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The Midnight Incendiary: America's Myth of Black Violence

Writing Process

I went through an extensive researching, writing, and revising process for this essay. I spent most of the Spring 2022 semester researching. I initially investigated the ties between slave patrols and our contemporary police institution, and, after following a winding road of sources and ideas, that topic morphed into a historiography of Southern militia conflict. I read and summarized many sources to find patterns in historical characterizations which I then organized into the interpretive categories I identify in this essay. Once I had the shape of the essay and worked out my argument, I went through many rounds of edits: First, for my ASI 120 class, and then to submit to a previous issue of this journal (which was not accepted, as it was a significantly poorer essay than the version published here). Then, many months later, I revisited the essay for my McGrath application. I edited it once before sending it to my professor, then to send to peer reviewers for comments, and again once I received feedback. I added several layers of analysis, found sources for and analyzed contemporary connections, reorganized my arguments, and rewrote or reworded most of the body of text to finally end up with the essay herein.

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The 'Midnight Incendiary': America's Myth of Black Violence

Eleanor Yates-McEwan

The Civil War was one of the most monumental and deadly events in American history, and American Reconstruction, the period that immediately followed, reflected that turmoil. Despite the Civil War ending in 1863, conflict between those for and against the emancipation of enslaved people plagued the culture of the South through Reconstruction's end in 1875. States and civilians, including many Civil War veterans, responded to this struggle by forming militias. These extra-legal organizations taught their members to fight and perform military drills, patrolled and maintained their sense of "order" in their communities, and, in some cases, acted on the racial conflict felt within those communities. In many ways, militias, particularly state-sanctioned and white militias, served as paramilitary, civilian police forces. While militias created by the government were often integrated, independent militias tended to emerge as either white or Black. These militias, particularly the latter, clashed, their altercations propelled by the racial bitterness of white Southerners who opposed the emancipation of enslaved people. The many stories told by historians about white and Black militia conflicts during Reconstruction are relevant for today's still-divided America.

Race is at the forefront of the collective consciousness of America after a decade fraught with violence, particularly police violence against Black individuals. There are communities who would promote racial equity and those who still oppose change to the racial status quo. Government and police organizations evade scrutiny and suppress awareness, hiding evidence of systemic violence and excusing racist behavior. A December 2022 *Washington Post* article reveals that large swaths of fatal police shootings are missing from the FBI fatality database.¹ Without this data, FBI statistics suggest that fatal shootings of citizens by police officers are decreasing. The *Washington Post*, however, collects

¹ Ba Tran, A., Healy, C., Iati, M., "Fatal Police Shootings Increase, More Go Unreported," *The Washington Post*

their own data on fatal police shootings which indicates that the numbers are rising every year. Unfortunately, the laws governing police reports of their own shootings are lax, allowing them to misreport and thus misrepresent police interactions with civilians, particularly Black civilians. And, importantly, the *Washington Post's* data suggests that police shoot Black citizens more than twice as often as white citizens. That damning statistic is not reflected in the incomplete records of the FBI.² The largely unfounded arguments used to excuse police violence against Black people, and particularly Black men, include that they are inherently dangerous, that violence is always provoked, and that lethal force is discretionary by right. The *Washington Post* also reports increasing public scrutiny towards police shootings since the fatal shooting of Michael Brown in 2014, whose tragic death serves as an example of the ways police organizations justify violence against Black people. After Brown, a Black teenage boy, was fatally shot six times by a police officer, there were conflicting accounts of the altercation. One story, told in defense of the officer, said Brown had moved towards the officer in a “threatening manner.” Other stories say the opposite, that Brown had his hands up in surrender when he was shot.³ Either of these accounts might be true, and in either case it remains unreasonable for a police officer to shoot an unarmed citizen six times, including two shots to the head. The police department uses the claim that Brown acted aggressively to excuse the use of lethal force by police—force that would not be warranted even if that claim was true. Such arguments echo those early historians used to describe white militia violence during Reconstruction, illustrating the long history of fraudulent justifications for organized white violence against Black communities. The legacy of historic mischaracterizations of Black people and of organizations that worked against white violence and oppression can still be seen today with the vilification of the Black Lives Matter movement. Understanding this history helps contextualize our modern situation and brings much needed awareness to America’s collective consciousness. Such scholarship can inform and propel efforts to end racial violence and build a more equitable society.

