars" (Grenier, 2005: 12). The malleable and contested construction of the frontier provided both a physical and ideological border from which an assault was waged against "savages" in the name of "civilization" (Nugent, 2009: 304). Indeed, as argued by Richard Slotkin:

> the story of American progress … took the form of a fable of race war, pitting the symbolic opposites of savagery and civilization, primitivism and progress, paganism and Christianity against each other …. The doctrine of "savage war" depended upon the belief that certain races are inherently disposed to cruel and atrocious violence. (Slotkin, 1985: 53)

The irony, of course, was that in the expansion of the United States and the development of an American Empire, both formal and informal, engaging in savage wars became inherent in the so-called civilizing mission (Atwood, 2010; Nugent, 2009).

While there were numerous motivating forces and ideological rationales for conducting savage wars for over four centuries, from economic and geo-political imperatives to gendered expressions, white supremacist terror, in the form of an "iron fist," was part and parcel of wars that "exterminated 'savages' who stood in the path of Anglo-American expansion" (Drinnon, 1997: xi).[7] Whether those "savages" occupied territory on the continental United States or in Mexico, the Philippines, Vietnam, Afghanistan, or Iraq, American military forces unleashed white supremacist terror against racialized others. In highlighting the policies and practices that informed these savage wars, I want to underscore both those hegemonic moments in the construction of white supremacist terror and the half-life of that terror as it expanded beyond the continental United States at the end of the 19th century. As Janne Lahte contends in her recent study of the 50-year war against the Apache nation during the 19th century, the "United States was born, manufactured, and maintained through conquest and war" (Lahte, 2017: 20).

It is not surprising that the author of the Declaration of Independence, having cited fomenting "insurrection" by "merciless Indian savages" as one of the grievances against King George III, would himself become the advocate for merciless policies toward Native Americans. Although Thomas Jefferson hoped to convert Native Americans into yeomen farmers, he undertook courses of action that led to the dispossession of immense parcels of Indian Territory. Whenever there was any resistance by Indigenous peoples to what Jefferson considered the benevolent policies of a "Great White Father," he reacted with what would become the guiding rationale for white supremacist terror. In instructing his Secretary of War in 1807 on the preparations for military

engagements against any recalcitrant or resisting Native Americans, Jefferson spelled out "the danger they are bringing on themselves … and that if ever we are constrained to lift the hatchet against any tribe, we will never lay it down until that tribe is exterminated, or driven beyond the Mississippi" (quoted in Drinnon, 1997: 96).[8] While pursuing what Jefferson called an "empire of liberty" and what John Quincy Adams, in the aftermath of the Louisiana Purchase, labeled the "whiteness of innocence," that innocence was belied by the spread of white supremacist terror.

The very exemplar of white supremacist terror was Andrew Jackson who made no pretenses about the "whiteness of innocence."[9] Indeed, as Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz argues, "Jackson was the Dark Knight in the formation of the United States as a colonialist, imperialist democracy" (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014: 108). Jackson led both mercenaries and soldiers against various Indian nations, from genocidal war against the Muskogee nation in Tennessee in 1814 to Seminole "savage wars" in Florida in 1817–1818 (Drinnon, 1997: 104–111; Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014: 98–99; Rosen, 2015). (In the latter war, Jackson's white supremacist terror campaign against the Seminole intruded into the territorial claims of Spain.) Jackson continued his predations against Native peoples during his Presidency with policies that would lead to Indian Removal. Indeed, the Indian Removal Act of 1830 "mandated federal troops to push Native Americans beyond the Mississippi and extinguish their titles to their land" (Grandin, 2019: 58).

During the 1830s, tens of thousands of Native Americans were brutally uprooted and marched, often in the dead of winter, across the Mississippi. When even the US Supreme Court ruled in 1832 against such forced relocation, President Jackson defied the court.[10] The violent removal of these Indian nations continued under Jackson's successor, Martin Van Buren, concluding in 1838 with the Cherokee being put into detention camps before being forced out of Georgia and Alabama in a winter march, later to be known as the "Trail of Tears." Over 8000 of those Cherokee, including women and children, died under these horrific conditions. One of the US Army soldiers who later recounted his involvement in this violent uprooting of Cherokee noted: "I fought through the Civil War and have seen men shot to pieces and slaughtered by thousands, but the Cherokee removal was the cruelest work I ever knew" (quoted in Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014: 113).

