SELECTED EXCERPTS FROM VANITY FAIR SEPT 2020 INCLUDING:
Ta-Nehisi Coates Guest-Edits THE GREAT FIRE, a Special Issue
— Angela Davis and Ava DuVernay on Black Lives Matter
— Breonna Taylor's Beautiful Life, in the Words of Her Mother
— How America's Brotherhood of Police Officers Stifles Reform

EDITOR'S LETTER
SEPTEMBER 2020 ISSUE

TA-NEHISI COATES ON *VANITY FAIR*'S SEPTEMBER ISSUE, THE GREAT FIRE

"Whiteness thrives in darkness," Coates writes. **"So it was with the slave narrative. So it is with the cell phone."**

BY TA-NEHISI COATES

August 24, 2020

Last year Chicago poet Eve L. Ewing published *1919*, a volume that channels her city's Red Summer into blues. It is a magical work. The voices of house-keepers and stockyard hands are summoned. The thoughts of trains carrying black people north are conjured up. The doom of a black boy is told to the rhythm of a jump rope. The centerpiece of this bracing work is "True Stories About the Great Fire," a poem inspired by the belief among white Chicagoans that the first Great Migration to the city was "the worst calamity that had struck the city since the Great Fire" of 1871, which took hundreds of lives and burned out the heart of the city. The implications of this equation are haunting. Once a people become a "calamity," all means of dealing with them are acceptable. I have not yet watched George Floyd's murder in its entirety, but I have seen enough of the genre to know the belief in black people as disaster, as calamity, as a Great Fire upon the city, has not yet waned.

I don't know if there is a better way of explaining the police publicly torturing a man on a bright city street. I don't know how else to think about the killing of Walter Scott, save that an agent of the state had considered him an offense to God. I don't know what explains Botham Jean nor Atatiana Jefferson, killed in their own homes, save some perverted act of fire prevention. I see the face of Elijah McClain—his deep brown skin, his Mona Lisa smile, his eyes flush with nothing so much as the wide, willing magic of youth—and I think there can be no justification for erasing this young man, save the belief that he is not a man at all, that he is both more and less; that he is Mike Brown, bulking up to run through bullets, that he is Trayvon Martin, irradiated by Skittles and iced tea; that he is Amadou Diallo, whose wallet glinted like a gun. I don't know how else to comprehend the jackboots bashing in Breonna Taylor's door and spraying her home with bullets, except the belief that they were fighting some Great Fire—demonic, unnatural, inhuman.

IF TERROR AND SELF-DECEPTION EXPLAIN THE PRESENT CRAVEN ORDER, THEY CANNOT EXPLAIN THE UPRISING AGAINST IT.

The logic here is obvious. To plunder a people of everything, you must plunder their humanity first. To despoil the peasantry of Europe, it was necessary to regard them as a class condemned to "eat thistles and briars" and "go naked on all fours." Only after the English told themselves they were warring against cannibals and drinkers of blood could they devastate the Irish. To massacre the children of the Cheyenne and Arapaho would be a great crime. But to exterminate the "nits" who were to grow into "lice" was wholly permissible. And so it is with the children of the enslaved, regarded, to this very day, as a Great Fire consuming white maidenhood, immolating morality, and otherwise reducing great civilizations to ashes. There is an insidious cost to this—a man invents a monster to justify his brutality, only to find the monster is within. For fear of Fire, America has turned its worldly affairs over to a barbarian game show host, presently selling charlatanism while pandemic races across the land.

This story is old—older than 1919, and older than 1619. But if terror and self-deception explain the present craven order, they cannot explain the uprising against it. To date, that uprising, which did not begin this year, spans from Ferguson to Baltimore to Minneapolis to Salt Lake City to London to Tokyo. The implications have been profound. The killers of Corey Jones and Laquan McDonald are in prison. In India, the makers of skin lightener are being forced to face the implication of their product. In the United Kingdom, statues of slave traders are falling. The private army sent to Portland has been defeated. Washington, D.C.'s football team, which once pledged itself to a racist banner, has been rendered literally nameless.

This is a movement with all the problems of any movement—surely the absurd portrait of a banker taking a knee before a vault will not be its last perversion. And yet the math is clarifying: Black Lives Matter was still meeting disapproval in the wake of Heather Heyer's murder, but by the time of George Floyd's, those trends had reversed. Large majorities of Americans now acknowledge that racism and police brutality are problems. Something is happening, and I think to understand it, we must better understand the nature of this Great Fire.

WHEN WILL THE WALL OF MOMS BE BREACHED? HOW MANY HEATHER HEYERS CAN A PRIVILEGED CLASS TAKE?

Last month congressman Ted Yoho decided to publicly deride his colleague Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez as a "fucking bitch," and fellow congressman Roger Williams lent an assist. But more telling than the act was Yoho's denial that any such words had been uttered. For Yoho to admit that he'd committed such a vile act would have degraded him. For Williams to have stood by and watched the vile act would have degraded him further. Evil exacts a toll on both the donor and the recipient. Thomas Jefferson, oracle of American liberty, was most sublime when lamenting the effects of enslavement on enslavers such as himself.

“There must doubtless be an unhappy influence on the manners of our people produced by the existence of slavery among us,” wrote Jefferson. “The man must be a prodigy who can retain his manners and morals un-depraved by such circumstances.”

One way to both do evil and preserve one’s “manners and morals” is to emit a smog of euphemisms—*extraordinary rendition, enhanced interrogation, peculiar institution, heritage not hate*. In the wake of Bloody Sunday, a dissembling George Wallace recast native Alabaman John Lewis as an “outside agitator.” But beneath a rain of blows, Lewis, blazing at the highest flame, illuminated the stark brutality of Jim Crow for the whole world to see. Whiteness thrives in darkness. It has to—because to assert itself in full view, to admit to calling a congresswoman a “fucking bitch” to her face, is to have one’s own “manners and morals” degraded. A thousand Eric Garners will be tolerated, so long as they are strangled to death in the shadows of the American carceral system, the most sprawling gulag known to man. And so evil does its business in the shadows, ever-fearing not the heat of the Great Fire but the light. To clearly see what this country has done, what it is still doing, to construct itself is too much for any human to take. So it was with the slave narrative. So it is with the cell phone. The reaction of the beholder is physical. They double over in disgust. They wail on the floor. They punch the air. They pace the room until they are at last compelled out of their sanctuary, out of their privilege, out into the streets, out into the diseased air, to face off with the legionaries who guard the power implicit in their very names.

VOTING ALONE HAS NEVER BEEN ENOUGH TO PROTECT ANYTHING—LEAST OF ALL THE VOTE ITSELF.

It is an impressive thing, this Great Fire, but it is not omnipotent. It is endangered not just by corporate co-option, but by those who venerate “the art of the possible” like an 11th commandment. Even now it is said that only on November 3 will we truly know how bright the Fire burns. “Don’t boo. Vote,” we are told, when in reality we should do both. In 2018, New York State elected a slate of liberal legislators. The repeal of 50-a, a law which sealed police misconduct records, topped their list of reforms. But it wasn’t until June 12—amid a national movement of protest—that the political will amassed to take the law off the books. Voting is civic hygiene—both essential and insufficient. And voting alone has never been enough to protect anything—least of all the vote itself. In 1868, America cried black suffrage and Reconstruction; eight years later it chose Red Shirts and Redemption. In this way the path to a post-racist democracy was rejected, and America set down the dark road to 1919.

Thus from the vantage of America’s own record, the question is not will the protesters get out and vote, it’s will the voters continue to protest? How many Navy veterans will give an arm to force their country to keep its words? When will the wall of moms be breached? How many Heather Heyers can a privileged class take? Already we hear the music—*Trump is the first racist president. This is not who we are. America is better than this*—seeking to take us back to a world where Malice Green and Eleanor Bumpurs were simply the price of doing business. I would like to think it is different this time, and indeed there is math that

says so. It must be remembered that in 2016, the candidate of white supremacy lost the popular vote. It is possible, then, that for the first time in American history, a legitimate anti-racist majority is emerging and thus giving birth to a world beyond Founding Father idolatry, where we can seek not merely to defeat the incumbent president, but to erase his entire philosophy out of human existence.