Historians tell several different versions of Southern Black militias and their interactions with white people during Reconstruction. There are historians, usually white men writing in the early 20th century, who describe Black militias as the instigators of violence, and that their behavior provoked white militias to respond. Others, writing in the mid-20th century, provided a more balanced view, arguing that although Black militias were sometimes the instigators of violence, they also suffered from unprovoked acts of white violence. By the late 20th

² Ba Tran, A., Healy, C., Iati, M.

³ Schmidt, M., Robles, F. “Shooting Accounts Differ as Holder Schedules Visit to Ferguson.”

century and early 21st century, historians reached the conclusion that Black militias were not instigators, but rather the victims of white provocation and violence. This most recent category of interpretation provides the best understanding of historical events because it takes Black viewpoints into account, and, thus, is able to formulate the most holistic and nuanced interpretation.

All historians discussed below undertook the daunting task of understanding Reconstruction and explaining it to an audience. Writers of history, however, have the responsibility of objectivity, which includes the consideration of diverse perspectives and experiences, and must tell the story of history as accurately and honestly as they can. Though this is a monumental task, it is a necessary one. The summary and analysis of the sources below is intended to compare each story to these expectations. Against these, the third gives the best version of history, as it accounts for Black viewpoints, considers the nuances inherent to any violent event, and provides the most inclusive and thus most universal account of the past.

Interpretation One: Always the Instigators

The earliest found category of historical interpretation contends that Black militias committed violence against white militias and communities without provocation, and that they were the instigators of all racial conflict. Historian John S. Reynolds published his book, *Reconstruction in South Carolina, 1865-1877*, in 1905, and tells the story of a rowdy, violent Black militia.⁴ Reynolds describes Black militias who wasted no opportunity to perform obtrusive demonstrations in busy city streets and who often traveled in groups, firing their guns and scaring white women and children.⁵ Reynolds claims Black militia leaders purposefully riled up their militias against white people and encouraged violence and bloodshed. White people were forced to arm themselves in response. Reynolds argues white people were at a disadvantage because whites were only organized in political clubs while Black militias were backed by the government.⁶ Reynolds describes a militia conflict in 1870 in Laurens, South Carolina, in which a fight occurred between a white citizen and a Black State Constable the day after an election.⁷ In his telling, the Black militia quickly responded, likely on behalf of the State Constable, by arming themselves and firing volleys into the town square. The white citizens in town, who had been working for a peaceful election, scavenged what guns and weapons they could find and tried to stop the riot. After

⁴ John S. Reynolds, *Reconstruction in South Carolina, 1865-1877* (Columbia, South Carolina: State Company, 1905), 136.

⁵ Reynolds, 145.

⁶ Reynolds, 146.

⁷ Reynolds, 149

this altercation, as accounted by Reynolds, tensions rose around polling centers in other towns, but white people's relentless level-headedness protected these communities from any further violence.⁸ Later historians—one of whom will be addressed under the third interpretive category—relate the same event but tell a different story. In Reynolds' historical interpretation, Black militias incessantly instigated conflict between races. They committed violent acts without reasonable provocation, and were such a nuisance to white communities that white men were forced to organize against them. According to Reynolds, white people wanted peace and, for the most part, acted to prevent or diffuse conflicts between white and Black communities.

J. G. Randall, a historian from the 1930s, also tells the story that Black militias instigated violence. In his chapter, "Reconstruction Debacle," from a 1937 work, Randall addresses conflicts between Southern Black and white militias.⁹ He begins with his only mention of unprovoked white militia violence. He admits that white criminals in Arkansas formed violent militias that terrorized the state. The predominant story is that Black militias were independent instigators of violence, that Black militias in Arkansas were murderous, brutal mobs who broke into jails and destroyed grocery stores.¹⁰ Randall says that South Carolina faced a similar problem.¹¹ Like Reynolds, Randall argues that white people were forced to organize militias to protect their property and their lives from Black violence, and beyond this, were provoked to action for political reasons. Black militias, according to Randall, were politically corrupt organizations that supported a politically corrupt government. Randall argues that it was reasonable for white citizens to combat that corruption by forming their own militias.¹² Randall uses those stories to bolster the argument that Black militias were incendiary, destructive groups, and white organization was simply a response to provocation.

