Introduction

We gotta use this as a starting point.

ferguson organizer, August 9, 2014

FADE IN:
CANFIELD GREEN APARTMENTS—INNER CRIME SCENE—DAY ONE, NOON
Police kill an unarmed black male teen. Black citizens gather. Snippets of information are released.

On Saturday, August 9, 2014, a little after noon, eighteen-year-old Michael Brown Jr. and his friend Dorian Johnson were on their way back from a local store, Sam’s Meat Market, walking in the middle of the street that runs through the Canfield Green apartment complex. Ferguson police officer Darren Wilson pulled up and allegedly told them to “get the F on the sidewalk.”¹ Apparently, words were then exchanged between Wilson and Brown, and a struggle ensued at the squad car, putting Brown on the run, with Wilson firing at him. Johnson then took cover, and Brown reportedly stopped running, put his hands up, and faced Wilson. At this point, Wilson shot Brown in the head, killing him. Wilson later described Brown as having charged him.²

Canfield Green Apartments—where Brown was killed and where his body lay for more than four hours in the middle of the street—for now should be understood as the “inner crime scene” (the immediate area surrounding the scene of a crime and the victim’s body). It was from this location that the initial outcry from citizens emerged. This was the scene where citizens witnessed the shooting, commenced giving their accounts, and ultimately took to the streets. They expressed outrage against perceived police action and inaction. Furthermore, it was from here that the first descriptions of Brown’s murder would spread throughout St. Louis. More important, this is also the place where his family would first encounter the body of their beloved son, also known as Big Mike or Mike-Mike.
INTRODUCTION

I am reviewing the final edits for my book Race, Place, and Suburban Policing: Too Close for Comfort. I receive a text about a party. Then I receive a phone call about Brown and about protesters gathering.

What had begun as a relatively uneventful day for me took a sudden, unexpected turn. I had already spent much of the day tucked away in a local university library roughly twenty minutes from the inner crime scene, Canfield Green Apartments, where Brown had been killed and his body now lay, and where initial citizen action had occurred, along with the trickling out of scant information.

It was a little after 2:00 p.m. when I received both a text inviting me to a party and a phone call alerting me that a teen (Brown) had been killed by Ferguson police. The caller mentioned protesters gathering, asked me if I knew about it—I did not—and suggested that I check into local media online and maybe even drive by the scene. I agreed to do both. Given that I had been researching conflict between black citizens and police in the suburbs of St. Louis for years, I was curious and interested in learning more about this shooting and what appeared to be an instantaneous and personal response from black citizens. I immediately packed up my things, thinking I would merely drive by the scene to observe it en route to the party.

CUT TO:

THE LIBRARY—TWENTY MINUTES AWAY—SAME DAY, EARLY AFTERNOON

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CUT TO:

THE INTERSECTION OF WEST FLORISSANT BOULEVARD AND CANFIELD DRIVE—OUTER CRIME SCENE, “GROUND ZERO”—SAME DAY, LATE AFTERNOON

I was attempting to reach Canfield Green Apartments—the inner crime scene. However, as I drove up, I noticed that the street was blocked by crime tape and police. I then saw a group of protesters and media, unable to get in, anxiously waiting alongside a militarized police vehicle. An officer stood atop it with a very visible high-powered rifle. All were stark visuals that coalesced into an eerie scene in the middle of the street. This was not my first time at a homicide scene in St. Louis. However, as I approached, I noticed that this one was overtly different—from its already heavy multidepartmental, militarized police show of force to its audible, angry group
of protesters. Just a few hours in, it seemed clear that an extraordinarily hardened and combative line of opposition had already been drawn by both sides—black citizens and police.