As the United States was expanding in the 1830s, gobbling up, in the process, Mexican territories, Native Americans across the continent faced exterminationist attacks by white settlers, enabled by rich industrial and real estate barons. In 1834, California Native Americans numbered around 150,000. (By the end of the 19th century the number would be less than 20,000.) Seeking the land occupied by those indigenous inhabitants, Leland Stanford and other wealthy white transplants financially underwrote what were euphemistically called "Indian-hunting expeditions" that were, in fact, murderous assaults on California Native Americans. When Stanford became Governor of California in 1861, he appropriated state finances to expedite further extermination, all, of course, in the name of white civilization and the march of progress (Duster, 2017).

On the other hand, there were serious debates in the 19th century about US expansion and the so-called march of civilization, especially around the issues of annexation during the Mexican War (Slotkin, 1985: 173–190). Probably the most critical and prophetic of those in Congress challenging not only possible war with Mexico but also the endless wars on Native Americans was the ex-President John Quincy Adams. Fearful that annexation of Texas would further reinforce "the nation's habituation to racist wars," Adams admonished his congressional colleagues that "racism and war would be the only thing that gave the republic meaning" (Grandin, 2019: 85). In his Congressional address in 1836, Adams confronted the Speaker of the House, James Knox Polk, with these damning queries:

> Do not you, an Anglo-Saxon, slave-holding exterminator of Indians, from the bottom of your soul, hate the Mexican-Spaniard-Indian, emancipator of slaves and abolisher of slavery? Have you not Indians enough to expel from the land of their fathers' sepulchres, and to exterminate? (Quoted in Grandin, 2019: 86)

Although another slave apologist, Senator John Calhoun of South Carolina, favored annexing Texas, he feared absorbing Mexico with its "mixed blood" population. For Calhoun, the Union should be preserved for the "Caucasian race" (Love, 2004: 21–22). Abolitionists such as Frederick Douglas, who opposed both the Mexican War and a slave republic that excluded those of African descent from citizenship, condemned the war as "disgraceful, cruel and iniquitous … Mexico seems a doomed victim to Anglo-Saxon cupidity and love of domination" (quoted in Zinn, 1995: 155). Other abolitionists, especially in New England, criticized the war, as well as those, like a young Abe Lincoln in Illinois, who opposed the expansion of slavery. Yet there were white abolitionists who, while opposing slavery, nonetheless heralded a racialized "manifest destiny." The abolitionist Theodore Parker "declared that expansion was inevitable as a consequence of racial gifts and that it would bring with it a regime of Anglo-Saxon dominance" (Slotkin, 1993: 46).[11]

This racialized version of Anglo-Saxon identity not only informed the policies and practices of aggressive expansionism, but also provided racial markers for new immigrants, especially those arriving from Ireland in the 1840s. According to Matthew Frye Jacobson:

> "Anglo-Saxon" performed two distinct, exclusionary functions within the reigning ideology of American nationalism: it separated racially "pure" Americans from "mongrelized" and "degenerate" Mexicans on one front; and it divided virtuous self-governing Anglo-Saxon citizens from the pathetic Celtic newcomers on another. (Jacobson, 1999: 206)

Yet, the main ideological thrust of this racialized fetishism of Anglo-Saxonism is thoroughly revealed in Josiah Strong's 1886 paean, *Our Country*, and his embrace of the imperialist Anglo-Saxonizing of the world (Jacobson, 1999: 207). "Is there any room for reasonable doubt," Strong wrote, "that this race … is destined to dispossess many weaker races, assimilate others, and mold the remainder, until … it has Anglo-Saxonized mankind?" (quoted in Jacobson, 1999: 207).

It was in the context of expanding that regime of Anglo-Saxon dominance to the Philippines that US savage war enacted new imperial geopolitical aims that reflected the half-life of the iron fist policies toward Native Americans. One of the leading proponents of the imperial "civilizing mission" in the Philippines was Theodore Roosevelt. To Roosevelt, those who opposed the war in the Philippines were "Indian-lovers" and "traitors to their race." For Roosevelt, the war was a struggle between:

> civilization and barbarism …. Whether the barbarian be the Red Indian on the frontier of the United States, the Afghan on the border of British India, or the Turkoman who confronts the Siberian Cossack, the result is the same … without force, fair dealing usually amounts to nothing. (Quoted in Slotkin, 1993: 52, 106)

