

Oxford Handbooks Online

State Racism, State Violence, and Vulnerable Solidarity

Myisha Cherry

The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy and Race

Edited by Naomi Zack

Print Publication Date: Feb 2017 Subject: Philosophy, Social and Political Philosophy

Online Publication Date: Jan 2017 DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190236953.013.3

Abstract and Keywords

What makes #BlackLivesMatter unique is the implication that it isn't only some black lives that matter, that is, not only the mostly commonly referenced male lives. Rather, the hashtag suggests that all black lives matter, including queer, trans, disabled, and female. This movement includes all those black lives who have been marginalized within the black liberation tradition, as well as in greater society. The movement highlights the ways in which black people have been traditionally deprived of dignity and human rights. State racism and state violence are sustained together. The law creates a "subrace" out of those whom white society fears and holds in contempt. This leaves not only black Americans, but all citizens vulnerable. A way to fight this form of racism is not only to create a solidarity among the oppressed members of the subrace but to create a solidarity with all members, in "vulnerable solidarity."

Keywords: Michel Foucault, solidarity, police brutality, mass incarceration, subrace

IN 2014, #BlackLivesMatter, a popular hashtag started by three black queer women—Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi—exploded all over social media. The women created the hashtag as a call to action after the death of seventeen-year-old Trayvon Martin at the hands of George Zimmerman, who at the time was not being held accountable for the crime. #BlackLivesMatter soon turned into a movement that sought to bring attention to and fight against the seemingly increasing state violence against black people. Activists on social media and in the streets, declared "# Black Lives Matter!" when Michael Brown was killed by a Ferguson Police officer; twelve-year-old Tamir Rice was killed by a Cleveland police officer; Freddie Gray was found dead in a police van; Eric Garner was killed by the NYPD; and Sandra Bland was arrested for refusing to put out her cigarette and eventually found dead in her cell. What makes this hashtag unique is the implication that it isn't only *some* black lives that matter, that is, not only the mostly commonly referenced male lives. Rather, the hashtag suggests that *all*

black lives matter, including queer, trans, disabled, and female. This movement includes all those black lives who have been marginalized within the black liberation tradition, as well as in greater society. The movement highlights the ways in which black people have been traditionally deprived of dignity and human rights.

In an essay penned in “The Feminist Wire,” Alicia Garza states:

Black Lives Matter does not mean your life isn’t important—it means that Black lives, which are seen as without value within White supremacy, are important to your liberation. Given the disproportionate impact state violence has on Black lives, we understand that when Black people in this county get free, the benefits will be wide reaching and transformative for society as a whole. (2014)

Despite the intention, the message fueling the Black Lives Matter movement has been co-opted, dismissed, and misunderstood by politicians, celebrities, and allies. On July 31, 2015, Officer Sean Bolton was allegedly shot and killed by Tremaine Wilbourn while conducting a traffic stop in Memphis, Tennessee. The officer was white; the suspect was black. During a press conference, Memphis’s Director of Police Services, Tony Armstrong (who is [\(p. 353\)](#) also black), noted that the shooting is a reminder of how dangerous their jobs are. Noting that this was his fourth time in 2015 announcing the death of an officer, he stated: “There’s a theme that ‘Black Lives Matter.’ And at the end of the day, we have to ask ourselves ‘Do All Lives Matter?’ Regardless of race, creed, color, economic status, what profession that person holds, ‘All Lives [Do] Matter’ ” (Karimi and Shoichet 2015).

While “All Lives Matter” is true in theory, in practice, some lives do not matter. This makes the “All Lives Matter” rhetoric extremely problematic. In a civic democracy where belonging and acknowledgment are key, how has it come about that only some lives matter and at the same time, some accept the “All Lives Matter” rhetoric as tenable? Michel Foucault gives us some insight on how state racism creates hierarchies that determine which lives matter. Malcolm X shows how the state uses the media and statistics to perpetuate the myth of black criminality and thus justifies state violence against certain groups. Instead of adopting nihilism, Malcolm X reminds us of the power of the people to challenge and transform systems and structures whose practices have contributed to the elimination of black bodies. The exercise of this power through democratic procedures and organizing around collective vulnerabilities is what is needed to ensure that all lives can actually matter, not only in theory but also in practice.