Certainly the activists, artists, and writers assembled in these pages hope that such a world is in the offing, full knowing that we can never depend on it. We are enrolled in the longest war, ancestral, generational, impatiently waiting for the Fire to take effect. “And we can wait a long time,” as Ewing tells us. “And the Fire can too.”

MORE STORIES FROM *V.F.*’S SEPTEMBER ISSUE

— Ta-Nehisi Coates Guest-Edits THE GREAT FIRE, a Special Issue
— Breonna Taylor’s Beautiful Life, in the Words of Her Mother
— An Oral History of the Protest Movement’s First Days
— Celebrating 22 Activists and Visionaries on the Forefront of Change
— Novelist Jesmyn Ward on Witnessing Death Through a Pandemic and Protests
— Angela Davis and Ava DuVernay on Black Lives Matter
— How America’s Brotherhood of Police Officers Stifles Reform

Ta-Nehisi Coates is the award-winning author of the nonfiction best sellers *The Beautiful Struggle, We Were Eight Years in Power,* and *Between the World and Me,* as well as a novel, *The Water Dancer*.

LIVING HISTORY
SEPTEMBER 2020 ISSUE

AVA DUVERNAY INTERVIEWS ANGELA DAVIS ON THIS MOMENT—AND WHAT CAME BEFORE

The scholar and activist has spent more than 50 years working for social justice. This summer, society started to catch up.

AVA DuVERNAY: I was reading an interview in which you talked about something that's been on my mind quite a bit lately. It's about this time we are in that I'll just call a racial reckoning. Do you feel that we could have encountered this moment in as robust a manner as we've felt it this summer without the COVID crisis having been the foundation? Could one have occurred with this much force without the other?

ANGELA DAVIS: This moment is a conjuncture between the COVID-19 crisis and the increasing awareness of the structural nature of racism. Moments like this do arise. They're totally unpredictable, and we cannot base our organizing on the idea that we can usher in such a moment. What we can do is take advantage of the moment. When George Floyd was lynched, and we were all witnesses to that—we all watched as this white policeman held his knee on George Floyd's neck for eight minutes and 46 seconds—I think that many people of all racial and ethnic backgrounds, who had not necessarily understood the way in which history is present in our lives today, who had said, "Well, I never owned slaves, so what does slavery have to do with me?" suddenly began to get it. That there was work that should have happened in the immediate aftermath of slavery that could have prevented us from arriving at this moment. But it did not happen. And here we are. And now we have to begin.

The protests offered people an opportunity to join in this collective demand to bring about deep change, radical change. Defund the police, abolish policing as we know it now. These are the same arguments that we've been making for such a long time about the prison system and the whole criminal justice system. It was as if all of these decades of work by so many people, who received no credit at all, came to fruition.

You understood the dangers of American policing, the criminalization of Black, native, and brown people, 50 years ago. Your activism and your scholarship has always been inclusive of class and race and gender and

sexuality. It seems we're at a critical mass where a majority of people are finally able to hear and to understand the concepts that you've been talking about for decades. Is that satisfying or exhausting after all this time?

I don't think about it as an experience that I'm having as an individual. I think about it as a collective experience, because I would not have made those arguments or engaged in those kinds of activisms if there were not other people doing it. One of the things that some of us said over and over again is that we're doing this work. Don't expect to receive public credit for it. It's not to be acknowledged that we do this work. We do this work because we want to change the world. If we don't do the work continuously and passionately, even as it appears as if no one is listening, if we don't help to create the conditions of possibility for change, then a moment like this will arrive and we can do nothing about it. As Bobby Seale said, we will not be able to "seize the time." This is a perfect example of our being able to seize this moment and turn it into something that's radical and transformative.

I love that. I know that there's a lot of energy around how to keep the attention. But what you're saying is it needs to be happening in isolation of any outside forces. So that when the right time comes, there's a preparation that had already been in process. Don't think so much about sustaining the moment. Just always be prepared for the moment when it comes, because it will.

Exactly. I'm also thinking about your contributions. So many people have seen your work, your films: *13th* and the film on the Central Park Five.

THIS IS HOW THE WORLD CHANGES…AS A RESULT OF THE PRESSURE ORDINARY PEOPLE EXERT ON THE EXISTING STATE OF AFFAIRS.

***When They See Us*! I can't believe you know about it. I'm excited.**

Oh, my God. I've not only seen it, but I've encouraged other people to look at it. I saw that really moving conversation between the actors and the actual figures. All of that helps to create fertile ground. I don't think that we would be where we are today without your work and the work of other artists. In my mind, it's art that can begin to make us feel what we don't necessarily yet understand.

You've just made my life saying that. Thank you is not enough. There is a lot of talk about the symbols of slavery, of colonialism. Statues being taken down, bridges being renamed, buildings being renamed. Does it feel like performance, or do you think that there's substance to these actions?

I don't think there's a simple answer. It is important to point to the material manifestations of the history that we are grappling with now. And those statues are our reminders that the history of the United States of America is a history of racism. So it's natural that people would try to bring down those symbols.

If it's true that names are being changed, statues are being removed, it should also be true that the institutions are looking inward and figuring out how to radically transform themselves. That's the real work. Sometimes we assume the most important work is the dramatic work—the street demonstrations. I like the term that John Berger used: Demonstrations are "rehearsals for revolution." When we come together with so many people, we become aware of our capacity to bring about change. But it's rare that the actual demonstration itself brings about the change. We have to work in other ways.

I always love talking to you because you drop nine references in the conversation. You give me a reading list after from your citations. John Berger. Writing that down. One of the things that you've talked about that I hold on to is about diversity and inclusion. In many industries, especially the entertainment industry where I work, those are buzzwords. But I see them in the way that you taught me during our conversation for *13th*. These are reform tactics, not change tactics. The diversity and inclusion office of the studio, of the university, of whatever organization, is not the quick fix.

Absolutely. Virtually every institution seized upon that term, "diversity." And I always ask, "Well, where is justice here?" Are you simply going to ask those who have been marginalized or subjugated to come inside of the institution and participate in the same process that led precisely to their marginalization? Diversity and inclusion without substantive change, without *radical* change, accomplishes nothing.

"Justice" is the key word. How do we begin to transform the institutions themselves? How do we change this society? We don't want to be participants in the exploitation of capitalism. We don't want to be participants in the marginalization of immigrants. And so there has to be a way to think about the connection among all of these issues and how we can begin to imagine a very different kind of society. That is what "defund the police" means. That is what "abolish the police" means.

How can we apply that to the educational system?

Capitalism has to be a part of the conversation: global capitalism. And it's part of the conversation about education, because what we've witnessed is increasing privatization, and the emergence of a kind of hybrid: the charter schools. Privatization is why the hospitals were so unprepared [for COVID-19], because they function in accordance with the dictates of capital. They don't want to have extra beds because then that means that they aren't generating the profit. And why is it that they're asking children to go back to school? It's because of the economy. We're in a depression now, so they're willing to sacrifice the lives of so many people in order to keep global capitalism functioning.

I know that's a macro issue, but I think we cannot truly understand what is happening in the family where the parents are essential workers and are compelled to go to work and have no childcare. Not only should there be free education, but there should be free childcare and there should be free health care as well. All of these issues are coming to a head. This is, as you said, a racial reckoning. A reexamination of the role that racism has played in the creation of the United States of America. But I think we have to talk about

capitalism. Capitalism has always been racial capitalism. Wherever we see capitalism, we see the influence and the exploitation of racism.

We haven't been talking a lot about that period of Occupy. I think that when we look at how social movements develop, Occupy gave us new vocabularies. We began to talk about the 1 percent and the 99 percent. And I think that has something to do with the protests today. We should be very explicit about the fact that global capitalism is in large part responsible for mass incarceration and the prison industrial complex, as it is responsible for the migrations that are happening around the world. Immigrants are forced to leave their homelands because the system of global capitalism has made it impossible to live human lives. That is why they come to the U.S., that is why they come to Europe, seeking better lives.

