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Introduction: Antiblackness—Dispatches from Black Political Thought

> The human who is black is a being, is of being . . . the black one's ontological dilemma is not in regard to not-being or being-against; the ontological dilemma, as such exists, is being.
> —Kevin Quashie, *Black Aliveness, or a Poetics of Being*

For those of us working within the parameters and possibilities of Black political thought, trying to think about 2020, the global year of both the COVID-19 virus and Black Lives Matter protests, presents a unique set of challenges. The first is genealogical; it asks, What Black history of the present can account for the structural-racialized meaning of these two global events without erasing their racialized contingencies? The second is political; it asks, What forms of Black political thought are necessary for understanding these racially convergent, conjunctural events? While the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020 are the main focus of what we discuss, we want to insist that the COVID-19 pandemic provided a political horizon to those protests in ways that we are still trying to work through, although we do begin some of that work here. Both the genealogical and political questions posed above are also interested in how we should critically memorialize the BLM

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protests during 2020 in the context of COVID-19. For Black political thought, the principal issue with the critical interrogation of the past concerns the retrieval from erasure of atrocities integral to the past that are then memorialized as exceptional or incidental to the past. Related to this is the problem of the memorialization becoming more significant than what it memorializes. Particularly in recuperating the absented memory of those massacred in the past to revalue and re-narrate them in the present, memorialization can all too easily assume a radically divergent temporal break with that past by virtue of the present's presumed discreteness and evolution as its basis of confronting the past that long precedes it. Yet, the present, while always open to condemning the past, should not be thought of in the same way as the basis for consigning the past to the past. The present needs to be excavated and confronted for its contribution of atrocities to the past. It is not only that we are condemned to repeat the past by not remembering it, as George Santayana famously once warned, but also that we may be condemned simply to repeat the remembering. With that in mind, what do we need to remember but not repeat?

On June 15, 2020, Minnesota governor Tim Walz and Attorney General Keith Ellison attended a public ceremony with over two hundred people at the Clayton Jackson McGhie Memorial to acknowledge the one hundredth anniversary of the Duluth lynchings. The people who attended were told how, on June 15, 1920, three young Black men, Elias Clayton (nineteen), Elmer Jackson (nineteen), and Isaac McGhie (twenty) were falsely accused of raping a white girl and within twenty-four hours of being arrested were hanged to death from a lamppost in the town center of Duluth, Minnesota. An estimated ten thousand white people watched the lynchings, which was 20 percent of the Duluth population at the time (Magan 2020). According to Dora Apel (2008), the lynchings were then documented in a photograph widely circulated in a picture postcard that displayed Clayton, Jackson, and McGhie's murdered bodies, at the crime scene, "helpless, abject, partially stripped, psychologically emasculated and dehumanized." Also shown in the photograph, gathered in a semi-circle around the barbarities, is a well-dressed crowd of white men, all turned toward the camera, "nodding their heads forward to insure their faces will be recorded for posterity" (Apel 2008: 217–21). The Duluth lynchings memorial was the first substantial lynching memorial in the US when unveiled on October 10, 2003. Exhibiting sculptures of Clayton, Jackson, and McGhie, the memorial bears the inscription, "An event has happened upon which it is difficult to speak and impossible to remain silent" (Uenuma 2020). Speaking on the one hundredth anniversary of the lynchings, Attorney General Ellison recalled the

relevance of the inscription on the memorial to contemporary events when he told the crowd, "Silent complicity is a type of malady that infected the population then and affects the population now" (Lawler 2020). The metaphor of malady (which can be read as disease and/or disorder) chosen by Ellison on that day to enrich his remarks was also notable for his relating it to the different but connected idea of infecting and affecting. These biological and social descriptors of contagion seemed to draw upon a likening of the circulation of antiblackness to the spread of the COVID-19 virus, as if they were comparable pandemics. Curiously enough, Ellison unwittingly inferred a historical precedent that escaped the memorialization anniversary ceremony but was extremely significant. The Duluth lynchings took place only a couple of months after the global Spanish flu pandemic (1918–1920) was beginning to subside, having hit Minnesota heavily and also not so long after the previous year of antiblack riots by white supremacists across the US throughout 1919, when Black people were gratuitously attacked and killed in over seventy different cities across the US, between January and December (Schlabach 2019; McWhirther 2011). The conjunction of the Spanish flu pandemic and the pandemic of antiblack riots during 1919 is not often narrated or conceptualized in histories or analyses of either, nevertheless we need to remind ourselves about the historical precedent of that conjunction when thinking about COVID-19 and BLM during 2020. Clearly, we have been here before.

Minnesota Police Murder of George Floyd

Attorney General Ellison was undoubtedly aware of how the 1920 Duluth lynchings represented a different historical precedent when he delivered his reflections on their significance. He was aware, as indeed was the whole world by then that on May 25, 2020, at the height of the global COVID-19 pandemic, Minneapolis police officers arrested a Black man, George Floyd, on the accusation that he had purchased cigarettes with a counterfeit $20 bill. One of the officers drew his gun within six seconds of Floyd opening his car door. Three officers pinned Floyd on the ground, with one white officer, Derek Chauvin, kneeling heavily on Floyd's neck for nine and a half minutes, looking nonchalant with one hand in his pocket. "I can't breathe," Floyd said, at least twenty-six times. It echoed the last words of Eric Garner, another Black man killed by the police over cigarettes six years earlier and twelve hundred miles away. In those tortured last minutes of Floyd's life, he called out for his mother, begging for his life. After Floyd lost consciousness, bystanders shouted at the officers to check his pulse. Chauvin didn't move.

The other officers didn't provide medical assistance. An ambulance arrived, and Chauvin continued to kneel on an unresponsive Floyd's neck for nearly an additional full minute. The entire incident was captured in a phone video by then seventeen-year-old Darnella Frazier, who was walking her nine-year-old cousin to the corner store. Frazier uploaded the video to Facebook in the early hours of May 26, later saying to the *Wall Street Journal*, "I opened my phone and I started recording because I knew if I didn't, no one would believe me" (Stern 2020). That video went viral, nationally and globally, unleashing a worldwide avalanche of demonstrations that defied sheltering away from the COVID-19 pandemic.