We need to understand how it has come about that only some lives matter. Foucault offers useful tools for understanding why some lives do not matter, in his analysis of the superrace and subrace within a society. At the same time, the use of antiblack crime statistics as a self-fulfilling prophecy has justified excluding the subrace from the group

of lives that matter. Malcolm X provided a parallel analysis of racial oppression in the United States, and also a path toward “more lives mattering” through democratic procedures. The idea is for the people to use their power to make all lives matter.

Do All Lives Matter?

Armstrong’s comments were not unique. Some celebrities and so-called white allies responded to the hashtag “Black Lives Matter” on the Internet with the new hashtag “All Lives Matter.” However, Armstrong’s position as Director of Police Services made his response uniquely problematic for several reasons. Armstrong’s declaration not only serves as an erasure of the current crisis of a string of homicides of black unarmed civilians at the hands of the police, but it further creates a distraction from that fact. On the nationally syndicated news network CNN, Armstrong’s comments premiered immediately following a segment covering the killing of Samuel DuBose by a Cincinnati Campus police officer (<http://www.cnn.com/2015/07/30/us/ohio-sam-dubose-tensing/>). It is true that officers should not fear the possibility of murder while executing their jobs. It is equally true that innocent black people should not fear the possibility of being murdered at the hands of the police. These two truths are not mutually exclusive.

Another important aspect of the Bolton and Wilbourn case to consider is that this particular officer’s stop in Memphis was indeed a dangerous one. The suspect was armed and allegedly engaged in illegal activity. This is very much different from the circumstances of the cases activists protested while declaring “Black Lives Matter.” In those cases, the victims were not committing any felonies, the victims did not have any weapons, and neither were they (p. 354) attacking the officers involved. Armstrong’s statement was not only a distraction from the current reality of police killings, but it served as a justification for racially biased police stops and killings. It supported the myth that police have a right to feel that their lives are threatened in all circumstances and that all citizens of color should be treated with suspicion.

Finally, Armstrong’s statement was simply not true. The reason the Black Lives Matter movement is necessary is because these lives have been traditionally undervalued and mistreated as compared with other groups of people. If all lives truly mattered, a Black Lives Matter movement would not be necessary. Speaking with philosopher George Yancy in the *New York Times*, Judith Butler states that “Black Lives Matter” is obviously true but has not been historically realized. She continues:

So what we see is that some lives matter more than others, that some lives matter so much that they need to be protected at all costs, and that other lives matter less, or not at all. And when that becomes the situation, then the lives that do not matter so much, or do not matter at all, can be killed or lost, can be exposed to conditions of destitution, and there is no concern, or even worse, that is regarded as the way it is supposed to be. The callous killing of Tamir Rice and the abandonment of his body on the street is an astonishing example of the police murdering someone considered disposable and fundamentally ungrievable.

(Yancy and Butler 2015, 156)

The treatment of black bodies by the police is a direct indication of how the police on a national level perceive the value of black lives. The life of the police officer who was killed in Memphis *did* matter. Its value was shown in the way his colleagues and the media praised his life in the media, and in how quickly justice was administered in his case. This same value is not shown in the way the police encounter and handle black lives, in the way the media describes these lives after they have been taken, or in the way the justice system responds to their deaths. It has been shown, time and again over the decades, that the state not only seeks justice for the lives they believe matter, but through an intricate system of institutionalized state racism and violence, the police and justice systems of this country declare which lives matter and which ones do not.

State Racism and State Violence

The police are the enforcers of the law and they act on behalf of the state. One of the purposes of state violence, or politically sanctioned violence, is to maintain general order. The state describes this authorized violence as legitimate force. Some examples of state sanctioned violence used by the police are deadly force, police harassment and excessive force (brutality), and intimidation tactics. The police enjoy impunity with respect to their actions, while the prime targets of state violence have always been ethnic minorities and indigenous people. The police who engage in state violence also engage in state racism. State racism is a prerequisite to state violence. Michel Foucault gives us some insight on this relationship.

