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Black Women's Lives Matter

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WOMEN'S
BLACK LIVES
^
MATTER



Black Lives Matter! But does this include Black girls and women? In the current movement, it is often assumed that the only victims, in particular when it comes to police killings, are male. Black boys and men are, no doubt, most frequently targeted, however their female counterparts are also endangered.¹ Lack of concern about Black girls and women's lives in our movement could be dangerously divisive. We call for solidarity with and among Black men and women, to show that all Black lives matter.

In 2014, President Obama announced "My Brother's Keeper" initiative to help boys and young men of color. When challenged about the gendered orientation, supporters claimed that this population was "the canary in the coal mine."² Letters followed, to challenge this exclusive focus, one signed by 200 "Concerned Black Men."³ Another letter came from over 1000 Girls and Women of Color, famous and not, entitled "Why We Can't Wait." As this letter points out, the idea of the canary is not to save the bird, but rather the entire population, including girls and women of color who are breathing that same toxic air. Male Blacks are more likely to be murdered, imprisoned, and suspended from school than male whites; similarly, female Blacks face higher rates in all these areas than female whites--and they also face higher rates of interpersonal violence and rape. The letter calls for the creation of a "collective and inclusive movement" to help all youth of color.⁴

Some observers have dubbed My Brother's Keeper: "Moynihan 2.0." In 1965, Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan penned a report for the Department of Labor, entitled "The Negro Family: The Case for National Action." This report claimed that the Black family was "matriarchal," leaving men adrift and "alienated." Because this was "out of line" with an American society, it argued, "which presumes male leadership in private and public affairs,"⁵ it "seriously retards the progress of the group as a whole, and imposes a crushing burden on the Negro male." The report placed the blame on mothers for creating a "tangle of pathology," that included delinquency, joblessness, school failure, and crime.⁶

The “Moynihan Report” had an enormous impact on how American society has thought about Black women and men ever since.⁷ Then and now, although Black women face tremendous hurdles to survive and raise their children, policy makers concentrate “remedial efforts” on men. Then and now, those contesting this view are calling for solidarity among and inclusion of both men and women.

In the “Black Lives Matter” movement, women occupy an important role, continuing in the steps of their foremothers. The leadership, from Ferguson to Beavercreek, includes many powerful Black women. Even the slogan that has given the movement its name was formulated by three Black queer women, Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors and Opal Tometi, organizers with the National Domestic Workers Alliance and other freedom groups. It started, as a hashtag, after the murder of Trayvon Martin and acquittal of his killer⁸, and expanded into a broader call for action.

The justified fear of the police in the Black community has an additional impact on women. Black women who fall victim to domestic violence or rape hesitate to call the police and are thus deprived of what should be a form of protection.⁹ Not only do they fear bringing the police into their community, but there have also been incidents of police actually raping women of color, as illustrated by the recent arrest of an Oklahoma police officer for allegedly raping Black women while on duty.¹⁰

Black women are also killed by the police and while in custody. This booklet presents a dozen cases of such slayings, from a 7 year-old girl a 92 year-old grandmother. We demand justice for Carolyn “Sissy” Adams, Tanesha Anderson, Rekia Boyd, Anna Brown, Eleanor Bumpurs, Miriam Carey, Erica Collins, Michelle Cusseaux, Shantel Davis, Karen Day, Sharmel Edwards, Sherese Francis, Shelly Frey, Pearlie Golden, Latanya Haggerty, Kendra James, Kathryn Johnston, Aiyana Stanley-Jones, Kyam Livingston, Tyisha Miller, Kayla Moore, Chuniece Patterson, Sheneque Proctor, Aura Rosser, Yvette Smith, Alberta Spruill, Alesia Thomas, Malissa Williams, Tarika Wilson, and, no doubt, many others.