I never made it to the party. I parked at the back of a nearby car wash, got out, and walked straight into the intersection of West Florissant Boulevard and Canfield Drive. This intersection—or rather crossroads, literally and figuratively—was roughly two and a half blocks from where the shooting occurred, or the inner crime scene, and right in front of Red’s Barbeque restaurant. The intersection had become a new, or rather a second, location for collective action that day. This place should also be understood as the “outer crime scene” (an exterior and more distant perimeter, quarantining the “inner crime scene”). Later, in the heat of civil unrest, it came to be known as “ground zero” and became the locale for much of the direct action by citizens and the site most often used for riot police formations, the deployment of tear gas, and the firing of rubber bullets on citizens (see figure 1).

LAP DISSOLVE TO:
SAME PLACE—THE INTERSECTION—OUTER CRIME SCENE, GROUND ZERO—SAME DAY, LATE AFTERNOON
Crime tape is still up. More protesters gather. The media presence increases. State and local elected officials arrive. Only limited or no information is being received. Tension thickens. Brown’s mother and other family members appear to emerge from the inner crime scene. Group prayers and condolences are offered. I wait for the inner and outer crime scenes to be opened.

As more and more protesters gathered at ground zero, bits of information continued to trickle from the inner to the outer crime scene. It was difficult to truly know whether Brown’s body was still lying on the ground. Standing at the outer crime scene perimeter, we were unable to see his body, yet all signs (information coming from the inner crime scene, the crime tape, the blocked street) indicated that he was indeed still lying in the street. This further infuriated the protesters, and they demanded answers. Given that there had been some indication that Brown was killed while attempting to surrender, the protesters were adamant about learning who the shooting officer was and whether he would be held accountable. Both concerns were exacerbated by the apparently callous treatment of Brown’s remains.

By now it had been well over four hours since Brown was killed, and the armored vehicle with an armed officer standing atop it, the visible
high-powered weapons, the police line, and the crime scene tape had become symbolic. They had become constant, overt reminders of black vulnerabilities and the persistently aggressive, now-militarized policing of black citizens. For protesters, this hard-line police stance was tactless, inhuman, and indicative of institutional arrogance and a blatant disregard for what had just occurred—all factors the protesters believed to be consistent with the lack of real explanations being given for the shooting and perhaps symptomatic of a police cover-up getting under way. Protesters were increasingly enraged by this seemingly antagonistic show of force. It was intimidating—what appeared to be an observable readiness to inflict violence again, this time against the protesters. Subsequently some protesters became more aggressive, yelling, “Fuck you!” and other expletives at the police and then following up with questions: “Now what? You gon’ shoot me, too?”
prompted other protesters—almost all at once—to warn and instruct some of their fellow protesters not to escalate the situation:

**Male protester 1:** Hey, hey, hey, hey, hey! Don’t go to jail; . . . [D]on’t provoke ’em [police] like that.

**Female protester 1:** [Angrily interrupts, yelling] How?!? We ain’t said shit towards ’em!

**Male protester 1:** I’m just sayin’. . . . Don’t cuss ’em! You can talk all you want, but don’t cuss ’em. . . . Anything they can get on you [they will use].

Moments later two more protesters who had been listening to this conversation walked over and chimed in, offering similar advice. One of them spoke as if he were a brother to one young man who was yelling obscenities:

**Male protester 2:** [Taking the young man off to the side] Use better words than that, bruh. . . . You better than that.

A third male protester then spoke proactively and reactively to the entire group, not all of whom had been yelling. He wanted them to think more broadly about the perceived direction and possible consequences of their actions when interacting with law enforcement. Through this frame of reference he encouraged the group to act and respond accordingly. Here is what he said:

**Male protester 3:** Check this: . . . be intelligent. . . . [You] know what I’m sayin’? Be intelligent when you put ’em [police] in check ’cause when you ignorant, they treat you ignorant . . . for real . . . [A male voice in the background: “So they can lock you up!”] . . . But y’all know the game. . . . All of y’all out here know the game. . . . Y’all know it’s [the criminal justice system] set up against us.