How does it feel for a woman born into segregation to see this moment? What lessons have you gleaned about struggle?

That's a really big question. Perhaps I can answer it by saying that we have to have a kind of optimism. One way or another I've been involved in movements from the time I was very, very young, and I can remember that my mother never failed to emphasize that as bad as things were in our segregated world, change was possible. That the world would change. I learned how to live under those circumstances while also inhabiting an imagined world, recognizing that one day things would be different. I'm really fortunate that my mother was an activist who had experience in movements against racism, the movement to defend, for example, the Scottsboro Nine.

I've always recognized my own role as an activist as helping to create conditions of possibility for change. And that means to expand and deepen public consciousness of the nature of racism, of heteropatriarchy, pollution of the planet, and their relationship to global capitalism. This is the work that I've always done, and I've always known that it would make a difference. Not my work as an individual, but my work with communities who have struggled. I believe that this is how the world changes. It always changes as a result of the pressure that masses of people, ordinary people, exert on the existing state of affairs. I feel very fortunate that I am still alive today to witness this.

And I'm so glad that someone like John Lewis was able to experience this and see this before he passed away, because oftentimes we don't get to actually witness the fruits of our labor. They may materialize, but it may be 50 years later, it may be 100 years later. But I've always emphasized that we have to do the work as if change were possible and as if this change were to happen sooner rather than later. It may not; we may not get to witness it. But if we don't do the work, no one will ever witness it.

THE GREAT FIRE: A Special Issue, Edited by TA-NEHISI COATES

VANITY FAIR

SEPTEMBER 2020

BREONNA TAYLOR

A BEAUTIFUL LIFE

Painting by
AMY SHERALD

COVER STORY
SEPTEMBER 2020

THE LIFE BREONNA TAYLOR LIVED, IN THE WORDS OF HER MOTHER

In a series of interviews, the author spoke to Tamika Palmer to paint a picture of a full, loving life taken too soon.

BY TA-NEHISI COATES

Shortly after midnight March 13, strangers shot and killed Breonna Taylor in her own home. The strangers claimed to be investigating a drug case. The strangers found no drugs in Breonna Taylor's home. The strangers left their incident report almost totally blank.

Tamika Palmer is Breonna Taylor's mother. What follows is her attempt to illuminate the life that was taken. To grapple with the nature of strangers. To fill in the blanks.

Kenny calls me in the middle of the night. He says, *Somebody kicked in the door and shot Breonna*. I am dead asleep. I don't know what he's talking about. I jump up. I get ready, and I rush over to her house. When I get there, the street's just flooded with police—it's a million of them. And there's an officer at the end of the road, and I tell her who I am and that I need to get through there because something had happened to my daughter. She tells me I need to go to the hospital because there was two ambulances that came through, and the first took the officer and the second took whoever else was hurt. Of course I go down to the hospital, and I tell them why I am there. The lady looks up Breonna and doesn't see her and says, *Well, I don't think she's here yet*. I wait for about almost two hours. The lady says, *Well, ma'am, we don't have any recollection of this person being on the way*.

So I go back to the apartment. And I am able to get through the street a little more. And when I get up to the apartment, it's still taped off and roped up around. So I tell the officer there that I need to get in the apartment, that something is going on with my daughter. He tells me to hang tight. He tells me hang tight, he'll get a detective over there to talk to me.

It takes a little while for him to come. He introduces himself. I don't remember what his name actually is, but he kind of just goes on to ask me if I knew anybody who would want to hurt Breonna, or Kenny, or if I thought they were involved in anything. And I go, *Absolutely not*. Both of them got jobs. They go to work. They hang out with each other. That's about it. I ask where Kenny is, and the detective tells me, *Hold on. I'll be back*.

But it's about another hour or so before he comes back. He asks me if Breonna and Kenny had been having any problems or anything. I say, *Absolutely not. Kenny would never do anything to Breonna*. And then I say, *Where's Kenny. I need to talk to Kenny*. He says, *Well, Kenny's at one of our offices. He's trying to help us piece together what happened here tonight*. We are out there for a number of hours afterward. It's kind of chilly. I leave. I get coffee and come back. I'm still standing out there waiting. It's about 11 in the morning when the officer comes over and says that they are about done and they are wrapping up, and we will be able to get in there once they are finished. I say, *Where's Breonna, why won't anybody say where Breonna is*? He says, *Well, ma'am, she's still in the apartment*. And I know what that means.

I'm from Michigan. I spent a lot of time in Detroit. But I grew up mostly in Grand Rapids. There was always stuff happening up there with the police. I was always hearing about them harassing black people or just always something. When I was about 13, I was outside one day with some friends. And the police just came up out of nowhere and started yelling. It was a gang of us, boys and girls, but they wasn't talking to any of us, the girls. They were just kind of screaming at all the boys, *Get on the ground! Get your stupid asses on the ground*! And so we all were like, *What are you doing! We didn't even do anything*! But there'd be stuff like that every day.

I remember being in the car, driving down a street, and being told if the police are behind us, don't turn around and look at them. And if we did get pulled over, don't say anything. Don't move, because they'll try and do something to us. I remember just kind of being told to stay away from the police, like you don't want to have no problems with the police or give them a reason to want to have a problem with you. And I don't really remember people ever calling the police. I remember people *not wanting to call the police*. I remember stuff happening and somebody would be like, *Call the police*, and people were like, *Fuck the police. They not helping us*. I just kind of steered clear of them. I tried not to be in trouble. I got the occasional speeding ticket or something. But for the most part, I never really had to deal with them a lot. I stayed out of their way. When I came to Louisville, it was the same thing.

KENNY CALLS ME IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT. HE SAYS, SOMEBODY KICKED IN THE DOOR AND SHOT BREONNA.

My mother was born in Alabama. My grandmother died when my mother was 13. She was shuffled around through family. And then, she finally ended up in Grand Rapids with her aunt and uncle when she was in, I want to say, high school. Yes, it was high school. I do know that. My mother took care of everybody. I can remember probably almost everybody in our family living with us at different times. Or even when they didn't, everybody dropped their kids off at my mother's house—cousins and everything. It would at least be six of us at all times, but sometimes it was more. So it was always a houseful. My mother had two sons. And she took in her husband's kids and adopted some kids. And so, I had sisters from that.

My mother cooked all the time. We're all pretty good cooks because of her. We always, whenever there was anything going on, we all had a part to play in cooking and whatever we had to do in the kitchen. My part? Just depended. Holiday-wise, I was in charge of whatever was going on with the dressing. I had to dice up the onions and celery and green peppers and mix it all up and season it. To be honest, I always remember cooking. I don't really remember when I started, because whenever my mother was in the kitchen, she had me in there doing something with her. We did chores. We would clean up. We had to. My mother worked hard—she was a nurse's aide. But she was sick a lot. I think she had her first stroke or heart attack, she was like 33 years old.

I was a popular kid at school. I don't know how I became popular or why I was that person. Because it wasn't like I was into sports or doing anything like that. But all my life, even to this day, people kind of flocked to me. I don't know what that is or was. I learned to double Dutch at school. I started when I was around 10 or 12. I had to get my coordination right. But you get popped with that rope a couple times, then you get it together. You gotta watch the rope. You gotta watch the side where you're trying to jump in. When that side of the rope goes back down, that's when you want to try and get in. You need a superlong rope. You gotta learn to turn. You can't be double-handed because then you're going to mess up the flow and such when somebody's jumping and then they going to go off on you because double Dutch is serious. It's a serious thing, and so if you double-handed, somebody's going off on you. Double-handed? Well there's a rhythm to turning the rope right, so if you don't got this rhythm, they call it double-handed, and it makes it hard for people to get in there and get their rhythm, and so then they got a problem with you. I'm pretty good. I ain't doing no flips or nothing, but I can switch up my footwork a little bit, but I ain't flipping and all of that. Double Dutch is serious. There would be double Dutch teams, so people would be teaching you all of this. Even later with Breonna, anything we did, we was playing double Dutch.

