Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Politics
Withdrawing and Drawing In: Political Discourse in Policed Communities
--Manuscript Draft--

Manuscript Number:	JREP-D-19-00024R2
Full Title:	Withdrawing and Drawing In: Political Discourse in Policed Communities
Article Type:	Research Article
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Abstract:	A growing body of literature explores the ways in which direct or vicarious contact with forms of state surveillance affects political behavior and perceptions of government legitimacy. We develop a new method, Portals, to collect conversations between residents from highly policed areas in five different US cities collected between 2016 and 2018. While existing research emphasizes the ways in which interactions with the carceral state are alienating and demobilizing, our analysis of these conversations illuminates productive ways in which civic discourse can respond to oppressive encounters with police. Citizens respond to interactions with policing, that is, not only as victims but as resisters: they construct and act upon civic sensibilities in the face of state oppression. These civic sensibilities, we argue, are centered on a logic of "collective autonomy" – given police ignorance, abuses of police authority, and the little political power that residents of race-class subjugated communities have to demand change, many conclude that power is best achieved by receding from state institutions in the short term while building community in the long term.

Withdrawing and Drawing In: Political Discourse in Policed Communities

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Abstract

A growing body of literature explores the ways in which direct or vicarious contact with forms of state surveillance affects political behavior and perceptions of government legitimacy. We develop a new method, Portals, to collect conversations between residents from highly-policed areas in five different US cities between 2016 and 2018. While existing research emphasizes the ways in which interactions with the carceral state are alienating and demobilizing, our analysis of these conversations illuminates productive ways in which citizens can respond to oppressive encounters

with police by generating civic sensibilities. These civic sensibilities, we argue, are centered on a logic of "collective autonomy" – given police ignorance, abuses of police authority, and the little political power that residents of highly-policed communities have to demand change, many conclude that power is best achieved by receding from state institutions in the short term while building community in the long term.

They rode through streets and alleyways in cars with 'To Protect and Observe' emblazoned on the side. They visibly shadowed local authorities. And when police surveillance departed from the Constitution or local regulations, they flashed red lights, blared sirens, and documented police behavior with tape recorders and notepads. These participants in a "community alert patrol" in the Watts area of South Los Angeles were joined by similar efforts for communal self-protection against brutal police practices and illegal force that were organized across the nation during the 1960s, with local patrols that sought to 'police the police' cropping up in Seattle, Detroit, West Oakland, and in urban areas in the South. Such "community alert patrols," "freedom patrols," and "self-defense patrols," as they were variously called, assiduously monitored police stops of local black citizens, standing at a safe distance and in some cases reciting the law and Bill of Rights, often following an arrested person to jail and posting bail on their behalf. They took and filed complaints on behalf of the community, held street-corner rallies, initiated community-based efforts to curb crime, and trained youth in patrolling (Bloom et al. 2016; Felker-Kantor 2018; Malloy 2017; Murch 2010).

This movement five decades ago ought to remind political scientists that the people and communities targeted by police violence often resist it, sometimes by attempting to assert community authority over the criminal justice system and public safety. And yet, a careful reader of much contemporary political science research might come away with the impression that adversarial encounters with police have exclusively alienating consequences. In the midst of renewed attention to policing and criminal justice expansion, the most prominent storyline has been, in a word, an *anti-politics*, as scholars document ways in which coercive, involuntary interactions with carceral state agents lead to political withdrawal at the individual and community level (e.g., Burch 2013; Lerman and Weaver 2014; Manza and Uggen 2008; White 2019).

This attention to demobilization and alienation was important and necessary for unearthing the consequences of state surveillance and punishment on democratic publics. But as Soss and

Weaver (2016) observe, in its focus on marginalization, political science research has had little to say about how communities experiencing the punitive face of the state "exercise agency in relation to it" (11). In this manuscript, we join a small number of scholars in political science (e.g., Owens and Walker 2018; Walker forthcoming) in identifying responses to police encounters that are *constructive* of political thought and action.[1]

Our study explores unmediated political discussion among 293 black residents of highly-policed communities in five cities (Baltimore, Chicago, Los Angeles, Milwaukee, and Newark) using a technology and civic infrastructure called "Portals" and a methodological approach that listens to political ideas, aspirations, commitments, and ideologies in order to build a ground-up conception of political life. This approach is not only novel, it is necessary; as Michael Dawson (2001) argues, subaltern discourses in the black counterpublic are often "partly hidden from view," leading scholars to underappreciate the range of political ideas among this group, and particularly their non-liberal features. Similarly, Melissa Harris-Lacewell's examination of the discourse of black counterpublics argues that "one important element in understanding how black people interpret and make sense of the political world is to listen in on their everyday talk" (2004, 5). Informed by the research of these scholars, we use this Portals technology to create immersive environments for discourse and we examine how black participants in poor and working-class neighborhoods co-construct meaning around state authority in conversation with one another, given their unique experience with state violence, surveillance and discipline, and police as enforcers of racial order. We listen to how people theorize the state and argue for and against particular courses of action.

We find that discourse around policing and state authority more generally revolves around two adjoined themes. First, and consistent with existing research, involuntary police interventions incentivize strategic retreat from engagement with the state, broadly speaking (Bell 2016a; Brayne 2014; Goffman 2009; Lerman and Weaver 2014; Stuart 2016). This is because people tend to engage

the state only when they have a basic trust that it will not dominate them, humiliate them, or physically assault them. "Warrior style" policing tactics that criminalize routine behaviors and result in arbitrary stops of residents as they move through public space do the opposite – they deter citizen engagement with police and with the local government. Critically, this response is not solely a passive withdrawal or reluctance to engage, as some literature suggests, but an "ethics of aversion," in which "nonengagement, as opposed to direct confrontation or submission, is utilized as a means to limit and reduce the range of interactions with members and institutions of the dominant group" (Hanchard 2006, p. 110; see also Cohen 2010 and the "politics of invisibility").