In 1996, six years after losing her 15 year-old daughter to an unsolved murder, **Carolyn “Sissy” Adams** was shot dead by a New Brunswick, New Jersey police officer. He was trying to arrest the 39 year-old woman for prostitution and claimed that she bit his finger so hard that he was afraid he would pass out and she would take his gun. The officer was not indicted.¹¹



November 13, 2014, **Tanesha Anderson**, a 37 year old African-American woman in Cleveland was killed by police officers. Anderson’s family called to request an ambulance and aid in transporting her for a mental health evaluation, but the police also responded. They put her into a cruiser and she became nervous and tried to get out. After a struggle, one of the officers violently slammed her against the pavement and put his knee in her back. Anderson immediately lost consciousness and was left face down, her sundress raised above her waist, and was administered no aid for the 20 minutes it took for the EMS to arrive. Anderson was pronounced dead upon arrival at the hospital. Her death has been ruled a homicide, but the officers involved are currently only on restricted duty and an investigation is pending.¹²



In 2012, 22 year old **Rekia Boyd** was in a Chicago park with three friends. They had a verbal exchange with off-duty police officer Dante Servin. He got into his unmarked car and fired several times over his shoulder, shooting Boyd in the back of her head and another person in the hand. Servin claimed to have thought that their cell phone was a gun and that he feared for his life. He was charged with involuntary manslaughter, reckless conduct and reckless discharge of a fire arm and his trial is pending. Boyd’s family won a \$4.5 million settlement from the City of Chicago.¹³



Anna Brown, 29, had suffered many hardships: she lost her home in a tornado and became homeless, lost custody of her two children, and was afflicted with mental and other illnesses. She died in a police jail cell in September 2011, the result of blood clots in her legs and lungs. After being turned away by two St. Louis hospitals, this homeless woman went to a third emergency room complaining of of severe leg pain. When doctors told her she was fine and

she refused to leave, the police came and arrested her for trespassing and (unfounded) suspicion of drug use. They carried her into a jail cell by her arms and ankles and left her on the concrete ground. She died within 15 minutes.¹⁴



In 1984, 66 year-old **Eleanor Bumpurs** was killed by NYPD Officer, Stephen Sullivan. After the Housing Authority unsuccessfully attempted to evict Bumpurs for arrears of approximately \$400 in rent, they called the police, telling them that she was “considered emotionally disturbed and possibly dangerous.” Officers arrived with a Y-shaped bar and protective plastic shields. They encountered Bumpurs yielding a large kitchen knife with which she struck at the officers multiple times. Then, Sullivan fired two shotgun shots, three seconds apart. Sullivan was indicted for manslaughter but was acquitted in a trial criticized by the DA for disregarding evidence, and not explaining the reason for the second shot. The city later awarded Bumpurs’s estate \$200,000 and issued revised guidelines on how to subdue emotionally disturbed people, using non-violent force whenever possible.¹⁵



Cincinnati, Ohio, October 2012. **Erica Collins**’s dispute with her sister got heated and she threatened to slash her sister’s tires. The police were called. Witnesses reported that Erica was yelling at Officer Matthew Latzy and was refusing to drop the knife, however every witness stated that the officer was not in immediate danger. Erica did not charge at the officer, but when she turned her body his direction with knife still in hand, he shot her two times. Erica’s life ended from a shot to the chest and a shot to the head.¹⁶



Shereese Francis was suffocated to death, in front of her mother and sister, by New York City police. Francis, who suffered from schizophrenia, had gone off her medicine and her family wanted medical help to persuade her to go back on them. Francis’s sister, called 911 to get the EMTs to take Francis to the hospital. Police officers arrived and were granted access to the house. They wrestled Francis onto the bed and four of them piled on top of her, pushed her face into the mattress, and handcuffed her. Twenty minutes later Francis was dead and was only transported to the hospital more than 90 minutes later.¹⁷



In 2004, **Kendra James** was shot and killed by Officer Scott McCollister of the Portland, Oregon Police Department after attempting to drive away from a crime scene. After police arrested the person with whom James was in the car, James moved from the back seat of the car to the front driver's seat. McCollister, later testifying that he was 80% in the car at the time James tried to pull away, said that he was forced to shoot her out of fear that he would be run over. The officer claimed he used a taser as a first option, but it was not sufficient to subdue her. McCollister was cleared of charges by a grand jury, but eventually was disciplined by the Portland Police Department for his actions. The city's guidelines stated that use of deadly force at a fleeing vehicle was prohibited.¹⁸