Meanwhile, as the agitated protesters continued to wait for official word that Brown’s body had been removed, they paced, stood, and sat near the intersection and had additional fiery exchanges with each other and with law enforcement (see figures 2 and 3). In many instances these activities led to passing *more* time venting about what they believed had happened to Brown, their distrust of the police, and an overall suspicion of the criminal justice system. Male protester number 3 continued to call for protesters to “check game,” as he called it, or rather to consider the entire
situation—what had just happened to Brown as well as their own positions and experiences (direct and indirect) when interacting with law enforcement. Here is what he said:

[Talking to protesters:] Y’all betta check game! [To police:] Cuz y’all wrong . . . in y’all heart! [Male voice in background: “Yeah, they wrong!”] Y’all gettin’ a check . . . ALL y’all gettin a check . . . [Female voice: “They don’t give a fuck about that!”] . . . and y’all know that shit [Brown’s death] was wrong! Y’all know it . . . in y’all heart!

The police watched quietly, a few with apparently sad and confused facial expressions and others “sit’n [standing] up there with the mean mug,” as one female protester described them. Nevertheless, the third male protester called attention to their checks (i.e., their jobs as civil servants) and hearts (i.e., consciences). It was as if in doing so, he hoped to evoke clear empathy from them—that is, some reaction to corroborate what he and others were feeling—to mitigate the crowd’s perception of them as a seemingly unsympathetic police line and a militarized display of aggression.

This was the situation just before sunset: protesters both indiscriminately calling the police and each other out for what they believed to be improprieties and perceptively redirecting one another’s behaviors in an
effort to avoid what appeared to be looming violent confrontations with law enforcement. Furthermore, amid the waiting and mounting tension, Brown’s mother appeared at the intersection. She had made her way from the inner crime scene to the outer, where we were, and was visibly shaken, now pacing the intersection with everyone else and calling for calm. The game had changed, and now we were waiting with some members of Brown’s family—the protesters were now having to deal directly with the visible pain of the family, still checking one another’s words and actions and generally trying hard to be respectful and patient, mostly for the sake of the family. Thus, consoling Brown’s mother and other family members immediately took precedence over everything else. Several black state legislators, a city council member, and a pastor were on the scene, and with some of the family now present, there was a sterner call for all of us to come together.

We held hands and formed a circle around Brown’s mother. We sang hymns and prayed as people offered hugs and condolences. Moments later the police removed the crime scene tape at the outer crime scene perimeter—the official indication that Brown’s body had finally been removed. We were now permitted to walk through to Canfield Green Apartments. Then, with roses and tea lights in hand, we accompanied Brown’s mom and other family
members back to the scene of the shooting—the inner crime scene or rather the middle of the apartment complex, to the double lines in the middle of the street where Brown’s still-visible blood brought silence and clarity to the reality of this tragedy.

INTERCUT FROM OUTER TO INNER CRIME SCENES:
GROUND ZERO AND CANFIELD APARTMENTS—SAME DAY, DUSK/NIGHT
Dusk. We are standing where Brown had lain and are memorializing the scene of his death.

Here we were—protesters and local press from both the inner and outer scenes—standing where Brown’s body had lain for well over four hours on a hot August day. His body was gone, though the expressions on everyone’s faces spoke to his presence. This was a surreal moment. It was indescribable, and everyone appeared deflated from seeing traces of blood still on the ground and the pain of Brown’s family. His mom then took rose petals and sprinkled them over the spot. The lit tea candles were also placed there and used to spell out his name—Mike. As at the intersection, we formed a circle and prayed, and a couple of protesters led the group in inspirational songs. More directly, it was during this observance that the ground was somewhat consecrated, forming the later widely visited and photographed, makeshift memorial to Brown in the middle of the street.