The United States did not just apply force in the Philippines; it let loose forms of white supremacist terror that recalled the Indian Wars and presaged the wars on Southeast Asia, Afghanistan, and Iraq. The massacres that were part of the white terror against Native peoples at Sand Creek (1864), the Washita (1869), White Mountain (1870), and Wounded Knee (1890) were rehearsals for the violence visited upon Filipinos. "If 'Indian' was the racial epithet for Filipinos preferred by the high command, the second most popular – and the one preferred by the rank and file – was 'nigger'" (Slotkin, 1993: 114). According to Walter Nugent:

> Senior American officers who were veterans of the Indian Wars easily equated the Filipinos with the "savages" of the Plains, deserving extermination. Common soldiers, many of them lightly trained volunteers, were unlimited in their patriotism and their racism. One wrote, "I am in my glory when I can sight my gun on some dark skin and pull the trigger." (Nugent, 2009: 270)

The atrocities that followed from this white supremacist terror were so disturbing that they actually led to courts martial of commanding officers. However, the General who demanded that Samar be made a "howling wilderness" faced a court martial that resulted in nothing more than his forced retirement.

Nevertheless, the use of torture, such as the "water cure" (later to be used in Iraq as waterboarding), the murder of prisoners and civilians, rape, and even the killing of anyone on the island of Samar above the age of 11 were all part of this notorious enactment of savage war. As reported at the time in the Philadelphia *Ledger*:

> Our men … have killed to exterminate men, women, children, prisoners and captives, insurgents and suspected people … [the] prevailing idea that the Filipino, as such, was little better than a dog, a noisome reptile in some instances, whose best disposition was the rubbish heap …. It is not civilized warfare, but we are not dealing with civilized people. The only thing they know and fear is force, violence, and brutality, and we give it to them. (Quoted in Slotkin, 1993: 113)

Another reporter recorded later the words of an American officer in the Philippines:

> We exterminated the American Indians, and I guess most of us are proud of it, or, at least, believe the end justifies the means; and we must have no scruples about exterminating this other race standing in the way of progress and enlightenment. (Quoted in Drinnon, 1997: 314)

Although over a half-century later, the US imperial intervention in Vietnam replicated the kinds of atrocities committed against other racialized Asians, including the murder and mutilation of innocent civilians as in the Philippines and during the centuries long Indian wars. As Frances Fitzgerald pointed out, connecting that long history to what transpired in Vietnam:

> The Americans were once again embarked upon a heroic … conquest of an inferior race. To the American settlers the defeat of the Indians had seemed not just a nationalist victory, but an achievement made in the name of humanity – the triumph of light over darkness, of good over evil, and of civilization over brutish nature. Quite unconsciously, the American officers and officials used a similar language against the National Liberation Front. (FitzGerald, 1972: 491–492)

White Supremacist Terror and Enslavement

While there are certainly resonances and regressions up to the present day of US white supremacist violence against indigenous populations around the globe, it is critical to look back on the ways in which the dispossession of the Indigenous in North America coincided with the expansion of slavery (Estes, 2019: 76). Throughout the 1830s, "the homelands of the Choctaw, the Chickasaw, the Creek, the Seminole, and the Cherokee had, through the military power and legal authority of the United States of America, been converted into a vast reserve for the cultivation of whiteness" (Johnson, 2013: 31). That whiteness reflected both white supremacy and the massive growth of cotton on the slave labor camps in these former homelands of these aforementioned Native peoples. The brutal regime that drove enslaved Africans under constant torture to harvest the dominant export commodity of the United States during this time was cotton. In turn, cotton was at the core of an expanding world market that garnered economic rewards for the white enslavers throughout the pre-Civil War period (Baptist, 2014). Hence, cultivating whiteness in this historical epoch entailed levels of cruelty and violence against both enslaved and indigenous populations. In the case of the enslaved, a system of violence and cruelty through abduction and torture enacted an accumulation by possession. In the case of

Native Americans, a system of violence and cruelty through displacement and extermination enacted an accumulation by dispossession.

