

“We’re Still Dying Quicker Than We Can Effect Change”: #BlackLivesMatter and the Limits of 21st-Century Policing Reform¹

Michelle S. Phelps, Christopher E. Robertson, and Amber Joy Powell
University of Minnesota

Black Lives Matter protests in the mid-2010s thrust police violence into the public spotlight, highlighting the stark racial divide in experiences with law enforcement and prompting a wave of police reform. We examine how residents in low-income neighborhoods on the North-side of Minneapolis, Minnesota, made sense of this focus on police violence and reform across racial lines. Drawing on interviews with a diverse sample of 112 adults, we show that there was broad consensus on the social problem of racialized police violence, but Black residents perceived the problem as more severe, more persistent, and in need of more dramatic forms of racial redressment than their white neighbors.

INTRODUCTION

Freedom from state violence has been at the center of each successive wave of Black freedom struggles, including the Black Lives Matter Movement (BLMM) and the broader Movement for Black Lives (M4BL), which

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sparked nationwide protests challenging police violence in the mid-2010s (Ransby 2018; Boyles 2019; Hinton 2021). The explosion of BLM protests forced a political reckoning about police violence under President Barack Obama, who formed the Taskforce on 21st Century Policing to bring together leading scholars and practitioners to outline the “best practices” for police reform. Their report, released in 2015, served as a roadmap for liberal policing principles and strategies, including implicit bias and deescalation training; accountability policies, such as body-worn cameras and use-of-force restrictions; and community engagement efforts. Over the next half-decade, police departments across the country selectively adopted these recommendations, in part due to pressure from local BLM protests (Arora, Phoenix, and Delshad 2019), even as federal leadership turned more conservative after President Donald Trump’s election in 2016. In the summer of 2020, however, BLM protests again erupted across the country after the police killing of George Perry Floyd Jr. in Minneapolis, Minnesota, becoming one of the largest movements in U.S. history (Buchanan, Bui, and Patel 2020). This time, activists have called for more than police reform, demanding defunding, dismantling, and abolishing the police.

We explore the time between these flashpoints—collecting data in 2017–19—to better understand this period of upheaval, asking how residents in heavily policed neighborhoods in Minneapolis made sense of racialized police violence and attempts toward police reform. Previous criminological scholarship has extensively documented orientations toward law enforcement among members of race-class subjugated (RCS) communities, or places and groups that experience stark racial and economic exclusion and state predation (Soss and Weaver 2017). Often focusing on low-income, predominantly Black or African-American (and, increasingly, majority Latina/o/x) neighborhoods, this work finds that policing in these communities is marked by routine injustice and violence—including racial profiling, intrusive vehicle and pedestrian stops, verbal harassment, and physical abuse—and a failure to protect residents from victimization. Together, this overpolicing and underprotection of RCS communities produces what legal

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scholar Monica C. Bell (2017) terms legal estrangement, a process of alienation from the state.

We build on this research by asking how people in the neighborhoods most impacted by violence have experienced this public spotlight on policing in recent years. In addition, we focus not only on attitudes about police violence but also residents' ideas about police reform and the future of public safety—or methods of redressing legal estrangement. Extant studies typically document that residents in RCS communities often desire more fair and responsive policing (Campeau, Levi, and Foglesong 2021; Carr, Napolitano, and Keating 2007; McCarthy, Hagan, and Herda 2020; Meares and Prowse 2021), alongside other kinds of community investments (Forman 2017). One of the goals of anti-police violence organizing in recent years, however, has been to challenge this "bounded creativity" (Bell 2017), encouraging Americans to imagine other responses beyond the police to address social problems (Vitale 2017; Kaba 2021). As the BLM protests grew into a movement, they increasingly articulated a vision that countered the dominant prescription to the policing crisis—arguing not (just) for police reform but for broader social investments to support the flourishing of Black communities.

In addition, one of the victories of the BLMM/M4BL has been to focus white attention on the problem of police violence. During the initial BLM protest years, white Americans (particularly Democrats) grew increasingly concerned about police violence specifically and racial inequality more broadly (Hayward 2020). This swing accelerated dramatically during the massive protests for George Floyd, with some conservatives finally voicing support for BLM and President Trump signing a police reform executive order.² By that point, white Americans' confidence in the police had slightly declined, with 56% expressing "quite a lot" or "a great deal" of confidence in the police, while Black Americans' attitudes plummeted, with only 19% reporting the same (Jones 2020). Yet, by the following year, white Americans' support for BLM (and perceived unfavorability of the police) quickly receded, expanding racial (and partisan) divides in these attitudes (Chudy and Jefferson 2021; Reny and Newman 2021). This retrenchment highlights the importance of qualitatively studying white Americans' racialization and racial attitudes as well as the possibilities and limits of "racial sympathy" in the contemporary United States (Chudy 2021; see also Cole 2020).

Bridging these literatures, this article uses qualitative interviews with residents of heavily policed multiracial neighborhoods in Minneapolis to

² Full text available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/executive-order-safe-policing-safe-communities>.

investigate attitudes about police violence and police reform in the Black Lives Matter era. We ask two interrelated research questions: (1) How do people in heavily policed communities make sense of police violence and recent reform efforts to redress this violence? (2) How does race—or more specifically, racialization, racism, and racial privilege—shape residents’ orientations toward police and police reform? Their answers help us to understand why record-breaking protests erupted during the summer of 2020 as well as the barriers to implementing transformative change that followed.

In this article, we focus on Minneapolis, an understudied early hotspot for BLMM/M4BL activism and 21st Century Policing style reform. In the mid-2010s, the city was selected as one of six demonstration sites for the National Initiative for Building Community Trust and Justice and simultaneously experienced several high-profile police killings that rocked the city (and country). We recruited interviewees in North Minneapolis (“Northside”), the heart of the city’s Black community and a set of neighborhoods marked by high rates of poverty and police-citizen contact. However, North Minneapolis remains a multiracial neighborhood, allowing us to compare experiences and attitudes across racial identities. Between 2017 and 2019, our research team conducted interviews with 112 adults who resided in (or, for a few, heavily frequented) Northside. The interviewers asked residents to share their experiences with exposure to violence and law enforcement, knowledge of police reform and anti-police violence activism, and desires for the future of policing. In the analysis, we compare and contrast the experiences and discourses of residents of color (who primarily identified as Black or African-American) and their white neighbors.

Across our sample, participants largely agreed that racialized police violence was an acute social problem. For many white residents this was a new awareness, whereas residents of color often described pervasive negative experiences with law enforcement throughout their lives. Race, and the embodied experiences of racism, also divided residents’ sensemaking about the scale of the problem and its potential means of redressment. Black residents’ personal experiences with criminalization and state violence (toward themselves and loved ones) produced what we describe as a “racial realist” perspective, drawing on the work of legal scholar Derrick Bell (1992). These community members argued that racism was endemic in policing and that real redressment would require massive overhauls of our systems—both inside and outside law enforcement—to create a society that valued the lives of people of color. In addition, we document that a minority of residents (more frequently, but not exclusively, white) continued to resist framing racialized police violence as a social problem, instead identifying crime and neighborhood exposure to victimization as the real threat facing Northside. Together, our findings show the potential and limitations of protests, media campaigns, and even spatial proximity to develop white Americans’

racial sympathy, as well as the complex array of perspectives within Black communities on law enforcement. Our conclusion considers how our findings resonate with more recent developments in Minneapolis, including struggles to defund, dismantle, and abolish the Minneapolis Police Department (MPD). We argue that to ultimately redress racialized state failure and race-class subjugation, structural, political, and cultural transformations that support Black lives must accompany changes in the criminal legal system.

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

Racism, Policing, and Legal Estrangement

Research consistently finds that African-Americans are at heightened risk of involuntary police contact and demeaning, abusive, and violent police interactions, even when controlling for the behavior of the person encountering police (Rojek, Rosenfeld, and Decker 2012; Legewie 2016; Nix et al. 2017; Voigt et al. 2017). As critical race scholars have noted, racism and policing have always been intimately intertwined—with policing practices shaped by the long history of anti-Blackness and Blackness continually (re)inscribed with criminality (Muhammad 2011; Van Cleve and Mayes 2015; Hinton and Cook 2021; Kramer and Remster 2021). Black Americans are also more likely than white Americans to live in the low-income, racially segregated neighborhoods where law enforcement is most abusive and predatory (Soss and Weaver 2017).³ A long line of research in criminology and related fields argues that this barrage of negative police encounters among residents of RCS communities fosters legal cynicism, “a cultural orientation in which the law and the agents of its enforcement . . . are viewed as illegitimate, unresponsive, and ill equipped to ensure public safety” (Kirk and Papachristos 2011, p. 1191; see also Sampson and Bartusch 1998; Brunson and Miller 2006; Carr et al. 2007; Kirk and Matsuda 2011; Hitchens, Carr, and Clampet-Lundquist 2018; Braga, Brunson, and Drakulich 2019).