Shortly thereafter, and almost as if officiating at a funeral, an older black man—one of many seasoned organizers in St. Louis—stepped forward and delivered a mandate that invigorated and mobilized the group. He articulated an agenda—a twofold course of action for the black community. As “I Won’t Complain” (widely attributed to the Reverend Paul Jones) played in the background, the man began to speak:

We got to be real serious on several levels, first of all in terms of the outrage. If you’re truly outraged, this is just one day in a long protracted struggle to get justice, . . . and if you are serious about it [justice], then you need to organize your neighbors, you need to organize all family members. [Male voice: “Yeah!”] We need to have a motto: “No more!” [Male voice: “Yes!”] . . . And if we don’t do that, then we just expressing a one-day outrage because any of us could be victims like this. . . . [Several voices: “Yeah, yes, right!”] And then the other thing we gotta do: We gotta use this as a starting point because . . . you gotta understand there’s like a war going on. And so in fighting war, we have to get organized so that we can prevent these kinds of cries of woe that’s coming from [the] outside . . . folks who work in our community [but] don’t give a damn about us.
Same day. Same location. Nightfall. It is eight or nine hours since the shooting. The situation is extremely fluid.

By nightfall countless exchanges (e.g., conversations and chanting) were occurring simultaneously among individuals and groups of protesters on both sides of the street—mostly near the spot where Brown’s body had lain for hours. From amid the high-spirited and somewhat rambunctious crowd, I noted that a lone police car was entering the apartment complex. It stood out particularly because in that moment it appeared that people had finally been afforded time to reflect on the day’s events privately, or at least without the overt scrutiny of law enforcement. It was like taking a breather. After all, varying degrees of contentious interactions between black citizens and police had been going on for more than eight hours. However, with the arrival of this squad car, it was as if peace had been disrupted and an unspoken, temporary truce had ended. Protesters immediately surrounded the squad car with their hands up, chanting.

Unable to pass through the crowd, the officer then slowly backed the car out the same way he had driven in. Almost immediately and as if intuitively, countless police cars with sirens blaring and lights flashing raced in from the opposite direction. I remember thinking, Oh, my God, what’s happening? It was as if someone had flipped a switch, and all hell was about to break loose. I had never seen so many police cars speed into a place so suddenly and from numerous jurisdictions. But before I could fully grasp what was happening, officers were out of their vehicles—some with rifles in hand, others with dogs—and were approaching protesters. Again, I thought to myself (as others vocalized similar sentiments): What just happened? What is this about? as police actions once again appeared to be unjustifiably aggressive and excessive. Their arrival only further inflamed protesters, especially as police raced straight through, and decimated, the new memorial to Brown—that is, the one we had watched his mother start with rose petals only a short time before. Some protesters just lost it.

Words could not capture this climate change. The atmosphere in Ferguson and throughout the St. Louis region was ripe for social redress, civil unrest, and transformation. As such, the protesters were all in, as were the police. There was lots of yelling, and in some instances police and protesters were cursing, gesturing, and seemingly goading one another. I was beyond stunned, and unbeknown to me, this volatile night would be the precursor for more of the same, with greater intensity, in the months to come.

As tensions escalated, I again observed protesters trying to reason with and protect one another, routinely pulling each other back and trying to calm each other down. However, even-tempered police did not seem to do
the same with confrontational officers. Consequently, I was thinking that under the circumstances, it would take nothing more than for one person—protester or officer—to act suddenly, for this encounter to end tragically, mainly for us, the noncommissioned citizens. In the event that things went horribly awry, we (the protesters and I) would have no means of defending ourselves if the police characterized us as threatening, because they were empowered to respond accordingly. Perhaps naively, I believed the protesters and I were completely nonthreatening and defenseless, at least in comparison to the police. Yet ironically, in light of Brown’s and Wilson’s deadly exchange, we were still positioned for what could be another ambiguous but transformative confrontation between black citizens and police. Therefore, as others took to social media, I called and texted my family and friends to alert them to where I was and what was transpiring. Furthermore, I relied on the camaraderie of the protesters around me for relief—groups of mostly black citizens who, despite being strangers, had shown themselves able to ally with, protect, and serve one another proactively, reactively, and spontaneously.