A makeshift memorial was quickly installed on the corner where Floyd was killed; a week after Floyd's death, a police car drove through it. In response, residents created George Floyd Square, where "an ad-hoc committee of activists and residents erected and staffed guard shacks at entrances. An abandoned Speedway gas station was repurposed as the People's Way, and an improvised fire pit, set up between empty pumps, became a gathering place. . . . It included a platform where visitors could leave flowers and messages, and a nine-foot-tall steel sculpture of a fist that the artist Jordan Powell Karis had designed, as a replica of an earlier wooden sculpture, and that residents helped assemble. The Square was becoming more than a shrine to Floyd's life; it was a monument to others who had died in encounters with police, and a headquarters for an emergent movement" (Cobb 2021). We should note that George Floyd Square was removed in June 2021, approximately six weeks after the funeral of Daunte Wright, another young Black man shot and killed by a Minneapolis police officer who claimed to have mistaken her gun for a Taser. Not only had we been here before, we were here again. The outcry over Floyd's death at the hands of the police also echoed two earlier instances of deadly police violence in the same city. In July 2016, Philando Castile was shot during a traffic stop by police officer Jeronimo Yanez, about a fifteen-minute drive from the place where George Floyd was murdered. Castile, a school nutrition services supervisor in the Saint Paul Public School District, advised Yanez that he had a licensed firearm in his vehicle during a traffic stop; Yanez then fired seven close-range shots at Castile. Castile's girlfriend, Diamond Reynolds, who was in the car along with her four-year-old daughter, posted a livestream video of the immediate aftermath of the shooting to Facebook. Yanez was charged with second-degree manslaughter but was ultimately acquitted. Then, in 2017, Justine Damond was killed by a Minneapolis police officer who mistook her for

an assailant. This time, the officer was convicted of third-degree murder and manslaughter and sentenced to twelve and a half years in prison. However, the conviction raised the question of whether the fact that Damond was a white Australian woman, and Mohamed Noor was a Black police officer of Somali descent, had anything to do with the sudden shift on this occasion to hold the police accountable.

That the police murder of George Floyd took place in Minneapolis, in the state of Minnesota, should not pass without comment. Samuel Myers has observed that the state of Minnesota is generally known for being *nice*, which raises the question of how the sadistic police killing of George Floyd can happen in that Midwest state. Minnesota is routinely celebrated as one of the best American states to live in terms of quality of life, but it has also been identified as one of the worst places for Black Americans to live. Myers describes that extreme divergence between white and Black citizens and their quality of life in the same state as "the Minnesota Paradox" (2020). According to Myers, Minnesota produces the highest national average scores on SAT exams, has housing prices below the national median, has a strong regional transportation network, and has a large vibrant arts, theater, and music community, having previously been the home of the musician Prince. In contrast, African Americans are "worse off in Minnesota than they are in virtually every state in the nation" when measured by racial disparities in unemployment rates, home ownership rates, mortgage lending rates, and standardized test scores. Of course, Minneapolis, like many American cities, has a long history of structural racism at the base of its local policies and municipal operations, including redlining practices by real estate brokers and lenders, restrictive racial housing covenants, and segregation in employment, not to mention the Black neighborhoods destroyed in the postwar era to make way for Interstate 94 (Myers 2020). And lest we forget, Minneapolis, like many American cities, also has a long history of racial policing against Black communities; indeed, in 2014, when the US Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs launched the "National Initiative for Building Community Trust and Justice," Minneapolis was one of six cities chosen to participate, and yet, as Jesse Jannetta puts it, "George Floyd was killed by a police officer in Minneapolis" (2020). The account we have given of Floyd's death is probably close to what it would have looked like had 2020 not been the year of the COVID-19 pandemic and the BLM protests, obliging us to think about what happens to our analysis once we begin to factor in those national and global dimensions that the pandemic and protests represent.

Two Pandemics

We are inclined to think of 2020 as the year of the two pandemics: COVID-19 and antiblackness, the former structured as emergent, the latter structured as longevity, with both exploding into the glare of national and global attention, as much through mass anguish and protesting about these social and political phenomena as through their respective epidemiological and antipolitical/antisocial outbreaks in different places at different times. Although the term *pandemic* is usually reserved exclusively for describing the expansive travels and travails of a disease, we want to suggest that as a metaphor, *pandemic* describes what has been symptomized by both the spread of COVID-19 and antiblackness in their respective transmissions from person to person, city to city, nation to nation, namely, a sudden or long-term eruption or outbreak of microbiological violence (COVID-19) or colonial racial violence (antiblackness) within a social gathering, or in an attack on a single person. We should note that *pandemic* is much more of a social than scientific term. Since the seventeenth century, this social imprecision has allowed it to convey generically the idea of a large epidemic, insofar as its Greek roots, "pan (all) and demos (people), reflect its widespread nature," while the term *epidemic* is often translated from the Greek as "that which is upon the people," referring to a "high-incidence or widely prevalent condition" when there is "rapid temporal and geographic spread" (Morens et al. 2020: 3–4). Another way of thinking about the two pandemics can be derived from a reading of Laura Spinney, writing about the Spanish flu of 1918, which is frequently drawn upon as the nearest and closest comparison to COVID-19, who has argued that "at the root of every pandemic is an encounter between a disease causing microorganism and a human being," which in turn is shaped by "numerous other events taking place at the same time—as well as by the weather, the price of bread, ideas about germs, white men and jinns" (Spinney 2017: 5). This suggests not only that pandemics are frequently biological and social doubles but that they are also routinely framed by the colonial-racial animations, if not machinations of white supremacy.

We can develop this idea by turning to Brett Bowman's discussion of the global status of COVID-19 and the BLM protests during 2020. According to Bowman, pandemics comprise "public health threats so significant" that they require a global response that "fundamentally alters the human, social and economic dynamics of everyday life" to restrict possible transmissions of the pathogen. Bowman reminds us that "struggling to breathe" is an epidemiological symptom of the pandemic caused by the Severe Acute

Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) and that "the world has witnessed widespread protests against the killing of George Floyd, who like Eric Garner, was suffocated to death" as part of a system of antiblack police violence (Bowman 2020: 1). For Bowman, when we think about the morbid expression "I can't breathe," words repeated by both George Floyd and Eric Garner and in chants by BLM protesters, we should realize that the "juxtaposition of transmission risk for a respiratory disease through protest" takes place against the background of "the suffocating effects of police violence" that in turn, through the protests that it provokes, makes the protesters vulnerable to both the racial brutality of the police and the "communicable disease (COVID-19)" (Bowman 2020: 1). We can read this as a description of two deeply entangled pandemics: on the one hand, the pandemic of microbiological violence aka COVID-19 and the global policy reactions to it and, on the other, the pandemic of colonial-racial violence, aka antiblackness, and the global protest responses to it.