Bell (2017) argues that this dynamic is better conceptualized as legal estrangement, “a theory of detachment and eventual alienation from the law’s

³ Our focus in this article is on low-income neighborhoods, but the police maltreatment of African-Americans operates across class contexts. Heightened police targeting of Black Americans may in fact be higher in racially mixed, predominantly white, and/or gentrifying neighborhoods (Stewart et al. 2009; Epp, Maynard-Moody, and Haider-Markel 2014; Boyles 2015; Bell 2016, 2020; Laniyonu 2018). In addition, since Black middle-class neighborhoods are often spatially (and socially) proximate to Black low-income areas (Pattillo 2013), they can experience “spillovers” in aggressive policing and vicarious marginalization (Bell 2017).

enforcers” that “reflects the intuition among many people in poor communities of color that the law operates to exclude them from society” (p. 2054). Where legal cynicism sees distrust of the police, and residents’ cultural repertoires, as the focal concern, legal estrangement centers residents’ alienation from the state and its production through exclusionary, abusive, and inadequate policing (see also Soss and Weaver 2017). Bell (2017) defines three sociolegal processes undergirding legal estrangement: procedural injustice, or experiences of discriminatory and/or abusive policing; vicarious marginalization, including experiences of police maltreatment by friends and family and stories transmitted through traditional and social media; and structural exclusion, or “lower-quality policing” (p. 2114) and a failure to protect, including delayed responses to 911 calls, police hostility or apathy during citizen-initiated contacts, and high rates of criminal victimization (see also Meares 1997; Meares and Kahan 1998; Fortner 2015; Forman 2017). As a result, Black Americans often report feeling simultaneously overpoliced yet underprotected, as racialized state failure produces both high rates of street crime alongside ineffective, abusive policing (Miller 2014; Bell 2017; Boyles 2019).

Due to this dual state failure, residents of RCS communities experience high rates of interpersonal and community-level disorder and victimization, including domestic violence, fighting and gun violence, and public drug dealing, with few options for state assistance outside of law enforcement (Carr et al. 2007; Schaible and Hughes 2012; Bell 2016; Hagan et al. 2018). As a result, despite social norms against “snitching,” residents often report that they rely on both informal dispute resolution and, when necessary, police intervention (Clampet-Lundquist, Carr, and Kefalas 2015). This conflicted reliance on the police may partly explain mixed empirical findings on whether high-profile instances of police brutality reduce 911 calls in RCS communities (Desmond, Papachristos, and Kirk 2016; Cohen et al. 2019; Zoorab 2020). Similarly, studies that ask residents what they would like to see in policing (and/or to reduce crime) find that RCS communities often voice support for more and better (i.e., more responsive, just, and fair) law enforcement (Skogan 2006; Weitzer and Tuch 2006; Carr et al. 2007; Fortner 2015; Forman 2017; McCarthy et al. 2020; Meares and Prowse 2021), in part because they draw on the law’s promise of a just response rather than their past experiences of poor treatment (Campeau et al. 2021; Meares and Prowse 2021).

Bell (2017) explains this “conflicted desire for police protection” as a form of “bounded creativity” (p. 2119), or difficulty in imagining alternative kinds of social control and community development to address public safety in places experiencing mass criminalization and persistently high victimization rates (see also Clair 2021). While this finding of support for more law enforcement holds across demographic groups in poor urban neighborhoods, there are notable patterns of variation. Some studies find that older residents, homeowners (or adults with relatively higher socioeconomic status), and

We're Still Dying

women are more likely to engage the police to solve neighborhood concerns (Cobbina, Miller, and Brunson 2008; Bell 2016; Forman 2017; Barrett and Welsh 2018; Elliott and Reid 2019). Research on non-Black people of color and the police has been more sparse; the largest of these literatures is on Latinx Americans' experiences with and orientations toward law enforcement, which often fall in between their Black and white neighbors (Schuck, Rosenbaum, and Hawkins 2008; Lai and Zhao 2010; Rios 2011). In this analysis, we predominantly focus on racial gaps in attitudes about police violence and police reform (which were layered on top of class differences), although we also note where patterns varied by gender and age.

Few qualitative studies have examined the experiences of white residents in low-income urban neighborhoods, but the extant literature suggests that whiteness serves as a partial shield against experiencing procedural injustice even within neighborhoods with majority nonwhite residents and among white Americans with police contact (Hitchens et al. 2018; Cobbina 2019). While some research on poor white Americans has shown that they can be "othered" and/or racialized due to their social proximity to people of color (McDermott 2006) and thus treated with courtesy stigma in the criminal justice system (Van Cleve 2016), surveys find that white respondents consistently report more positive evaluations of the police than Black Americans, even holding income and neighborhood conditions constant (Weitzer and Tuch 2005; Schuck et al. 2008; Wheelock, Stroshine, and O'Hear 2019). Fewer studies have qualitatively investigated how white Americans think about the solutions to problems in policing, in part because they typically identify fewer problems in the first place (Herbert 2006), although that pattern may have shifted in the context of BLMM/M4BL mobilization.

#BlackLivesMatter: From a Hashtag to a Movement

Black communities have long fought against police violence, with many of the Black rebellions of the 1960s and '70s sparked by instances of police violence (Hinton 2021). The #BlackLivesMatter hashtag was founded by three Black feminist organizers in the wake of George Zimmerman's acquittal for the murder of Trayvon Martin in 2013. In 2014, following the police killing of Michael Brown, digital activism and on-the-ground protests exploded in Ferguson, and then across the country, propelling the "Black Lives Matter" rallying cry (Boyles 2019; Cobbina 2019). As Williamson, Trump, and Einstein (2018) trace, BLM protests spread in the following years to cities across the country, often following local police killings. These protests built on years of struggle against racism in the criminal justice system and work by social movements to define mass incarceration as a systemic injustice for Black Americans (Oliver 2020; Walker 2020). The protests drew massive

media interest toward police violence, which, at times, sympathetically broadcast to the public the concerns of protesters and organizers (Kilgo, Mourão, and Sylvie 2019). As the hashtag and protests grew into a movement, BLM came to incorporate the formal Black Lives Matter Movement (BLMM) and its local chapters, as well the umbrella Movement for Black Lives (M4BL) collective, and online activism using the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter (or #BLM) from movement-affiliated leaders and activists and social media users alike (Ransby 2018).

Much of the nascent social movements literature on BLMM/M4BL has focused on whether or not the movement fits with classic movement theories developed to understand the Civil Rights movement (Tillery 2019). While some aspects of the movement—including its use of digital media and centering of women, transgender, and other traditionally marginalized voices—are novel, the BLMM/M4BL has several similarities with earlier organizing for racial equality and Black liberation. Most centrally, the movement has attempted to increase the salience of racism—as made visible through state violence against Black boys and men, and, through the #SayHerName campaign, Black women (Ransby 2018). As Butler (2017) argues, one of the victories of BLMM/M4BL activism has been to disrupt the prevailing “police-community relations” frame of the policing crisis to center instead anti-Blackness and white supremacy.

At the same time, the social movements literature has become increasingly race conscious, exploring how race and racism shape social movements and their reception by the mainstream (i.e., white-dominant) culture (Oliver 2017). Bracey (2016), for example, critiques the implicit whiteness of much of the early social movements literature on Black resistance in the 1950s and 1960s, arguing that the goal was never simply to change the state (or just “civil rights”) but rather to disrupt racism and white supremacy as the U.S. status quo. Similarly, recent movement scholarship emphasizes how disruptive acts work not by changing (white) hearts and minds but by focusing public attention on “things that they are motivated to ignore” (Hayward 2020, p. 449). Thus, some scholars argue that it may matter less whether Americans, and white Americans in particular, “approve” of the BLMM (or specific kinds of political actions) than whether increased attention to police violence, and other glaring racial injustices, shape public discourse and the new “common sense” about racism and policing, which in turn can open the door for policy victories (Woody 2015). As evidence for this changing landscape, Hayward (2020) points to the 2014–16 spike in the number of white Americans who chose “race relations/racism” as the most important problem facing the U.S. Chudy (2021) argues that such support can be understood in the context of “racial sympathy,” defined as white Americans’ “distress over black suffering” (p. 123), which is correlated with support for policies that benefit Black Americans. More recent public opinion data

We're Still Dying

suggest that the BLM protests following Floyd's murder deepened the political polarization of attitudes toward policing, intensifying the unfavorability of law enforcement among white liberals (and perceptions of discrimination against Black Americans more generally), while staunch conservatives showed little change (Reny and Newman 2021).