Foucault, in “Society Must Be Defended,” writes that racism arises not by creating a polarity between two distinct races but when a single race or society is split into a [super]race and [sub]race (Foucault 2003). He calls this *state racism*. State racism fragments a society; it creates distinctions, hierarchy, and assigns good qualities to the superrace and bad qualities (p. 355) to the subrace. The superrace is the true race, which

defines the norm, while the subrace is portrayed as the deviant from the norm and a biological threat. To normalize the population, the subrace must be excluded and segregated from the superrace. Biopower's focus is not to defend the state against the threat of another state, but to defend the state against the threat posed by the subrace. It is no longer state against state, but the state is "protector of the superiority and purity of the [super]race" (Foucault 2003, 81).

For Foucault, state racism not only fragments society but also promotes the mantra that if you want to live, you must take lives; it establishes a relationship between "my life" and "your death." Those deemed abnormal are eliminated so that the superrace can thrive. Their death makes life in general healthier. Because the subrace is a biological threat, killing is justified. State racism is the "precondition that allows the state to kill." Foucault suggests that this death is not only physical but can include political death and rejection.

The subrace can be any group the state deems abnormal, or lesser. The state promotes the idea that this abnormal group is to be feared and that society must at the very least, be suspicious of it, and in the most extreme cases, kill its members. One of the ways to promote fear is to make the subrace synonymous with criminality. As a result, the subrace is often overcriminalized and surveilled. State violence can therefore be viewed as a biopolitical project of protecting the superrace from the "now criminal" subrace (Davis 2003; Alexander 2011).

Foucault lets us know that even if we as citizens decide to be color-blind, *antiblack racism* may be eliminated but *state racism* will still be alive and well. While antiblack racism may point to cruel treatment based on the color of one's skin, state racism is cruel treatment based on whatever reason the state gives that will convince others that a particular body is a threat. John Adams once said that "the form of government which communicates ease, comfort, security, or, in one word, happiness, to the greatest number of persons, and in the greatest degree, is the best" (Adams and Peek 1954, 85). America proves its exceptionalism and its power through the protection and security it provides to its citizens. Unfortunately, this protection comes at the cost of the protection and security of those citizens erroneously depicted as an inside threat. State racism, therefore, is a strategic tool, used by the state to create and maintain overall order and power.

In the United States, society has historically been divided into the "deviant" black and brown communities, and the "innocent" others. Black and brown bodies are the subrace, and bad qualities have traditionally been ascribed to them. They have been stereotyped as lazy, ruthless, freeloaders, and dangerous, while other bodies are depicted as pure and innocent. These "innocent" others are the superrace. To protect the superrace, black and brown bodies must be eliminated. The role of the police is to protect "the others" by eliminating the subrace. They are eliminated through police brutality, stop-and-frisk

polices, and even death. Police brutality and excessive force led to the physical death of Samuel Dubose and Rekiya Boyd. Disproportionate, biased arrests have led to the mass incarceration of black and brown people. Mass incarceration not only eliminates black and brown bodies from the population for the specified time of their incarceration, but it eliminates them even when they physically return back to their communities. These black bodies suffer the death of their identities as citizens, with their voting rights stripped and the denial of the right to sit on juries. They are locked out of the economic market because of their record and, until recently, did not have the ability to obtain federal education funding. They are effectively eliminated from society with these exclusions (Travis 2003). The primary reason given is the “threatening” and “deviant” quality of the subrace.

(p. 356) Understanding the Campaign of State Violence on Black Bodies

It seems safe to conclude that only those lives that do not threaten the lives of the superrace “matter.” If the state can show that a group of people are a threat to the population, then that becomes proof that their lives do not matter and their elimination and oppression are justified. Some believe that black lives do not matter because of their perceived “bad” qualities and the threat they pose to society. But where exactly do these myths come from, and how does the state succeed in spreading them? In a June 8, 1964, interview with Mike Wallace, Malcolm X states, “the police commissioner feeds the type of statistics to the white public to make them think that Harlem is a complete criminal area where everyone is prone towards violence. This gives the police the impression that they can then go and brutalize the Negroes, or suppress the Negroes, or even frighten the Negroes (*CBS News* June 8, 1964).” In a 1962 speech given at the memorial service of Ronald Stokes—a black man killed by the LAPD—Malcolm talked about the role of the media in this.