Pandemic One: COVID-19

Following George Floyd's murder, the medical examiner's autopsy report revealed he had tested positive for COVID-19. In 2020, COVID-19 had become a worldwide household name. COVID-19, the latest coronavirus, an infectious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, inflicts mild to extreme respiratory illness, depending on any underlying medical conditions. It spreads rapidly by person-to-person contact, through respiratory droplets deposited in the air people breathe when speaking, singing, sneezing, or coughing. Throughout 2020 we learned that anyone can get sick with COVID-19 and become seriously ill or die at any age. We also learned through recurrent studies that Black and Brown people in the US and other Western countries disproportionally contracted COVID-19 and disproportionally died from COVID-19 related conditions; and that governments ill-prepared for tackling public health crises struggled and mostly refused to switch from neoliberalism to social welfarism, while government and medical advice were contested for their veracity by the populism of New World Order conspiracy theories. While many of these developments mirrored experiences undergone during the Spanish flu (Spinney 2017), on this occasion "what was unprecedented was the reaction" (Tooze 2021). Across the world, public life was shut down, economic life was downsized and reinvented by being moved online, creating a "massive interruption of normality" and stirring up in response "various degrees of incomprehension, indignation, resistance, non-compliance and protest" (Tooze

2021: 31). The year 2020 also exposed how dependent neoliberal capitalist economies were on the stability of a natural environment it had chosen to generally neglect and not protect, given a "tiny virus mutation in a microbe could threaten the entire world's economy" (Tooze 2021: 17); and at the same time, it exposed how even limited practices of society, or at least communities and populations tethered to or invested in social relationships and institutions, as regimes of normality, became fractured and easily dislocated without emergency social welfare government support and public health intervention.

In early 2020, as governments worldwide struggled to deal with the global pandemic of COVID-19, in different and sometimes in indifferent ways, the terms were set for an informal political referendum on the very idea of an interventionist government, particularly where the ideal of public health was concerned. After decades of the neoliberal dismantling and repression of the social welfare state and the accelerated implementation of social austerity measures since the global economic crash of 2008, many Western governments found themselves not only unable to respond effectively with public health protocols for COVID-19 but facing wide-ranging public distrust in liberal democratic institutions. Right-wing populism resurged across Europe and North America, solidifying the characteristically Western democratic deficit, and responding to COVID-19 death statistics with disinformation campaigns and conspiracy theories. Throughout the year, national and subnational governments alike attempted to govern public health by restricting public life through social distancing, face mask wearing, and lockdowns. Although advocated as measures to protect public health and deter privatized lives from becoming daily reported public deaths, these public health measures also attracted the wrath of right-wing populist protests that viewed them as unnecessary government overstep. COVID-19 came to symbolize the emergence of a new political conjuncture if not a new ideological age.

Initially it all began so slowly. The first case of COVID-19 in the United States was confirmed on January 20, 2020. However, such was the rapid spread of the virus that by the end of March more than a dozen states had closed schools and imposed shutdown orders; professional and college sports suspended their seasons, international borders were closed to nonessential travel, the majority of Americans were living under stay-at-home orders, and President Trump declared a national emergency. But the pandemic was not equally devastating for all Americans; nor were the policies put in place by unprepared and desperate governments universally benefi-

cial. Early demographic data from April 2020 revealed that Black Americans were infected with and dying from coronavirus at disproportionate rates across the country. In Chicago, for example, Black residents were dying at six times the rate of their white counterparts (Thebault et al. 2020). In the months that followed, it became increasingly apparent the that the burden of the disease fell on poor Black communities and other communities of color, where people are more likely to live in densely populated areas and be employed in high-risk, low-wage, essential work, especially in the health care sectors and the service industry. The risk to Black citizens and the virus's rampage of Black communities were compounded by longstanding vectors of socioeconomic stratification, including unequal access to health care, access to and quality of public services, the ability to shelter (safely and comfortably) in place, and the inability to benefit from the safeguards and accommodations put in place for many middle-class workers, such as working from home. Between March and April, more than 22 million Americans filed unemployment claims; Black workers experienced the highest unemployment rate of any racial group—14.4 percent in July 2020, significantly higher than the white unemployment rate (9.2 percent) or the average of the total population (10.2 percent) (Long 2020).

The psychological toll of the pandemic is hard to account for and impossible to measure. The sheer amount of human loss—nearly one hundred thousand dead on the day of Floyd's murder, and more than half a million more by the time of Derek Chauvin's sentencing—is on a scale that was previously unimaginable, given the self-assuredly "advanced" nature of Western societies and the United States' self-proclamation as the world's only remaining superpower. The amount of grief and loss on both interpersonal and societal scales was paralleled by a dramatic, rapid increase in experiences of vulnerability, economic precarity, and the threat of premature death across the entire population. In the United States, blame fell squarely at the feet of the Trump administration; the haphazard, halting, and wholly insufficient federal response to the pandemic was, by all accounts, an epic government failure. Perhaps more than anything else COVID-19 translated into view the political horizon within which deeply structured racial inequalities and racial injustices, compounded by police violence, allowed a captive lockdown audience to see intimations of the slow violence structurally instrumentalized particularly against Black working-class populations. Rob Nixon describes slow violence as "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all"

(Nixon 2011: 2–3). This is how we understand terms like *structural racism*, *racial inequalities*, and *racial injustices*, mobilized in Black political discourses. They refer to the violence of wearing down and wearing out the physical and psychological well-being of Black people over decades of unacknowledged and publicly silenced suffering, sanctioned by the normativity of routine white citizen supremacy. Slow racial violence is unrelenting and opaque to a white society whose civil comfort resides in not knowing it is there or not having it brought to its attention. As Nixon has noted about violence generally, it is "conceived as an event or action that is immediate in time, explosive and spectacular in space, and as erupting into instant sensational visibility" (Nixon 2011: 2–3). This encapsulates effectively the spectacle of police antiblackness that captured national and global attention during 2020, but it was in the glare of that attention that Black protesters attempted to illuminate the slow historical racial violence of what was increasingly called white supremacy and antiblackness, and underlined the entrenchment of the second pandemic.

Pandemic Two: Antiblackness

In 2020 Black Lives Matter also became a worldwide household name. BLM was in the air that nearly everyone breathed as a result of George Floyd's murder. Once the video of it went viral, in reaction it produced an avalanche of BLM demonstrations and protests that spread rapidly across the US denouncing police racism and white supremacy. These reactive protests circulated across the globe in mass outrage at the murder and denounced police racism and white supremacy in their own particular cities and nations. BLM protests in turn were condemned and opposed by right-wing and white nationalist protesters who disparaged the organization BLM as Marxist, criminal, antiwhite, and manipulated by George Soros or Bill Gates.

The year 2020 was hugely combustible, conjuncturally and paradigmatically, effectively ushering in a referendum on the idea and principle of government by the people for the people, if indeed the neoliberal fiction of the people was not an overreach in the age of the corporations' subordination of the state to the market. And, at the same time, 2020 was also unceremoniously revealing in making visible what had long been visible to those long made invisible, the radical precarity of economically impoverished and racially violated lives, under a neoliberalism that had dispensed with the idea of government, except in securing the conditions and prospects for corporate capitalism and the social mobility of small businesses for the enterpris-

ing middle-classes, as well as investing heavily in policing, immigration control, and militarism. Government responses to COVID-19, particularly through lockdowns, mask wearing, and social distancing, inadvertently lifted from what was already a bare-life, austerity-preserving government the last remaining social contract restraints on the repressions, timings, and placings of social protest. For example, lockdowns and working and schooling from home created and concentrated an unusual sensation of community, albeit disaffected in different ways in different spaces, that pulled apart the now seemingly tenuous idea that the national population comprised only disparate, self-possessive, consumerist individuals while at work and school. In addition, it liberated time during the day for any disaffection with confinement policies to be used or overcome by collective and creative uses of that time in responding to issues that previously might have been circumscribed by lack of available time. These temporal factors that proved invaluable to the protests that took place were also mediated by the seasonal time of year, the summer, which made it more conducive to be out on the streets, even though congregating in the streets, especially if unmasked, was breaking the protocols of social distancing and lockdown and encouraging the dispersal of COVID-19 by those who were *infected*.