As the BLMM/M4BL gained momentum, the movement's goals slowly moved from garnering public attention toward specific demands for policy and practice changes at the local, state, and federal levels. The BLM frame of the problem as situated in racism (and, as the movement evolved, racial capitalism) suggested a need for radical solutions (Ransby 2018). Yet organizers and movement leaders developed different visions of these solutions—debating how much to center police and police reform. In 2015, a coalition of Ferguson activists introduced Campaign Zero, an online repository of data and research as well as a police reform platform, which went beyond the 21st Century Policing model to demand bolder changes, including ending “broken windows” policing, community oversight with teeth, making more stringent use-of-force policies and accountability for violations of those policies, ending for-profit policing, demilitarization, and renegotiating police union contracts. In contrast, in 2016, the M4BL unveiled their “Vision for Black Lives,” which detailed few police reform policies but instead demanded an end to the “War on Black People,” calling for funds spent on the carceral system to instead be redirected to supportive services like housing, employment, and health care.⁴

By 2020, these two platforms for change—transformational reform versus divest-invest—came to a head with Campaign Zero’s #8cantwait campaign, which proposed eight policies to restrict use of force and increase accountability for misconduct.⁵ This was quickly countered with the #8toabolition campaign.⁶ Abolitionist organizers sharply critiqued the #8cantwait platform as the kind of reform that entrenched, rather than reduced, police power. Campaign Zero instead framed its reforms as a harm-reduction strategy to reduce the number of police killings as more systemic alternatives and community investments expand. Yet for abolitionists, the police represent, by definition, state violence—a fact no amount of reform can change (Vitale 2017; Akbar 2020). This abolitionist perspective on public safety entered the public discourse to unprecedented visibility after the police murder of George Floyd and the rebellion that followed, with abolitionist activists and scholars speaking to reporters and penning op-eds in the *New York Times* (Kaba 2021) and elsewhere.

⁴ Available at <https://m4bl.org/policy-platforms>.

⁵ Available at <https://8cantwait.org>.

⁶ Available at <https://www.8toabolition.com>.

We conducted interviews midway through this period of contestation, after the first wave of BLM protests but before summer 2020. Our analysis interrogates how residents in a heavily policed community in Minneapolis made sense of public conversations around police violence and police reform in the context of their own lived experiences. We focus on a set of neighborhoods that are majority nonwhite and low income and thus face the brunt of abusive and inadequate policing. By interviewing a diverse sample of adults in North Minneapolis, we are able to trace how embodied experiences of racism and racial privilege shaped residents' perspectives on police violence and reform. While our data are limited to the years prior to Floyd's death, many of the dynamics found in our data continue to mark the city's response.

DATA AND METHODS

We selected Minneapolis because of the city's position as an early center of BLM protests and police reform. Minneapolis is a midsize city in the Midwest, notable for both its left-leaning politics and stark racial disparities in wealth, housing, education, and criminal legal system contact. BLMM activism in Minneapolis emerged first as solidarity protests with Ferguson after the killing of Michael Brown (Ransby 2018) and continued to build momentum through a series of local police killings, starting with the 2015 death of Jamar Clark, a Black man fatally shot by a white MPD officer who responded with his partner to an altercation between Clark, a woman he had been at a party with, and two paramedics in North Minneapolis. Philando Castile was shot and killed by police in his car after being pulled over in a nearby suburb in 2016, similarly sparking large protests (and later a criminal trial). In 2017, after we began interviews, a Somali-American MPD officer shot and killed Justine Damond (née Ruszczyk), a white woman living in a wealthy neighborhood in South Minneapolis who had called 911 to report a possible sexual assault occurring in her alleyway. Three other Black and multiracial men, Thurman Blevins, Travis Jordan, and Mario Benjamin, were killed by MPD officers in 2018–19, yet their deaths received considerably less media attention and community outrage (likely in part because all three men were armed at the time of their deaths).

This period in Minneapolis was also marked by efforts toward police reform. In 2015, the MPD was selected as one of the six demonstration sites for the National Initiative for Building Community Trust and Justice. As part of this work, the MPD implemented a suite of 21st Century Policing style reforms including hosting community listening sessions; adopting more restrictive use-of-force policies and strengthening the misconduct review process; releasing data on police stops; developing stricter body camera policies; deploying training on procedural justice and implicit bias; and developing a

mental health co-responder pilot (Urban Institute 2019). This work began under MPD Chief Janeé Harteau (the first LGBTQ, first woman, and first Native American chief), who resigned in the wake of Damond's death, and continued under Chief Medaria Arradondo, the city's first Black chief, who earlier in his career sued the department for racial discrimination.

We collected our interview data in 2017–19 in the midst of this trauma and contestation. We centered data collection in North Minneapolis—known among locals as “Northside”—because it is the area of the city where exposure to violence and police contact is most concentrated. A collection of neighborhoods north of downtown, Northside has served as a center for Minneapolis's Black community since the Great Migration. Formerly a Jewish enclave, North Minneapolis provided a home to a wave of Black residents from the South, excluded from other neighborhoods due to residential covenants, redlining, and racial and religious discrimination (Taylor 2002). The city was one of many across the country that saw unrest in the “long hot summer” of 1967, including the burning and looting of stores in North Minneapolis's commercial district following a parade where white residents and police assaulted Black residents (MPD150 2017; Hinton 2021). With the in-migration in the 1970s and 1980s of young white families, immigrants from Latin America, and Hmong refugees, North Minneapolis has become a low-income racially diverse community where Black residents make up the largest racial/ethnic group. Across the two zip codes that comprise Northside (which includes roughly a dozen individual neighborhoods) in 2015–19, 70% of North Minneapolis residents were people of color, including Black or African-American (45%), Asian or Pacific Islander (13%), Latinx or Hispanic (9%), and multi-racial (6%), while the remaining 30% identified as white (compared to 60% in Minneapolis as a whole). Compared to the rest of the city, the neighborhood is poorer (with 39% surviving on a total household annual income of \$35,000 or less vs. 30% citywide), and residents report lower levels of completed education (23% of adults with a bachelor's degree or higher vs. 50% citywide).⁷

We posted flyers at businesses (including restaurants and cafés, stores, salons, and barbershops), churches, community centers, and bus stops in the central Northside business corridor. A smaller group of interviewees were recruited through participant referrals, including, in some cases, referrals from residents posting our recruitment flyer on neighborhood social media pages. Our sample primarily includes current Northside residents, although

⁷ All community demographics reported from the Minnesota Compass website, which summarizes American Community Survey data. Data were aggregated for Near North (<https://www.mncompass.org/profiles/city/minneapolis/near-north>) and Camden (<https://www.mncompass.org/profiles/city/minneapolis/camden>) and compared to the city of Minneapolis as a whole (<https://www.mncompass.org/profiles/city/minneapolis>).

we also include 13 people who responded to our flyer but were former residents and/or weekly frequenters of Northside (typically as churchgoers or employees of Northside businesses). We interviewed participants in fast food restaurants, libraries, cafés, stores, and (in a few instances) group home facilities. Interviews lasted 30 to 75 minutes. Each participant received \$30 in compensation. Interviews were audiorecorded and transcribed through an online transcription service,⁸ edited for accuracy by members of the research team, and imported into NVivo 12 for coding. We assigned each participant a pseudonym to protect anonymity.

The interviews were conducted by our team of four students, which was made up of one undergraduate student and three graduate students, with varied racial/ethnic identities (Black, biracial, and Hispanic), gender (men and women), and class backgrounds (working and middle class), supervised by a white woman faculty member.⁹ We used this diverse research team to ensure that the interview guide and (as described below) the coding scheme reflected multiple racial subjectivities. While we did not systematically assign interviewers, by chance many of the interviews with white participants were conducted by the biracial and Hispanic interviewers, while the racial composition of the interviewers for Black participants was more mixed. Where the interviewer's race seemed salient to the context of a quote, we provide it below.

The interview guide combined a short, structured survey with a semi-structured qualitative interview. The preinterview survey (completed independently on a tablet by the participant) collected demographic information as well as measures of attitudes toward law enforcement, including overall trust in police and perceptions of police discrimination. Following the brief survey, our team conducted semistructured qualitative interviews with participants. Semistructured interviews allow for a more in-depth look at the contexts that shape individuals' self-reported attitudes (Lamont and Swidler 2014). Our questions probed participants' thoughts about their neighborhood conditions (e.g., safety level, problems, positive aspects); interactions with, and perceptions of, police more generally and the MPD

⁸ All but one participant agreed to be digitally recorded. In this case, the interviewer provided extensive notes of the participant's responses. We do not use direct quotes from this interview.

⁹ Students were selected for the project according to their interest in the topic and a demonstration that they would approach interviewees with empathy and dignity. All of the research assistants were trained in interview techniques and did several practice interviews with friends and project team members before conducting interviews with participants. We received human subjects research approval from the University of Minnesota's Institutional Review Board. All researchers completed their required human subjects research training prior to starting interviews. We collected written consent, informing participants that their participation was voluntary and that their data would remain confidential (except for mandatory reporting).