For whatever reason, my mother told me that my dad was dead. I asked my mother a lot about how he passed away, about who he was, *Do I look like him*? and *Did he pass when I was a baby*? I asked those types of questions, but she just wasn't trying to answer. And so

it was just one of those things like, Oh, I just didn't have a dad. And I remember one night, when I was 12, I was at my aunt's house and it was so weird. There was this guy and he kept staring at me, right? And I remember saying something to my mom about it because he just kept staring. And she was like, *Oh, you're fine*. She just brushed it off. And so, later on in the evening, I remember being in the kitchen doing something. And so, the man who was staring came in there and I remember him talking to me a bit, just asking stuff about me. And then he asked me if I knew who he was. And I said, *No*. And so, then he told me that he was my dad and I said, *No you're not. My dad is dead. So yeah*…. And he just stood there and my aunt, she was like, *No. That's your dad*. We lived around the corner from her house, and I remember leaving and walking home by myself. But my aunt ended up driving around and getting me and making me come back.

So I talked to him and he introduced me to his wife because she was there, and he said that he wanted to hang out with me some the next day if I would let him, and then we would just go from there. And so the next day I did hang out a little bit. He took me shopping and stuff. And so, then he asked me if I would be willing to come and visit him sometime. And I remember freezing. And he was like, *Well, you don't have to right away, but we'll come and see you more first until you get comfortable to come*. And it just went from there.

I liked Detroit. I started spending summers and breaks there, we would get spring break and winter breaks, and all that stuff. I liked it, but it was weird. It was never like I had to go or, *Now, you've got a dad and you have to do this*. But in the beginning it was just weird…. But then I started to look forward to it. And it became, *Oh, I'm ready to be there*. I was ready for my breaks to come. Sometimes it was just like…getting away from Grand Rapids. There was a big difference from being at my mom's house and being at my dad's house. It was less hood. In Grand Rapids, people mostly rent their homes. Where my Dad lived, everybody pretty much owned their homes. My dad worked for Chrysler until he retired.

I used to always tell my daughters, Breonna and Juniyah, how lucky they were. See I didn't grow up where we were being told how college was important or that you needed to be doing these things to have a career. But I always would stay on my girls. I have this thing I say to them all the time, *If you don't work, you don't eat*. Meaning, you want to be the best at whatever it is you want to be. If you want to be a hairdresser, be the hairdresser that owns the shop. I don't care what it is. You want to just be the best at whatever it is. And so you will have to go to school, you will have to learn things about yourself and your business and whatever it is you want to do in life. But when I look back, nobody ever said those things to us. I learned them later from being around my dad and them. Because my sisters both, they went to college, and I watched. There were certain things I never wanted for my girls. I never wanted them to feel distanced from me. I always felt like I had to take care of them. So I was just ready to work and do whatever I needed to do to make sure

that, like, we wasn't a family moving around all the time. Like, I just didn't want them to have to see the things that I saw or feel the way that I felt coming up.

I got my first job when I was like 15. Babysitting. Well, I always babysat a little bit, even up before 15. Like my mother's friends, you know? We would babysit their kids. But then, I actually went out and got my own babysitting job for this family who had these three little boys. And so, that was my thing. And then, I did that all the way up until I had a baby. I had my own money. It was great. What did I do with the money? Shoes. I have a freaking shoe problem. And my kids have a freaking shoe problem. I remember buying my first pair of Lottos on my own. I thought I was it! I was somebody. You couldn't tell me nothing. Sometimes we would catch the bus out to the mall to get shoes. Or we had a guy we knew, a neighborhood guy. He had a store—Timmy D's. And he was not far from the hood. We would all gang up together, and walk up to Timmy D's.

I USED TO ALWAYS TELL MY DAUGHTERS HOW LUCKY THEY WERE. I DIDN'T GROW UP BEING TOLD HOW COLLEGE WAS IMPORTANT. BUT I ALWAYS WOULD STAY ON MY GIRLS.

I met Breonna's father at school. Me and his sister were best friends. Were we boyfriend and girlfriend? Hell no. My first time out the starting gate, I just got pregnant. Like literally. It was terrible, because from the moment I was 12, I had already decided in my life how I never wanted kids. Two things I figured out by then—I never wanted to be in love and I never wanted kids. And so to find out, at 16, I was pregnant was like, *What the hell? That can't be right*. But my mother kept saying I had this bad attitude or something. And I was like, *I don't know what you're talking about*. She made me take a test. And so then I went to school, and then by the time I came home, she was like, *Yeah. You know you're pregnant, right*? And I'm like, *Oh, that's impossible*. My mother was shocked. I hung out with all the boys, but I was very tomboyish. I wasn't, like, boy-crazy. I remember her asking me how I got pregnant. And I told her I didn't know. And she was asking me who was I pregnant by. And I said I didn't know. But my friend—Breonna's father's sister—told my mother. My older sister was sick at the time. And she wanted kids. And she couldn't have kids. And so she just was like, *You've got to have this baby. And I'll help you take care of it. You can just give it to me*. And I was like, *I'm not giving you a baby*. But we didn't know how much longer she would be around. And so she kind of talked me into the whole *you can do this* thing. She passed two years after Breonna was born.

I ended up having an emergency C-section, because I had been in labor for like eighteen and a half hours. Breonna was stuck. It was this big ordeal. And so I had an emergency C-section, and apparently I was asleep forever. Then all of a sudden, I woke up. And they were like, *Do you want to hold your baby*? I'm like, *What*? But I remember holding her and thinking like, *Oh…I'm responsible for her. And I got to do something different*. And I

remember thinking how people were waiting for me to screw this up. And I was like, *No. I'm not screwing this one up. Yeah. I got this*. But my whole world had changed. I had to figure life out. Because I think prior to that, I was an average, everyday kid. Didn't have a care in the world. Hanging out with our friends, just kind of moseying on through life. I had no cares. And so here I am now with this kid, and it was like, *You're responsible for somebody else. And you got to do something different*.

There were all the people I had to cut out because I didn't want a lot of people around my kid, you know what I'm saying? I didn't really lose any friends. But it changed how I dealt with my friends. I was the first in my group to have a kid, so I had to grow up a lot faster than they did. Breonna's dad wasn't really around. He was young and stupid himself. I graduated from high school and then I started working in a nursing home. I worked full-time and my mom would keep Breonna, so I didn't have any problems with dealing with day care or stuff like that. I was a nurse aide, taking care of older people. It was nice but it would get sad, because they die. And some of these people you get really attached to and some of them don't have family. So it would break your heart sometimes.

Breonna was a good baby. She wasn't a crier. She was a happy baby. She started walking early—like at nine months, so she was just a little person early. I always say she had an old soul. She liked listening to the blues with my mother. She would sing me the blues. It was hilarious. She used to sing "Last Two Dollars." That was her song. We always had these Christmas gatherings. Everybody would be at my dad's. They would do karaoke. And one time my dad said to Breonna, *What do you want to sing*? And she said, *I want to sing Johnnie Taylor, "Last Two Dollars*." Everybody just fell out, like *Where did this little girl come from*? And everyone was like, *I got to see this*. And they put this song on and gave her the mic and she was just going at it. And I was like, *Oh my God*! Everybody loved Breonna. Who wouldn't love a baby? But literally she was everybody's baby. She was close with my dad. My sister helped out. I remember we would get into arguments because it could be a holiday or something coming up. You want to go and get the baby an outfit and some shoes. She would beat me to the store. Like, *I got her this. She's wearing this*. And I'm like, *Dude! I got this*. And she's like, *Nah. She's wearing this*. And *blah, blah, blah*. Yeah. But it was great.