Historians who follow the "Always Instigators" argument generally describe militia conflict between white and Black people as one-sided. Both sources above characterize Black militias as aggressive, violent, and criminal, echoing racist sentiments within the post-war South. However, Reynolds emphasizes Black militias' moral corruption at length, not only discussing their actions but also their malicious intent, while Randall only lists their crimes. Randall's brief mention of

⁸ Reynolds, 149-150.

⁹ J. G. Randall, "Reconstruction Debacle," in *Reconstruction in the South: Problems in American Civilization* (Boston: Heath and Company, 1952), 14-15.

¹⁰ Randall, 14-15.

¹¹ Randall, 15.

¹² Randall, 15.

violent acts of criminal white militias is a glimpse of a broader perspective, though he does not argue that those white militias instigated violence against Black militias or communities. So, while he does present a slightly more nuanced account of Reconstruction militias, Randall remains a proponent of this flawed historical category.

Interpretation Two: Sometimes Provoker, Sometimes Provoked

A second category of interpretation of Reconstruction-era militia violence builds off the narrative of Black violence found in the sources summarized above. Historians in this second category agree that Black militias instigated violence between themselves and white militias. However, they say this narrative is not the whole story. Rather, they write that white militias and communities also committed unprovoked violence against Black militias; violence was a two-way street. This historical interpretation is generally found a little later in the 20th century than those in the “Always Instigators” category.

E. Merton Coulter, in his 1947 book chapter “The Blackout of Honest Government,” describes the rise of Black militias in the South. Black militias both incited violence between themselves and white militia (or militia-adjacent) organizations, he says, and committed unprovoked acts of violence against white communities.¹³ According to Coulter, Loyal Leagues, which were Radical Republican political clubs, inspired Black militias to take aggressive actions against white people and arm themselves in public.¹⁴ Coulter quotes a South Carolina governor who claimed that Black militias were known to rob and destroy houses and barns in the night, acting as a “midnight incendiary”—meaning they both very literally burned things in the night and that they stirred up social conflict through that destruction.¹⁵ Coulter uses this moniker to emphasize his argument that Black militias incited violence purposefully by being outwardly hostile. But, while recognizing and promoting the argument that Black militias were often the instigators of violence, Coulter concedes that white militia groups sometimes instigated violence. For example, he acknowledges that the Ku Klux Klan was an incendiary white militia group that provoked riots, and also notes that crimes against Black people increased after the Klan’s creation.¹⁶ In this way, Coulter differs from prior historians. Randall, from the first interpretive category, said that white people sometimes were criminals, but he never claimed that white

¹³ E. Merton Coulter, “The Blackout of Honest Government,” in *Reconstruction in the South: Problems in American Civilization* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press and the Littlefield Fund for Southern History of the University of Texas, 1947), 104-105.

¹⁴ Coulter, 104.

¹⁵ Coulter, 104-105.

¹⁶ Coulter 104-105.

people incited racial violence. By admitting that the Klan instigated some racial violence, Coulter parts ways from previous historians.

Otis Singletary contributed to this interpretive category in 1955 with his journal article, “The Negro Militia During Radical Reconstruction.” In his narrative of Reconstruction, white people resented Black militias for a few reasons.¹⁷ Singletary says that, while Black militias were not as vicious as Conservatives made them out to be, they did sometimes behave in ways that strained relations between parties to the point of inevitable violence. For example, Black militias got involved in elections on behalf of the Republicans, which provoked white Democrats.¹⁸ Singletary also remarks that politicians used state militia funds for their own corrupt political gain.¹⁹ Most state militias were integrated and thus considered Black militias. White people faulted Black militias themselves for politicians’ corrupt uses of militia funds. Singletary does conclude that the core motivator for white resentment and subsequent violence against Black militias was racial bitterness.²⁰ White people saw Black people organizing and publicly wearing uniforms—and thus as figures with public dignity—as an affront to the accepted racial hierarchy.²¹ Singletary, further breaking away from historians with the previous interpretation, quotes a Black historian who said that white people, driven by their resentments, lashed out against Black militias, especially Black officers, with physical violence and political subterfuge.²² By giving voice to this Black perspective, Singletary diversifies and therefore strengthens his version of history. Though recapitulating the narrow historical narrative of Black incendiarism, he begins to enrich that narrative by concluding that Black militias also suffered unprovoked white violence.