We're Still Dying

specifically; awareness of MPD reforms and activists' efforts to transform Minneapolis policing; and residents' own demands for change. Seventy-five interviews were conducted one-on-one, while 37 participants were interviewed in groups, typically in pairs when requested by the participant (i.e., when a participant arrived at the interview with a family member or close friend).¹⁰ These group interviews were very similar to individual interviews, since they were typically conducted with people the participant trusted. One advantage of this flexible approach is that in group interviews participants responded to one another's comments, allowing us to trace points of agreement and contestation.

Our final sample consisted of 58 men, 52 women, and two nonbinary adults (for a total of 112 participants), who ranged in age from 18 to 76 (with a median age of 43 years). Interviews were conducted with 24 white residents and 88 residents of color, among whom 65 identified as Black or African-American, six as Native or American Indian, one as Hispanic, one as Asian, and 15 as multiracial (often identifying as Black or African-American and another race/ethnicity) and/or an "other" race category. Racial differences were overlaid with class differences in our sample (as in Minneapolis and the United States more broadly). As displayed in table 1, white residents in our sample benefited from higher incomes (57% earning more than \$40,000 per year in household income, compared to 10% of residents of color), educational attainment (46% with a bachelor's degree vs. 9%), and homeownership rates (63% vs. 8%). This suggests that while white participants and participants of color shared social proximity, they also occupied separate (although overlapping) socioeconomic positions.

Our recruitment process was structured to maximize sample diversity across race, gender, age, and relative socioeconomic status. Compared to the neighborhood demographics described above, our sample is less white and poorer. Thus, we likely oversampled people living on the blocks in Northside with the highest rates of concentrated disadvantage, especially for Black respondents. Legal cynicism among our sample was even more pervasive than in the results of a larger study of the lowest-income and highest-crime blocks in Minneapolis (the majority of which were located in Northside) during the same period (Urban Institute 2017), with most of our sample agreeing that police officers arrested people "for no good reason" (57%) and "will judge you based on your race/ethnicity" (85%). Only 15% of our sample reported that they had "quite a lot" or "a great deal" of confidence in police, which is lower than national confidence rates among Black Americans (Jones 2020). In addition, our sample is older than the neighborhood

¹⁰ In addition, a housing-related nonprofit responded to our flyer and asked us to conduct a focus group with eight of their residents. This was the only focus group we conducted for the project.

TABLE 1
DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF SAMPLE

	RESIDENTS OF COLOR		WHITE RESIDENTS	
	%	N	%	N
Race/ethnicity:				
White	—	—	100	24
Black, African-American	74	65	—	—
Native American Indian	7	6	—	—
Latinx, Hispanic	1	1	—	—
Asian, Asian American	1	1	—	—
Multiracial or Other Race	17	15	—	—
Sex/gender:				
Male	57	50	33	8
Female	42	37	63	15
Nonbinary	1	1	4	1
Age:				
18–30	32	26	17	4
31–50	34	28	38	9
51+	34	28	46	11
Living arrangements:				
Homeowner	8	6	63	12
Renter	60	44	21	4
Lives with relative/friend	19	14	0	0
Other	12	9	16	3
Annual household income:				
\$10,000 or less	44	31	7	1
\$10,001–\$20,000	24	17	14	2
\$20,001–\$40,000	23	16	21	3
\$40,001 or more	10	7	57	8
Employment status:				
Full time	36	31	43	10
Part time	9	8	4	1
Unemployed	19	16	0	0
Out of labor force	35	30	52	12
Educational attainment:				
Less than high school	12	10	0	0
High school graduate	32	27	4	1
Some college	47	40	50	12
Bachelor's degree or higher	9	8	46	11
Total N		88		24

NOTE.—Data are from participants' responses to a self-administered survey completed prior to the interview. Some respondents did not answer all questions; percentages are only for nonmissing responses. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

population, in part because we limited study participation to adults over 18 years.

Utilizing Deterding and Waters's (2021) flexible coding approach, which adapts grounded theory principles for large data sets with multiple collaborators, we drew on both theoretical perspectives and our data to develop a collaborative and iterative coding model. We first coded for descriptive

themes from the interview guide, including “Experiences with Police,” “High-Profile Cases of Police Brutality,” “Police Reform,” “Resident Involvement in Policing Advocacy/Activism,” and “Resident Attitudes toward Changes in Policing.” Second, we began the process of data reduction by examining patterns across race, age, gender, and class. During this phase, we discussed emerging themes through data memos and looked for patterns (in)consistent with prior research. We wrote over 100 pages of data memos, tracing patterns across our sample, drawing conceptual maps that linked theories with residents’ accounts, and comparing and contrasting residents’ responses to the closed-ended policing questions with their qualitative narratives. We continually examined similarities and differences in our data across white residents and residents of color.¹¹ The final analyses examined residents’ narratives across the two key themes—reckoning with racialized police violence and reforming or transforming policing. We also include a third analytical section to map the discourses of residents who rejected the police violence frame altogether.

FINDINGS

Constructing the Social Problem of Police Violence

Most of the residents we spoke with expressed deep concerns about how the MPD policed North Minneapolis. While concerns about policing were broad, ranging from criminalization and police harassment to lack of protection (Bell 2017), one core complaint was the disproportionate threat of police violence faced by Black boys and men. Although white residents and people of color often came to similar conclusions about racialized police violence as a social problem, the process of constructing this problem diverged, with residents of color drawing on personal and proximal experiences with racist treatment and white residents drawing more heavily on high-profile cases of police killings spotlighted by BLM protests.

Embodied Injustice

For residents of color, the social fact of racialized police violence often emerged in discussions of personal experiences, or what Weaver (2021)

¹¹ Individual racial and ethnic groups have experienced distinct racial histories in the United States and cannot be homogenized under one label. However, in our study, the number of participants who identified as Native, Latinx, Asian, or “other” in the race question were too small to analyze as separate categories. When our findings are specific to Black residents, we use that category, rather than the broader nomenclature of residents of color.

describes as “state baptism.” These stories were both raced and gendered, with men of color most likely to directly experience criminalization and abusive policing (Brunson and Miller 2006; Muhammad 2011; Rios 2011; Butler 2017; Jones 2018), while women of color faced more frequent vicarious criminalization and maltreatment (Dow 2016; Elliott and Reid 2019; Malone Gonzalez 2019; Powell and Phelps 2021). Three quarters of the 49 Black, Hispanic, and Native men we spoke to described personal experiences of verbal abuse or physical violence by police at some point in their lives. Thus, for these men, the reality of racialized police violence had long been highly salient. Police violence was not an abstract policy problem, or media topic, but a visceral threat to their lives (Pickett, Graham, and Cullen 2021).

For example, when Teddy, a Black man in his mid-30s, was asked whether he felt safe in his neighborhood, he immediately referenced his relationship with law enforcement: “I do not feel safe with the police, period. Because I’ve been targeted too much by the police jumping out on me, violating my rights, putting my life in danger while they point guns at me for no apparent reason.” Teddy then described an emblematic example where he witnessed police break up a fight between Black teens by shoving them to the ground, aiming guns at them, and then threatening their parents with violence and arrest if they intervened. For Teddy, these experiences resonated with high-profile cases where police “killed . . . on camera, in front of the world” with impunity. Similarly, David, a Hispanic man in his late 20s, had many negative encounters with police, including being arrested after he called 911 to report that his white fiancée had endangered their infant, and other “fucked up shit.” David recalled watching the video of “the whole Jamar Clark thing” and concluded that police “hate us” and “don’t like dealing with us . . . it’s just like, ‘Fuck you! Shut up! Get in the car! You’re going to jail!’” Asked who he meant by “us,” David replied, “I mean people of color.”

Thomas, a Black veteran in his early 50s, recounted a harrowing story where two young white officers stopped him and a friend in the hours before dawn. Thomas described how the officers yelled racial slurs and demanded to know why they were out. The officer presumed they were “stealing something” and went to pat down Thomas and his companion. Thomas perceived the officers as “provoking us, you know, enticing us to go in your pocket so he’s got a reason to shoot us.” In describing this “setup,” Thomas implied that the officers were fabricating a threat so that they could later justify shooting him by saying they feared for their lives. Thomas ended his interview by recounting several high-profile cases of police violence and concluded, “I hate what they do. Like, oh my God, man. And all of them getting away with murder.” For Teddy, David, Thomas, and most men of color we interviewed, the threat of police violence had always been clear because of their own experiences. For some of our older respondents, these firsthand encounters had happened for decades.