My brother, Anthony, used to hang out with this motorcycle club. And I would say to him, *Why are you hanging out with these dirty people? What are you doing*? And he'd be like, *Dude, it's not even like that*. So somehow I ended up hanging out with him one night and I realized, *Oh my God, these people in these clubs, there's police officers, there's nurses, there's all different types of people who just enjoy riding motorcycles*. And then, I was like, *Man, I'm going to get me a bike*. I sure did get one—a Honda CBR. I was just nervous about riding, learning how to stop and go. It's a process to learn how to hold the

clutch in and give it enough gas, but then it's like, *Okay*. It didn't take me long at all. I'm in a club now called No Haterz. What do I like about it? The freedom. I don't really care to ride from stop sign to stop sign. But when you're able to get on a country road or on the highway and be just cruising, you really enjoy it.

I taught Breonna how to ride a motorcycle. The first major thing I taught her was to stop and go. You hear people tell you, *If you can drive a stick, you can drive a motorcycle*. That's not a true statement. They're two different things. I don't know why people say that. But you do have a clutch, which is in your left hand. You've got to be able to let off this clutch and give the bike enough power to go without stalling it out. Breonna was a quick student. She was nervous though. She always worried about perfecting any and everything. But she had it. She dropped my bike a couple of times, though. We were in the parking lot. She couldn't go too fast. I was trying to teach her how to turn around on the bike instead of just stopping and walking it back. But she stalled the bike out once like that and dropped it. She used to say, *We're going to buy us some new matching bikes, Mom*. That was her thing.

What am I looking for in a bike? I want to know what type of cc's it has. And I'm looking at its height, because most bikes are too tall for me, so I usually have the bike lowered so that my feet can be on the ground a little bit, or at least where I can control it. You can get all kinds of features—rims, custom paint jobs, lights that change while you're riding. Music is a big thing. My bike was lowered and stretched out, so it has this extended swing arm on the back of it. It was built for racing. It has a 1,300-cc motor, one of the bigger motors that you can get on a bike, but then they did some motor work to it and made it even faster.

I first came down to Louisville on a ride with a bunch of friends. We came down from Grand Rapids for the Kentucky Derby. We spent the weekend here and the whole vibe was just different. And so then I told my friend I'm going to come back. So I ended up coming to visit her that next January. And I remember when I got here, I was like, *Dude, where's the snow*? And she was like, *Girl, it don't snow like that here. Shoot, it snows here they're going to shut the city down*. I was like, *What? I've got to live here*. So I went home and told everybody I was moving to Kentucky. But everybody was like, *Shut up, you ain't going nowhere*. I guess that's what so many people say back home, *Oh, I'm moving somewhere*. And they ain't going nowhere. But I was like, *Yeah, okay. I'm telling you by March I'm gone*.

I loved Louisville. The vibe was just different. The people were different. I'm from Grand Rapids–Detroit area, where everybody has an attitude. Everybody walks around with a chip on their shoulder. And here, it was like these random people saying good morning to you. And I'm like, *What's wrong with these people? Why do they keep talking to me? I don't know these people*! It was a big difference. But I loved it. There was always big events for the kids—concerts on the waterfront and stuff. Back home we didn't have anything like

that. And my kids loved it, and that was the most important part for me at the time, was that they were happy and that they would be okay here. And they were safe. Back home, I just kind of felt like history was always repeating itself, everybody was teenage moms, and it was corner boys and just whatever else. I would say definitely 75 percent of the boys I went to school with ended up in jail. I didn't expose my kids to a whole lot of stuff. And not to say this toward anybody, but, like, they've never seen struggle. You know what I'm saying? Everything that I dealt with or was around when I was a child, my kids didn't see that.

YOU ASKED ME WHETHER I KNEW SOMEONE WHO WANTED TO HURT MY DAUGHTER. BUT YOU DID IT.

Breonna was never really a troublesome kid. Only thing is, she would be fine all school year and then in the last few days she would somehow get in trouble with her mouth. I guess by the end of the year she probably had enough of people and so she would be snappy. But I didn't have a lot of problems with her. She was very computer literate. I bought her first computer when she was seven years old and she just loved it. She loved to play double Dutch. And as she got older, she loved cars. Yeah, she's a lot like me. I love older cars. Like a Cutlass and stuff like that. I love Thunderbirds, the old one with the bird on it. Breonna's absolute favorite was the Dodge Charger. She was on her second one—a 2019 Dodge Charger R/T. She was so proud of this car, it was her baby. And she got these pipes on it. It's got dual exhaust so you get the *vroom*! She had just bought this one. I'm in her car right now.

Kenny was a pretty decent kid too. He just was funny to hang around and he worked. His parents were married, so he had a pretty good upbringing himself. In the beginning, they were just friends. Even before they got into a relationship, Kenny would say, "I'm going to marry her." I'd be like, "Be careful what you wish for, Kenny." I want to say they were together about five years. They had talked about having a baby at some point. And she had just recently started saying, *Yeah, I think I'm almost ready. I just want to get a house first and then go from there*. Because that was the next thing. She got her Charger. And next was the house.

Breonna wanted to be a nurse. That was her thing. But her very first job she worked was Steak 'n Shake. She was 15 years old and she worked there for a few years all through school. And then she started working with older people herself. And she liked to drive, like I said before, so she drove this little bus that goes around and gets the older people and takes them places. She drove that for a while. And then she went to do EMT and she did that, but it was a lot. So then she went into the ER and worked as a tech and she absolutely loved it there. And so her goal was just to finish school with being in the ER and be a nurse.

I have so many stories. I think about how I had to tell Breonna how to make chili a hundred times, and she would still call me when she would go to the store. She worked third shift. So she gets off of work at 7 in the morning, and of course I'm at work by then, because I start work at 4, 4:30 in the morning, you know? And so Breonna would be in the grocery store at 7 in the morning, calling my phone, and it would be funny because this is what my coworkers will remember the most about her—they always talked about Breonna in the grocery store, calling me like, *Mama, what do I need to buy for chili? Blah, blah, blah*. And I would say *Breonna, can you write this down, because I don't understand why I got to tell you this all the time*. And she would say, *I don't need to write it down, I can just call my mama*. My coworkers would just laugh. But she'd just say, *I need to talk to my mama*. And I'm like, *Girrrll…*

Bossy. She was bossy. Breonna was bossy. She was so OCD. And she was one of them people who didn't talk about other people. If something was going on with you, she'd rather figure out a way to help you than talk about you. She was a hard worker. If she missed work, something was really wrong. She loved being in the hospital, she loved her job, and she loved the people she worked with. Clearly, they loved her. They would always be leaving her little notes about them loving her and loving to work with her. Even when she passed, some of them came to the funeral. *We just can't believe this, we love her so much. We're just going to miss her.*

The first day, we are just all together crying and just trying to figure it out. I am just trying to replay this thing in my head. I am having these thoughts—*Maybe it's not Breonna*, because I never see her, mind you. The police never let me see her. But I know it's her house, you know what I'm saying? But just the fact that I physically haven't seen her…. And then, I can't talk to Kenny. But the last thing I know is Kenny called me and said, *Somebody kicked that door in*. And I'm thinking, *Who would want to do that? What is happening*? My head is all over the place. And the police aren't talking to me or telling me anything. My daughter's dead and they're not telling me anything. And I keep wondering, *Why would somebody do this*? Until I actually learn on the news that the police did this.

It is probably the next day. Someone texts me and says, *Did you see the news*? Of course I didn't see the news. I didn't know nothing about it. I watch everything on my iPad. I google the news station and then I watch the story. And I am like, *Why would they ask if somebody wanted to hurt her*? Now I'm confused. Because you asked me whether I knew someone who wanted to hurt my daughter. But you did it. Why couldn't you have just told me that the police did this? You asked me if somebody wanted to hurt "them." And Kenny…you said you had Kenny over at the office trying to help you figure out what

happened. But come to find out, you got Kenny down here trying to charge him with attempted murder. And Breonna's gone. What the hell?