On November 21st, 2006, **Kathryn Johnston**, a 92 year-old African-American woman in Atlanta, Georgia was shot by plainclothes officers. When they entered her home unannounced, Johnston fired a shot in self-defense and was answered by 39 shots from the police. These shots ultimately killed her. The officers handcuffed Johnston and she was soon pronounced dead at the scene. Officers had a "no-knock warrant" for an alleged drug search. Officers Jason Smith, Gregg Junnier, and Arthur Tesler admitted to fabricating evidence of drugs in order to obtain the warrant. Each officer was sentenced to ten, six, and five years in prison respectively for the illegal activity leading up to the murder of Kathryn Johnston. Shortly before this incident, another elderly woman in the community was nearly killed by officers carrying out a mistaken drug raid.¹⁹



In 2013, **Kyam Livingston** was arrested after her grandmother called the police saying she was violating a protection order prohibiting alcohol and fighting on the premises. Police took Livingston to a Brooklyn hospital where she was treated for intoxication and then transferred her to a holding cell. According to a witness, Livingston repeatedly complained for seven hours of symptoms including cramps and diarrhea—in a cell allegedly "filled with feces and other unsanitary conditions"--but did not receive medical attention until she started having seizures. She was pronounced dead upon arrival at the hospital.²⁰



The 2013 death of **Kayla Moore**, née Xavier Moore, could have been prevented. Moore was a schizophrenic whose roommate called authorities after she had been “drinking and doing drugs all day.” Berkeley, California Officers arrived and arrested Moore, using a pending warrant that turned out to be for a different Xavier Moore, 20 years her elder. The police grabbed Moore’s arms to put her in handcuffs, but she resisted, projecting herself and the officers forward onto a mattress. After a struggle, officers handcuffed her and put a wrap device on her legs. At one point, an officer, seeing that Moore’s chest was not moving, turned her on her side, began chest compressions and called for a CPR mask, but it came but it came too late. The victim’s father contends that the call for a mask was motivated by the officer’s refusal to perform mouth-to-mouth resuscitation on a transgender woman. A leaked confidential Berkeley PD file has showed that the officers did not keep track of Moore’s vitals. The Berkeley PD has instituted a new training program for officers to better deal with mental health crisis, but to date, only 24 of 89 officers have completed the training.²¹



Chuniece Patterson was arrested and jailed for stealing beer and missing court. Patterson spent nearly all of her two days in jail vomiting and doubled over in pain. Her calls for help went unanswered for 14 hours. She died from an ectopic pregnancy.²²



On February 16, 2014 in Bastrop County, Texas police responded to a domestic disturbance 911 call regarding two males arguing “with the presence of firearms” in the home. **Yvette Smith**, opened the door of her home to which the police had been dispatched, and was shot dead in her doorway. Police reports say Smith was holding a gun, although no eyewitness reports have confirmed this allegation and family members say Smith would not have been comfortable holding a weapon.



Seven-year-old **Aiyana Stanley-Jones** was killed by a Detroit police officer in May 2010. The officer was part of a Special Response Team that mistakenly entered Aiyana's grandmother's home in search of a murder suspect. Aiyana was sleeping on a couch just inside the door when police tossed a flashbang grenade through the window despite having seen children's toys on the lawn. The grenade barely missed the 7-year-old and singed her blanket. When the police entered the home, Aiyana's grandmother reached out for the little girl, and an officer shot Aiyana through the head and neck. The officers were being filmed by the crew of *The First 48* at the time of the raid.²³