In previous research, we illustrated that Black, Native, and multiracial women in our study suffered negative experiences with the police as well, individually and through proximal violence directed toward their children, partners, and friends (Powell and Phelps 2021). These experiences included being profiled by police, harassed by officers, and being criminalized and mistreated when they did dial 911. Of the 38 Black, Native, Asian, and multiracial women interviewees, over half described experiencing threatening behavior from police toward themselves and/or their loved ones. Cameron, a 26-year-old multiracial person, described one of their earliest experiences with police. Called in to mediate a dispute between Cameron (who described themself at that time as “a very tiny woman”),¹² their girlfriend, and a man, police detained Cameron and “slammed me on the police car . . . to search me . . . his body was completely pressing up against my body and I could feel his genitalia on me. And so it’s like not only do you not treat me like a human being, like a person, you don’t even speak to me.” This dehumanizing treatment was followed by officers arresting Cameron and leaving them inside of an overheating police car for an extended period while Cameron anxiously waited, questioning whether the officers “would beat me . . . would rape me?” While the encounter ended without further violence, it was a deeply traumatic experience for Cameron, who felt their life had been threatened.

Some women of color instead experienced this criminalization and police maltreatment through fear for their loved ones. Like many other Black women, Dee Dee, who was in her late 20s, described vicarious trauma from police abuse of her male partners. In one (of several) instance, police accosted the father of her child in a parking lot when he had gone out to grab something from a car. As she witnessed the interaction, he shouted at her, “Record them!” Dee Dee connected these experiences of racial profiling and police harassment to high-profile cases of lethal police violence, especially the video of Castile’s death, which she described as making her more fearful of police. Black mothers with older children often experienced police violence through family criminalization, fearing police violence toward their sons and working to manage and minimize this threat (Dow 2016; Elliott and Reid 2019; Malone Gonzalez 2019; Powell and Phelps 2021). Donna, a 45-year-old Black mother, for example, relayed the constant fear she encounters raising Black sons: “I know he’s feared . . . I know that he’s . . . America’s most wanted, and not America’s most gifted . . . that’s the reality for us. . . . We don’t know . . . if we gon’ see them when they come home! God forbid if they wanna have some dreads! . . . Because then they gon’ be really profiled! You know, so it’s like you have that . . . you have that fear when you

¹² Cameron identified as nonbinary on their preinterview survey but at several points in the interview referred to themselves as a woman.

bringing up boys in today’s society.” Donna’s reference to the stereotypes associated with dreadlocks echoed several women’s fears that their son’s physical characteristics would draw unwanted and unwarranted police attention. Like Dee Dee’s comments, some mothers directly connected this fear of police stops with high-profile cases of lethal police violence that began as vehicle stops. Many of the Black women in our study described the great lengths they went to try to protect their children, and especially sons, including monitoring when they could drive, dictating their clothing and hairstyle choices, and disciplining them in how to interact with officers through “the talk” (Malone Gonzalez 2019).

These direct and vicarious experiences meant that people of color in our sample did not see police violence as a new phenomenon but rather as a persistent feature of racist policing. As a result, high-profile cases of police violence were often described as reaffirming or deepening their prior distrust of law enforcement, rather than conveying new information. While the time frame between these high-profile killings (and the legal cases that followed) and our interviews varied, the deaths of Jamar Clark, Philando Castile, and others were highly salient and, as described above, commonly appeared in residents’ discussions of the police. As Black residents witnessed these (and other) deaths on social media, sometimes in real time, the loss of people who shared their racial identity was often experienced as a source of deep loss and psychological distress (Bell 2017; Smith Lee and Robinson 2019; Graham et al. 2020; Richardson 2020).¹³ In reaction, some Black participants responded to this trauma with a new sense of fear in their daily lives. For example, Kayla, a 35-year-old Black woman, described how she thought about Philando Castile every time she went to the suburb where he was killed, and that driving there made her “nervous” because “over there . . . they’ll shoot you.”

In a few instances, high-profile cases of lethal police violence were also experienced personally by our participants because they knew the victims or even witnessed the killing firsthand. For example, Marlon, a Black man in his mid-40s, had witnessed Clark’s death, exiting a local establishment right before the shooting. When asked how “witnessing that horrific event . . . change[d] the way” he thought about police, Marlon replied that it “solidified” his beliefs about police violence, adding that “we’ve been hearing about police shootings for some years,” tracing this history back to

¹³ These experiences may explain why police killings of unarmed Black men increase mental health symptoms in Black communities (Bor et al. 2018; although see Nix and Lozada [2021]). As Onwuachi-Willig (2016) writes, the spotlight on Black death, together with the continued failure of the criminal legal system to produce justice for victims, “reignites the subordinated group’s consciousness of its second-class citizenship and punctuates its already existing distress and suffering” (p. 337).

We're Still Dying

Amadou Diallo's killing in the 1990s, but cell phone recordings and social media had made these cases even more visible. From these experiences, Marlon concluded, "police . . . view us as disposable. I think they just don't care." Timothy, a Black man in his mid-20s, also had a personal connection—Clark was a family friend. He described the way his friend was killed as "worse than torture," reflecting that afterward, he was "really fearin' for my own life." For residents like Timothy and Marlon, police killings in Minneapolis weren't just front-page news, but rather deeply personal traumas that reverberated across their family and community.

Secondhand Injustice and New Dilemmas

In contrast to residents of color, the white participants in our sample were largely shielded by racial and class privilege from routine experiences of criminalization and police targeting and abuse (Hitchens et al. 2018; Cobbina 2019; Powell and Phelps 2021). While white men do face elevated rates of exposure to lethal police violence compared with white women, those risks are less than half of those facing Black men (Edwards, Esposito, and Lee 2018). Only one white respondent—Vic, a man in his early 30s who was friends with Jamar Clark and had a history of police contact due to illicit substance use—described a fear of lethal police violence, although Vic was also careful to note that his Black friends "are treated like shit" by law enforcement. In a handful of other cases, white residents spoke about the extra police scrutiny or disrespect they garnered by living in North Minneapolis (i.e., being "out of place" in a Black neighborhood), although this largely did not translate into experiences of procedural injustice.

More commonly, critiques of law enforcement among white residents centered on their concerns about neighborhood disorder and violence, alongside worries about racialized police violence toward their Black neighbors. To varying degrees, many white residents were reflexive about this racial privilege when describing their own experiences of positive police interactions with officers (Cole 2020). Indeed, most white respondents "somewhat" or "strongly" agreed that "police officers will judge you based on your race/ethnicity." Kerrie, a white woman in her mid-40s, echoed this sentiment in a joke she would share with friends: "I'm not driving while Black, so I'll be okay." Josh, a white man in his 30s, reflected that whites' racial privilege not only shielded them from police scrutiny and abuse but also allowed them to build relationships with police through neighborhood meetings. Whiteness, for Josh, meant that police assumed that you were their "allies" in the neighborhood—a weapon that directed police attention toward people and properties white residents deemed "concerning" (see also Doering 2020).

Due to their personal distance from police violence, many white residents' understanding of the issue was connected to stories from people of color, both in their personal networks and (more commonly) high-profile cases in the media (see also Rosenbaum et al. 2005; Walker 2020). Harry, a white man in his 70s, for example, contrasted his experience with Black neighbors and media stories: "My direct experience differs from what I hear in the media. But it certainly—and I remember Black friends saying how they get stopped more often—you know that clearly happens." Cindy, a white woman in her late 60s whose daughter had married a Black man, described coming to understand criminalization through her son-in-law's experiences. Cindy reflected on an example when her son-in-law was stopped in front of the couple's condo; her son-in-law told the police that he lived there but they "didn't believe him." Cindy continued that her daughter "fortunately came along to pick him up and said, 'That's my husband. I'm picking him up and taking him to work.'" Cindy concluded from these stories that she knew "a lot of minority people, especially Black men who are professionals, who have been, you know, stopped, picked up, arrested for almost no reason . . . when there are plenty of criminals running around." Cindy viewed this "disconnect" of "harassing somebody who nobody's complaining about" while letting residents be victimized by the "criminals" as something "more and more are understanding."

White residents' reflections on police violence often emerged in discussions of high-profile police killings of civilians, brought into the public conversation through digital recordings and BLMM/M4BL activism. These processes allowed white residents to witness police violence more directly through social media (Richardson 2020). As Rebecca, a middle-aged white woman, reflected, activists were "bringing what has been happening for a long time to the public's attention. Which is . . . you know, police murdering Black people." Among our white respondents, three-quarters brought up recent high-profile cases of police violence, and often described these cases as inflection points in their attitudes about law enforcement. Many white residents described that their awareness of racial inequality had shifted or deepened in the Black Lives Matter era, as high-profile cases provided new proof of the threat of police violence. Sheila, a white woman in her 40s, for example, told us, "I'm much less trusting than I was before, especially with, you know, a mile away Philando Castile having been shot. I think it's changed a lot of people's thinking, mine included." Lucile, a white woman in her late 60s, described how she watched the video footage from Clark's killing, noting, "The racism in our society ends up being a big problem . . . those kinds of incidents are usually the culmination of multiple mistakes along the way." She concluded that if Clark had been white, the paramedics or officers would have deescalated and "the whole thing wouldn't have happened."