What the sheer persistence and proliferation of the BLM protests suggested, both nationally and globally, was that many communities, cities, and nations had been deeply *affected* by the historical-structural spread of racial policing and white supremacy, manifest as *antiblackness*. Moon-Kie Jung and João Costa Vargas (2021) have argued that "antiblackness is an antisocial logic that not only dehumanizes Black people's embattled bodies, spaces, knowledge, culture and citizenship, but renders abject all that is associated with Blackness. This generalized abjection helps us grasp all the ways in which historically and contemporarily, Black people's spaces and humanity have served as counter-points to safety, rationality, belonging and life" (8–9). We would add to this conception of antiblackness an antipolitical logic that can be understood as the condition of possibility for the antisocial logic. The antipolitical logic of antiblackness specifies all the racial regulatory ways in which the post-slavery and postcolonial so-called Negro problem of autonomous, self-organizing, mobile, nominally democratically emancipated, restive Black populations are designated social and political threats to the white body politic and its public spaces that must be contained and repressed, if not eliminated.

There are two significant ways in which the anti-political logic of antiblackness is at work. First is where Black protest, influence, advocacy, critique,

or popular culture insists against the regulation and normalization of social life by white domination and becomes the focus of demonization and violence, unless these political forms of Black life can be appropriated and assimilated to the desires and ideals of white hegemony. The second is where Black social and spatial mobilities are deemed out of control, out of place, as well as intrusive, disruptive, contaminating, or threatening to white supremacy's occupation of public, visual, emotional, historical, institutional, and discursive spaces, and can be met with policing interrogation and violent evictions unless authorized and assigned by white supremacy to be there. The anti-political logic of antiblackness obliges or encourages assimilation to the normalization of white emotionality in everyday life and saturates the social and political dissent of Black populations with the suffocation of being racially policed and racially confined to inequalities and injustices of proscribed Blackness in white valorized societies. This is the long historical, structural, colonial-racial, routinely silenced pandemic of antiblackness that permeates the US, UK, France, Canada, Brazil, and many other places where BLM protests erupted in 2020. Antiblackness is exemplified in politically besieged and neglected Black working-class and poor communities, affected by socioeconomic areas of concentrated impoverishment, inadequate health care, and the heaviest racial policing; confined by racially debilitating social pressures in housing, education, health, environment, suffocating under and symbolized by the antiblack respiratory metaphor, "I can't breathe."

The question of breathing is central here. Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) describes the possible impact of COVID-19 once an individual has contracted the virus and is acutely infected. That it has a social and political analogue referenced in the protests mobilized against the police killing of Black people and the suffocating ways in which they were killed, should not be treated as fanciful, it is symbolic. "I can't breathe," the excessively repeated, existentially consuming, anguished, ignored, dying words of Eric Garner in 2014 and George Floyd in 2020 as they were slowly and violently choked to death by the police, echoes a number of observations Frantz Fanon made about social suffocation under the French colonial occupation of Algeria during the late 1950s to early 1960s. Writing in *A Dying Colonialism*, Fanon depicts a colonial condition that bears a family resemblance to Black people being racially policed by white supremacy in contemporary Western nations, where, he argues, "it is the country as a whole, its history, its daily pulsation that are contested, in the hope of a final destruction. Under these conditions, the individuals breathing is an observed [*sic*] an

occupied breathing. It is a combat breathing" (Fanon 1965: 65). What Fanon is suggesting by the idea of breathing is the capacity to embody self-expressive, self-accountable, accommodative social life, all of which is denied and defiled in the colonial-racial condition. Breathing signifies uninhibited capacities to inhale and exhale, to absorb and express, defined by one's own limitations and exertions, within an environment that provides social life support to those capacities. Fanon is concerned with the ways in which colonial-racial regimes and their apparatuses are intimately insinuated in diminishing those capacities, in reducing its social life-supports, regulating daily social comportments through policing and constraining practices and expressions from questioning that regulation, through colonial state sanctions that effectively impede populations from being socially free to breathe and thereby provoking socially resistant breathing. The statement "I can't breathe," mobilized in BLM protests, reveals its socially embodied respiratory location in the nexus between occupied breathing and combat breathing, sustained by the antipolitical logic of antiblackness. Racial urban policing is often the flashpoint, because "even as it comes from outside, even as it maintains its pain-inflicting exteriority, it intimately interpenetrates the very somatic fibers of its target, amplifying its wounding effects across the body to the point that it reduces the subject to the state of combat breathing" (Perera and Pugilese 2011: 1). George Floyd was murdered in a state of the shifting nexus between occupied breathing and combat breathing for all the world to see.

Here we should note there is an important political homology between the general public-health concerns of national and global populations being infected by the viral circulation of COVID-19 and it spreading socially, and the national and global Black social and political concerns about being affected by the historical-structural violence of antiblackness and its spreading through racial policing.

The idea of the two pandemics describes the simultaneous respective emergence, the resurgence of two overwhelming, spatially diffuse social contagions of microbiological and colonial-racial violence against human and social bodies. It also conveys the idea of a doubling in different contract tracing and tracking senses of what Jodi Dean has said of "affective networks" that inhabit "the circulation of intensities" which "leaves traces we might mark and follow" (Dean 2015: 91). As far as the pandemic of antiblackness is concerned it is important that we follow its global traces through the affective networks of the political mobilizations organized under the banner of Black Lives Matter.

Black Lives Matter 2020

How do we trace the significance of BLM protests since 2015? What should we be thinking about? We recognize the uprisings that catalyzed sustained BLM protests were far from inevitable. Indeed, there is no reason why we would expect that the murder of George Floyd would produce renewed support for Black Lives Matter. On the five-year anniversary of the Ferguson protests, Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor (2019) argued that the BLM movement had stalled because of internal politics and external obstacles. It struggled with central questions of whether activists should seek inclusion with the political establishment or remain outside the halls of power. The chasm between reformers and revolutionaries played out in public forums, and personal disagreements frequently became open attacks on social media for all to see. "Measured by the number of formal organizations it sprouted," Taylor admits, "the movement was barely ever alive, but it thrived in the hearts and minds of young black people who ached to be heard and seen." Even the recent resurgence of 2020 could neither unite the movement nor silence its chapters' demands for transparency and accountability from its leadership. In response to the appointment of Patrisse Cullors as the executive director of the Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation in November 2020, a group of ten BLM chapters, BLM10Plus, published a statement calling for more democratic accountability, financial accountability, collective decision-making, and collaborative political analysis and agenda-building between the BLM Global Network and local chapters on the front line of the struggle.