Second, aversion is consistently accompanied by another political stance – a drawing in toward community. Specifically, we find evidence of a prominent discourse of *collective autonomy*, in which people respond to oppression in the criminal justice system through temporary, strategic withdrawal from formal political institutions while simultaneously advocating for deep community engagement, consciousness, and power-building, not only to seek immediate relief from police incursions but also to improve opportunities for future collective struggle against police occupation. This expression of communalism, autonomy, and unity is a prevalent current that flows within and across different ideological outlooks and is consistent with an ideological tradition in black politics that spans generations and contexts of unfreedom (Dawson 2001; Price 2009; Cruse 1967; Barkley-Brown 1994).[2] In her accounting of black civic life in post-emancipation Richmond, Virginia, for example, historian Elsa Barkley-Brown (1994) describes the Richmond community's practice of collective autonomy as a set of communal repertoires used to pursue and practice freedom:

> "An understanding of collective autonomy was the basis on which African Americans reconstructed families, developed communal institutions, constructed schools and engaged in formal politics after emancipation. The participation of women and children in the external and internal political arenas was part of a larger political worldview of ex-slaves and free men and women, a worldview fundamentally shaped by an understanding that freedom, in reality, would accrue to each of them individually only when it was acquired by all of them collectively" (125).

In his study of the black radical tradition, Michael Dawson (2001) describes a related concept—black autonomy— as both an "institutional principle and ideological orientation" born out of the institutional exclusion of blacks throughout American history and formalized by black political theorists like Martin Delaney, Marcus Garvey, and Maulana Karenga. "Since Reconstruction, African Americans' notions of autonomy have included not only personal autonomy and liberty (which often led to clashes with white managers on how work was organized), but a community-based concept of autonomy…. Black discourse since the Civil War has emphasized both the building of autonomous political, economic, and social institutions within the black community and the demand for full citizenship rights…" (27). In this paper, we use the term collective autonomy over terms such as "community control", "communal nationalism", or "self-determination" (though they are related conceptually and sometimes discussed interchangeably) because of its ability to capture the more quotidian, affective features of political life that may not always be packaged into explicit policies or demands.

In the next section, after briefly discussing the prevailing focus of contemporary political science research on the politically demobilizing effects of the criminal justice system, we lay out the theoretical foundation for our study, with an emphasis on historical cases of black communal resistance to police violence. We then introduce the Portals infrastructure through which the conversations were conducted, as well as our analytical approach, and then map the contours of collective autonomy discourse in two stages. First, we take a bird's-eye view, discussing collective autonomy and its central features as it appears in the Portals conversations analyzed here as a whole. Second, we closely analyze three conversations that illustrate how collective autonomy is expressed in full conversational complexity and how it is voiced amidst differing belief systems and participant pairings. Despite a variety of distinct experiences, outlooks, and individual positions among Portals participants, a core narrative emerges of collective autonomy: withdrawal from engagement with

police and governing authority more broadly coupled with community-building, collective responsibility, and self-determination as a solution to immediate police activity and the broader oppression of the carceral state.

A Strategy of Community Control in the Face of Police Oppression

A large body of research in political science has documented that involuntary interactions with criminal justice institutions are politically demobilizing moments of negative socialization. For example, the finding that arrest and incarceration decreases voting among individuals, family members connected to justice-involved, and communities has appeared across a range of studies, including those that measure changes in voting behavior after an arrest or conviction across multiple waves, in non-parametric analyses that match those who had been incarcerated with those who would be in the future, and in studies that use random assignment to less and more punitive judges to estimate causal effects of brief jail confinement (Burch 2013; Gerber et al. 2017; Lerman and Weaver 2014; Manza and Uggen 2008; Weaver and Lerman 2010; White 2019a; White 2019b; c.f. Walker 2014; Anoll and Israel Trummel 2019).

Outside of political science, policing's negative consequences for citizen participation has long been a topic among legal theorists and sociologists concerned with "legal cynicism," the belief that legal institutions are capricious, unjust, and unfair. In places where policing is concentrated, adversarial, and violent, residents are much more reticent to call police for help, to report crimes, pass guilty verdicts on juries, or to report neighborhood problems (Butler 1995; Desmond, Papachristos and Kirk 2016). Some may not just close themselves off to cooperation with police and legal authorities, but also to seeking out local institutions more broadly. Sociologists have termed this "system avoidance," whereby custodial populations engage in a wider evasion of medical, labor market, and educational institutions (Brayne 2014; Goffman 2009; Rios 2011) or emergency rooms when police are present (Lara-Millan 2014). New York City residents who lived in areas of

aggressive stop and frisk tactics were less willing to invite government attention even when in need and recent evidence indicates stop and frisk negatively affected their voting habits (Kang and Dawes 2017; Lerman and Weaver 2014a). In short, research ably demonstrates that one way to register one's opposition to or unwillingness to risk state mistreatment is to forgo engagement with the state altogether, practicing strategic distancing and the politics of invisibility in the face of surveillance, targeting, and violence (Cohen 2010; see also Bell 2016a; Miller and Stuart 2017; Rios 2011).