For some white residents, the death of Damond, a white woman, cemented their concerns about out-of-control lethal police violence. Cindy, who described above how her Black son-in-law's experiences had shifted her attitudes, described this case's impact: "I had a hard time understanding what Philando Castile did to deserve to be shot and killed. But this one this weekend is really over the top for me. I can't even imagine a scenario that would even explain it and absolutely not justify it. It's unbelievable to me. And I think that I think my skepticism has been growing." Although Cindy did not explicitly name Damond's race, class status, or gender as key factors in her disbelief, her emphasis that this case was "over the top" signaled how residents perceived the case as unique. Yet unlike the deaths of Jamar Clark and Philando Castile, which were deeply resonant with Black residents' personal experiences and lives, white residents interviewed in the wake of Damond's death did not describe her killing as a personal loss, or one that deeply resonated with their own experiences and fears. For white participants, specific instances of police violence were experienced as isolated events rather than a collective racial wound.

For some white respondents, this new awareness prompted an "ethical dilemma" around calling 911, especially in situations involving Black people. Sheila, who above described her shift after Castile's killing, recounted a recent domestic violence incident that she witnessed: "I realized the cop is white and this woman is Black, and then I felt nervous . . . have I really helped her by calling the police, or is there a chance I've just put her in harm's way?" Sheila also worried about the outcome for the man, concluding, "Calling the police is maybe not the solution." Similarly, Samantha, a white schoolteacher in North Minneapolis, reflected that she would call the police when needed, but concluded that her "best friend . . . who's a woman of color" or "her students . . . [and] their parents" did not have that same privilege. Josh, who above described his frustration with how racial privilege and racism shaped neighborhood crime meetings, reported that he would have to do "a lot of analysis" before deciding to call the police, because "it's a flawed system, 'cause you don't know who's gonna show up and how they're gonna interact . . . and we've got, you know, a Jamar Clark, a Philando Castile." Thus, unlike residents of color, who had long grappled with the potential negative implications of calling the police, for many white residents their new consciousness about police violence prompted an evolving interrogation about their own complicity in calling 911.

This "new dilemma" discourse was more prevalent among white women, who were often more reflexive about their own racial, class, and gender positionality than white men in our sample. However, for some white residents, and especially men, the evidence of police violence in the community and (social) media was insufficient for shifting their perspectives on policing. For example, Sebastian, a white man in his 30s, noted that while he

had some concerns with police violence, he still thought most officers were well intentioned, concluding, “I don’t have a problem [calling 911]. I don’t feel uncomfortable reporting something.” Finally, as we describe below, there was also a minority of residents who resisted acknowledging racialized police violence altogether—a position that was disproportionately adopted by white men.

Redressing Police Violence: Reform, Transformation, or Abolition?

Consistent with the deep problems residents identified above, roughly three quarters of interviewees indicated that the MPD needed major changes. However, there was significant contestation about the solution—including debate over how deep and systemic the problems were, whether reform (or transformation) would address the problem, and potential solutions—attitudes that were again divided by race and racialized experiences.

From Bad Apples to Policy Conundrums

For white residents who perceived problem(s) in policing, their preferences were largely reformist and consistent with the 21st Century Policing model. These suggestions included deescalation and crisis intervention training, recruiting officers from Northside (or Minneapolis), increasing officer accountability and punishment for misconduct, and, more broadly, changing the culture of policing. As with defining the problem of police violence, white women were more likely than white men in our sample to embrace reform. Yet even among white residents supportive of reform, there was ambivalence about the severity and origin of the problem of police violence—were police killings the work of individual “bad apple” officers, which required only modest interventions, or a more systemic issue?

Many white residents minimized the problem of police violence and/or expressed ambivalence about its severity. Carol, a white woman in her 60s, reflected that police are “doing the best that they can at this point. Most of them.” Carol described the “tough job” officers faced, even as she questioned why “they’re pulling guns really quickly?” Cindy, who had grown more critical of the MPD after Damond’s killing, nevertheless concluded that the MPD was “doing a good job. I don’t feel like it would be like, you know, the Chicago or Boston or New York departments that might have all kinds of crime and stuff going on within the police. I doubt that.” Many white residents thought the media portrayed a skewed perspective on policing, only showing them the worst examples of police behavior. As Janet, a white woman in her mid-30s argued, “There are some [officers] out there that are genuine and good” and so if the media was “gonna show the bad,” they ought to “show the good too.” While these residents acknowledged problems in policing and

supported reforms (including better recruitment, training, and oversight), overall they thought most MPD officers were largely effective and professional.

The most critical white residents expressed uncertainty about whether police reform was up to the job of addressing police violence. Sheila, a white woman in her 40s, who above described her new worries about calling 911 after Clark's killing, provided a particularly voluble example of this ambivalence:

So, I still think it's worth throwing as much money at that [implicit bias training] as we possibly can. [But] I don't know that it has a huge impact. . . . We have to diversify police. . . . But I know that people have stereotypes against their own race and other races also, so that's not necessarily a fix. So, I don't know, I guess I see it's complicated. It's worth any effort we can to have reform. I do think we have to hold people more accountable in the judicial system when things go wrong, and police officers who do make bad decisions, holding them accountable. That's not happening in society currently, so I think we have to change our laws, sort of the standard against which people are held accountable. I think that has to change. Then, I get the whole thing of we're going to have fewer people applying to be police officers, and blah blah blah. I get it. It's super complicated.

Each time Sheila introduced a reform, she would immediately negate its potential impact or feasibility, ultimately concluding that the problem was "complicated." Other white residents similarly described meaningful police reform as "the hard part."

Like Sheila, other white residents would support police reforms in one segment of the interview but later question how much progress police reform had achieved. Yet for many of these progressive white residents, concerns about police reform were abstract—policing represented a complicated policy conundrum, not a threat to their lives. Few white residents adopted a more radical approach supporting a transformation in policing. The closest any of the white respondents came was Samantha, a white schoolteacher, who noted that even "good" officers could serve as tools of oppression and wondered aloud, "If the roots are rotten, can something better come from that? I don't really know." Josh similarly concluded: "I think if we focus on like 'OK let's continue to fund our police department at, you know, many many millions of dollars and then just trying to get them to be less, you know, racist or biased or whatever,' like that might not be the best approach." Instead, Josh thought, "Hey, let's actually take a chunk of this and invest in our young people so that there's . . . more opportunity for them to be successful . . . [and not] engaged in criminal behavior." Even Samantha and Josh, however, expressed these ideas as hesitant questions, rather than the forceful convictions of the residents of color we examine next.

Racial Realism and the Police

In contrast to progressive white residents' worried musings, for residents of color, the problem of police violence and its resolution was deeply visceral;

not an abstract policy problem but a direct and frequent threat to their lives and their loved ones. Black residents, in particular, expressed distress and outrage about police killings. As Kel, a Black man in his early 50s succinctly argued, what he wanted was for police to “stop killing Black folks!” Yet for many respondents the “problem” was not just police violence, but racism, which impacted their lives through multiple and overlapping institutions of exclusion (Boyles 2019; Hinton 2021). Thus, while residents of color often supported police reform, many saw it as woefully inadequate. Drawing on Derrick Bell’s (1992) work on racial realism, which argues that racism is a permanent feature of the U.S. legal structure, we argue that these discourses represented a “realist” perspective on the persistence of racism in policing. Residents of color had divergent reactions to this realism—from disengaging with the process, to settling for reform despite its limits, to promoting more radical changes in public safety.

When asked about police reform directly, residents of color (like their white neighbors) largely supported the kinds of initiatives in the 21st Century Policing Taskforce report and, at the more transformative edges, the Campaign Zero platform, including diversifying recruitment, better training, more oversight and accountability, eliminating racial profiling, and ending aggressive “quality of life” policing (which residents often felt led to racial profiling). Yet this support for reform quickly turned critical. This was perhaps clearest in discussions of body cameras, one of the most visible reform efforts undertaken during this period in Minneapolis. Residents of color were largely supportive of requiring officers to wear body cameras, hoping that they would improve accountability (see also Ray, Marsh, and Powelson 2017). Rhonda, a Black woman in her 50s, interviewed alongside her husband Phil, argued: “I think that that would help . . . [to] see exactly what’s transpired.” Yet discussions of the potential of body cameras quickly turned critical. When Rhonda supported the policy, Phil interjected, “But with the body camera, after something done happened and you need the body camera . . . they holds back on it.” Rhonda agreed, noting that body cameras would not increase accountability if cameras were turned off, leadership hid the footage, or police “made excuses.” AJ, a Black man in his 20s, similarly reflected, “Body cameras are trash because most of them don’t wear ‘em. . . . They turn ‘em off.”