The control press, the white press inflames the white public against Negroes. The police are able to use it to paint the Negro community as a criminal element. The police are able to use the press to make the white public think that 90%, or 99%, of the Negroes in the Negro community are criminals. And once the white public is convinced that most of the Negro community is a criminal element, then this automatically paves the way for the police to move into the Negro community, exercising Gestapo tactics stopping any black man who is ... on the sidewalk, whether he is guilty or whether he is innocent. Whether he is well dressed or

whether he is poorly dressed.... As long as he is black and a member of the Negro community the white public thinks that the white policeman is justified in going in there and trampling on that man's civil rights and on that man's human rights.

(Mossberg 2012)

Malcolm X gives us three components of a successful campaign by the state, enacted by the police, that justifies their state violence against black bodies: (1) crime statistics, (2) participation of the media, and (3) the approval of the general public. Each component has a unique role, although they are interrelated. I will explain each one respectively.

The police use crime statistics to justify their presence in black communities. The news media uses crime statistics to inform the public of black criminality. Statistical evidence is seen as scientific and mathematical truth: numbers reflect the truth; they do not, cannot, lie. We all may have personal beliefs, but a look at the numbers is supposed to bring us to the truth of the matter. But is this true? In a November 2014 *Meet the Press* interview, former Mayor of New York, Rudy Giuliani, stated that 93 percent of blacks are killed by other blacks. "We're talking about the exception here," he remarked in reference to the killing of a black man by a white man in Ferguson (Paquette 2014). Given the recent killings and violence of white cops on black citizens, Giuliani's claim was made to implicitly suggest that black-on-black crime is more prevalent and attention should be more focused on it than on police brutality. He introduced crime statistics to bring us all to that truth. In 2013, 38 percent of murders were committed by blacks while 31 percent were committed by whites; from 2011 to 2013, 38.5 percent of those arrested for murder, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault were black. African Americans make up 30 percent of the US population, but they make up (p. 357) 60 percent of the prison population (Federal Bureau of Investigation 2013). These are the crime statistics that are used to justify black criminality and thus a police state. However, here are several reasons why we should not put all of our trust in such crime statistics that are used to justify allegations of black criminality and, thus, state violence.

First, crime statistics may be produced out of the self-interest of police departments. When crime rises, cities hire more police. To increase the size of their department and other resources, the police have a vested interest in arresting more people. In the Justice Department's report on the city of Ferguson in 2015, for example, it was revealed that unjustified arrests were made on black people to generate funding for the city (Grow 2015). If crime statistics are high, more funding enters into a police department and it funds city government. On this view, crime statistics do not point to guilt or innocence but to biased targeting, need for money, and department corruption.

Second, the phenomenon known as “black-on-black crime” is often used to explain high crime rates in black communities. The concept of “black-on-black crime” describes how violent blacks are to each other, and it assumes that this type of violence is nonexistent in other racial communities. But the label “black-on-black” crime is misleading. Crime is most frequently intraracial. Most crime is committed by friends or acquaintances of the victim, and this usually falls within racial lines. So if there really is a phenomenon known as “black-on-black” crime, there is also a phenomenon known as “white-on-white” crime. From 1980 to 2008, 84 percent of white victims were killed by white offenders because most crime happens within close communities. This fact is never used to justify the presence of police in white communities or to paint whites as a criminal element.

A third reason to be careful in using crime statistics as proof of black criminality is because of the bias in arrests and sentencing. In the United States, people of color are disproportionately arrested, sentenced, and incarcerated when compared to white people accused of similar offenses. The Center for American Progress reports that this racial disparity is not necessarily due to the fact that blacks are more criminal than whites but because of implicit bias in sentencing, lack of proper legal representation due to poverty, racial bias of juries, overpolicing of communities of color, and the disproportionate targeting of blacks as criminal suspects (Kerby 2012). They also report that students of color face harsher punishments in school than their white peers. African American students are arrested far more often than their white classmates. In “Justice on Trial: Racial Disparities in the American Criminal Justice System,” national survey data show that in the federal system, black offenders receive sentences that are 10 percent longer than white offenders for the same crimes. Blacks are more likely to be sentenced to prison for the same crime than whites. One-third of people of color sentenced to prison would have received a shorter or nonincarcerated sentence if they had been treated in court the same way as white defendants facing similar charges. Blacks and Latinos are three times more likely to be searched than whites. African Americans are incarcerated at nearly six times the rate of whites (CivilRights.org 2005). A number may provide a picture of those who enter the criminal justice system, but it does not show the systematic bias that had a role in placing that person there.