In general, these historians attempt to consider the Black perspective, and thus provide a more nuanced history than those with the earliest interpretation. While they consider factors beyond the control of the Black militias that aggravated the white population, these historians still contend that Black militias were often politically corrupt, aggressive, and disruptive of white communities.

Interpretation Three: Victims of White Violence

More recent historians, parting ways with their predecessors, describe a different dynamic between white and Black militias. White militias, they argue,

¹⁷ Otis Singletary, “The Negro Militia During Radical Reconstruction,” *Military Affairs* 19, no. 4 (1955): 182.

¹⁸ Singletary, 183.

¹⁹ Singletary, 182.

²⁰ Singletary, 184.

²¹ Singletary, 184.

²² Singletary, 185-86.

mounted unprovoked attacks against Black militias who almost always acted in self defense. This may reflect a shift in racial understanding, but it also may be due to the changing nature of scholarship itself. Throughout the mid-to-late 20th century, Black access to the sphere of higher education and scholarship widened, as did the collective understanding of who counted as a historian, and whose work should be respected in academia. More recent stories may be expected to change in response to the inclusion of Black perspectives in the telling of history.

Historian Vernon Burton contributes to this interpretive category in his 1978 journal article, "Race and Reconstruction: Edgefield County, South Carolina," where he describes the relationship between Black and white militias in Reconstruction-era Edgefield County. Burton says that Black militias were seen as a threat to white people even though they did not act out against white communities. Instead, white militias actively opposed and attacked Black militias, notably in the Tennant riots.²³ The Tennant riots were a series of conflicts between white militias and a Black militia commander, Ned Tennant, and his militias. The first riot started, says Burton, when a white militia company heard the drill drum of Tennant's Black militia company. Enraged, they attacked Tennant's home. Tennant's militia responded, attempting to protect their commander, and were surrounded by a white militia force twice their size. Tennant and the white militia leaders parlayed, and no blood was shed.²⁴ The second Tennant riot followed a similar pattern, according to Burton. A rumor spread that Tennant planned to set fire to a white General's home, and white militia members rode to arrest Tennant. His militia members protected him and fired over the heads of the white militia members in warning. In response, General M. C. Butler, leader of the white militias, commanded over one thousand of his militia men to hunt Tennant down. Tennant evaded them and surrendered his and his militia's guns at the Edgefield Court House to broker peace.²⁵ Through the Tennant story, as well as other stories of white on Black violence, Burton creates a narrative in which Black militias were attacked without reasonable provocation, and one in which they did not commit unprovoked acts of violence. Rather, they were victims of white violence and responded accordingly, often suing for peace rather than lashing out with equal violence. Unlike previous historians, Burton does not characterize the actions of Black militias as outwardly aggressive, but rather as reasonable responses to provocation and threat.

²³ Vernon Burton, "Race and Reconstruction: Edgefield County South Carolina," in *Journal of Social History* 12, no. 1 (1978): 41.

²⁴ Burton, 41.

²⁵ Burton, 41.

Melinda Hennessey further develops this interpretation in her discussion of race relations in Reconstruction New Orleans, and conflict between different “clubs” or militia groups, in her 1979 article, “Race and Violence in Reconstruction New Orleans: The 1868 Riot.”²⁶ Hennessey describes how white people, angry about the presence of Black militias in New Orleans, physically lashed out against Black people, often culminating in violent riots. She argues that each wave of riots was started by white people; they shot at Black and Republican parades, rioted in the streets, and destroyed Black businesses and homes.²⁷ Hennessey’s specific examples of unprovoked white violence against Black civilians reveal that white on Black violence occurred independent of militia involvement or instigation. White people were especially aggressive towards the Black men who served as one third of the police force. The “police” in New Orleans served as part of a larger state militia under Louisiana Governor Warmouth. The Governor passed a bill allowing an integrated, faux-state militia thereby creating a state-funded, and thus state-loyal, police force.²⁸ In this narrative, the police, and thereby Black and integrated militias, do not take any out-of-the-ordinary actions that incite violence. Instead, it is their mere existence which incites violence, and Hennessey’s characterization implies that mere existence does not constitute incendiarism.