However, in its nearly exclusive focus on the ways that the carceral state "cleaves citizens from the democratic polity" (Lerman and Weaver 2014, 111), our field has tacitly embraced the claim that policed populations withdraw from political life. Ironically, such an emphasis in political science took off just as a pitched political mobilization against police violence took hold across the nation. In response to the police killings of Eric Garner, Lacquan McDonald, Korryn Gaines, Walter Scott, Rekia Boyd, Akai Gurley, and too many others to name, collective protests took place across the nation (Williamson, Trump, and Einstein 2018) and an array of groups formed, including We Charge Genocide, Million Hoodies for Justice, Dream Defenders, Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, BYP100, LetUsBreathe Collective, and Black Lives Matter. But existing literature, because of its focus on demobilization, does little to theorize and illuminate the forms of political expression that do exist within policed communities at both the activist and everyday level (c.f. Schneider 2014). Crudely, if unwittingly, many political scientists in recent years have constructed custodial citizens' politics as an anti-politics – a unilateral withdrawal from political activity – even as communities across the nation have told us otherwise.

Moreover, these subaltern activist groups are eschewing traditional framings and bipartisan rhetoric about being "smart on crime", "risk assessments", calls for improvements in training and technology like body cameras, and the like. Instead they are pursuing abolitionist agendas, challenging the criminal justice system itself as one of state predation, New Jim Crow, and neoliberal

extraction. In doing so, *they often place discourses and strategies of community control on center stage*: instead of financial incentives for diversion programs, they have authored "freedom budgets" that would repurpose bounties received by institutions tied to the criminal justice system to investing and spending on better schools and jobs and community infrastructure. Instead of mere representation through additional police of color, they have called for community authority over police in their neighborhoods and elected local officials committed to this goal.[3] From Chicago to Suffolk County, MA to Birmingham and Corpus Christi, and in between, stalwart tough-on-crime prosecutors have been ousted through their grassroots mobilization. These campaigns frequently coincide efforts to center community knowledge in the courtroom through initiatives like participatory defense and to heal community trauma in creative spaces like the #BreathingRoom in Chicago's South Side.

While there is much that is novel about the contemporary police resistance efforts, their emphasis on community control of policing has a long history and foundation in black thought and politics. For example, during the 1960s and 1970s, a brief but insistent movement for community control extended the boundaries of the black political agenda beyond rights and representation and toward self-determination (see Figure 1; Weaver and Decker 2014). These groups challenged police authority, undermined the police monopoly on surveillance by patrolling the police, tracked and investigated claims of brutality, educated disillusioned youth, and challenged the failures of the civil rights movement to end police killing and terror (Balto 2019; Felker-Kantor 2018; Hamilton and Ture 1967; Murch 2010; Pope and Flanigan 2013; Waskow 1969). One such group in Los Angeles, the Coalition Against Police Abuse (CAPA), organized "defense and justice committees" to help people victimized by police in a context of a vastly inadequate grievance process. Far from an anti-politics or "awkward silence" (Alexander 2011, 223), CAPA championed "alternative visions of urban power relations" and in particular "community control, external oversight, and decision-making over urban police strategies" (Felker-Kantor 2018, 12). Long after CAPA's demise, a local

black nationalist-inspired group, Los Angeles Community Action Network works today to "reverse

police the police" in LA's Skid Row community, focusing on collective community defense and

protection (Stuart 2016).

Figure 1: Examples of Historic Mobilization for Community Control of Police.

Sources: (top left) Community Patrol Corps of Blacks" (1969). Detroit Michigan Community Patrol Corps of Blacks. Photo dated Feb 11, 1969.
(top right) Guilty of Brutality Photographer: Charles Brittin Community Alert Patrol Offset, 1966 Los Angeles, California. (bottom) UCSD, UFW Archives

In many of these local cases, participants in these efforts went beyond police resistance to found communal institutions to protect blacks and promote wellbeing.[4] For example, they pioneered referral services and community hotlines to act as a hub for reporting both police abuse and slow responsiveness (Balto 2019; Felker-Kantor 2018). They also developed alternatives to surveillant and punitive responses to safety deprivation that centered the community's know-how. For example, angered by the resolute indifference of officials to the communities demands for treatment for addiction, the Young Lords and Panthers stormed a wing of Lincoln Hospital in the South Bronx and began running The People's Drug Program, giving treatment to an estimated 35,000 people over the initial years of its operation. As Matuozzi (2016) recounts, "The People's Drug Program encouraged patients to participant in community organizing work like advocating for welfare rights, helping evictees find housing, and founding trade organizations" (94). Though unsuccessful, campaigns to decentralize police forces and put them under the democratic control of neighborhood councils took place in most cities across the nation, constituting an open challenge to police authority but also a demand for communal power. Many of the campaigns modeled what true community voice meant by holding public hearings in the community to both hear the residents' stories of police abuse and to take stock of their needs and priorities.

We cannot adequately represent the dense urban history of such local efforts and their broader ideological moorings, but they shared several features. First, they paired steps to control police and make claims on the state with *community-building efforts* (even without access to mainstream resources), such as the Panthers' survival programs to provide social services and sustenance and emergency provision to residents (Murch 2010; Nelson 2011; Pope and Flanigan 2013). Such efforts

positioned the community as both a provider and a protective force, a guardian standing in the void left by official authorities and agencies.

Second, almost all of these campaigns asserted some level of authority over crime in their borders and demanded democratic control over the police force, whether they were the more radical adherents of Black Power or the vigilante citizen patrols Michael Fortner (2015) describes. Indeed, discourses of self-determination and collective protection ran the gamut from the most radical to the most conservative groups that tended to place emphasis on ridding the community of vice. Most importantly, a prominent ideological thread underpinning these groups and campaigns – despite their diversity – was self-determination. Their imperative was to shift power and authority to communities, whether through the more radical (and unrealized) demands for "community control of the police" and elected councils to oversee the police force in each neighborhood, to attempts to pass ordinances mandating that police live where they police, through communities themselves taking up the responsibility to ensure safety, or through the creation of more procedural civilian review boards.