In racial profiling, sentencing statistics are abused. Naomi Zack in *White Privilege and Black Rights* notes that conservatives make use of sentencing and conviction statistics to justify the racial profiling of certain groups (Zack 2015). For them, the fact that 1 out of 15 African American men are in prison proves the criminality of blacks. Statistics like these are (p. 358) supposed to prove to us who the criminally suspect are. But, Zack points out, if 1 out of 15 African American men are in prison, 14 of them are not. They are law-abiding. These statistics do not show that most African American men are criminals. It shows that the majority of African American men are not criminals. An abuse of these

statistics results in racially profiling a majority of law-abiding citizens. Instead of protecting this law-abiding majority, police “arbitrarily target members of a law-abiding, numerical majority, at any given time” (Zack 2015, 56). This makes racial profiling unjust. It also shows the ways in which statistics can be used to perpetuate certain unjust practices and target certain groups. We have reasons not to be easily convinced of crime statistics that attempt to prove black criminality. But those who are not critical will be convinced by this tactic. Malcolm X argued that the police release these crime statistics to the news media. The news media, armed with the power of persuasion and sensationalism, had and still have an effect on the public. While there are members of the public who hold explicit bias toward blacks, there are also those who, as a result of the media, will hold implicit bias toward blacks. This is not surprising, given that implicit bias literature notes that the media and news programming are often verified origins of implicit bias (Oliver 2003).

Explicit bias and implicit bias of the public have real-world behavior effects. In his *New York Times* piece “Crime, Bias and Statistics,” Charles Blow quotes an interesting discovery by the Sentencing Project as it relates to “how bias informs [crime] statistics and vice versa.”

Whites are more punitive than blacks and Hispanics even though they experience less crime White Americans who associate crime with blacks and Latinos are more likely to support punitive policies—including capital punishment and mandatory minimum sentencing—than whites with weaker racial associations of crime.

(Blow 2014, A19)

Along the same lines, Lisa Bloom in *Suspicion Nation*, writes, “The standard assumption that criminals are black and blacks are criminals is so prevalent that in one study, 60 percent of viewers who viewed a crime story with no picture of the perpetrator falsely recalled seeing one, and of those, 70 percent believed he was African-American. When we think about crime, we ‘see black,’ even when it’s not present at all” (Bloom 2014, 232). The power of the media’s use of crime statistics and sensationalism makes it so that the general public not only approves of state violence, but through the public’s implicit bias, they can play an active role in the elimination of the subrace.

Although it seems that Malcolm X’s description of the campaign of state violence and all its participants is full of gloom and doom, Malcolm X also explains the importance of “the public,” not only in relation to the media and the police but also as members of a democracy. There may be crime statistics, the police, and the news media, but this

system will not be complete without the public thinking that the police are justified in trampling on black people's civil rights.

A democracy is "a government of the people, by the people, and for the people." The people are all citizens, not just the majority or what Malcolm X refers to as "the general public." Although there are elected officials that act on the people's behalf, these representatives are answerable to the people. There are times in which it seems that elected officials answer more to themselves or to special interest groups, but it is "the people" who vote them into office and whose opinion has some weight. The police cannot just do anything they want to do (p. 359) to people, without falling into public disfavor. To not upset too much of a certain group, the state must make an appeal to certain members of the people (the majority). But, as I have previously argued, the state also creates the myth of an inside threat and presents a case that they, through the police, will defend *some* of the people against such a threat. If the state's appeal is successful, the police can engage in certain practices and enact certain policies against vulnerable citizens who are viewed as threats. Malcolm X's analysis all comes together here.