Critiques of body cameras and other reform efforts were often tied to a lack of justice when police officers killed—especially when the victims were Black. As Dee Dee, the Black woman in her late 20s who above described the police harassment of her boyfriends, decried, “We have body cameras or innocent bystanders’ footage saying you got this on camera and you **STILL** don’t have no justice. . . . No! . . . This is manslaughter!” Dee Dee continued that justice would be: “You need to be ripped of your badge and you need to go to jail.” Black residents often criticized how officers could take the life of

We're Still Dying

an “innocent person” without facing punishment. Marcel, a Black man in his late 50s declared that “the laws should matter all the time for police officers, for civilians, for everybody,” but, he mused, instead there were three “standards”: “your standards for whites, your standards for people of color, and then there is police standards.” Police, he continued, “violate every one of their standards but they’re never held accountable for it.” The only time accountability through criminal legal punishment had succeeded was following the killing of Justine Damond. Not incidentally, residents noted, the officer was Black and the victim white.

This experience of repeated police killings of Black people, with seemingly little punishment for the officers responsible, represented to many residents of color the reality of racism and anti-Blackness in the United States, which was unlikely to be “reformed.” Rudy, a Black woman in her late 30s, expressed this sentiment most forcefully: “We’re still dying quicker than we can effect change. . . . I don’t wanna be dead before I experience a neighborhood where I feel safe when the police are around.” Teddy, a man in his mid-30s who described his deep fear of police, similarly commented on a police shooting in a Southern state where a female officer “killed a man on camera.” Teddy continued, “I mean man got his hands up and everything! . . . in front of the whole world, she kills him and she didn’t serve no time . . . why even record it? . . . Why even say bring a body cam, dash camera, anything. What use is it?” Teddy expressed that each time a new high-profile police killing of a civilian happened, he would think, “Ah, here it go again. They trying to cover up. . . . They don’t want to hold they officers responsible. . . . It’s just a joke.” For Teddy and other residents of color, police violence, and the lack of accountability that followed, was an unbreakable cycle—and each instance of police aggression across the country was seen as invalidating the possibility of reform. As Kenneth, a Black man in his early 60s, concluded about police training, “It hasn’t worked then, and I doubt it’s going to work now.”

Thus, many Black residents viewed police violence, despite the efforts of activists and reformers, as intractable and endemic. As Donna, a Black woman in her mid-40s, argued: “We have to be real about it. We have to talk about the institutionalized racism. We gotta talk about the systemic racism.” Ms. Lenora, a multiracial woman in her 60s, interviewed with Donna, similarly concluded, “They [police] think of [us as] animals and dogs. . . . So until that changes, which ain’t going to happen no time soon, it’s just another day, another time . . . because [they] fear our Black faces, hate our Black faces.” For Donna, Ms. Lenora, and others, the root of the problem wasn’t inadequate police training, but rather, the continued dehumanization of Black people. Or as David, the Hispanic man in his 20s who thought police “hate us,” concluded, “I mean it’s fucked up but, uh, you know, we live in America.” Unlike Sheila’s long back-and-forth about reform ideas and their limitations, Kel, the Black man who declared that he wanted police to “stop

killing Black folks!” refused outright to list any kind of change he supported. When the interviewer probed on this response, Kel replied that he didn’t really think about reform because “it’s not gonna happen [laughs]” because there’s always going to be “more white cops . . . in charge” so equity in policing (or elsewhere) would never come.

Roughly one in every six residents of color we interviewed imagined, at least in part, more radical changes in policing. While these visions were sometimes modeled off police abolition, more commonly police still played a role in their imagining of the future—but it would be a police force unrecognizable to today’s residents. Pam, a 61-year-old Black woman, for example, concluded the only answer was to “Get rid of ‘em all and go from scratch!” because “you keep one bad apple in that bundle, the rest of them apples gon’ get bad too!” Pam was critical of the supposed reforms the department had made, concluding, “I don’t pay no attention to that—’cause they gon’ do what they wanna do anyway.” Similarly, Teddy wanted to get “all the crooks, all the racists, all the—yeah, you just have to clean it all out . . . from the chief on down to the patrol.” For Pam and Teddy, only starting from “scratch” might produce a police force that would really protect and serve the community. Yet residents were aware that such radical changes would be difficult and unlikely—as Pam continued: “That’s what I think, though it don’t matter.” A couple of respondents went further, however, calling for full police abolition and/or withdrawal from the state. As Cameron, the 26-year-old gender nonbinary person of color who shared their story about being trapped in an overheating police car, argued, police will “continue to murder people and . . . make the situation worse” because they “are not here to serve and protect people with pigment in their skin. Period.” These residents argued that the community needed a new blueprint. Evoking Black nationalist discourses, one interviewee favored retreating from the (white) state, “build[ing] our community back up” and “policing our own community,” instead of “rely[ing] on government and the system” (see also Weaver, Prowse, and Piston 2020).

Residents’ continued support for state-provided policing in some form reflected, in part, their dual concern with community and police violence (Bell 2017; Powell and Phelps 2021). Rudy, for example, quoted above on the deathly slow pace of change, described how she would often “go on Facebook . . . and say, you know, can we get some people to this location to help?” instead of calling 911. Yet she noted that she would call 911 if she saw someone with a gun, a frequent occurrence in the neighborhood (see also Clampet-Lundquist et al. 2015). Others similarly described an ambivalence around police—seeing them as both a source of, and protection from, violence. As Tanya, a Black woman in her 50s and longtime survivor of intimate partner violence, concluded, “Sometimes—I’m a say this even though I don’t like ‘em [police]—I like to see them because if anything happen to

me, they around. But I see 'em a lot. I see 'em a lot." This beleaguered, ambivalent reliance on police for protection was especially common among Black women, who would sometimes turn to the police for help managing interpersonal, gender-based, and community violence (Bell 2016; Cobbina et al. 2008; Powell and Phelps 2021). Thus, while a majority of residents of color desired deep changes in policing that would make them feel safe around officers, they also wanted to feel safe in their community.

Rejecting the Problem of Police Violence

A small cluster of residents rejected the frame of racialized police violence as an urgent social problem altogether. White residents were more likely to fall into this cluster, although resisters represented a minority of interviewees for both groups (6 of 24 white residents, compared to 7 of 88 residents of color). This position was also more common among men and older residents, paralleling national survey data on trust in the police and approval of BLM (Fortner 2020; Drakulich et al. 2021). These residents explicitly positioned themselves in alliance with the MPD, arguing that the "real" crisis was in the "criminal element" in the community rather than law enforcement. By locating the crux of the problem in troublesome residents and outsiders, these interviewees positioned the police as unfairly maligned for doing difficult jobs. Will, a white man in his 20s, for example, declared, "I'm extremely supportive of the work that the police are doing." As he concluded, activists were "trying to . . . villainize the police" when "those who are committing the violence should be the villains."

White residents who rejected the frame of racialized police violence often deployed their own positive experiences with police to advance color-blind discourses (Bonilla-Silva 2009). For example, George, a white man in his 70s, when asked about the MPD, replied that they were a "fine bunch of people." When pressed to explain why he thought police were doing "a good job," George replied, "I have no personal experience with them not doing a good job, so I have to say that they're doing a good job." The interviewer then asked if police treat all people fairly, to which George replied, "I have not observed them treating anybody unfairly, so I have to say yes." Similarly, Jane, a white woman in her early 50s, denied the existence of racial disparities in officer use of force in a hypothetical case that evoked the fatal police stop of Philando Castile (one of the few police shootings to make it to a courthouse for prosecution):

Do I think those people need some force from the police? Damn right—if they're caught. And if they're pulling someone over when a robbery just happened and the dude looks like the suspect that the description was given of? Is that fucking racial? No. They're pulling over someone who was just near that area, you

know, has a gun and whatever, and their car is filled with dope, or smoke of marijuana . . . what I have seen is police are just doing a job.¹⁴

For Jane, even fatal use of force is legitimate (and not “racial”) in the context of a suspected robbery and the presence of a gun. As a result, for these residents with entrenched support for law enforcement, stories in the media were dismissed as one-sided or lacking context.

Residents of color who rejected the police violence frame also invoked crime and, in addition, often used politics of respectability discourses, blaming the victims of police violence for their own maltreatment (see also Kerrison, Cobbina, and Bender 2018; Lopez Bunyasi and Smith 2019). For example, Marsha, a Black woman in her 40s who was a firm supporter of the police, critiqued “people who say ‘F the police’” and told the interviewer that Castile was (at least partly) to blame for his death because he reached into his pocket during the stop. Denise, a Black woman in her late 30s, located the problem not in law enforcement, but in “people out in the street that don’t wanna follow those rules.” Tyrone, a Black man in his 50s similarly, argued, “[You] got to realize they [the police] got people out there . . . getting killed for nothing, going to work or getting shot. . . . Sometimes we create these problems on ourselves, some of the things we do, you know.” Wayne, a 30-year-old Black man who was a more reserved supporter of the MPD, concluded, “Black people kill Black people all the time. So Black Lives Matter, it’s them, too.” For these residents, persistently high rates of violent victimization (including frequent homicides) within the Black community led them to support police officers’ efforts, even when they witnessed the violence officers meted out.