Third, they articulated the limits of liberal embrace of representation without power, voice, or community knowledge. For example, as one writer in the Amsterdam News argued: "The cry should not only be for Black policemen, for some Black policemen are worse than their white counterparts. They, too are part of the oppressive system. The cry should be for control and accountability, and this accountability must be to the people of the local community. The court system, I believe, should also be decentralized and people should be tried by their peers, not by outsiders—economic, ethnic, or geographic….Yes, control of institutions within the Black community is a must if we are to survive" (Russell 1972, A5).

As this brief description of contemporary and historical police resistance efforts shows, highly-policed communities have often responded to police oppression not merely by withdrawing

from politics, as some literature would suggest, but by engaging in political mobilization, *and in particular by building power in order to achieve community authority over the police*. While these groups have encompassed distinct strategies, priorities, and actors, a shared tenet has been the idea that black communities themselves should have more control over the policing of their neighborhoods and that it is only by democratizing and decentralizing the police that black communities can be protected and survive. In the next section, we describe how we approach our investigation of the ways in which residents of highly-policed communities theorize, critique, and respond to involuntary encounters with the carceral state.

Methodology

Portals are gold shipping containers with immersive audio-visual technology that allow people in disparate places to connect intimately, as if sharing the same room. The Portals technology has two main virtues for facilitating organic conversations, and for underscoring the community's (rather than the researcher's) authority over their narratives. First, the Portal does not require a facilitator or researcher, allowing participants to converse freely and with minimized oversight. Second, Portals are staffed by members of the community – curators – who, in addition to doing outreach and describing the study, also use Portals to host community initiatives like creating murals with youth, town hall discussions, global art and music exchanges, and activism. Thus, Portals provide an intentional place for everyday, unscripted political dialogue and interaction that is participant-directed (allowing them to define what topics/concepts/language is meaningful) in a community-driven setting characterized by "equality, reciprocity, and unity of purpose" (Taylor 1997, 49), run and informed by the goals and needs of communities themselves. Because we are linking people across cities who would not otherwise encounter one another, the stakes of the exchanges are lowered and do not hinge on past interactions or future expectations (Small 2013) but a shared position provides a foundation for deep, yet casual, engagement.

We placed Portals in eleven neighborhoods with high levels of police-citizen encounters located in five US cities—Baltimore, Chicago, Los Angeles, Milwaukee, and Newark. Portals participants typically entered the chamber after walking by (54% of participants) or after hearing about the project through word of mouth (25% of participants). After the Portals curators administered a brief iPad survey to acquire basic background information, a participant in one city would speak with participants in another for approximately 20 minutes about their perceptions and experiences with police. Each Portal dialogue was video recorded, transcribed, and then coded for analysis. Between March 2016 and March 2018, approximately 866 Portals conversations were collected, amounting to 430 hours of dialogue. For the purpose of this paper, we focus on the 293 conversations between black participants because, like other scholars of black political discourse, we want wanted to hone in on how people who share a group position and identity that "affords African Americans the opportunity to exchange interpretations of the truth; to understand the complexity of the political world; to link their individual experiences to group narratives; to identify friends and foes; to define desirable outcomes to public problems; and to devise strategies for achieving those outcomes" (Harris-Lacewell 2004, xxii).

The median age of a black Portals participant was 36 years old, they had extensive, early, and recent experiences with police (48% had been stopped over 7 times and the median age of their first stop was 11, though this varies considerably by gender), 55% had a high school education or less, and 59% reported that they rarely or never trusted police. Readers should refer to the online appendix for more details on the Portals method, background characteristics of participants, and our approach to coding and analysis.

A Listening Method

In our analysis, we followed the constitutive and "active listening" approaches of scholars such as Katherine Cramer (2016) by identifying and coding themes within each conversation,

mapping the structure and pattern of whole dialogues, identifying meta-themes across them, and triangulating accordingly. Our approach was an interpretive exercise, in which we attended to how Portals participants use "everyday talk" to describe their civic responses to police encounters (Harris-Lacewell 2004). We began by coding excerpts[5] within those Portals dialogues in which participants express a *response* to their experiences with policing, heeding Cathy Cohen's (2004) call to consider "the possibility of oppositional politics rooted outside of traditional or formal institutions," and allowing subjects to define civic agency on their own terms (32). Thus, whereas most surveys identify civic responses as those that are actively responding to institutions through voting, protest, petitions, or public meetings, we considered a civic response to be any form of engagement, adaptation, recommendation, or aspiration that flows from experiences with the criminal justice system. One example of a political response captured in the Portals transcripts but not captured in traditional measures of civic engagement is when participants describe "cop watching," publicly observing police officers engaging with civilians to stave off or document officer wrongdoing.

After coding the full corpus of the Portals dialogues for responses and characterizing them accordingly, we looked for patterns across the dialogues (Cramer 2016; Miles and Huberman 1994) and logged these meta-themes, noting especially divergent patterns – similar ideas that surfaced within dialogues that were housed in both more conservative and more radical theories of the state. Calls for unity, for instance, have many different faces, a finding consistent with other analyses of discourse, in which the same phrase (i.e. "coming together") may take on different meanings across different contexts; we also find that different phrases may take on similar meanings (Soss 2002). We elaborate on this in the subsequent section.