To justify the overpolicing of certain communities, the police must justify their actions to the general public by using crime statistics. The news media uses these statistics to perpetuate the stereotype of black criminality. Through persuasive use of crime statistics, the police are thus able to win public opinion, mostly white. If the superrace (nonblacks) is convinced that they should be afraid of certain groups and that the police can keep them safe, there is sufficient justification of the state's need for state violence. But the police and the news media do not have the final say! For, if the police can use democracy to achieve their goals, the people can also use democracy to achieve the goal of making sure citizens are not unjustly and inhumanely eliminated by the state.

Radical Democracy and Vulnerable Solidarity

Democracy is a form of government that gives power to the people. Democracy is also relational. It is about the people's relationship with the state and also about the people's relationship with each other. A democratic voice gives communities power. Politicians will only do what their constituents force them to do. Therefore, through the use of a collective voice, it can be the people that force politicians to do things. The people's voice is backed up with the vote to elect officials with certain policies. When the state abuses certain groups, it is because there is an accepted belief that they can get away with it with no consequences. The state may believe that that community is disempowered and that even if they have a voice, they have no vote or their vote doesn't make too much of a

difference—or they do not vote. To continue to abuse people of color in cities that are predominately black appears to be political suicide for the people would collectively use their political power to remove officials from office, they would vote against unfair policies, and they would contest oppressive and unequal treatment of which they are the targets. But it is not suicide if the only voice and vote that rise up are from whites who may not care what happens to nonwhites. In this way, whites are no longer the minority but they become the majority. Whites become the “general public” that the state is accountable to. In doing so, “the people” are neglected.

Radical democracy takes democratic tools seriously and uses them against institutions and people that seek to use democracy as a way to promote injustice and oppression. When practicing radical democracy, the people see the value in their voice, their vote, disruption, and organizing. Voting can be a revolutionary act. If you don't believe me, consider Ella Baker, Fannie Louie Hamer, and the students who attempted to register blacks to vote during Freedom Summer in 1964. Having a voice and a vote says to the state, “You are accountable to me and you will pay for your unjust actions with my voice and my vote against you.” This (p. 360) vote is not only a silent act, privately done in a booth. In radical democracy, the people know that their vote can be used as a threat and as leverage to draw attention to their oppression to hold the state accountable, and to eventually end unjust practices and policies. This is what makes voting a radical act. With a voice, the people can declare that if stop-and-frisk policies do not end, they will respond in disappointment and disagreement with their vote. When unjust practices are performed by an entity that is not elected by the people, such as the police, the people go after the public officials who are responsible for giving the police power, for example, the mayor. “Going after” these public officials includes creating their own public campaigns and boldly making their frustrations clear. The people can declare that if politicians do not listen to them, they will not be excluded from the political process. The people will create their own political party if they have to.

Democracy is also about the people's relationship with each other. A history of social movements in the United States not only shows the fight and organizing power of certain groups, but it also shows the diverse groups who have been oppressed in this country. There has been religious oppression, gender oppression, oppression against immigrants, Muslims, blacks, gays, the Japanese, Native Americans, and labor groups. Since the establishment of America, there has been state violence. The subrace and superrace distinction has always existed in America. This list of historically oppressed victims also lets us know that, at any time, any of us can be placed into the subrace category. Even members of the superrace who do not become members of the subrace can nonetheless be impacted by state violence targeted toward the subrace. Although the War on Drugs has been a war on black, brown, and poor bodies, for example, there have been some

casualties within the superrace. White drug “criminals” have been what Michelle Alexander refers to as “collateral damage in the War on Drugs” (Alexander 2011, 205). The war that was waged on black and brown people has affected white people, and in reality, we are all vulnerable to state violence.

We *all* are hurt by the injustice of others. As Martin Luther King, Jr. proclaimed in his *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*, a “threat to justice anywhere, is a threat to justice everywhere” (King 1963). Simultaneously, we are also helped by the justice of others. This is what Alicia Garza meant when she said that once black people get free, the benefits will transform society. All citizens are vulnerable to state racism because at any time the state can reduce a particular group to the subrace category, and their delegation to that category, as well as the violence that is directed to them as a result, has a huge impact on *all* people. State violence and state racism is never really a black or a brown issue. It is an American issue. In our democracy, with a government for the people by the people, we are all affected by each other. This fact not only brings to light our own vulnerability, but it also gives us a wonderful opportunity for solidarity and activism. Vulnerable solidarity is solidarity that is formed based on the vulnerability that we all face as citizens to be targeted and/or affected by state racism and state violence.

