

STATE MILITARIZED VIOLENCE

Jared Story

Introduction (Jared Story):

- Les: Jared Story is an activist in Chattanooga who is visiting tonight to lead this class.
- I work with Concerned Citizens for Justice, which was founded in 1984 by four black women, one of whose father was murdered by the police in jail. There's never been justice in that case, in part because there is a racist at-large elected commission form of government in Chattanooga.
- After a few years of dormancy, the Trayvon Martin Case led us to reinvigorate CCJ as a black-led organization. Our first march included five-hundred people, which was huge for Chattanooga. We wanted to hold that energy and move forward.
- We're organizing to oppose police violence and to develop a Chattanooga People's Assembly.
- State Militarized Violence is the broad topic for tonight. I've narrowed it down to militarized police violence. Because of Ferguson, we want to put things in a broader historical context, including the War on Drugs, which has existed for a while.
- The Learning Objectives:
 - To broaden the discussion of militarized policing to include the full historical context (capitalism, colonialism, etc.)
 - To see how it is expressed in everyday policing, not just in major events like that in Ferguson
 - To think about how that context and the manifestations should affect our strategies for opposing militarized police violence

Overview of the History of Militarized Policing (Jared Story):

- When slaves ran away from early Portuguese colonies, volunteer militias were created to regulate slaves and prevent insurgencies by them. Eventually, every island in the Caribbean had regulations for slaves and eventually paid slave-catchers, including the English colonies. On Barbados, they had a full military force to patrol and control slaves which included free whites, indentured servants, and some free blacks.
- Slave Codes (collections of laws and policies) in each colony included rules and regulations concerning control of enslaved people.
- Some wealthy slave-owners from Barbados who established the colony of South Carolina brought the established policies with them; other English colonies also followed the pattern.
- Whenever African Americans outnumbered white people in a community or colony, the people in power passed laws to stop alliances between indigenous and enslaved people.
- The slave patrols routinely searched slave homes and gatherings. There was a lot of surveillance.
- At first, slavery wasn't wholly racialized. Whiteness was perceived as a category to separate European indentured servants (people required to work for seven years or more for the person who paid for their passage from Europe to an American colony) from the enslaved people by giving them some rights and involving them in slave patrols.
- When the northern colonies in the first half of the nineteenth century industrialized with the help of the capital/wealth created by enslaved workers, they developed "Victorian" (prudish) standards of morality and imposed night watches to control crime and regulate indigenous, poor, and working people.
- The night watchers became a form of police. After some riots and other problems, professional police, beginning in London, became more common.
- After the Civil War, the functions of the slave patrols were divided up so local police departments dealt with local crime issues. The most violent enforcement was taken over by vigilante groups. The two worked together.

- The new police forces, particularly in the North, were quickly coopted by political forces and controlled by politicians. They became more authoritarian.
- Some of the first attempts to reform police involved professionalizing police. That involved some forms of militarization. Some of the reformers had been involved in opposing insurgencies overseas.
- Vollmer in the Philippines was one of those reformers. He wanted to eliminate arbitrary power by having standards of professionalism. That insulated the police from the community criticism and control. Once professionalized, the discipline and the accountability were internalized for that institution.
- The Great Depression led to renewed working class resistance, which also led to stronger police repression and violence, especially against resisters of class oppression.
- In the thirties, J. Edgar Hoover encouraged the police to see activists as internal threats to security who had to be stopped.
- After World War II, O. W. Wilson, a protégé of Vollmer, was involved in militarizing the German police forces after the war. Military hierarchies came into the police forces and other militarized institutions.
- Accountability was supposed to increase along with professionalism increased.
- In the sixties, there was violent oppression by the police against the Civil Rights Movement and the anti-war movement. Cooperation between local and national police forces.
- There were a lot of demands raised around police brutality.
- The LBJ Administration declared a war on crime, with an agency to cooperate between law enforcement and special operations overseas (counter-insurgency). U. S. police training the overseas people and vice-versa.
- Many practices that we consider standard (such as stop and frisk) came from overseas practices.
- After the riots in the sixties, the Kerner Commission recommended that the police shift away from the more violent practices like hitting people with batons and shooting into crowds and switch to non-lethal chemical weapons like pepper spray. To use more disciplined, military practices, except that led to more riot gear.
- All of this was influenced by the Cold War anti-communism and a desire to avoid creating martyrs or politicizing people. But their arriving with the riot gear still politicized people.
- SWAT teams were created in the late sixties.
- Nixon declared the war on drugs. Reagan intensified the War on Drugs in the eighties and the Contra War led to crack in the black communities.
- September 11 led to the War on Terror and the Department of Homeland Security, which led to more militarization. Also learning from occupying forces around the world.
- As we move further into the topic, we may discover some elements I left out of this history.