Some responses read as what we might describe as *agentic,* or action-oriented, while others read as *aspirational*, or suggestive of an action. Agentic responses take two forms in the dialogues: engagement, which looks like traditional measures of civic engagement (e.g. voting, protest,

community service, sustained activism), and adaptation, where participants change their behavior to increase their level of power, safety, or dignity. Adaptations comprise actions such as staying indoors or out of groups, modifying dress or self-presentation, changing routes and routines, engaging with the police in a particular way, or calling neighbors or family members instead of police. These responses are more reflective of what Robin DG Kelley calls "the politics from below," or what Jim Scott terms the "weapons of the weak" (Kelley 1994; Scott 1990). An aspirational response is a proposal for what might change the status quo without taking any particular action. Aspirational responses may include proposals for increasing police efficacy or legitimacy (e.g. better training, accountability, descriptive representation) or for addressing the underlying conditions of violence, including poverty and education reforms. Aspirational responses may seem more amorphous, suggestive, and affective. Participants may express an urgent desire to "come together," "to know our history," to rebuild from the ground up or "police ourselves".

This coding process revealed that when two black participants are speaking to one another, their responses often focused on aspirational visions of unity, specific ideas of coming together as a racial group or community, or concrete ways they labored to protect, uplift, or empower their community. We also took notice of what expressions were not present, observing that for black participants responses that hinged on assimilation, integration, or moral suasion had less abiding hold. And perhaps ironically, the most common response where participants expressed agency was not collective action or any active form of engagement; instead they strategically distanced themselves from public life. These responses, taken together, constitute what we call a logic of collective autonomy. We also began to notice certain recurrent phrases that we systematically tracked (i.e. "come together," "as a community," "we need to," "as a people," "stick together," etc.); these phrases tended to cluster together with expressions of collective autonomy.

To better understand distinctions and resonance in the dialogues, we mapped their structure. We examined how participants connected and clashed along various thematic lines, considering who listens and who leads, and at what points (Hollway and Jefferson 2000; Mishler 1991). For example, a participant may disavow the police upon sharing a personal or vicarious encounter with them. Two female participants may waffle between a desire for protection and an antipathy for police treatment of their sons after connecting on experiences as mothers. Their dejection about reform may arise in moments after reflecting on failed measures of the past – or reflections on the past may give rise to suggested antidotes to anti-black violence. These pivot points, which we illustrate later in our conversation analysis section, are central for understanding how civic discourse and behaviors flow directly from treatment by the criminal justice system.

Collective Autonomy

In this section, we describe the contours of collective autonomy as it emerged in the Portals conversations. Without imposing too much of a central tendency on a discourse that transcends a variety of ideological perspectives, we see four important features. The first feature is the action of strategically withdrawing or distancing from the state, while the next three are articulated as aspirations: coming together as a community, acknowledging structural barriers to doing so, and honing a collective consciousness.

Strategic Distancing

Across the body of conversations, we observe a generally confirmed wisdom that the way to deal with the gravitational pull into police oversight is to distance oneself immediately in order to preserve individual autonomy. In order to avoid police incursions and the possibility of state assault, the immediate imperative is to unburden oneself from the police. Such expressions were often contained in a specific message to avoid enlisting the help of police. For example, a woman from Baltimore who teaches her own children to have a favorable view of police explains why she and her

neighbors are nonetheless reluctant to use their services: "Like I'd rather just deal with this than have the police come and shoot my son for acting a donkey or whatever…if I can avoid calling them…because I'm going to tell you, you call them and it gets worse, you know what I mean?...and it happens so fast, like they show up angry." Another Baltimorean, this time a 35-year-old man, expresses a similar sentiment: "I avoid them [cops] because I know I ain't got a chance going up against them."

In addition, conversations also described a more *general* aversion, not only from interaction with police but also from public life. Often, these were passing references to non-confrontation and disassociation: "I try to stay to myself and mind my business because things can go left at any moment"; "Right now, what I'm doing out here in the streets of Chicago, little bro, is staying to myself, minding my own business, and doing what I gotta do to survive in these streets as a black man"; "keep your head low". Staying to oneself and avoiding ordinary association with friends and neighbors followed directly on the heels of experience with and expectations of police; as a woman in Chicago put it: "The police…they got badges, they can do what they want. And it don't make no sense. And they can harass you for no reason. I don't have my ID on me right now, but I'm not doing anything. [parroting police] 'I don't want you standing in this spot. You gotta move.' That's why I don't even hang out no more. There's no point in hanging out. I stay in my house every day."

But there is something else of significance in the brief voicing of withdrawal. Such expressions rarely linger there. They travel rapidly from immediate individual autonomy to a more expansive vision of long-term community power and protection. Thus, this withdrawal response is not passive retreat but an active political stance – one that prioritizes investing in community autonomy and collective personal responsibility. As one 25-year-old male participant in Chicago put it: "Until we all wake up and come together and start pushing this black agenda…We are trying to police ourselves. No more call the police. Stay out of their way. Stop trying to look to them for

protection. Stop getting in trouble with other people on the street. Trying to use their services to come lock niggas up…. Stop believing in their paperwork. All together. Yeah, we definitely need to do that." The clarion call to avoid police interaction or service – withdrawal – is also part of the search for collective autonomy.