Looking back on the inception and development of slavery on the North American continent, everywhere one looks, whether on the auction block, in slave labor camps, in the forced break-up of families and brutal migrations, or in the daily tortures, one can find evidence that racial capitalism exacted a terrible toll on the enslaved through the daily practice of the iron fist of white supremacy. One study of how "slave breeding" was executed through the "rape of enslaved women" argues persuasively that "the growth of the Southern economy was tied directly to the productivity of the capitalized womb" (Sublette and Sublette, 2016: 24). Cotton production, in particular, was premised on whipping as "a gateway form of violence that led to bizarrely creative levels of sadism," producing, in the process, "pathological bullies" (Baptist, 2014: 141, 122). Whites not directly engaged in this daily sadism were nonetheless incorporated into the regimes of discipline and repression in slave patrols. The primary purpose of the slave patrol was to uphold slavery, from tracking down runaways and returning them to their enslavers to being granted a license to kill African Americans. As noted in one study of slave patrols during the 18th and early 19th centuries in the Southern states, "the new American innovation in law enforcement … was the creation of racially focused law enforcement groups" (Hadden, 2001: 4).

Of course, the legal and political documents that accompanied racial capitalism and white supremacy deliberately obfuscated this violent reality and imposed their own forms of social and civil death on the enslaved. Everywhere in the Constitution of the United States the invisible hand of the enslavers and white supremacists can be found. Provisions throughout the US Constitution reflected the hegemonic rule of slavery, from the guarantee to return a "Person held to Service or Labor" to the "Party to whom such Service of Labor may be due" to the three-fifths clause, "a politically acceptable accounting gimmick for figuring out how the rig the national vote on behalf of slaveholders" (Sublette and Sublette, 2016: 292, 294). Indeed, the United States Constitution was a perfect reflection of a slave republic, built on empire, expansion, and exclusion. According to Barbara Jean Fields (1990: 114), "racial ideology supplied the means of explaining slavery to people whose terrain was a republic founded on radical doctrines of liberty and natural rights." The Second Amendment to that Constitution inscribed militias as a vehicle of state violence against both the Indigenous and enslaved populations (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2018). Hence, hiding beneath the ideological veil of liberty and security was an iron fist of state violence, especially against people of color, whether red, Black, or Brown (Singh, 2017: 35–73).

White Racial Frame and Institutionalized Terror of Policing

Especially with white supremacy as the dominant ideological order through the 19th and 20th centuries, African Americans suffered at the hands of white vigilantes and law enforcement officials (Hadden, 2001: 203–220). In a dozen southern states between 1877 and 1950, there were over 4000 lynchings. One historian's reflection on the role of lynching described them as "theatrical spectacles of white supremacy, as whites claimed their economic, cultural, and social dominance over Blacks through ritualized forms of mob violence carried out in official public spaces" (Romano, 2014: 17). Furthermore, according to racial justice activist Bryan Stevenson (2017: 14), "lynching created an environment where racial subordination and segregation could be maintained for decades with limited resistance. Most critically, lynching reinforced a legacy of racial inequality that has never been adequately addressed in America." These public spectacles of lynching and racial violence, especially during and after the First World War, were also intended to prevent Black migration from the South while keeping African Americans under a repressive political and economic regime (Anderson, 2016: 39–44).[12]

In the Southern states, in particular, right through the 1960s, police and white vigilantes were part of terrorist networks that punished any Black person who violated the rules of white supremacy. Moreover, that terrorist network implicated all of the agencies of the state, particularly those in the South, where:

> at least through the late 1960s, white men could murder Blacks and their allies without fearing any meaningful retribution … [since] the state … shared some responsibility for racial violence of the era. And the unwillingness of juries to convict shows that many whites understood that upholding the racial status quo necessitated turning a blind eye to murder. (Romano, 2014: 43–44)

Thus, the practice of white supremacy doomed many African Americans in the South to a reign of terror and a forfeiting of any hope for racial justice.

White supremacy did not disappear with the overcoming of segregation and second-class citizenship. If it no longer relied on white sheets to promulgate its terror, it could always find blue uniforms to hide behind whenever travesties were committed against the African American community. Of course, the police had been implicated in terror networks, like the KKK, especially in the South. On the other hand, as Richard Rothstein's study of *de jure* housing segregation across the nation makes clear, federal and state authorities at all levels of law enforcement enabled discriminatory practices against African Americans in particular, while institutionalizing legal advantages for whites, utilizing a white racial frame. Moreover, according to Rothstein (2017: 143), "During much of the twentieth century, police tolerance and promotion of cross burnings, vandalism, arson, and other violent acts to maintain residential segregation was systematic and nationwide."