And I am telling you it kills my whole family. Breonna is like the family glue—even at 26 years old, she is pretty much the glue. And she is bossy. She don't care what is happening, she is going to make sure we get together and have a game night or have a cookout or have something, because we all tend to get so busy and consumed with work and whatever. But she has a personal relationship with everybody, even all my little cousins. They don't call each other cousins. They all call each other sisters and brothers. All the kids, the younger kids, or even the kids her age, looked up to Breonna. And my dad stops turning on the television. Breonna was his first granddaughter. To see what happened, to hear what happened, it breaks his heart and he can't stand it. And Juniyah is depressed. She is just going through the motions. Because she's used to seeing Breonna every day, and arguing with Breonna every other day.

The funeral home calls me when they get her body. The police never let me see her. They aren't talking to me. It's after midnight when I get the call. And they say I can come see her. Everybody is with me. My whole family—my four sisters, my dad, my daughter Juniyah, my sister's boyfriend, my boyfriend, the kids, a couple of close friends. Nobody wants to be left out. And when we see her body, it's just tears and screams. I walk out the home because everybody is just crying. And I am just so pissed off that she is lying there.

On the news they are saying it's a drug raid gone bad. And it's so common to hear these things—*drug raid. Cops met with gunfire. One suspect dead. The other in custody*. And that's how they're describing what happened with Breonna. Breonna and Kenny are drug dealers. That is how it's being portrayed on the news. And I am pissed off because I know how hard Breonna worked. I know that Breonna ain't about that life. Breonna couldn't tell you where to buy a dime bag of weed. She isn't that person on the news. Neither is Kenny. So somebody has to do something. Somebody has to help me. Somebody has to…. Look, I'm a person who believes if you live by the sword, you die by the sword. I am not saying that if somebody shoots you, you should get shot. But I am a person who believes, if you out here selling all these drugs and your house get raided, and you in there doing what you doing…well…you end up in situations and you brought that on yourself. Live by the sword, die by the sword. But that wasn't Breonna's sword. And I cannot let them do that to her. With COVID happening, it feels like they want to just sweep this under the rug real quick. But we will not let this go.

So every morning we all talk, my whole family, we talk like, *Okay, well what's our plan today*? We have started talking to Christopher 2X. He's an activist in the community. We asked him about attorneys and he brought up Lonita Baker. She's my lawyer. But still it takes about two months before people really start paying attention. On one particular morning my sister writes this thing. And it reads something like, *My name is Breonna*

Taylor. On March 13, LMPD broke in my house and murdered me and no one's been arrested or charged. She sends it to me and I say, *Okay, I'm going to post this on Facebook*. Like an hour later, it has like 10,000 shares. It's like a light switch cuts on and all of a sudden this story is everywhere. Two hours later, it has even more shares. And now people are like, *I can't believe they did this*! And now people are asking, *When is the funeral*? I'm like, *The funeral was two months ago*. And the next thing I know there's a protest. I don't even know anything about it. But somebody ends up calling me and saying, *They got a protest going for your daughter. There's all these people down here*. The mayor finally calls—two and a half to almost three months later. He calls because we have filed a lawsuit. So he offers his condolences. And I'm like, *Okay*. And that's it.

I see what happens with George Floyd and I am pissed. I don't know the story. I don't care. This man is telling you he can't breathe, begging you to get off of him. And you put your hands in your pocket like this man is a dog or something. But now people are saying, *This happened in our city too. If Minneapolis can stand up, so can we*. And I think this is about to get crazy. On the one hand, I'm ecstatic that these people are standing up and demanding justice and saying her name. On the other hand, I don't want people to be hurt. I don't want y'all to tear up the city. We still got to live here. And still I understand the anger. Breonna was everybody's sister and daughter. As easily as this happened to Breonna, it could've been anybody else's child. So the mayor calls again. People are getting real antsy, and he doesn't want them to set the city on fire. They are tearing up the city, and he wants me to come and tell the people to stop. But I don't do it. Because I know the people don't want to hear from me. They want to hear from him. They aren't looking for me. They want to talk to him. That's his fight, not mine.

And people are asking me to come to the protests. I am advised to be careful with that because if these protests get out of hand, I'm not wanting to seem like I'm condoning that or something. But people want to see me. They want to say they're sorry. They want to apologize for the police. They want to offer their condolences. They want to apologize for not listening. I can't believe it. People are begging for forgiveness like, *I'm sorry we weren't listening*. I just can't believe it. I felt like with the whole pandemic, Breonna would be forgotten, and we would just get swept under the rug.

And how do I feel then? Like, my God, somebody heard me. Like I finally caught my breath. That's how I feel. Like I finally caught my breath.

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BLUE BLOODS: AMERICA'S BROTHERHOOD OF POLICE OFFICERS

To understand the citadel of law enforcement, we must reckon with its unions—which resemble fraternities more than labor unions.

BY EVE L. EWING

August 25, 2020

The man stands before them, head slightly bowed. He is gangly, awkward, against the backdrop of the officers' firm march. They are hurried and he is not. Everything about them is fast, crisp, matte.

We watch the push. We watch him fall.

We watch them pass his body. Swirling around him, an eddy of thick black fabric. When the blood comes, it drifts languidly across the concrete.

When night falls, this is the story they tell: "During that skirmish involving protestors, one person was injured when he tripped & fell." But when the video appears, the world will see the police shove Martin Gugino to the ground, fracturing his skull.

The email from John Evans, president of the Buffalo Police Benevolent Association, came the next day. Evans forcefully defended the police officers implicated in the assault. "After witnessing first hand how these 2 officers were treated," Evans wrote, "I can tell you, they tried to fuck over these guys like I have never seen in my 54 years." He signed off the email by writing, "Fraternally, John Evans – PBA."

There are people who will tell you that people like John Evans lead a union. But this is not a union. This is something else.

This is a brotherhood. It abides no law but its own. It scorns the personhood of all but its own brethren. It derides all creatures outside its own clan. And for that reason, the brotherhood is not only a hurdle impeding reform. It is the architecture of an alternate

reality, one that seethes and bubbles just beneath the surface of our own. And it's a reality in which none of us are human.

In May, the Chicago chapter of the Fraternal Order of Police elected John Catanzara as president. According to a 2017 report by the United States Department of Justice, the police department in Chicago "engages in a pattern or practice of using force that is in violation of the Constitution," where "officers' force practices unnecessarily endanger themselves," "a pattern…[which] results from systemic deficiencies in training and accountability."

And yet, even given the city's abysmal standard of police conduct, in his 25 years on the force Catanzara has managed to distinguish himself from his peers by being especially awful. According to the Citizens Police Data Project (a database of police misconduct records made public after a lawsuit and Freedom of Information Act requests), Catanzara has been the subject of 50 complaints, putting him in the 96th percentile for allegations. At the time he was elected to lead the FOP, Catanzara was assigned to administrative duty; according to the *Chicago Sun-Times*, he is the first president to take on the role while stripped of his official police powers.

In June, when asked about the killing of George Floyd, Catanzara referred to Officer Derek Chauvin's actions as an "improper police tactic." "Explain to me how race had anything to do with it," he went on. "There's no proof or evidence that race had anything to do with it." Catanzara has said that any lodge members showing support for protesters could face disciplinary action from the FOP, and perhaps expulsion.

Chicago's Fraternal Order of Police is a local chapter of the larger national organization of the same name. The national FOP boasts more than 2,100 such lodges, representing more than 330,000 members, which makes it, according to its website, "the world's largest organization of sworn law enforcement officers."

IT ABIDES NO LAW BUT ITS OWN. IT SCORNS THE PERSONHOOD OF ALL BUT ITS OWN BRETHREN. IT DERIDES ALL CREATURES OUTSIDE ITS OWN CLAN.

When Chicago police officer Robert Rialmo killed Quintonio LeGrier and Bettie Jones—a young man having a mental health episode and his neighbor, who answered the door—Rialmo was fired. The vice president of the Chicago FOP called the Civilian Office of Police Accountability, which recommended the firing, "a political witch hunt on police officers. The investigations are unfair and politically motivated."