Unlike their white counterparts, however, Black defenders of the police were more likely to acknowledge some measure of racial discrimination, drawing on their own experiences. Marsha, for example, noted that “some people are born and raised to hate a certain group of people . . . racism ain’t going nowhere. It’s not, it’s still here. . . . You might have some racist police [officers] out there . . . I’m sure there are.” Tyrone similarly noted that race mattered in policing outcomes, arguing that Black people were more likely to be killed by police and that officers of color were more likely to be punished for police violence. Describing an incident where a white woman pulled a gun on an officer, Tyrone reacted to his interviewer (a young Hispanic man): “If that had been me or you, they would have pumped twelve bullets in

¹⁴ Castile was ostensibly pulled over because of a broken taillight. However, police radio transcripts from the stop document that the officer believed Castile matched the description of a robbery suspect from several days prior “cause of the wide-set nose” (Mannix 2016). This flimsy physical description does not seem to provide a real “description” of the alleged robbery perpetrator, but rather a phenotype stereotype about Black men.

We're Still Dying

us." For residents like Marsha and Tyrone, anti-Black racism still played a role in society, but their worries about racism in policing were overshadowed by a focus on violence in the community.

CONCLUSION

This article began by asking how race, or, more specifically, embodied experiences of racism and racial privilege, shaped sensemaking about police violence and police reform among adults in North Minneapolis in 2017–19. Consistent with prior policing scholarship, we document persistent racial divides in experiences with, and attitudes about, law enforcement (Barrett and Welsh 2018; Hitchens et al. 2018; Cobbina 2019), with people of color experiencing significantly more legal estrangement (Bell 2017) than their white neighbors. These attitudes, however, were rearticulated in the context of the BLMM/M4BL. For Black Americans, in particular, their own negative experiences with police and collective trauma have been reinforced by the repeated examples of police killings and the lack of justice that followed. This cycle often resulted in a racial realist perspective (Bell 1992) on police violence, which understood police killings as an endemic, and perhaps permanent, social problem produced by racism. White participants, in contrast, typically described being newly conscious of racialized police violence, and many continued to minimize the harm as the work of a "few bad apples" rather than systemic oppression.

Moving beyond trust in law enforcement, the central focus of much of the legal cynicism and legal estrangement literature, we show the importance of analyzing how people make sense of police reform and paths toward redressing police violence. As Clair (2021) argues, it is vital to center criminalized subjectivities, or the understandings of the people most subject to the intertwined forces of racism and criminalization, in (re-)imagining the future of the criminal legal system, a process he terms "legal envisioning." Despite their exposure to state violence, people most impacted by the system, including residents of heavily policed neighborhoods, often report a preference for more (and better) policing rather than fewer police—wanting to feel safe in their communities and able to call the police for help without fear of discriminatory or abusive treatment (Carr et al. 2007; Bell 2017, 2020; Forman 2017; Clair 2021; Meares and Prowse 2021). Fair and responsive policing in this framing is a symbol of the promise of full inclusion of Black Americans into U.S. society (Campeau et al. 2021; Fortner 2020). Our participants largely expressed similar preferences, although they were simultaneously critical of prior police reform efforts. In addition, a small but passionate group shared visions of more radical transformations. Asking not for more (or better) policing, these participants demanded that the country uproot

law enforcement as we know it and replace it with systems that really support Black lives (see also Weaver et al. 2020; Clair 2021).

By framing residents' attitudes about police violence and the limits of 21st Century Policing reform in the framework of racial realism, we can more clearly see how debates about policing are concerned with not just law enforcement but with the broader patterns of racial domination that shape exposure to both crime and criminalization. Undergirding Black residents' legal envisioning was a persistent theme about structural racism inside and outside of law enforcement. Many understood changes in policing as necessarily embedded in broader remedies to racism in U.S. society—including the persistent dehumanization of Black people—which had to be redressed before policing could change. With pervasive anti-Blackness, stark residential segregation, a lack of economic and political power in Black communities, and majority white police departments, police unions, and courtrooms, residents questioned how much police reform, even under a Black chief of police, could accomplish. This meant that residents simultaneously saw the deep transformative changes needed in law enforcement and the stark structural barriers to such change. This framework rendered the changes MPD had implemented as too little too late and continually invalidated by police violence across the country. The palpable distress at this lack of change despite several years of BLM protests, we argue, undergirded much of the rage we saw on the streets of Minneapolis following the murder of George Floyd.

The racial structuring of our findings underscores the mutual construction of race and criminal justice attitudes, experiences, and outcomes (Van Cleve and Mayes 2015)—and, as a result, the limits of relying on white America's racial sympathy (Chudy 2021) in building cross-racial movements for Black liberation (Oliver 2017). Despite their spatial proximity to Blackness, white Northsiders' realities were still quite divergent from those of their racially subjugated neighbors. While they were often (although not always) moved by the footage of police violence made visible by BLMM/M4BL organizing, their racial and class privilege shielded them from persistent police targeting and abuse. This "arm's-length" distance to police violence changed the tenor of interviews, with white residents questioning the role of the police as an abstract dilemma but not fearing for their lives. As a result, white residents often shied away from the deeper, more transformative visions of what needed to change in policing (and society). This emergent yet fragile cross-racial solidarity is consistent both with the spike in support for the BLMM and police reform in summer 2020 as well as its retrenchment in the year that followed (Chudy and Jefferson 2021; Reny and Newman 2021). In other words, it is unclear how much temporary shifts in racial sympathy produced by each egregious case of police violence will persist in shaping white Americans' policy preferences and their willingness to cede power and resources.

We're Still Dying

As noted above, our findings are limited in some ways to our data collection period (2017–19) and site (North Minneapolis) and thus may not generalize to other times and places. For example, we would expect to see more vocal support today for specific reform and/or defunding initiatives, for example, alternative first responders for mental health crises, that have gained traction. Similarly, some of the residents calling for profound structural changes in 2017–19 might today more readily adopt the language of abolition. In addition, the majority of our sample was middle-aged, which limited our ability to analyze cross-racial divergences across the life course. Substantial research documents that young people tend to be more vulnerable to (and critical of) police violence (Carr et al. 2007; Cobbina et al. 2008; Barrett and Welsh 2018) and supportive of recent calls to defund and/or abolish the police (Fortner 2020). The relatively small share of 20-somethings in our data, and our exclusion of younger teens, means that this youth voice is not well represented in our study. Finally, North Minneapolis is a somewhat unusual context, given the racial demographics of both the neighborhood and the city.

Despite these limitations, there is strong evidence that the underlying tensions we identify in our data—including the bounds of white racial solidarity, contestation over the roots of police violence and means of redress, and persistent concerns about criminal victimization—continue to shape the public struggle over policing. Perhaps most notably, despite a robust set of grassroots organizers fighting for transformative changes in policing, including abolition, and a slate of progressive city council members elected during the BLM era in Minneapolis, progress in the wake of the summer's rebellion to dismantle the MPD has been slow, piecemeal, and deeply contested. In June 2020, a majority of the city council shocked the country by declaring an intention to “end” the MPD. Yet nearly as soon as the statement was drafted, elected officials began to walk back its promises. Echoing the white Northsiders in our study, many white elites (including the mayor) have argued for not dismantling but reforming the MPD and better supporting the chief in enacting culture change. Some of the city's Black civil rights and community leaders, echoing our Black respondents, have also pushed back against efforts to permanently reduce the MPD target force size, arguing that reductions in the number of MPD officers in the wake of the unrest has put Black lives at risk. The lack of protection by city police, they argue, is another form of racism. While Derek Chauvin has been convicted of murder, the future of policing in Minneapolis remains uncertain.

We argue that these struggles underline the challenges facing progressive cities working to enact antiracist policies in policing and beyond. Addressing the harms of racialized police violence will mean not only transforming public safety but working to reshape the conditions that are both the cause and consequence of racialized state failure (Miller 2014; see also Boyles 2019;

Cobbina 2019; Bell 2019). Dramatically reducing the number of people killed by the police, for example, will require many kinds of transformations in tandem, including addressing the high rates of gun violence in low-income communities of color; reducing the prevalence of discriminatory police stops in those same communities; and altering the policies, training, and accountability structures that guide officers' decisions. In other words, we need alternatives to the police, we need to invest in addressing root causes, and we need transformative changes in policing. Much of these shifts will require not just local decision makers, but also state and federal support—a tough proposition given the racial, political, and regional polarization on social welfare and the criminal legal system. Yet if police violence is ultimately just one manifestation of race-class subjugation, alongside many others that expose Black Americans to premature death (Miller 2014; Bell 2017; Soss and Weaver 2017; Boyles 2019), then the work to make Black lives matter requires pruning the many roots and branches of structural racism and seeding investments in communities of color that produce safety, equity, and power.

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