Yet, despite these organizational struggles, the social and cultural landscape of BLM appeared to have changed, perhaps generationally, in ways yet to be understood. A radical political trajectory of opposition to white supremacy had gained considerable traction, through the various organizations that had been operating under the banner of BLM throughout the previous decade. While the movement certainly had its problems—Minneapolis BLM disbanded, for example—the longevity of the discourse around BLM, police violence, #SayHerName, prison abolition, and more was important. Activists were ready to mobilize their online and in-person networks; problem definitions and issue frames were sorted; the messaging had long been established. A week after the uprisings began, Alicia Garza, frequently identified as one of the cofounders of BLM, told the *New York Times* that "seven years ago, we were treated like we were too radical, too out of bounds of what is possible. And now, countless lives later, it's finally seen as relevant" (Wortham 2020). The claims of BLM, though far from hegemonic in the eyes of white America,

were at least recognizable and readily mobilized any time a circumstance of deadly police violence hit the mainstream media. The repetition time after time of violent and viral Black death at the hands of law enforcement was a key element to the legibility of BLM for white citizens who were otherwise predisposed to ignore it, and it also reminded Black citizens that "race as repetition involves a commitment to the reproduction of white forms of life over, above, and against black forms of life" (Hesse 2017: 589).

Perhaps it was that social media legibility and social media preoccupation time afforded by the COVID-19 lockdowns that explains the impact of other high-profile antiblackness events that preceded and followed George Floyd's murder, in the early months of the year, adding textures of critical framing as well as galvanizing critical outrage in their own right. First, there were reports of Ahmaud Arbery, a young Black man who had been jogging in February 2020 near Brunswick, Georgia, when he was followed and then murdered by three white men, who were not arrested and charged until seventy-four days after Arbery's death, and only after a video of the murder when viral. Second, in March 2020, Breonna Taylor, a young Black woman, was killed in her home when officers from the Louisville Metro Police Department used a "no-knock warrant" to force entry into her apartment. Taylor's boyfriend, Kenneth Walker, believing that the plain clothes officers were intruders, fired a warning shot; the police fired thirty-two shots in return, killing Taylor in an operation that had nothing to do with her. Third, a few days after Floyd's murder, as the video was still gaining traction online, another video surfaced of an encounter between a white woman, Amy Cooper, and a Black man, Christian Cooper, in New York City's Central Park. Birdwatcher Christian Cooper asked Amy Cooper to put her dog on a leash, and in response she called 911 and falsely claimed that an African American man was threatening her life, while Christian Cooper was videoing her.

The pattern was undeniable. Police violence ended Breonna Taylor's life, just as it had ended George Floyd's. Neither posed any kind of threat to the officers that murdered them. Taylor's death, in particular, also illustrated the kind of secondary attention that even an intersectional social movement like BLM has trouble sustaining for the vulnerability faced by Black women (African American Policy Forum 2015). Arbery's murder and Cooper's confrontation also solidified tragic messages for the broader public. Arbery was effectively lynched by white men who felt he didn't belong in their neighborhood while doing the normal, innocent, even mundane activity of jogging, which confirmed the danger Black people face simply for existing in white spaces. And yet, for those who took Arbery's murder as yet

another confirmation of Southern exceptionalism—that "real racism" only exists south of the Mason-Dixon line, that racism is the abhorrent acts of white supremacists—everything about Christian Cooper's birdwatching situation eroded that logic. The incident took place in New York City, a Democratic stronghold, in Central Park, a widely accessible public space, and was initiated by Amy Cooper, a white woman who probably would have voted Democrat if she could—it turned out that she was from Canada, a place that white settlers have proclaimed to be a multicultural paradise. Social media connected the dots between Christian Cooper and George Floyd—how quickly one could have become the other, all because a white woman was willing to weaponize her indignation at being called out for acting irresponsibly with her unleashed dog. Admittedly, these were all dramatic episodes of racial violence, very different in homology and analogy to the slow racial violence of structural inequalities and injustices we referred to earlier, but arguably their repeated discrediting and interrogation of white normativity momentarily broke its hold on white citizenship solidarity, long enough for other possibilities of critical thinking and radical participation to filter through.

We note that in 2020 there were extremely high numbers of white participants, often in largely white cities, both in North America and Europe, involved in these protests. This was in stark contrast to the BLM protests of 2015 to 2016. It is worth recalling that first iteration of BLM was Black-led and Black-focused, with a reception by majority white citizens, white corporate media, and white political establishments that can only be described as uncoordinated but nevertheless relentless demonization. By the time of the second iteration in 2020, there were not only white participants in extensive numbers sustaining protests, but white mainstream media, politicians, and corporations expressed varying forms of support and solidarity that came close to normalizing the ideals of BLM. Indeed, the protests of 2020 might have begun as a rebellion against the normalcy of deadly police violence in Black communities, but their impact soon deepened to infiltrate other parts of the criminal punishment system and diffused across social realms, in both circumstances offering a more sustained critique of the structural nature of endemic antiblack racism. The claim that the police violence was merely the outcome of the actions of a few unrepresentative "bad apples" unraveled to reveal violence at the core of the state itself. The discourse of police and prison abolition went mainstream, signaled by a watershed opinion editorial by scholar-activist Mariame Kaba (2020) in the left-leaning but not-that-far-left *New York Times* at the height of the rebellions: "Yes, We Mean

Literally Abolish the Police." There were early victories for abolitionists, including proposed cuts to the police budget in Los Angeles, a vow by members of Minneapolis City Council to dismantle the Minneapolis Police Department, and the removal of police officers from schools in Portland, Oregon, and Seattle, Washington. One year following Floyd's murder, the NAACP Legal Defense Fund reported that more than three thousand policing related bills had been introduced in state legislatures in response to the protests, in addition to the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act, passed by the US House of Representatives in 2020 and 2021.