With cries for "law and order" and the pointed use of drug and criminal justice policies, the African American community faced renewed state violence and police brutality in the late 20th century. As the "war on poverty" of the 1960s morphed into a "war on crime," African Americans became the target of punitive policing as a consequence of racist presumptions about the "pathologies" of the Black community. With the insurgencies of those Black communities from Newark in 1964 to Detroit in 1967, innocent African Americans fell victim to the mayhem of malevolent police and military repression. Policing in Detroit and Chicago took an ominous turn with the creation of "special" police units that waged a "reign of terror" against Black men in particular. The STRESS ("Stop the Robberies, Enjoy Safe Streets") squad in Detroit in the first years of its existence in the early 1970s murdered on average one young African American male a month (Georgakas and Surkin, 1998: 167–173; Hinton, 2016: 99, 109–110, 191–202). In Chicago, the counterinsurgency techniques and torture practiced in Vietnam found their way into a police unit that subjected over 100 African American criminal suspects over a 20-year period to the brutal methods deployed in Vietnam and then later used by some of the very same police in the "enhanced interrogation" at Guantanamo (Singh, 2017: 68–69.).

Especially in the aftermath of the Black Power insurgencies of the 1960s, aggressive militarized policing and punitive policies toward African Americans resulted in the "exponential growth of imprisonment" of Black men (Hinton, 2016: 178; Taylor, 2016: 66–67). This physical and legal harassment of African Americans not only led to higher rates of incarceration, but also continued a legacy of white supremacy when it came to the criminal justice system. As noted by Keeanga-Yamatha Taylor, although:

> there have been many changes in Black life, politics, and culture … the threat and reality of police surveillance, scrutiny, violence, and even murder has remained remarkably consistent. The daily harm caused by the mere presence of police in Black communities has been a consistent feature of Black urban history, and, increasingly, Black suburban history. Police brutality has been a consistent badge of inferiority and second-class citizenship. (Taylor, 2016: 107–108)

Among the most recent incidents of police violence against unarmed young Blacks is the tragic, but instructive, incident of the murder of Michael Brown in 2014. The six bullets fired by Ferguson police officer Darren Wilson did more than terminate Michael Brown's life with extreme prejudice. Brown's death and its repercussions once more demonstrate the persistence of racial injustice and the contradictions inherent in how local, state, and national authorities pursue their blinkered sense of justice. At the local level, the outrageous and arrogant behavior of the overwhelmingly white Ferguson police force and political establishment toward African Americans is not just an egregious example of the continuing rule of white supremacy in the suburbs of St. Louis. It is reflective of institutional and ideological patterns that inform cities and suburbs across the United States, especially when it comes to meting out "justice" to Black and Brown youth. Whether through the operation of racial profiling in the criminal justice system or extrajudicial killings of people of color by police or white vigilantes, punitive measures disproportionately target minority communities (McKesson, 2018: 52–67).

As clinical professor of law and director of the Civil Rights and Police Accountability Project at the Edwin F. Mandel Legal Aid Clinic, Craig Futterman notes: "For all too many people out there, when people think of the words 'criminal', 'drug dealer' or 'gangbanger,' images of Black and Brown folks come to mind and that's equal with respect to police." Hence, implicit bias, operating on a racialized white subconscious that relies on the long history of racial stereotypes, targets, in particular, young people of color. Indeed, as Futterman's research shows, police perceptions of young Black and Brown men are as a "potential criminal or a potential danger, and that also makes that police officer far more likely to feel threatened and far more likely to shoot" (quoted in Muhammad, 2012).

According to Brigitt Keller, executive director of the National Police Accountability Project, "excessive force by police … is getting worse." She identifies possible causes as the militarization of the police, ongoing police impunity, and an exaggerated sense of what police confront, no doubt reinforced by the spread of Homeland Security horror stories. Certainly, when it comes to African Americans the police and homegrown white terrorists are more a threat than foreign terrorists of color (Lindorff, 2014). Yet, there remains a deep racial divide when it comes to assessing the inequities of police violence. A Pew Research poll taken in the aftermath of Michael Brown's murder reported that 80% of Blacks thought Michael Brown's death raised "important issues about race that need to be addressed," against only 37% of whites who agreed with that sentiment.