The concept of vulnerable solidarity is beneficial when fighting against state racism and state violence because vulnerability creates a stronger motivation to fight against injustice than emotions like empathy. Research indicates that empathy is prone to in-group bias and does not extend across gender and racial lines as we might think (Prinz 2011), but it seems intuitively obvious that a sense of vulnerability is universal and much more powerful. In vulnerable solidarity, citizens understand that we are all susceptible to attack or harm by the state. Vulnerable solidarity opens up the bonds of trusts among “vulnerable” groups, which may be difficult to do with groups defined by their superrace and subrace identities. Instead (p. 361) of joining a cause because it has a direct impact on our social positioning now, people will join causes because they will know that all injustices have an impact on us all; if not directly, indirectly, if not now, in the future.

This is not to deny the black solidarity that Tommie Shelby describes in *We Who Are Dark* (Shelby 2007). Shelby argues that a collective identity should not be the basis of Black solidarity. Instead, black solidarity should be based on blacks’ commitment to end racist practices. For Shelby, removing the collective identity condition will not only unite blacks who have various ways of identifying as black, but it will also allow for nonblacks to join in on the fight for social justice with blacks. On Shelby’s account, it is blacks who are vulnerable and committed to ending racism, and it is nonblacks who are sympathetic to their plight. On my view, black solidarity can coexist with vulnerable solidarity. But vulnerable solidarity recognizes that shared commitment is not the only thing that can tie

us together nor the only motivation for political resistance, but also shared vulnerability. Shelby writes that other groups' solidarity commitments have often been used to "exploit the economic and political disadvantages of African Americans as a group. And whites in power sometimes favor these other groups over blacks, creating resentment and competition between minority groups" (Shelby 2007, 241). I think this competition happens when oppressed groups see their oppression and the political response to it as separate from each other. Vulnerable solidarity sees oppression, particularly state racism and state violence, as something that affects us all and something we are all vulnerable to. This is not to say that we all experience state violence in the same way. We must listen and give credence to the testimony of others whose experiences are different than our own. Vulnerable solidarity is also not an excuse to take political organizing power away from those who may be experiencing oppression now and give organizing power to the citizen who may experience state violence in the future. This may only reinforce the superrace and subrace distinction.

How we are to organize based on vulnerable solidarity is too much to cover here. What should be noted is that vulnerable solidarity is a unique way of looking at our relationship with each other and our relationship with the state. In vulnerable solidarity, we no longer see our privilege as stable. We no longer see each other as merely suspects or victims, but as comrades. We no longer see our country as perfect, but in need of radical transformation. Overall, vulnerable solidarity would allow for collective self-defense against injustice. In this sense, we all join together and become one—"the people"—that unjust police forces and the government must answer, listen, and respond to. Vulnerable solidarity that arises from state racism widens the scope of not only potential victims but also potential participants in fighting against the injustice of state violence and state racism. It sends a loud message to the state, that the distinctions that they create will not be tolerated. *We are the people!* All of our lives should matter and we will fight together to make it so.

References

Adams, J., and G. A. Peek, G. A. (1954). *The Political Writings of John Adams: Representative Selections*. New York: Liberal Arts Press.

Alexander, Michelle. (2011). *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. New York: New Press.

Bloom, L. (2014). *Suspicion Nation: The Inside Story of the Trayvon Martin Injustice and Why We Continue to Repeat It*. Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint.

(p. 362) Blow, Charles. (2014). "Crime, Bias, and Statistics." *The New York Times*, September 7. Accessed May 16, 2016. http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/08/opinion/charles-blow-crime-bias-and-statistics.html?_r=1.

Civil Rights.Org. (2005). "How is the Criminal Justice System Racist? Accessed on June 19, 2016. <http://www.publiceye.org/defendingjustice/pdfs/factsheets/10-Fact%20Sheet%20-%20System%20as%20Racist.pdf>.