The expansion of protest politics beyond the realm of criminal punishment aligns with the 2016 vision of the Movement for Black Lives (M4BL), which had always contained an expansive view of the scope of antiblackness and the efforts required for repair and redress. Alongside the demand that the state end its war on Black people, the M4BL platform demands reparations, a divestment from the police and reinvestment in Black communities, economic justice, community control, and the political power necessary to achieve self-determination. It was not until the uprisings of 2020, however, that the broader public began to consider the persistence of other forms of antiblackness in capitalist formations, popular culture, sports and media, universities and corporations, vernacular discourse, and practically all other major social, legal, and political institutions. In placing the police killings of and assaults on Black people at the center of sustained public debate in spectacles of mass media and social media scrutiny across months of protests, the public language for talking about racial oppression radically expanded beyond discrimination, individual prejudice, and unconscious bias to include structural racism, white supremacy, and antiblackness. As in 2015, the uprisings embodied a radically Black discursive intervention in the body politic marking it as a white citizen democracy and thereby comprised "constitutively fugitive formations of Black politics" that "cut into," interrupted, and exposed the ruse in the "modern capitalist, liberal democratic tradition of representing the Western polity outside of its colonial-racial gestations" (Hesse and Hooker 2017: 444). Certainly, it was the global circulation of the uprisings in the formerly colonizing nations of Europe and formerly colonized nations by Europe that confirmed the fugitivity and influence of Black politics, particularly given the forms of police and political repression that followed, principally inflected through the revenge of white liberal and white nationalist narratives, where the former sought to minimize and assimilate Black politics to policy statements on racial justice and the latter endeavored to demonize Black politics and recast it as antiwhite.

It is also important to remember the BLM uprisings of 2020 were not contained by the borders of the United States.[1] The specific circumstances of the fatal brutality inflicted upon George Floyd were propelled into a roving spectacle and moving commentary that propelled protests into a continental American, and even worldwide, questioning of the white legitimation of democracy. These were not disjointed, uncoordinated protests, but instead strategic, globally inflected, locally nuanced, ideologically sutured rebellions against various forms of police racism, white supremacy, and antiblackness. Despite the US being in the eye of the storm of these mobilizations, the BLM protests became and remained global. Their occurrence in nations like the UK, France, Canada, and Australia, which all have long colonial-racial histories of degrading Black populations, while affirming white supremacy and police brutality, remind us of their colonial-racial formations in the Europeans empire of modernity. The global protests, as in the US, were multiracial and multicultural. It was not just the friends and family of those directly affected by the loss of loved ones who were protesting. Those protesting exceeded the usual suspects of activism and agitation.

The global legibility of these protests appeared in two distinctive ways. First, it appeared in the recognition that police violence in the Minnesotan street can be linked through the extension of an equivalent logic to the toppling of statues of slave traders, eugenicists, and the architects of the European colonial-racial enterprise. This global dimension generated a public space where it could be demonstrated that contemporary manifestations of white supremacy and antiblackness are constitutive of the colonial, institutional, and iconic inheritances of the modern world. Second, the global legibility of BLM protests impressed upon the world that these were not only historical but also historiographical. Their performativity, particularly in different Western cities and nations, radically disturbed the "power-knowledge relation of Western societies, which in order to esteem liberalism, capitalism and democracy as universal deny the continuum of their lineages in colonial-racial institutions." In that way, by focusing on the violences of white supremacy and antiblackness, the protests were engraving in the public sphere, however temporarily or ephemerally, "a corrective to the 'White man's view of history,' which remains hegemonic in national public spaces across the planet" (Hesse and Sayyid 2020).

Matters of White Nationalism

Throughout the BLM mobilizations on both sides of the Atlantic there were public, vernacular indictments of institutional *white supremacy*, a term that

quickly became a familiar epithet in popular discourse. At the same time there were also various mobilizations of what we call white nationalism. It is important that we now clarify our understanding of these two different but related terms. Historically and politically, white supremacy is a European colonial form of racial governance through the violence, authority and ideology of *we the white people*, exercised over those designated, subordinated, and inferiorized as non-white. White supremacy became increasingly codified and elaborated at the height of late nineteenth-century European colonialism and US Jim Crow. It was a political and cultural response to the abolition of racial slavery across the Americas, exerted as public policy in punitive controls on non-white immigration, entrenched in the spatial segregation of non-white populations and symbolized by the emergence of self-proclaimed "white men's countries" in the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa (Lake and Reynolds 2008).

By the early twentieth century white supremacy was increasingly cultivated, disseminated, and globalized through Western doctrines and practices of white superiority, the civilizing mission, racial policing, racial science, and racial caricatures and stereotypes of non-whites in newspapers, literature, movies, cartoon strips, and commodity advertising. Up to the last third or quarter of the twentieth century this was the liberal humanist modernity of the Western colonial world, a white supremacist world dominated by capitalist liberal democracies that hardly faltered along Left and Right distinctions. It is worth recalling that after World War II, which was waged by Western powers for democracy against fascism and racism, those powers continued to subscribe to the white supremacy of colonialism and Jim Crow; it was anticolonial, civil rights, Black power, and anti-racist movements that precipitated the disestablishment of formalized white supremacy and the adoption by Western governments of official stances and legislation against racism within apparently inclusive democracies. However, we need to recognize it was under these conjunctural circumstances that a different lineage of white supremacy predominated. Although one lineage of white supremacy was now readily pathologized as the legacy of Nazism, Jim Crow, eugenics, and the Far Right, an alternative lineage of white supremacy emerged, reconstituted, influential, and determining in the white citizen's normative understanding and liberal enforcement of it as a universally agreed "silent protocol," enabled by the strategic and cynical removal from public discourse of any discursive evidence of racism (Fureudi 1999). Consequently, what came to shape the Black politics of the US post–civil rights era were racial antagonisms contextualized by assertions of the silent yet palpable protocol of white supremacy and denials by the white citizen body politic that such a protocol existed.

These racial antagonisms had two social formations. First, white supremacy shifted from the largely representational, activated in public ideologies, to the largely performative, routinely institutionalizing the normative rule of white citizens over non-white citizens, underwritten by legislative and policy-driven white privilege, political dominance, economic disparities, law and order policies, and cultural wars of appropriation and demonization against Black citizens. Second, seemingly paradoxically, the post–civil rights era also saw the influence of Black politics on limited anti-race–discrimination changes in law and public policy, immigration, affirmative action, diversity, and equal opportunities, as well as the partial opening up of Black access to the political, public, and corporate spheres, media, education, and popular culture. The racial antagonism between these social formations was signified in confrontational discourse that, on the one hand, insisted that anti-racist changes to the white normativity of sociality had gone too far and, on the other, insisted antiracist sociality had not gone far enough and white normativity was white supremacy in disguise. What more than anything else symbolized the political incarnation of that racial antagonism as structural was the 2008 election of Barack Obama as the first African American president of the US. In particular, Obama became a lightning rod for the for the grievances of white nationalism, which is the contemporary political formation of whiteness that was ignited to confront mobilizations of BLM during 2020.

Expressed at its most general level, white nationalism is the belief that national identity should be built around white ethnicity and that white people should therefore maintain both a demographic majority and dominance of the nation's culture and public life. Hence white nationalism is about maintaining political and economic dominance, not just a numerical majority or cultural hegemony (Kaufman 2019). Michael Feola (2021: 531) has suggested white nationalistic anxieties emanate from a "melancholic rage" encapsulated by the feeling that not only is the nation "slipping away from its racialized core but is being taken from its rightful heirs and given to undeserving others" (531). The suggestion is that in a Western democracy, a white majority and white dominance ought to be irreplaceable. From this perspective we can think critically about the meaning of white nationalism in two connected ways. First, as a white nostalgic imaginary of American patriotism invested in a driven desire to restore the institutional and cultural aesthetics of a colorless heritage of the US, normatively white but unmarked as white. Second, as an adaptable and flexible white supremacist strategy of opposing and violating non-white influences, interventions, and identities as a means of restoring paradoxically a national future based on its white nos-

talgia. White nationalism is a racially restorative desire that responds to the perceived diminution or decline of white supremacy as general normativity.