In November 2012, 30 year-old **Malissa Williams** was a passenger in a car driven by a black man in Cleveland, Ohio. Police officers, who claim the couple might have been involved in a drug trade, pulled them over for a turn signal violation, but the accused took off with the police in pursuit. When the car passed a police station, an officer thought he heard a gunshot. The ensuing high speed chase, involving 62 police cars and 104 officers, ended when the couple pulled into a dead-end parking lot. The police opened fire, shooting 137 bullets into the car, 15 of which were fired directly into the windshield from the hood of the car, killing the couple. No weapons or gun shells were found in the vehicle. A U.S. Supreme Court ruling states that officers are prohibited from firing on suspects after a threat to public safety has ended. 64 officers and 12 supervisors were disciplined for violating department rules, 5 supervisors were indicted for misdemeanor of dereliction of duty and one officer was indicted on 2 counts of manslaughter. The trial is pending. A federal lawsuit resulted in a \$1.5 million award to the estates of each victim.²⁴



On January 4, 2008, 26 year-old **Tarika Wilson** was with her six children in an upstairs bedroom of her Lima, Ohio home, when the city's SWAT team raided the house in search of her partner, suspected of drug trafficking. She and her 1 year-old son were shot by Sergeant Joe Chavalia when he blindly shot into the dark room. Chavalia heard gunshots and claimed that he feared for his life; what he had heard were his fellow officers shooting at the dogs. The autopsy report stated that Tarika was either hunched over or on her knees when she was killed. Chavalia was found not guilty on charges of negligent homicide and negligent assault. Wilson's Family won \$2.5 million in a wrongful death settlement from the city.²⁵

¹No reliable statistics exist as to these deaths. ProPublica claims that young Black men are 21 times more likely to be “shot dead by police than their white counterparts.” Ryan Gabrielson, Ryann Grochowski Jones and Eric Sagara, “Deadly Force, in Black and White: A ProPublica Analysis of Killings by Police Shows Outsize Risk for Young Black Males,” ProPublica website, Oct. 10, 2014, <http://www.propublica.org/article/deadly-force-in-black-and-white>, accessed January 17, 2015. Other estimates are lower, but most concur that the trend exists. Jaeah Lee, “Exactly How Often Do Police Shoot Unarmed Black Men?” Mother Jones Aug. 15, 2014. <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2014/08/police-shootings-michael-brown-ferguson-black-men>, accessed January 17, 2015.

²John A. Powell and Maya Rockey Moore, “Obama’s Plan to Aid Black Men and Boys Will Be a Boon to Other Groups, Too” July 8, 2014 The Chronicle of Philanthropy, January 17, 2015. <http://philanthropy.com/article/Obama-s-Plan-to-Aid-Black/147541/> accessed January 17, 2015.

³“Letter of 200 Concerned Black Men and Other Men of Color calling for the Inclusion of Women and Girls in “My Brothers Keeper” May 30, 2014, African American Policy Forum <http://www.aapf.org/recent/2014/05/an-open-letter-to-president-obama> accessed, January 17, 2015.

⁴“Why We Can’t Wait: Women of Color Urge Inclusion in “My Brother’s Keeper” June 17, 2014, The African American Policy Forum. <http://www.aapf.org/recent/2014/06/woc-letter-mbk>, accessed January 17, 2015. This recalls the book by the same title penned by Dr. Martin Luther King.

⁵The white family--even though the report states that the husband is most often dominated, was dubbed “egalitarian”!

⁶Office of Policy Planning and Research, United States Department of Labor, The Negro Family: The Case For National Action, March 1965. <http://www.dol.gov/dol/aboutdol/history/webid-meynihn.htm>, accessed January 24, 2015.

⁷Even the Black male revolutionary, Frances Beal argued in 1969, critiques the system, but “when it comes to women, he take his guidelines from the pages of the Ladies Home Journal.” She argues that “there seems to be some confusion in the movement as to who has been oppressing whom...” Certain Black men are maintaining that they have been castrated by society but that Black women somehow escaped this persecution and even contributed to this emasculation.” Frances Beal, “Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female,” Black Women’s Manifesto, pamphlet, Third World Women’s Alliance, n.d. ca. 1969. http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/wlmpc_wlms01009/, accessed January 24, 2015.

⁸Alicia Garza, “A Herstory of the #BlackLivesMatter Movement,” the feminist wire, October 7, 2014 <http://thefeministwire.com/2014/10/blacklivesmatter-2/>, accessed January 17, 2015.

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