When Jason Van Dyke was convicted of second-degree murder for the death of Laquan McDonald, the FOP defended him. When four of the officers accused of aiding in the cover-up were fired, a *different* FOP vice president used the decision as an occasion to impress upon police board members that they should not "fall to the pressure of the media or the radical police haters."

These men were sworn officers of the law. But they did not look at Van Dyke as a convicted murderer who had broken that law. They did not look at him and see *police*—a social category, a profession, a uniform one puts on and can take off. They looked at him and saw their brother. They saw a different type of being, bound by an oath that transcends civilian understanding. And by virtue of Van Dyke's *being*, in their eyes, he could do no wrong.

The same logic underlies the phrase "blue lives matter," which semantically equates the color of a uniform with the nonnegotiable, unshakable fact of Blackness. It's a phenomenon not unlike the transfiguration that took place behind the eyes of Darren Wilson. "It looks like a demon," he told the grand jury in describing Michael Brown. Michael Brown: not man, but beast. Jason Van Dyke: not man, but kin. A brother in the pantheon. A demigod among demigods, his actions deemed necessary and virtuous because they were wrought by his hand, and his hand was necessary and virtuous.

Of course, as Catanzara's comment about support for protesters demonstrates, it's not that it's impossible to be cast out from the brotherhood. The unforgivable sin within the brotherhood is to cast aspersions against the only people whom the brotherhood recognizes as human—its own kind. Shoot a boy in the back, and you can still be in the brotherhood. Side with the people who are asking questions, or raise a fist with them, or kneel before them, or talk to them, and you are out.

Maya Angelou had a thing she used to say—*When people show you who they are, believe them the first time*. Perhaps it's time for America to heed Angelou's advice. The Fraternal Order of Police has told us candidly what they are—that they are not a union, but a fraternity. A brotherhood. We ought to believe them.

History would suggest that unionism and policing are, at their foundation, incompatible. For one thing, the officers who founded the FOP made it very clear that it was *not* a union. In the volume *The Fraternal Order of Police 1915-1976: A History*, a work commissioned by the FOP itself, cofounder Martin L. Toole is quoted as saying, "We are banded together for our own enjoyment!" Founding officers rejected the name "United Association of Police because 'that name sounded too much like Union, and Union sounded too antagonistic.' " These officers sought a way to bargain collectively over issues like wages and hours, without affiliating themselves with labor organizations.

And as labor historian Rosemary Feurer told me in an interview, until the 1970s "there was a feeling that police didn't belong in the union movement. And now I think we have to realize that that is part of our history, from the stark reality that people were confronted with police brutality whenever they tried to assert their rights as union members." Indeed, the most formative days of the labor movement were marked by police violence against workers. During the 1886 Haymarket Affair, police fired on the crowd during a dispute with striking workers. During the 1921 Battle of Blair Mountain—the largest labor uprising in American history—thousands of West Virginians led by the United Mine Workers were in armed struggle against thousands of police and National Guardsmen. The local sheriff, Don Chafin, was paid by mine operators to beat, arrest, or intimidate suspected union organizers, a job which each year earned him more than 10 times his annual salary in bribes and helped him maintain a well-funded department. By 1921, his net worth was about $350,000. In the 1937 Memorial Day Massacre, police fired on a demonstration of steelworkers, killing 10 and seriously wounding many others, including a baby and an 11-year-old boy. A worker on the scene said that as the injured fell under the hail of bullets, it looked "as though they were being mowed down with a scythe."

And the institution of policing as a means of violently controlling working persons' right to economic freedom has deeper roots than even the labor movement itself. The need to attack workers in the name of private interests is historically intertwined, like a double helix, with the need to control, limit, and sanction Black autonomy.

"You will find that this question of the control of labor underlies every other question of state interest," South Carolinian William H. Trescott told the governor of South Carolina in 1865. The end of the Civil War meant that millions of Black people were transformed from items of property, from which labor could be forcibly and freely extracted, to independent humans with, at least nominally, the agency to do with their labor what they pleased, for their own benefit. "Virtually from the moment the Civil War ended," writes historian Eric Foner, "the search began for legal means of subordinating a volatile black population that regarded economic independence as a corollary of freedom and the old labor discipline as a badge of slavery." In the absence of slavery as the means by which Black people could be made to stay in one place and work when and how White people needed them to work, the plantation class looked to the law to ensure that they would. Hence, the Reconstruction-era legislation known as the Black Codes was born. In Mississippi, being Black and not having written proof that you were employed was now illegal. In South Carolina, being Black and having a job other than servant or farmer was illegal unless you paid an annual tax of up to $100. Being in a traveling circus or an acting troupe? Illegal. In Virginia, asking for pay beyond the "usual and common wages given to other laborers" was illegal. In Florida, disrespecting or disobeying your employer was illegal. In some areas, fishing and hunting, or even owning guns, were now banned, as these activities could lessen Black dependence on White people for employment.

And who would enforce these new laws? The police. In some cases, Foner writes, these newly deputized men wore their old Confederate uniforms as they patrolled Black homesteads, seizing weapons and arresting people for labor violations.

Despite this history, those who lead America's police unions raise a cautionary alarm—that teachers and other public sector workers should be wary of any attempts to curtail police power, lest they find themselves at the center of the next effort to limit union rights. In June, Patrick J. Lynch, who heads the Police Benevolent Association of the City of New York, wrote an op-ed in the *New York Daily News* drawing a direct connection between efforts to defund the police and a broader labor struggle. "Our brothers and sisters in the labor movement should be very careful. If they support a successful campaign to strip police officers of our union rights, they will see those same tactics repeated against teachers, bus drivers, nurses and other public sector workers across this country."

But there's a crucial difference. "How many unions are there where you're assigned a gun and told you can shoot people?" Philadelphia district attorney Larry Krasner asked me during a phone interview. "I mean, they have superpowers. They are given superpowers over the lives and freedom of other people. Over the integrity of their bodies." Krasner told me of two instances in his legal career when he defended women who, after finding their police officer husbands cheating and trying to divorce them, had been arrested by those same husbands. One was arrested twice. The other was arrested alongside her brother, who had tried to defend her. Both women were found not guilty despite police officers testifying against them on the stand. Krasner attempted to sue on their behalf, for monetary damages but also injunctive relief—for the police department to change its policies to require an arrest of a relative or spouse to be overseen by a supervisor.

"The answer that I got from the city is nope. We're not going to do any of that. Dealing with the police department, contract negotiations…we're not even going to get into it. So we'll just pay you more money," Krasner recalls. "So you know, that kind of told me everything I needed to know. It was an overwhelming imbalance of power. It's a city I think that in many ways is so politically compromised by its relationship with police unions that they have for a very long time pretty much given them anything they wanted." Krasner believes that the situation is exacerbated by the fact that in Philadelphia, the FOP allows retired officers to be voting members. "The police union is the voice of the past," says Krasner, "and in Philly the past is Frank Rizzo," the 1970s-era Philadelphia mayor who openly told his supporters to "Vote White." Before becoming mayor, Rizzo was police commissioner. During his campaign, Rizzo promised his supporters that after he was elected, he would "make Attila the Hun look like a faggot."

Rachael Rollins, district attorney of Suffolk County (which includes Boston as well as nearby Chelsea, Revere, and Winthrop) agrees with Krasner, telling me that police are "the only section of our municipal local, state, or federal government that has the lethal and

legal authority to kill you with no oversight." For this reason, she dismisses Lynch's comparison between police unions and teachers unions. "If a teacher strangled George Floyd as an 11-year-old," Rollins said, "no D.A. would even wait a nanosecond to charge that teacher with a homicide. We would be shocked and appalled. But when police do it, we have been so triggered to believe law enforcement, right? To not question them.... When you have the authority to do something as final as death without oversight, you are different than any other union we are talking about."