In sum, I have depicted here my on-the-ground insights on Day One in Ferguson at key locations and the key actions taken immediately following Brown’s death. A counterculture of interactions emerged among protesters as what I will refer to as a “protest community.” These were mostly black citizens engaging in direct action and subject to the effects of chaos. Thus, civil unrest in Ferguson became analogous to disadvantaged black neighborhoods whose residents contend with duress daily and automatically create buffers for managing it. This situation was rife with tremendous pressure and threats amid discrimination and disorder, a combination that too often results in compromising behaviors by some protesters or neighbors and local law enforcement. During the unrest in Ferguson, as in their neighborhoods, black citizens relied on their social ties. Although these had been formed in a relatively short span of time, the citizens trusted and deferred to their impromptu familial connections. Under intense pressure, they were protective of others and then were similarly safeguarded.

In the end, the night concluded without major incident—although it was followed by absolute black citizen dissonance with law enforcement, protesters’ relentless commitment to social justice, and their unflinching preparation for direct action (protest) the next day. Only the next day (Day Two) would the world see smoke-filled streets with mostly black citizens facing tear gas and rubber bullets from police—as if in a war-torn country. In subsequent months this situation would not improve, but rather would escalate after the governor dispatched the Missouri National Guard to
Ferguson. As a result, the informal social ties of the mostly black protesters continued to be one of their many survival tactics for managing tumultuous situations.

FERGUSON IS ST. LOUIS: A HISTORY OF REGIONAL DIVISION

Because of the ambiguities surrounding Brown’s murder and the subsequent months of relentless civil unrest, many people around the world have become somewhat acquainted with the City of Ferguson or what we St. Louisans refer to simply as “Ferguson.” Ferguson has often been thought of and referred to by non–St. Louis residents as a separate, unattached city, but it is actually a small part of the broader structure of St. Louis—a predominantly black, North County St. Louis suburb. Thus, blacks’ protecting and serving one another in Ferguson and throughout other parts of the St. Louis metropolitan area is significant, particularly because turmoil in Ferguson did not emerge as an anomaly or in isolation within the region. In fact, protests in Ferguson erupted on the heels of other local conflicts between black citizens and police. In one such conflict, citizens, police, and elected officials were killed roughly twenty-five minutes up the highway from Ferguson; that had subsequently led to a previous intervention by the US Department of Justice. Given the tenor of similar cases in the region—routine exchanges with the criminal justice system—and the socioeconomic and political disenfranchisement of disproportionate numbers of black citizens, the time was ripe for direct action. That is, Brown’s premature death became the catalyst for an already simmering push for social redress. In fact, many protesters—immediately following Brown’s death, in the months after the investigation, and well into the present—were not residents of Ferguson but lived in other locations throughout the St. Louis metropolitan area. However, they were, and remain, committed to mass mobilization efforts because social conditions across both St. Louis and the nation generally have remained such that they deserve examination.

Let us now turn to St. Louis, Missouri, the historic “Gateway to the West” or, as it is sometimes called, “The Lou” or “STL.”

St. Louis at a Glance

St. Louis is a Mississippi River city famous for its numerous public events, celebrated citizens, and internationally known businesses and industries. It is notable for its historical significance, including being the jumping-off
point for the 1803 Lewis and Clark Expedition; the place where Dred Scott filed his famous slavery case, decided by the Supreme Court in 1857; the site of the 1904 World’s Fair; and the location of the sociologically infamous Pruitt-Igoe Urban Housing Projects, which were completed in 1956. St. Louis has been home to legendary citizens such as Chuck Berry, Maya Angelou, Dick Gregory, T.S. Eliot, and Red Foxx, as well as renowned businesses and industries such as Anheuser-Busch, Boeing, and Edward Jones.