Coming Together: Black Self-Determination

The reason why salvation from police depends on the black community banding together, as articulated in the dialogues, is as follows: because we cannot depend on the police, or the country more broadly, to treat us reasonably ("America has never loved you, bro"), we must come together to improve the health of our families, communities, and institutions. Calls to stop depending on others were followed by discussions of the need to strengthen ourselves, to "come together," "stand tall together", and "harvest our own." As a 57-year-old female participant in Chicago said, "if you just said, fuck them, get up, and do it for yourselves, then we wouldn't need them. And we can show them like, hey, we don't need y'all. They scared of us, like, for real, for real." Across the conversations, there was a shared idea that if the community "got on one accord," police would no longer have the upper hand. Police power would deflate as the power of the community increased. As we searched these conversations, it was not entirely clear how coming together would happen, what it would look like, or how exactly it would deliver them from police occupation. Narrow policy prescription wasn't the prize; aspiration for a different future was.

There was a more conservative variant of this aspiration to come together and a more radical one, though they are closer than they first appear. The more conservative expression usually occurred within a "clean our house first" vocabulary. These conversations voiced an impatience with criminal offending over and above police actions and a demand to snuff out the gangs and vice (occasionally with threats of street justice). How can we expect them to take our community seriously, they opined, when we flaunt disrespect for our own? These conversations argued for a

responsibility to the community to correct its own people, and sometimes this was seen as preceding united opposition to the police ("we got a hell of lot more on the whole community – black people, before we can even begin to think about what the fuck somebody else could do for us.")

The promotion of community reliance was also voiced more radically, through the explicit pursuit of power to 'govern ourselves.' These conversations argued for self-determination, which was two-pronged: actual community control of police, and authority to resolve intra-community conflict. Many conversations proposed the idea that policed communities should patrol (and govern) their own neighborhoods rather than ceding power to those who do not understand the community or care very much about its wellbeing or have shown a failure to act justly on its behalf. These conversations often saw little role for existing police; indeed, police reform was perceived as akin to improving slavery. "We need to police ourselves" or "we can protect ourselves" was a fairly common phrase, often coming directly out of the idea that police had shown that they could not handle the job and had no sense of the communities they were charged to police or were unnecessary: "Um, just leave black people alone. Just leave us alone. We don't need you to come in and tell us how to act. We don't need you to police us. We don't need that. You have no idea. You think you have a idea because you studied us. But you don't know us. You know what I'm saying? Um, what I ... they just need to ... we need to police ourselves. Stop coming in our community with preconceived ideas and notions based upon your study of how you should respond to a particular situation" (62-year-old female participant in Los Angeles).

There was a common belief that communities themselves could fix things going wrong without police as they had done in years past, and here again the strategy of distancing is bound up with the ideal of communal responsibility: "Rule number one; no cops ever. Don't ever call them. We'll settle it ourselves. Like men. That's the way we did it and we didn't have the problems that we do now. We didn't have people rolling up on us just jumping out. They lock you up, they'll find

anything." Very few people indicated that they had actualized this vision for formal community patrols, with the exception of a woman in Los Angeles who called the Nation of Islam's peaceful security force to mediate a conflict but more informal workarounds did occur like mediating their own conflicts or relying on friends for help in emergency situations.

Disunity Begets Vulnerability

Across the conversations, many Portals participants expressed that being divided limits blacks' power, holds them back as a collectivity, and opens the way for state violence. For example, a young woman in Baltimore said:

I feel like they target a lot of youth, because the lack of togetherness. Our youth is so against each other. They always shooting each other and killing each other, so we so divided it's easy to attack them… if we was as … we would be stronger ... It's easy to … with somebody that stand alone. Our people not standing together. We're not being strong to what make us any easy target for the police. Yeah, they play a big role, the police are 90% of the problem, but the other 10% fall back on our people because we don't come together.

From this perspective, it is not just that coming together is a positive aspiration with intrinsic value; not coming together exacerbates police oppression. Consistently, Portals participants argued that interpersonal violence was an open invitation for police raining down on them. When police see evidence of us not sticking together, the argument went, they know they have a free pass to kill us: "If we do not get together and show these people that we can love each other, they are going to keep on doing what they are doing."

Many participants viewed their neighborhood as culpable, therefore, by putting themselves in the predicament to have police come in in the first place. Collective exhaustion with interpersonal violence and with the police response to that violence were adjoined. Many wistfully recalled an earlier time when their own communities were united before coming apart, decimated by drugs, the police, or both; they yearned for "strong leaders" like MLK and Malcolm X who were nowhere around; they shook their heads at the community's tendency to set its own businesses and streets alight when protesting police killing.

But unity would not come easily. Portals participants often expressed that one reason unity remains out of reach is that the police actively promote snitching and division, destabilizing their neighborhood dynamics; as one recounted, "the laws try to take a motherfucker from the hood that holds the hood together." So division is difficult to escape because conditions of domination prevent unity; we can't come together, they argued, because we have so little and what little we have "we got to grind for it". They ended up moving like "crabs in a bucket," each one trying to get out by standing on the others back. But this was a double bind; if conditions occasion disunity, only unity begets freedom ("the only people that's gonna save us is us. You can't expect your enemy to save you.").

Collective Consciousness and Redefinition

The final component in this civic discourse is the idea that community power depends on a collective consciousness, and this consciousness is impeded by not knowing blacks' history and unique cultural greatness. There was special emphasis on learning blacks' true past in contrast to the "invented past" told to them by those in power. Sometimes, this idea was voiced as a forgetting of their history as "God's originals," as African "kings and queens," as the builders of great civilizations; other times it appeared as a more modest reclamation of black pride and redefinition (i.e. 'we are inherently creative, talented, hardworking, peaceful people who, with parallel resources to whites, would beat them in this game'). The logic of their argument can be paraphrased: Because, somewhere along the way, we had lost our sense of culture, turning inward meant not only self-government and economic reliance but also bolstering awareness of our history and possibilities and attempts to recapture our identity. It is therefore incumbent on blacks to start "telling and controlling our narrative" and resist political and media storylines that criminalize our communities. Some even suggested that without this knowledge, authorities can take advantage of us and thwart the realization of our gifts.