What things about militarized police violence are common threads carried through from historic state violence?

Round Robin: When you hear the term militarized police, what is the first thing that comes to mind (personal, past, public, whatever)?

- 1: As a whole, slavery ending meant the enforcers didn't have anything to do. Free labor was replaced by chain gangs and later by the practices now called the New Jim Crow. Police involvement in stopping young black men for jaywalking. Currently, we have the same processes of stopping and frisking young black men for no reason.
- 2; Sometimes blondes are stopped as well, depending on the neighborhood. Drugs are still big in America. One white man was arrested in Buckhead and then they found cocaine.

- 3: I think of folks organizing and protesting and then seeing police in full riot-gear against crowds which may have been peaceful.
- 4: The first thing I think about surprised me. I thought about a cultural festival held every year in Chattanooga. It used to be a black community happy celebration. Because of the militarization of the police, it changed to having a curfew at sundown and police wearing SWAT gear and pushing people off the street. Bringing in the tanks. It led to our feeling differently about ourselves.
- 5: Some of us are choosing to live under a police state, a military state for safety. It's been a long time since I thought of policemen as peace-keepers instead of instigators in dress. They are now threatening instead of protectors.
- 6: I think about singing on a line while the police are in Ferguson. State police being given military grade weapons, whether they use them or not. They use them on our communities.
- 7: I had to go into another country, Greece, to hear about border checkpoints inside the city of Athens. Cops do what border officials do elsewhere in the world.
- 8: However they are dressed, the police function as agents of the state. They are in service to some entity to maintain the status quo. With the increased militarization, the desire to demonstrate is an exercise of power. The more people are intimidated, the more they keep control.
- 9: I remember, as a child, being taught in elementary readers that "the policeman is your friend," which made sense only because I was white and lived in a relatively elite neighborhood in the Jim Crow South. The father of a friend from a small, close community in the Catskills in New York was like that story-book policeman. If he saw someone who was drunk, he put him to bed. Later, before there were Storm Troopers in Star Wars, I saw members of the Oakland TAC Squad. They did not look or act like they would be my friend.
- 2: A friend in his mid-thirties came here from Australia. He described being in a bar fight in a rough bush area. He had to stab a drunk man who came into this house. The cops came without guns and mediated the situation by talking to him and taking the man to the hospital. Around Five Points in downtown Atlanta, cops have machine guns on regular days. They have scopes in the backs of cars. That's there before anything starts to invoke fear. They are using military tactics on us even though we are regular citizens. War tactics with no war.
- 10: I was part of military resistance in Olympia, Washington. They had, at one point, stopped military shipments for some time. The group figured out who a military spy was within the activist group. He was connected to a Fusion Center in Seattle, an infrastructure for law enforcement to share information. He was coming to our meetings, communicating with Homeland Security, the local police, the local school cops. It's illegal and there's a lawsuit pending about that practice. Some of it was comical: what they recorded about ordinary interactions and statements. Their emails showed they were getting off on the drama. It's more often scary.
- 11: I was part of a Title program in school, when police came in daily, but it did not feel good, because of how it looks and sounds and feels to have cops around. I was also part of the big shut-down of Seattle in 1999, two years before 9/11. Because we could surprise them, their reaction was more violent. We researched later and learned they were buying things from a weapons supplier to get what they wanted within twenty-four hours. We can think about when and where the public and private connection happens. The exchanges happen throughout history. The Seattle Police Department was sent around the country to control other departments. The heavy militarization happened most after 9/11, but the infrastructure was there earlier.
- 12: There is the contradiction of the military being an agent of state control and police supposedly being there to support justice. They're not supposed to be the same. It's weird that militarizing police doesn't seem so strange anymore.

- 13: I think about the distinctions being less, with the military becoming more police-like and vice-versa, as in Iraq where they are enforcing control in occupied areas. The blurring between the two shows they have never been that distinct, as seen in the connections between Ferguson and Palestine. The maintenance of that empire.
- 14: I think first of the War on Drugs. I've been stopped thousands of times by the cops in different cities. I took a Megabus to D. C. We stopped in Virginia and I pissed next to an apple tree. I looked over my shoulder expecting police.
- 15: What prepares you for the police makes me remember in middle school or earlier when going through a metal detector and being patted down and having police officers in and outside of the school, making students feel that we were the perpetrators. Training us how to deal with the police before we went out into the world. When I visited white schools, I saw how different that was. Anyone could walk into the school. Being bothered by the police comes to seem normal.