In the epilogue of her book, *Slave Patrols: Law and Violence in Virginia and the Carolinas*, Sally Hadden addresses the formation of both integrated governmental militias and independent, community-run Black militias. Hadden says that Republicans reformed, armed, and integrated state militias.²⁹ Newly emancipated Black people also created their own, independent, voluntary militias. They behaved, according to Hadden, as most white militias did, drilling with weapons and organizing marches through their towns. Hadden says that white people saw these activities as a threat nonetheless.³⁰ Hadden frames Black volunteer militias as mediums of Black social and political participation. She describes one Black militia organization as both a training camp and a community barbeque. Nevertheless, white people believed that Black militia organization and power necessitated white militia retaliation. Hadden characterizes that stance as unreasonable and unwarranted. Hadden’s interpretation showcases Black militias as centers of social organization and opportunity, similar to churches or schools.

²⁶ Melinda Hennessey, “Race and Violence in Reconstruction New Orleans: The 1868 Riot,” in *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 20, no. 1 (1979): 79-81.

²⁷ Hennessey, 86.

²⁸ Hennessey, 83.

²⁹ Sally Hadden, *Slave Patrols: Law and Violence in Virginia and the Carolinas* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2001), 204-205.

³⁰ Hadden, 205.

Unlike the historians in previous categories, she does not describe independent Black militias as culminations of political corruption, but rather as mediums for more equal political participation. Her story supports the historical interpretation of Black militias as victims of unprompted white attacks and counters their characterization as mobs that would attack white militias unprovoked.

Historian Richard Zuczek also furthers this interpretation. In his dissertation, *State of Rebellion: People's War in Reconstruction South Carolina, 1865-1877*, Zuczek explains that the state militia came to be known as a Black militia because most members were Black. White men did not want to serve alongside or under Black men, so they often refused to join the state militia and formed “social clubs” or militias of their own.³¹ Zuczek argues that the Black militia did not attack, plunder, or steal, as they were often accused of, but rather had an exemplary record of the opposite.³² In Zuczek’s narrative, the Black militia was enthusiastically armed by the government, who thought that a powerful Black militia would keep Southern Democrats in line. Southern Democrats reacted by heavily arming themselves. Zuczek describes the same event in Laurens County, South Carolina that Reynolds did. According to Zuczek, there was a small skirmish between white and Black people which, he says, was instigated by white people. Other white people jumped on the opportunity to organize and use militia force against Black people. Thousands of white militia men came to Laurens, followed by approximately three hundred Black militia men who arrived after hearing of the incident.^[26] In Lauren’s story, white people were the instigators of a larger conflict, and they greatly outnumbered and outgunned the Black militia. Zuczek’s story says that white people were responsible for instigating racial militia violence and describes Black militia members as people who responded to threats, not people who incited conflict.

The historians in this interpretive category describe Black and white militia conflict as provoked by the white militias. Hadden and Zuczek detail ways that white militias organized themselves, usually motivated by racism rather than legitimate threat, and how they instigated violence against Black militias. Hadden goes further to characterize Black militias as a pillar of community and stability, not as chaotic and destructive like those in the first interpretive category, and not as militaristic as those in the second category suggest. Burton and Hennessey promote the idea of white instigation, and they also describe the ways that white

³¹ Richard Zuczek, *State of Rebellion: People's War in Reconstruction South Carolina, 1865-1877* (Ohio State University, 1993), 205-31.

³² Zuczek, 209-10.

people attacked Black militias and communities unprovoked, often claiming that white militias committed the crimes prior historians assigned to Black militias.

Conclusion

Historians tell stories of the past and a charitable reader assumes they try to tell the best story possible. However, what is perceived as the best story changes over time. As can be seen in the sources above, historians' perspectives and narratives change as scholarship shifts towards new and different historical interpretations. The most recent story, the third interpretive category, is arguably the best, most historically accurate of the stories these historians told. "Victims of White Violence," looks past the racial bitterness found in accounts from whites in the Reconstruction South (not accepting the mere existence of Black militias as an act of provocation). They consider Black perspectives and experiences that were not told by their predecessors. Because of this, these narratives are more comprehensive and nuanced accounts of the past.

Historians with the earliest interpretation characterized Black militias as aggressive, amoral, and corrupt as they recounted events in their stories. But where is the evidence for this account of Black violence? Randall provides no specific examples or eye witness accounts of Black on white violence. Randall supports his claims by citing Dunning school graduate W. L. Fleming, who said Black militias in South Carolina destroyed grocery stores and broke into jails.³³ Given that Fleming was born in 1874, and these events preceded his birth, he is an unreliable source. Randall also fails to describe exactly how white militias responded to these disturbances, and at what point they got involved. Without this, his characterization of Black militias is spurious and fails to explore the nuances of historical events. Early historians often did not represent Black voices and perspectives when coming to conclusions about the past, and consequently tell an incomplete story.