This divide is nothing new when it comes to how justice has been meted out to people of color, those in the lower classes, and anyone deemed "dangerous" to the law and order of the land. It was just over 55 years ago that white supremacist vigilantes aided by local police murdered civil rights workers Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner. For many whites in Mississippi, these civil rights workers had it coming to them since they were disturbing the "peace" of a racially sanctioned order. "The racial murders of the 1950s and 1960s," declares one of the best histories of the murders of those decades and the trials that followed, "operated as a tool of racial terrorism, driven by a desire to stifle Black protest and uphold white supremacy" (Romano, 2014: 19).

While police brutality has not been limited to the African American community, it remains as a visible thread of deeply woven structures of ongoing racial injustices. As made very clear in the Department of Justice (DOJ) report on Ferguson policing and the court system, African Americans in that community were singled out for a wide variety of punitive policies, from attacks by police and police dogs to endless and expensive court citations. The DOJ report cites instance after instance of the violation by the criminal justice system of First, Fourth, and Fourteenth Amendment rights of the Black citizens of Ferguson, reflective of clear patterns of racial bias.

While the DOJ report on Ferguson provides ammunition to the arguments for a more expansive civil rights agenda, it also underscores the fact that without massive demonstrations following the

murder of Michael Brown and the failure to indict Darren Wilson such a report may not have even been issued, especially in light of so many other examples of lethal police action against African Americans and Latinos. Given the report's focus on the denial of Constitutional protections for the African American citizens of Ferguson, it is instructive that the DOJ never bothered to investigate or condemn the millions of instances of Blacks and Latinos whose rights, especially the Fourth Amendment protection against unwarranted searches, were violated by the "stop-and-frisk" policies in New York City (Singh, 2017: 70). Although struck down in court and abandoned by Mayor DeBlasio, the erratic role of the federal government and the Obama administration in dealing with racial justice issues highlighted the importance of the Black Lives Matter movement (Ransby, 2018).

Ferguson certainly sparked outrage within and outside the Black community, inciting agitated responses not only in Missouri but also elsewhere in the United States. As Robin Kelley has argued regarding these movements led by African American organizers in Ferguson and around the country:

> They remind us not only that Black lives matter – that should be self-evident – but that resistance matters. It matters because we are still grappling with the consequences of settler colonialism, racial capitalism, and patriarchy …. The young people of Ferguson continue to struggle with ferocity, not just to get justice for Mike Brown or to end police misconduct but to dismantle racism once and for all. (Kelley, 2014)

Hence, the agenda of Ferguson activists and Black Lives Matter goes beyond remedying the gaps in civil rights and civil liberties protections for African Americans (Taylor, 2016: 153–170). It goes to the very heart of how and why institutionalized white supremacist terror persists and the need to find ways to contest that institutionalization.

Conclusion

Contesting the history and present reality of white supremacy and the accompanying institutionalized terror will certainly require the understanding of its constructions and an active commitment to its deconstructions (Omi, 2001).

As Timothy Tyson contends in his conclusion to his compelling history of the Emmett Till murder:

> all of us must develop the moral vision and political will to crush white supremacy – both the political program and the concealed assumptions. We have to come to grips with our own history – not only genocide, slavery, exploitation, and systems of oppression, but also the legacies of those who resisted and fought back and still fight back. (Tyson, 2017: 216)

Making the "concealed assumptions" visible and contesting the "political program" of white supremacy in its present form means that whites must confront in the most rigorous manner how our own national history has been replete with the racial projects of white supremacy.

Writing over 55 years ago, James Baldwin identified our national history as a:

> collection of myths to which white Americans cling: that their ancestors were all freedom-loving heroes, that they were born in the greatest country the world has ever seen, or that Americans are invincible in battle and wise in peace, that Americans have always dealt honorably with Mexicans and Indians and all other neighbors and inferiors. (Baldwin, 1963: 101)[13]

By denial and "collective forgetting" (Glaude, 2016: 46–50), these myths retain their racialized renderings even as such racial framing is especially invisible to those who refuse to confront the

legacies of white supremacy. In refusing to recognize the white supremacist terror inherent in the foundational structures of the American polity and its half-life in more recent history, historical responsibility for their perpetuation in different forms can be overlooked and attributed to "aberrations from America's exceptionalist path" (Behdad, 2005: 6).