In sum, collective autonomy responses constitute a dominant framework across conversations, flowing from a desire for liberation from police abuse and connected to aversion imperatives. Highly-policed citizens don't choose between exit, voice and loyalty, in the famous words of Albert Hirschman. Instead they combine elements of exit from traditional state involvement with loyalty to their group. Thus, strategic distancing and solidarity are two sides of the same coin: residents seek safety by putting distance between themselves and the state in the short term and also seek unity and power in the long term.

Conversation Analysis: Tracing Collective Autonomy and Strategic Distancing in Three Exchanges

This section illustrates how collective autonomy unfolds in contextual dialogue through a close reading of three Portals dialogues. We selected these conversations not because they were "clean" articulations of collective autonomy, but rather the opposite. The conversations are not always linear, and participants try on different discourses that may be read as contradictory. We selected these conversations to demonstrate that belief systems can be messy; that they are worked out and worked over through experience, through borrowed frameworks, through rapport and discord with others.[6]

"I'm for walking in our neighborhoods. I'm not with the walking to the police station":
More radical expressions of communal autonomy

In this dialogue, collective autonomy is expressed through ideas of black self-determination: the need for the community to set its own rules, govern its own people, and develop independent economic power to obtain freedom from police and state subjugation. Both participants are black men in Milwaukee and Chicago, who are in their late 30s/early 40s, have a high school education, have had high levels of contact with police, and maintain low levels of trust in police. They are both fathers, and both live in poor, majority-black communities; and both designate themselves as

mentors to young men in their neighborhoods but do not seem to associate with any formal organization. They both articulate a particular concern for black men, while women receive no mention throughout the dialogue.

The Chicago participant begins the conversation by anchoring his ideas in self-determination. He introduces himself as a businessman concerned with black economics and spreading these ideas through his community. Yet his concept of collective autonomy is multi-faceted, weaving together several frameworks: he calls for replacing the use of police with community-based alternatives, creating black solidarity through acts of community responsibility and unity, and redefining dominant conceptions of black life and worth:

We gotta have something to pass down to our children's children, you know what I'm sayin, so, I preach that hard man, the black economics thing. I'm for walking in our neighborhoods. I'm not with the walking to the police station. It's not gonna change nothing, you know what I'm saying? We have to change within ourselves. Community...you know with us being unified first. That's more what I'm saying with the whole thing. That's why I click with certain brothers that's, you know, like-minded and we hit the hoods, you know what I'm saying? We don't just be hitting any old place. We go to the hoods to show black love and spring black love and chant black love and black power, things like that. And you know, like, chop it up with the people.

The Chicago participant's reflections lead the Milwaukee partner to critique black pastors, whom he admonishes for their distance from community life ("If you got money, pay our dues, pay our all. But, we know what's going on out here in the streets. We drive around the streets every day. Your church in the ghetto but you don't live in the ghetto"), and their distorted priorities ("But they don't want to preach about that…They talk about the black on black violence"). His conversation partner in Chicago concurs ("We need to make sure we letting [black pastors] know, ay this is what's going on"). This critique represents the Milwaukee participant's own flavor of self-determination, which focuses on the community needing power over institutions, including non-state actors such as churches, as well as local elected positions, the latter which he broaches later in the dialogue.

The Milwaukee participant proceeds to describe how his neighborhood—particularly its men—must be better equipped to solve their own problems in order to avoid the police. He does

not deny the reality that men in his community rely on they gray and underground economy to make ends meet, nor does he admonish them for doing so. Both he and his conversation partner concur that these choices are out of economic necessity ("a lot of the times it's just to feed they family, you know, because they struggling").

M85: Understand that things happen, people get shot everyday. At the end of the day, you see your brother down there you'll be easy to debate this. Talk this out. This is- you could sell a nickel rock, a dime bag, just so you could be on the corner doing all that. You could easily talk this out. You don't have to go gun violence all the time. That's how you get the police involved now.

C86: Exactly. You right, you right. I mean it's tearing up our communities. They in the hood, it's going on in the hood just like the church in the hood or the liquor store in the hood, you know, all these things in the hood but we not really making no, we not making no money. You know, drug money ain't money that's gonna go down in the taxes. Unless you rip it and do something right by it you know a lot of the times it's just to feed they family, you know, because they struggling.

The exchange above is reminiscent of a Catch-22 that aggrieves many Portals participants as they explain why collective autonomy is so arduous to achieve: *disunity makes us vulnerable to police coercion but a lack of resources impedes our unity*. To rectify this pattern, the pair agrees "we gonna have to flip this into some power" by putting residents' gifts to better use. The Milwaukee participant celebrates black men pursuing real estate and broker licenses and the Chicago partner suggests that they should convert occasions for violence into productive collaboration: "ten brothers out there shooting each other, same ten brothers can get together and form some type of business at the end of the day." They also reference other ethnic groups who've succeeded in building power despite state oppression ("Jews…went through the Holocaust you never head of no them falling apart. After the Holocaust they been through, they said we gonna make this even tighter"). However, they do not overlook the particularities of the black condition, and crucially, the state's role in undermining the potential for a deep reckoning with history:

C86: Right,right. You know, I mean we do gotta deal with the, you know, it was put in us. You know we act like what didn't happen, slavery happened. What happened was generations of curses of what they put in and conditioned the black people. So we do kind of got to get out there and tell them the history of, like, look before we slaves we was kings, period. It's not in our history books but we can find it though. At the end of the... We ran this world. I don't know what happened [laughs]

M85: It's there, they don't want to put it in the history book…we can't get up and take a private jet and go see Egypt, Russia, Africa. So, it's there, it's proof that black people is kings…We the first, we the first Adam and Eve.