However, despite its grand history, in 1876 St. Louis voted to split into two sections (the urban city of St. Louis and rural, suburban St. Louis County) over disputes about taxes. This became known as the Great Divorce. At the time the urban population was believed to be 310,000, with 27,000 living in the rural (later suburban) areas. In short, urban residents were more concentrated within a significant landmass and no longer wanted to underwrite the incongruent agenda and needs of the more rural areas. Furthermore, inner-city residents did not envision the city as advancing much beyond its existing boundaries. As a result of the vote, the City of St. Louis officially withdrew from St. Louis County in 1877, but its departure did not occur without incident. There were several disputes over voter irregularities before the split, and afterward efforts were made to reunite the city with the county. Between the late 1890s and early 1900s, the city’s westward expansion became more adaptable, with the introduction of boulevards and advancements in transportation. As the once rural areas underwent suburbanization, whites fled St. Louis City (i.e., the urban area), taking a significant portion of the tax base to St. Louis County (i.e., the suburbs). Moreover, the tables had turned—the now-suburban population and tax revenues were increasing, in contrast to the inner-city’s declining circumstances and loss of population. In an effort to mitigate the unanticipated suburban expansion, numerous attempts were made to reunify the urban and suburban areas, one of which even included developing a borough system like New York City’s. Nevertheless, the split held as large voter turnouts registered St. Louis County’s opposition to these proposals. Thus the St. Louis metropolitan area has remained divided, with each entity operating under a separate government.

Maintaining the Split with a Race and Class Rift

Today the move for St. Louis City to rejoin St. Louis County remains topical and seemingly aspirational. Under the auspices of the nonprofit organization Better Together, along with some city and county elected officials, the push to consolidate is ongoing. However, reunification has yet to occur despite the disadvantages of the split for the region (e.g., billions...
wasted on duplicate government expenditures, internal economic competition). Many of these disadvantages seem to be rooted in suburbanization, whose history hinges on deliberate segregation—that is, racial and economic separatism reinforced by geographical distinctions (e.g., distance) that safeguard white affluence from the disproportionately black and poor inner-city populations. It is also for this reason that some black elected officials and residents are leary. They see reunification as potentially diluting black political advancement. Together, the city and county make up the St. Louis metropolitan area. According to 2017 census data, the population estimate of St. Louis City was 308,626; St. Louis County’s was 996,726. As for the black-white racial divide, St. Louis City was 42.9 percent white and 47.6 percent black, whereas St. Louis County was 66.1 percent white and 24.7 percent black. In addition, the median household income from 2013 to 2017 was $38,664 for St. Louis City, with 25 percent of people living in poverty, while median household income was $62,931 in St. Louis County, with 10 percent of people living in poverty. Simply put, St. Louis City is significantly less densely populated and has a majority of black residents, whose median income is lower and rates of poverty are higher than—roughly double those of—St. Louis County’s. These disparities illustrate the race and class rift at the root of the St. Louis City and St. Louis County divide.

Furthermore, St. Louis is a city of neighborhoods, while the county, which has its own government, is divided into ninety municipalities, some of which are disincorporating; many operate their own small governments and police departments. Each municipality unofficially competes with others for revenue. Ferguson is one of these. Black citizens have provided a disproportionate amount of revenue to some of these municipalities because overlapping, aggressive policing has resulted in their accruing fines, court costs, and other expenses within and across jurisdictions. That is why I have sarcastically but truthfully explained to people unfamiliar with the St. Louis region that one could easily drive five minutes down a main thoroughfare through predominantly black segments of St. Louis County and be subjected to five police stops and receive countless tickets—or worse—from five different police departments. This outcome could result from one’s having passed through five different municipalities, whose economic viability often hinges on untoward municipal court practices. In another example, the Better Together website describes how a St. Louis resident who drives from the Galleria Shopping Mall to Lambert–St. Louis International Airport passes through “fifteen separate police jurisdictions during a fourteen-minute trip.” This motorist could be subjected to the
laws of numerous jurisdictions with their own stops and fines all along that one drive. Some municipalities are so small that one resident calculated as many as thirteen could fit into his St. Louis City neighborhood.24

These and similar exploitative arrangements have fueled the cumulative resentment among the area’s black citizens that led to civil unrest in Ferguson during and after the protests sparked by the killing of Michael Brown Jr. Furthermore, long-standing discrimination, community disorder and its effects, and black mobilization are the reasons this study captures citizens’ direct actions and efforts to combat violence against blacks across communities: the Ferguson protesters, protests, and all other direct actions and residents in neighborhoods with higher crime (e.g., murder rates). From these various locations throughout the St. Louis region, black citizens’ outrage gelled and sparked in response national and international efforts to preserve black life, as well as a subsequent backlash.