Beyond affirming historical responsibility for past egregious aggressions, the continuing racial injustices and inequalities "at the heart of this nation" cannot also be seen as mere "aberrations" (Glaude, 2016: 8–9). Indeed:

> when we forget about the horrors of lynching, lose sight of how African Americans were locked into a dual labor market because of explicit racism, or ignore how we exported our racism around the world – we free ourselves from any sense of accountability. (Glaude, 2016: 188)

As racial justice activist Tim Wise observes, "we aren't to blame for history – either its horrors or the legacy it has left us. But we are responsible for how we bear that legacy and what we make of it in the present" (Wise, 2012: 23). Embracing that responsibility also necessitates nurturing "an ethics of care for the ways we are implicated in producing others' suffering" (Ioanide, 2015: 112). We must, therefore, take responsibility to reject all aspects of white supremacy, especially when it has been and continues to be the cause of so much suffering to others. Reflecting on an exhibit on the history of lynching and white terrorism at the Brooklyn Museum, Kai Wright, a columnist for the *Nation* magazine, opined about "owning the legacy of white terrorism." He concluded with the following admonition: "white citizens who want to dredge their communities of the hateful morass in which Trump wallows will nonetheless have to bravely, publicly claim their history, knowing the truth is the only thing that will set them free" (Wright, 2017).

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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Notes

1. Most of the material in this article appears in more developed form in specific chapters from my book, *Weaponized Whiteness: The Constructions and Deconstructions of White Identity Politics* (Leiden: Brill Publishing, forthcoming 2020).
2. While there has been a rise in violent incidents promulgated by white supremacist extremists since 2017, they lack the legitimized clout and sanction of earlier forms of institutionalized white supremacist terror, notwithstanding the tacit approval and encouragement of Trump. See Hankes and Amend (2018).
3. According to physician and sociologist Johnathan M. Metzl (2019: 276), "racial anxiety, xenophobia, and misguided nationalism (have been) amplified in the United States of late because they divisively suggest that minorities and immigrants are hoarding resources."
4. Robin DiAngelo's relevant definition of white supremacy is "a sociopolitical system of domination based on racial categories that benefits those defined and perceived as white" (DiAngelo, 2018: 30).
5. According to Native American historian and activist Nick Estes: "Indigenous elimination, in all its orientations, is the organizing principle of settler society" (Estes, 2019: 89).
6. As noted by Ned and Constance Sublette, "the move to a slave society in Virginia bound rich and poor whites together through the privilege of skin color [and] … the profitability of owning slaves as capital, added to their capacity for labor … made slavery foundational to Virginia's economy" (Sublette and Sublette, 2016: 134, 135).

7. For a classic text on the economic motivations for American empire, see Williams (1982). On the connections between war capitalism and race war, see Singh (2017: 74–97). For an example of how "martial manhood" informed American expansion, see Greenberg (2005).
8. The campaigns waged by the US to dispossess indigenous peoples of their land and to expand the nation as a "white possession" are discussed in Moreton-Robinson (2015).
9. On the connections between whiteness and innocence, the African American philosopher George Yancy (2004: 6) notes: "As long as whiteness constitutes an ensemble of power relations that places whites in positions of advantage and power … vis-à-vis nonwhites, whiteness will never be innocent."
10. On the other hand, as noted by Nick Estes, legal decisions during this period, enforcing a kind of "invisible hand" of white supremacy, more often granted no legal or political rights to Native Americans, thereby facilitating their removal (Estes, 2019: 76).
11. On the racial meanings of manifest destiny, see Horsman (1981), especially where he maintains that by "the 1850s it was generally believed that a superior American race was destined to shape the destiny of much of the world. It is also believed that in their outward thrust Americans were encountering a variety of inferior races incapable of sharing America's republican system and doomed to permanent subordination or extinction" (Horsman, 1981: 6).
12. Lynching, of course, was not limited to African Americans. Especially in the West and Southwest, white mobs and vigilantes deployed lynching against Native Americans, Mexicans, and Chinese. For an overview of lynching and racist violence against Mexicans and Mexican Americans on the Southwest border in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, see Grandin (2019: 156–167). A lynching party attacked the small Chinese population in Los Angeles in 1871, murdering, in the process, at least 19 of the 172 Chinese living there. See Wu (2002: 61).
13. The idea that the United States is "invincible" in battle has been punctured by any number of critics, most forcibly by military and diplomatic historian Andrew Bacevich (2008).

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