Historians with "Sometimes Provoker, Sometimes Provoked" interpretations pondered broader perspectives. Singletary, for example, briefly quotes a Black historian, using his insight to support and inform his claims about white and Black militias.³⁴ By taking diverse experiences and expertise into account, these historians clarify that Black militias were not always aggressors, and were sometimes even the victims of violence. However, the second interpretive category is flawed because it still maintains the story that Black militias often sought out conflict, committed crimes and vandalism without reason, and whose

³³ Randall, "Reconstruction Debacle," 14-15.

³⁴ Singletary, "The Negro Militia," 184.

existence alone was detrimental to the peace. Recognizing nuance is important, and these historians take the first steps towards a nuanced telling of the past.

The final interpretive category presents the best historical interpretation because it considers firsthand accounts of Black people during Reconstruction, and uses those perspectives to come to a new, more nuanced characterization of Black militias. For example, Burton cites a letter written by Black lawyer and politician Paris Simkins (1849-1930) as a resource when he describes Black sentiment surrounding enrollment in Black militias.³⁵ Inclusion of Black perspectives makes possible a new understanding of the community-centered nature of Black militias and creates a more inclusive, holistic narrative. Burton's broader perspective, through the use of diverse primary sources, supports the overall narrative of the final interpretive category—that Black people were often victims of white violence and that violence was due to the narrow and racist perspectives of white people in the Reconstruction South.

The historians of the “Victims of White Violence” narrative are a diverse group, inclusive of women and Black historians who bring to the table a more diverse range of experiences and perspectives. This diversity is reflected in the new aspects of Reconstruction militias that these scholars investigate. Hadden explores Black militia's role as methods of community building and support—a line of investigation not found in earlier scholarship. Hennessey also provides insight when she describes the experiences of Black policemen—who were a form of militiamen—in a Southern, urban setting. Finally, Zuczek reexamined the previously told story about the Laurens County riot and came to the conclusion that Black people were not the ultimate aggressors. Each of these historians worked to uncover and tell the story of Black militias in Reconstruction more inclusively by incorporating diverse viewpoints with their nuanced understandings of the political and social climates of the time, and therefore they provide the best overall historical interpretation.

These more inclusive historians go beyond the white lens of the postwar South in the effort to tell the story that reflects the truth for the broadest number of people. When only white perspectives are considered, only white truths can be reflected. A more inclusive lens reveals that Black militias were not groups organized to incite violence, but rather to protect themselves against such violence. The historians in the third category also examine and challenge the work of earlier historians. Zuczek addresses the same story that Reynolds told and argues against the previous interpretation, valuing truth and critical inquiry over deference to prior historians. The efforts of historians to objectively consider

³⁵ Burton, “Race and Reconstruction,” 41.

every perspective on historical events leads them to a narrative that informs both history and our present-day condition. The pernicious nature of organized, systemic white violence against Black people infects America to this day. The present-day narrative around and the reality of police violence against Black people reflects the narratives told about white and Black militia conflicts from the first two interpretive categories. Those categories ignore and suppress stories about unprovoked white violence against Black militias, and, like in New Orleans, against Black communities in general. Nuanced understandings of the past require that historians challenge the stories told by their predecessors, and seek out perspectives that were previously ignored.

In the present day, as reflected by the *Washington Post* story about the FBI's false fatal police shooting data, the effort remains to hide the reality of organized, systemic, and unprovoked white violence against Black people. The narrative of Black people as the aggressors is also still used to excuse white violence against Black people. The justifications for the killing of Michael Brown exemplify that narrative. Suppressing the truth about white violence against Black people allows for the continued and unchecked assault and murder of Black people. For the sake of the lives and safety Black people in America, and for the good of all communities, the history of white aggression and Black counter organization must be examined through the most inclusive and comprehensive lens. In our modern context, learning the difference between aggression and self-protection and studying the ways that the perception of Black aggression has been woven into America's historical narrative is necessary for a clearer understanding of the world around us. It is also our best chance to overcome our history and achieve an equitable, peaceful future.

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