POST-FERGUSON CONTEXT: INFORMAL SOCIAL TIES AS BUFFERS OF COMMUNITY DISORDER

Black St. Louisans, especially the poor, had contended with disproportionate, persistent, subpar social conditions long before the death of Mike Brown Jr. If truth were told, civil unrest in Ferguson and throughout the St. Louis metropolitan area had already been on the horizon. It was just a matter of time before it exploded. The region had become a “hot box” characterized by all manner of seething differential treatment of its black citizens, and Brown’s killing ignited it.25 That is why this project treats racialized treatment and denigrating social conditions as interconnected, underlying correlates of Brown’s death and all that transpired afterward. More directly, this project defines, stipulates times and timelines, and simultaneously situates “Ferguson” within a cultural community context.26 It provides macro- and microanalyses of social conditions, inequities, and resistance framed in terms of twenty-first-century “critical consciousness” and approaches to social justice.27

Furthermore, “Ferguson” is a template that represents a decisively racialized, sociohistorical shift whereby a sustained, oppressive interjection occurred that triangulated punitive, pre-Emancipation messages and indirect experiences triggered by the public display of a state-executed black person. “Post-Ferguson” commences with the removal of Brown’s body from the scene. In other words, this project time-stamps “post-Ferguson” as beginning with the initial call to action among protesters at the inner crime scene and all ensuing forms of direct action thereafter. Thus, it has been
black solidarity and a continuum of organizing characterized by the shift (i.e., persisting exploitation, a flashback of a pre-Emancipation, publicly displayed, executed black person: “Ferguson”) and (re)igniting of efforts to preserve black life that have resulted in a particular kind of contemporary activism (dichotomous)—that is, a long-lasting, impromptu, and strategized black action that seemingly threatened, warranted, and normalized punitive enemy combatant status and state-sanctioned tactics used against black citizens. More directly, “post-Ferguson” represents a multilayered cultural departure that transcended previous periodic protests against the police to provide a broad, solid template for mass mobilizing and social change. It is through this profound push for black liberation that countless populations rode the wave. They carved out space, creating a domino effect of multidirectional, twenty-first-century resistance.

Theory and Methodology

An amalgamation of pain and empowerment among black citizens is the crux of the examination for this project. It extends a platform to marginalized populations who face unyielding, front- and back-end, systemic penalizing as an added plight in the fight for social justice “post-Ferguson.” Therefore, it is through those additional experiences—perceived state vigilantism and neighborhood victimization, black mobilization, and subsequent systemic retaliation—that this study is framed and examines pervasive community disorder (both physical and social) post-Ferguson. More directly, this project expands the theoretical premise of (dis)order to reflect black perceptions of it, or really the way black citizens (de)construct it, as a by-product of mostly racial and economic discrimination across two case study communities: the mostly black protest community that emerged from police brutality in “Ferguson” and engaged in disparate forms of subsequent direct action, and the mostly poor black citizens who, apart from civil unrest in Ferguson, routinely negotiated the often overlapping and degrading effects (e.g., dilapidation, interpersonal violence) of living in disadvantaged neighborhoods.

The Study Question(s)  This study began by seeking to understand a dichotomous situation: the efforts to preserve black life (i.e., from police violence and from interpersonal violence) and to better respond to what seemed to be increasingly routine statements suggesting that blacks needed to police themselves. For example, look at how former Fox TV’s Bill O’ Reilly articulated this situation: “It is also long past time for African-American communities across America to begin to police themselves—criminal activity,