That what we have called the two pandemics took place during the Trump presidency requires further comment about white nationalist politics and ideology. As Alexander Laban Hinton reminds us, summarizing so many commentators before him, Trump's path to the presidency "was very much intwined with demagoguery, hate speech, the demonization of non-white others, and the increased visibility of neofascists and other white power actors who supported him" (Hinton 2021: 13). Trump was both the mirror and focus of white nationalism in a country whose meaning had always been secured and defined by two white Americas, one conservative, one liberal, sometimes different, sometimes the same, but always ensuring the authorizing rule of whiteness enforced as normativity. However, when Trump entered the presidential arena in 2016, the apparent post–civil rights era silent protocol agreement, that explicit, uncoded forms of white supremacist discourse had no place in public office, was broken by Trump. Instead, he played conservative white America against liberal white America, and white America against non-white America, re-signifying in public and popular culture the visibility and audibility of a steadily growing white nationalist movement of grievances. He symbolically and politically boosted the racist self-esteem and confidence of various identities and movements in white nationalist America who were deeply unsettled by what they perceived as the intrusions and contaminations of non-whiteness, immigrants, diversity, feminism, Islam, and liberalism perceived as foreign and corrosive to the meaning of the real America. This mirrored the rising tide of white nationalism that was sweeping through Europe, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, where, ideologically, these movements understood themselves as righteous saviors and conservationists of white heritage, moving against what they described in Europe as the "Great Replacement" and in the US as "White Genocide," both of which posited the conspiratorial idea that policies were being developed through immigration, diversity, and affirmative action to either eliminate the white population or reduce it to a powerless minority (Camus 2016).

We can see this illustrated in one the more eventful signifiers of white nationalism in recent years that became unmistakably public and identified with the Trump presidency. It took place in 2017, when a mass gathering of different right-wing groups came together as protesting white nationalists in the "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, Virginia. Although the protests were ostensibly and strategically concerned with opposing developments to remove statues that memorialized the Confederacy, it was more

significant for three events. First, the slogan the protesters chanted as they marched through the university campus at night with burning torches revealed to the world the political emotionality of white nationalism. The protesters chanted repeatedly "Jews will not replace us." Second, the white nationalist rally led to the murder of Heather Heyer, a white anti-racist counterprotester, who was killed when a white nationalist drove a car at high speed into an anti-racist counterprotest group. Third, Trump refused to condemn white nationalism, providing cover and succor to it by declaring publicly, "There were good people on both sides" (Tenold 2018). What these three events signified was a white nationalism that envisaged a nation split and torn between authentic and inauthentic whiteness; in particular the accusatory reference to Jews indicted them as renegade whites, responsible for the machinations of liberal policies of immigration, affirmative action, and anti-racism that introduced non-white people, influences, and ideas into the white landscape of the nation. Here we see the Nazi resonance of antisemitism as white supremacy. It shares a political family resemblance with Adolf Hitler's observations in his 1926 autobiography *Mein Kampf*, about the French military occupation of the Rhineland during the early 1920s and their deployment of colonized African soldiers after World War I. Hitler's white supremacist grievances condemned the Jews as "responsible for bringing negroes into the Rhineland, with the ultimate idea of bastardizing the white race which they hate and thus lowering its cultural and political level so that the Jew might dominate" (Hitler 1926: 296). This too is a lingering strain of contemporary white nationalism.

Trump's white nationalist presidency, regularly replenished through mass public, pseudo Nuremberg rallies, mobilized his personalized investments in white grievances as if they were public policy. In short, "Trump played directly to white power sentiments and beliefs ('this is our country'), sometimes with hypermasculine and misogynistic language that valorized white male virility" (Hinton 2021: 14). There were at least two main white nationalist cultural and political developments that gained popular traction in US culture between 2016 and 2020, each emphasizing white activist convictions that white ownership of the US needed to be restored. The first was the increasing visibility of demonstrations and rallies, by the Far Right, neo-Nazis, and white militias, together with sporadic but not infrequent mass public shootings by lone white gunmen. The second was the regular spate of white individual citizens questioning the presence of Black people in various social arenas, ranging from gateways to residential housing complexes, hotels, parks, coffee shops, and threatening to call the police, and in

many cases calling the police. These were dominant activisms of white nationalist grievance, that white citizens were losing the control and ownership of their own country. It explains the populist appeal of Trump's presidential campaign slogan while he was running for office, which continued to resonate, while he was in office, taking on a life of its own among his supporters: "Make America Great Again."

As Juliet Hooker (2017) has argued, white grievances are the outcome of political imaginations that have not been shaped by loss in democratic politics. This orientation to political entitlement distorts white citizens' political views into a racial calculus in which they can only understand Black gains as white defeats. A post–civil rights era history of white grievances against civil rights, affirmative action, diversity, demographic decline, and immigration has now become exacerbated by the emotionally political deluge of BLM protests and the surrounding rising tide of white nationalism.

The year 2020 was a time of urgent divergent protests in white and Black. The anti-COVID-19 climate of protests was initiated by white-led and dominated demonstrations against public health measures, such as social distancing, mask mandates, and lockdowns. In Michigan, for example, hundreds of armed white citizens gathered inside the state capitol and attempted to enter the floor of the legislative chamber in April 2020, where state lawmakers debated Democratic governor Gretchen Whitmer's request to extend her emergency powers during the pandemic. There were limited responses to this kind of display of white anger by the police; predictably, the increased powers granted to local law enforcement during the pandemic were designed and destined to target and extract fines from poor and racialized populations.

In thinking about the symbolic meanings of the white and Black protests that would define the street politics of 2020, Carolyn M. Rouse has written about social media meme commentary on this juxtaposition, singling out in particular contemporaneous TikTok posts that showed photographs of white Americans protesting against lockdown orders with signs that read "don't cancel my golf season" and "we demand haircuts" juxtaposed next to photographs of Black protesters with signs that read "don't kill us" and "I can't breathe" (Rouse 2021: 360). The image of white citizens protesting against what was inconvenient to them and Black citizens protesting against what was deadly to them was sustained throughout the year. This was part of the context in which Minneapolis exploded in protest. As Tobi Haslett (2021) writes, "Something deeper and more disruptive had breached the surface of social life, conjuring exactly the dreaded image the conspiracy theorists refused to face. This was open black revolt: simultaneous but unco-

ordinated, a vivid fixture of American history sprung to life with startling speed. . . . But what emerged under the banner of blackness was soon blended with other elements, flinging multi-racial crowds against soldiers and police." In the weeks that followed, protests spread across nearly every major city in the United States. They were the largest, longest-lasting, most diverse mass mobilizations—possibly ever. The protests inaugurated an incredible albeit temporary shift in white public opinion. According to one poll, white people's support for Black Lives Matter increased more in the two weeks following George Floyd's murder than it had in the previous two years (Cohn and Quealy 2020). There was no precedent, comparison, or roadmap for the kind of political action unleashed on the streets of America.