Beyond this point—police carry guns and are permitted by the state to kill people—is a deeper distinction: the task of policing itself as intrinsically counter to the ideology of a union. "A union is supposed to protect the rights, and the labor movement is supposed to protect the rights, of *all* working people," said Sheri Davis-Faulkner, a program director at the Center for Innovation in Worker Organization in the School of Management and Labor Relations at Rutgers University. "The point is to be lifting up *all* working people. That is the work. Collective bargaining and having bargaining units, that is a part of it. But it's also pushing an ideology that people should not be exploited." Police unions do not and cannot promote this ideology, because doing so would require them to confront "the infrastructure that has been built for them to be policing Black bodies and protecting White communities," Davis-Faulkner told me.

"In its best formulation, the labor movement has been about the concept of solidarity," says Feurer, who studies political conflict and the labor history of the late 19th and 20th centuries at Northern Illinois University. "And so that is the key conundrum here. Is that if you're an entity that's sworn against solidarity, you can put your foot on the neck of a working-class person. It is the cardinal issue that we're facing right now...what do you do with a group of workers that are in your movement whose purpose is a state purpose? Whose purpose is to *deny* protest rights, and to deny solidarity?"

In Minneapolis, after the killing of George Floyd and subsequent protests, Bob Kroll, president of the Police Officers Federation of Minneapolis, wrote a letter to membership in which he said: "I commend you for the excellent police work you are doing in keeping your coworkers and others safe during what everyone except us refuses to call a riot.... What has been very evident throughout this process is you have lacked support from the top. This terrorist movement that is currently occurring was a long time build up which dates back years."

In August 2019, when Daniel Pantaleo—the NYPD officer who killed Eric Garner—lost his job, Lynch, the PBA president, condemned the decision. "The police commissioner needs to know he's lost his police department," he said at a press conference. Lynch declared that if Pantaleo could be labeled "reckless," the condemnation could be applied to any police officer and warned that the commissioner would "wake up tomorrow to discover that the cop haters are still not satisfied, but it will be too late."

After Tamir Rice was killed, Jeffrey Follmer, the president of the Cleveland Police Patrolmen's Association, told MSNBC that "this shooting was justified. It was tragic that it was a 12-year-old. But it was justified."

Indeed, for American policing to function, physical assault is an important tool, but as important is intimidation—the *threat* of physical assault and the psychological terror it engenders. And for those tools to work, they require the premise of impunity, elevating the police officer as a different kind of being, one unencumbered by the laws of civic comportment or even the basic laws of reality. It requires not only that Alabama state troopers beat John Lewis after he marched across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in 1965, fracturing his skull—it requires a system that defines Lewis as the criminal in that scenario, and the trooper as the guardian of safety and order. It requires not only that a Chicago police officer, guarding a statue of Christopher Columbus this past July, be able to punch 18-year-old Miracle Boyd in the mouth, knocking out her front teeth—it requires us to see the video and know that the officer will go unnamed and unpunished. It requires not only that a New York City police officer crack 20-year-old Dounya Zayer's head against the pavement, causing her to have a seizure—it requires a commanding officer to watch and do nothing. It requires Lynch to refer to the officer who shoved Zayer as someone "whose boss sent him out there to do a job, who was put in a bad situation during a chaotic time," and to refer to the decision to charge him with assault as "dereliction of duty." For the police to act as they do, and for the body politic to accept it, requires not only fear or force but a reconfiguration of the very fabric of reality as we know it.

"Part of what fascist politics does," explains philosopher Jason Stanley, "is get people to disassociate from reality." In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt argues that such politics craft an alternate universe—an *unreality*. "It is not so much the barbed wire," says Arendt, "as the skillfully manufactured unreality of those whom it fences in that provokes such enormous cruelties and ultimately makes extermination look like a perfectly normal measure."

When I was in college, I was a resident assistant, which meant that in some instances I was the first responder when someone had been sexually assaulted. I once confronted a young man who was the president of one of the fraternities where a resident of mine had recently…she thought, she wasn't sure…she had woken up, in the attic, she told me. Alone. She didn't know where he had gone, or….

I asked: *How could you choose to call someone your brother when you know they are capable of something like that*? He looked away.

This was the wrong question. The whole point of the brotherhood is that it enables a willful not knowing. The brotherhood swallows all other planes of reality that could pose an existential challenge. I had asked the wrong question, because the answer to *how can*

you call someone your brother when he does something like that is: *Because he is my brother*. The brotherhood is a self-contained universe, with its own physics, its own gravity. Within a band of brothers, there is no law that supersedes the law of the brotherhood itself. To be part of a brotherhood is not to be a "member" of something—for membership is fleeting, and outside oneself. To be part of a brotherhood is not simply to be a workaday person who *belongs* to a collective corps, but to be reborn as a new type of thing, nestled in a selfhood intimately woven among other selfhoods, moving as one through a world in which you trust nothing but one another, because your self has become inextricable from all those other selves you call brother.

In the brotherhood, there is no such thing as wrongful police action. A member of the brotherhood cannot err any more than a dropped apple can fall toward the sky. The man who choked Eric Garner to death can never be "reckless." *All* police work is "excellent police work." The death of a 12-year-old boy is "justified." You watch the video again. *He tripped and fell. He tripped and fell.*

In the days after my city rose against the clouds, I woke to a news item that made me laugh out loud. When desperate and angry and tired people were breaking windows across the South Side, a group of police officers had broken into the campaign offices of Representative Bobby Rush. The surveillance footage is almost cartoonish. The officers ate popcorn. They made coffee. As Chicago burned, they napped on the couch.

When the incident became public, Catanzara told the press that Rush or his staff had asked the officers to come. He told local news that Rush was "an absolute liar, a piece of garbage" and that anyway, the coffee and popcorn were bought with taxpayer money, and the officers were taxpayers, were they not?

Of Mayor Lori Lightfoot's criticism of the officers, Catanzara said: "Shame on her for ever questioning their valor and the heroism and the officers of CPD to make it sound like they were letting other officers get the crap beat out of them while they sat there and slept. That is a disgusting accusation. She owes the men and women an apology for even implying that was."

I read the statement. I looked again at the picture of the sleeping officer.

He tripped and fell. He tripped and fell.

A union is a pact, wrought among the human. Among the fallible. And there can be no error in the brotherhood. And the brotherhood can never be reformed, because reform requires fidelity to something external, and the brotherhood has fidelity only for itself. This is the unreality of the brotherhood. And as long as police are endowed with near-absolute state-sanctioned power, it is *our* unreality. We live behind its gates.

EDITOR'S LETTER
SEPTEMBER 2020 ISSUE

RADHIKA JONES ON *VANITY FAIR*'S SEPTEMBER ISSUE

V.F.'s editor in chief introduces guest editor Ta-Nehisi Coates.

BY RADHIKA JONES

August 24, 2020

In late May, when the protests were gaining momentum and the death toll from COVID-19 had surpassed 100,000 Americans, we asked Ta-Nehisi Coates to join us as guest editor for our September issue. This edition, one of the most important of the year, is usually planned months in advance. We did not have the luxury of time, but we had something more galvanizing: the urgency of the moment.

Ta-Nehisi traveled to Louisville to report the story of Breonna Taylor as only a mother could tell it. LaToya Ruby Frazier photographed Taylor's family, her boyfriend holding the engagement ring he was never able to propose with. Ava DuVernay spoke with the eternally prescient Angela Davis, and Deana Lawson made Davis's portrait. Jesmyn Ward's story arrived quietly in our inboxes and broke our hearts.

We worked under pandemic protocols. Our feature portfolio, "You Said Hope," a collection of artists, activists, and visionaries, is the result of 19 photo shoots, often conducted in our subjects' backyards. And the photographers, many under the age of 30, represent a new generation in our pages.

Partnering with Ta-Nehisi under the banner of *Vanity Fair* has been an honor, though the title "guest editor" is not honorary. He is the driving force of this body of work, both creator and collaborator. Over Zoom, on email, in text threads, we planned stories, selected photos, assigned illustrators, debated headlines, all as a team. It was our shared goal to make a magazine that would capture the spirit of this time, and that it would be beautiful, a keepsake. An object to push back against ephemerality. A way to remember, and a sign of things to come.