Small groups to discuss three topics

1. Common threads through time in all forms of policing:

- 1: Hassling people for vagrancy has been common, with close relationships between private and local militia, even in Grant Park where there is a private security patrol. One of the institutions police enforce is the existing social hierarchy. What does it take to train someone to be a policing agent? Partly, the names given to different groups to not see people as regular humans. There are differences between who sees police as common dangers and those who don't that affects the ability of police to keep different communities from uniting. There is still the same purpose to not allow the relationships that threaten the powers that be.
- 2: Taking away people's humanity, as in Vietnam, calling the people geeks. Having to name people to keep them from being
- 3: Fox News talks about "those protestors."
- 4: "Police" has become a verb, showing how many different groups can do it.

2. Differences over time:

- Normalized reactions to militarized police. Police violence against non-violent protestors. Now they come out automatically; it's seen as a sane response. We see the cop or police in multiple roles. High action films that romanticize them. The development of weapons over time. Police spying is faster and easier now. More spaces to infiltrate. Fear of the police state is happening at a younger age.
- 1: We are desensitized about good or bad cops, so we get used to "what they do." We may be upset about a specific reaction, but it's seen as their job, when it's not supposed to be. Putting too much power into them. They look intimidating. Giving them ammunition to walk around like that because we accept it.
- Incentives because of the prison industrial complex to incarcerate mass numbers. A caste system of the people in prison. It's normalized to put them there.

3. Impact on our demands, strategies, and tactics against the state:

- 1: What might we do in our resistance that we don't do now? In the past social movements could do more than we can because of the added surveillance. We're fighting an army. What could we learn from past social movements? Are there any historic models we could follow? A past change that was as drastic as what we would want? We're moved by seeing a cop rescue a cop. Or TV cops solving paranormal crimes. Do we want to identify with the cops? Espionage seeming true. Body cameras: Do they increase accountability or just increase their professionalization and therefore decreasing their accountability? During the popular phase of the Ukraine uprising, there was a picture of an older woman standing up to the police.
- 2: Often social movements model themselves on the existing paradigm.

- 3: Often we do what reflects the bureaucracy. We decide what's important by the standards of the officials. How can we have strategies and demands that don't reflect a police state?
- 4: At the youth assembly, we stressed that we are trained to enforce the status quo. When some youth raised the idea of free childcare in high schools, the group started setting limitations regulating each other quickly. If you've always had police in your schools, it will seem a big shift to do without any policing.
- 5: Uniforms on policing officials in school have to go. Also regulations that criminalize minors for not following school policies.
- 6: you have to meet sophistication with sophistication, especially when attacking a police-state. Young working-class children in Atlanta face seven different kinds of police each day: MARTA police, state troopers, Capitol Police, SROx in schools. It's not about their not thinking that hierarchy sucks. They know that. They've had so many years of police states that have not been overcome. It's hard to imagine something different. Our demands can be limited because we don't realize how deep the issues are. Two officers beat up someone on camera but received their jobs back. What happened in Ferguson is legal. It's so hard to imagine abolition, so we seek the next best thing. Body cams seemed good at first, then I realized that would help them surveil us with their cameras. What does transformation mean in a police state? We need to have those conversations first.
- 7: It's important that there is an agent of the "law," as during slavery. What we're challenging the police as part of a criminal entity, even though the state. Their actions are criminal. The Human Rights Narrative. They are like police in Nazi Germany or South Africa. In whose interests are they serving? We are fighting against a criminal enterprise. We need more literature pointing out the contradictions. The reports go annually to the U. N. on Human Rights, but documenting these things helps. Pointing out that they are the criminals. This is why it's dangerous to watch the cop on film, as he becomes the entertainer.
- 8: What's imaginable. [something to be copied here?] We need more discussions about what could be another kind of society to be able to transform.

Small group break out questions:

1. What things about contemporary militarized police are common threads carried through from historic state violence directed at communities of color, women, workers, immigrants, LGBTQ folks, and other oppressed groups, by police.
2. What things about contemporary militarized police are different or intensified from historic state violence directed at communities of color, workers, immigrants, queer folks, and other oppressed groups, by police.
3. How does the continuation of historic trends and the contemporary militarization of police impact the demands, strategies, and tactics that we use against the state?

Question 1:

1. Vagrancy/ loitering/ getting hassles
2. Private/local militia historic and Grant Park
3. Training to become police- to see/not see people
4. Distinction between people consulting being policed/ not policed- to break/ prevent alliances
5. Demoralizing/ dehumanization naming

Question 2:

Normalized reaction to militarized police- acceptance

Media/action films glorify violence

Different weapons- lethal

Spying- more spaces, quicker, easier

Dealing with militarized state at younger ages

Intimidating appearance

Incentives to mass incarceration

Caste system of people in prison

Question 3:

Limits because of surveillance

Are there historic models of change to the extent we want police to change?

Do we romanticize, want to like the cops, how do we challenge this?

Do body cams increase accountability to increase the insulation through professionalism?

What's imaginable is or can be limited by what we know/don't know about systems/history

Fighting against criminal enterprise

Continue the narrative that cops are the criminals violating our human rights