The politics of Black and white conflicting protests across the two pandemics, COVID-19 and antiblackness, were also embroiled in interrogating the role *white normative narratives* play in suppressing the critique of structural racism, white supremacy, and antiblackness, as well as their role in underlining the valorized discourse of the representative citizen as white. A white normative narrative is a story, explanation, or representation of a subject matter in relation to which it could reasonably be expected to make some direct reference to or raise issues of race, racism, colonialism, or white supremacy, but instead avoids making any of those references. A white normative narrative has the kinds of emotional emplotment and stage directions that foreclose any facility to recall or reveal a colonial-racial grammar. It is the story that is always being told as well as the story to tell one's children. Seamlessly erasing evidence, memories, and resonances of social and political forms constituted and shaped by racial hierarchy and racial segregation, a white normative narrative fosters the routine illusion of an unremarkable, ineffable white exclusivity and white domination in its representations as incidental, natural, and universal, outside any historical context of race.[2] White normative narratives are the cornerstone of American universalism. One of the ways we can think about the impact of the BLM protests is by examining the extent to which the hegemony of the white normative narrative has been dislodged, especially among white citizens expressing solidarity with BLM.

Of course we need to recognize there were three kinds of white citizen protests during 2020, the first two of which were always going to congeal around desires to restore the white normative narrative. The first was directed against COVID-19 social protocols of lockdowns, face masks, and social distancing, eventually morphing into antivaccination protests. The second was directed against BLM demonstrations and campaigns for defunding or abolishing the police, and also associated with activism against Critical Race The-

ory, the 1619 Project, and the teaching of the history of race in schools. The third was radically counter to the previous two and involved mobilizing active support for and participation in BLM protests, especially in white-dominated cities. In their mobilizing Black languages and demonstrations of critique, through conceptualizing and vocalizing "structural racism," "white supremacy," "antiblackness," and interrupting the normalization of racial policing and even the conventional narration of US history that fails to account for the issues underpinning the protests, they became involved in a wider Black cultural politics of overthrowing the white normative narrative. Against that background, we can only say 2020 (re)introduced some white citizens (who knows how many or for how long?) to accelerating the working through and confronting of white nationalism and returned others to the white defense of Making America Great Again.

Conclusion

The uprisings that began as protests in Minneapolis, hitting a tipping point and then bleeding across the country, continent, and globe in 2020, were certainly unpredictable, and perhaps even unfathomable, to those of us writing about BLM protests in 2017 (Hesse and Hooker 2017), when we made political sense of protests that emerged from Black rage (Thompson 2017), revealed the limits of political action confined to the formal realm of voting, public office, and policy proposals (Makalani 2017), and challenged the mainstreaming of antiracist cultures through neoliberal appropriation (Márquez and Rana 2017). However, what has come to pass in the months and years following George Floyd's murder is nevertheless far more familiar. Support among white Americans for BLM and racial justice was temporary, declining swiftly in the latter third of 2020, reaching levels lower than they were before George Floyd's murder (Chudy and Jefferson 2021). This leads us to ask, perhaps only momentarily, was there a racial reckoning in the summer of 2020, and if so, what exactly was reckoned, or reckoned with? The idea of reckoning is interesting. Most commonly used to denote the process through which debts are settled, promises are honored, and payments are made, it is a phrase steeped in temporality, meant to imply a balance once lost or never realized has finally been restored, but simultaneously an experiment of futurology, in that "to reckon" is to imagine, to conjure, to dream, to understand, and perhaps to expect. More often than not, though, a reckoning faces the past, again and again, not unlike other words in its semantic web: repetition, rehearsal, revision, reconnaissance, return. It also invokes

ideas of space and territoriality; in navigational terms, a dead reckoning is used to calculate one's geographic position relative to where we were when we last knew where we were.

This so-called racial reckoning was presumed to be an inflection point in American history, when the abstraction of the nation was forced to come to terms with the enduring legacy of slavery, to finally acknowledge its unpaid debt to Black citizens and deliver on the promissory note of American citizenship. Of course, the idea that some form of racial equilibrium could be put in motion as if it is simply a matter of capitalistic transactions that compute and compare costs and benefits, inputs and outputs, is overly simplistic. A reckoning necessarily implies a judgment and an atonement. The determination of what is owed and to whom is always an interpretive process and therefore imbued with social power. Any kind of reconciliation—an inevitable extension of any reckoning—that occurs through the prism of the liberal democratic state will inevitably naturalize, privilege, and even extend the nature of state power against which the reconciliation must take place. Given the experiences of Indigenous peoples around the world, there are reasons to be wary of the idea of "reconciliation," which is not infrequently a hollow affair of liberal democratic trickery and masquerade. But let us be clear, there was no racial reckoning in 2020. The two pandemics allowed us to see momentarily in a global idiom in real time that Black populations, their politics, culture, thought, and solidarities, remain entangled in struggles with and oppositions to racial policing, antiblackness, and white nationalism.

Notes

1 For example, in Toronto, activists connected Floyd's murder on May 25 to the recent death of Regis Korchinski-Paquet, a Black-Indigenous woman who fell from the balcony of her twenty-fourth-story apartment after the police were called to assist with a mental health crisis. On May 29, 2020, French legal authorities cleared police officers of wrongdoing in the death of Adama Traoré, a Black man who died in police custody in 2016; on June 2, 2020, more than twenty thousand protesters in Paris, Lyon, and Lille flooded the streets in the name of both Traoré and Floyd. In Brazil, where police brutality has long been a focus of Black activism, thousands of protesters marched in support of Black Lives Matter and against President Jair Bolsonaro; in response, the president called the demonstrators "thugs" and "terrorists." According to preliminary data collected by the authors, the rallying cry of Black Lives Matter also shaped protests in Kenya, Tunisia, Nigeria, Japan, Palestine, Poland, Denmark, Iceland, Norway, Greece, Australia, Bermuda, Mexico, and even the McMurdo Station in Antarctica.

2 For example, consider the dominant leitmotif in any narration of the role of the US in World War II. It's a story that has been told countless times in passed down recollections, political speeches, textbooks, and movies, where the US is fighting for democ-

racy against Nazi Germany; and yet it manages to remain a story that mutes any recognition of the absence of democracy for the majority of African Americans under Jim Crow and obscures the presence of African Americans who fought in the war serving in racially segregated troops.

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