Davis, Angela. (2003). *Are Prisons Obsolete?* New York: Seven Stories Press.

Federal Bureau of Investigation. (2013). *Crime in the United States 2013. Uniform Crime Reports*. Accessed May 16, 2016. <https://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ucr/crime-in-the-u.s/2013/crime-in-the-u.s.-2013/tables/table-43>.

Foucault, Michel. (2003) *Society Must Be Defended, Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-1976 (No.3)*. New York: Picador.

Garza, Alicia. (2014). "A HerStory of #BlackLivesMatter." *Feminist Wire*, October 7. Accessed May 16, 2016. <http://www.thefeministwire.com/2014/10/blacklivesmatter-2/>.

Grow, Kory. (2015). "Ferguson Police Racist, Unconstitutional, Justice Department Says." *Rolling Stone*, March 5. Accessed May 16, 2016. <http://www.rollingstone.com/culture/news/ferguson-police-racist-unconstitutional-justice-department-says-20150305>.

Karimi, Faith, and Shoichet, Catherine. (2015). "Memphis Shooting: Suspect in Officer's Slaying Arrested." *CNN*. Accessed May 16, 2016. <http://www.cnn.com/2015/08/03/us/memphis-officer-killed-traffic-stop/>.

Kerby, Sophia. (2012). "The Top 10 Most Startling Facts About People of Color and Criminal Justice in the United States." *Center for American Progress*. Accessed May 16, 2016. <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/race/news/2012/03/13/11351/the-top-10-most-startling-facts-about-people-of-color-and-criminal-justice-in-the-united-states/>

King, Martin Luther Jr. (1964/1986). "Letter from the Birmingham Jail." In *Why We Can't Wait*, ed. Martin Luther King, Jr., 95-110. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Mossberg, Donnie. (2012). Malcolm X Speech in Los Angeles (May 5, 1962). *YouTube* Accessed May 16, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gpr6PK-Cz3c&list=PLnUXGZWN-riQYIt6z0hNwxbhYnlE373Xg>.

Oliver, M. B. (2003). "African American Men as 'Criminal and Dangerous': Implications of Media Portrayals of Crime on the 'Criminalization' of African American Men." *Journal of African American Studies* 7 (2): 3-18.

Paquette, Danielle. (2014). "Giuliani: "White Police Officers Wouldn't Be There If You Weren't Killing Each Other." *Washington Post*, November 23. Accessed May 16, 2016. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-politics/wp/2014/11/23/giuliani-white-police-officers-wouldnt-be-there-if-you-werent-killing-each-other/>.

Prinz, Jesse J. (2011). "Is Empathy Necessary for Morality." In *Empathy: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*, edited by Amy Coplan and Peter Goldie, 211-229. New York: Oxford University Press.

Shelby, Tommie. (2007). *We Who Are Dark: The Philosophical Foundations of Black Solidarity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Travis, Jeremy. (2003). "Invisible Punishment: An Instrument of Social Exclusion." In *Invisible Punishment: The Collateral Consequences of Mass Imprisonment*, edited by M. Mauer and M. Chesney-Lind, 15-36. New York: New Press.

Yancy, George, and Judith Butler. (2015). "What's Wrong With 'All Lives Matter'?" *New York Times* 12: 156.

Zack, Naomi. (2015). *White Privilege and Black Rights: The Injustice of U.S. Police Racial Profiling and Homicide*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

Myisha Cherry

Myisha Cherry is interested in issues at the intersection of moral psychology and political philosophy. A former educator at the Fortune Society and Faculty Associate at John Jay College's Institute for Criminal Justice Ethics, she is also passionate about the relations between character, forgiveness, race, and the criminal justice system. Myisha is also the host and producer of the UnMute Podcast (<http://www.myishacherry.org/the-unmute-podcast/>) and is currently a PhD candidate in philosophy at the University of Illinois, Chicago. In 2016-2017, Cherry is a Visiting Edmond J. Safra Graduate Fellow in Ethics and a Santayana Fellow in the Harvard Department of Philosophy.