In the absence of resources and recognition, participants reiterate that their communities remain vulnerable to police violence in the subsequent exchange. Importantly, however, even amidst their vulnerability, neither passively retreats during encounters with the state. The Milwaukee participant notes that he's even been told by family members associated with law enforcement to strategically avoid the police ("you might as well don't even step out and pull up in front of the police station nowadays") so long as the police continue to operate out of fear and fail to make the choices to protect themselves and civilians. Meanwhile, the Chicago participant describes how he engages in "cop watching" when he observes stops in his neighborhoods and references a recent instance in which he did so, reminiscent of the more concerted strategies in the 1960s. Importantly, the following excerpt concludes with a similar logic from which it began: if the state isn't accountable to our people, we need to get power to protect ourselves. Here, participants theorize lack of power as stemming from both group disregard by the state ("black already means nothing at the end of the day") and from the absence of a structure to channel collective claims and facilitate unity. There is a general acceptance of the perpetual nature of police violence unless stopped through agitation ("they ain't gonna stop").

M85: Right and like, like with all the cop shootings going on, like, I know I got family members who been in the military. I got family members who been police officers and everything and they tell me, like today, you might as well don't even step out and pull up in front of the police station nowadays …I don't want to get shot. I might pull out ID? I don't wanna get shot pulling out my ID and social security.

C86: It's crazy. We gotta have our hands up, you know with the, and that's...I seen it man [laughs] A young brother- it was like four of them deep in the car- I just kind stood by and watched, I didn't even leave because I saw them pulling them over. I feel like we all gotta be accountable for each other now… All the brothers had their hands up and it's sad we got to do that but that was smart of them to do that though. Because they had four police cars that done stopped on these young brothers and they didn't look like they was doing nothing, you know what I'm saying? So it's like we gotta do all this precautionary type things just to live and survive and it's crazy but we kinda got to do it right now.

M85: Right. I still have to have my ID and everything out before you get to the car. There's no reason I need to pull this out. You need to stop me, I have already had the stuff out? No. You should ask me for my ID and registration. I should have the right to go to my glove compartment or my back pocket then pull it out… You nervous that I'm gonna pull something out? You need to call backup. If you feeling nervous. You feel like I'm going to do something to you? Don't push my car until you got another squad coming.…Yes man. You know what you doing. You have a choice. You made that choice to pull that trigger.

C86: That's it, that's it. And deal with the consequences but you know, justice means just us. So they not dealing with the consequence so that's why I feel like we need to get some power. Cause we need to be able to deliver. See we ain't got no money so we ain't got no say so. You know, black already means nothing to America at the end of the day. But we also have no type of structure, no type of unity, and no type of power. So our voice don't mean nothing although we're screaming, you know, and chanting black power and unity. We ain't got no power cause we ain't got no money, you know. We gotta build some type of structure so that when they do stupid, because they gonna keep on doing it. They ain't gonna stop. But when we get some power, when we hold down the whole block, the whole area, and we do march for real that time? They gonna have to make move then. Like the Malcolm X movie, you know what I'm saying? When they marched up there and they had to send dudes to the hospital

The Milwaukee participant elaborates on the Chicago participant's last point about building power, calling for community control specifically by electing local officials ("we gotta get the right people in, the right justice in"). It is worth noting that this form of political self-determination is uncommon in the Portals conversations; rarely do participants speak about electoral engagement or external representatives. Importantly, however, the engagement he calls for is not to make current representatives more responsive but to displace them; it is to shift the balance of power back toward the community by putting in power officials who will hire police not just in the community but *of* the community. Electoral influence here, crucially, is in the service of community control. Community members need to *take responsibility for community control* by going to the ballot box.

M85: That's why I'm telling, I want to say to like us black men? It's everything like, people trying to say white peoples trying to hold us down. It's like no they ain't holding us down, it's us. You gotta get up, you gotta go and vote for your aldermen, senators, counselors. Vote for mayor! You voting the white man, you doing little for your community.…They hire these cops who don't live here and drive two hours away to come work in your community…They don't know what you going through every night.

C86: Right. They don't don't what's up with nothing. They just see what they think they see is a nigger, an animal.
…
M85: Mhmm. And only thing you can do is keep talking, keep preaching to the black man. It take, it take a tremendous change. But we gotta get the right people in, the right justice in, the right district attorney in, the right chiefs, the right sheriff in.

C86: Yeah that's true. Yeah we got to start from the bottom in a sense but I think we can make up there though. I think we can make it to the top we just got to keep on going. We got to keep on pushing through.

This conversation highlights that collective autonomy is texturally rich, anchored by a central strategy, then complemented and complicated by others. In this dialogue, to achieve self-determination participants propose a variety of collective strategies that are marbled throughout the dialogue. On one hand, they each consider the need to bolster community unity and pride ("We go to the hoods to show black love and …chop it up with the people"). On the other, one participant expresses the need for individual responsibility: if the community fails to stick together and solve its own conflicts, the police have an excuse to intervene ("You could easily talk this out. You don't have to go gun violence all the time. That's how you get the police involved now."). Meanwhile, in the short term, participants strategically distance from police engagement ("I'm not with walking to the police station") while remaining dedicated to community power. One walks the streets to promote community safety and acts as a bystander during police encounters while the other lectures his brethren on conflict resolution and calls for community-based institutional accountability.

"I can get my own black brothers and sisters to protect me": Communal Autonomy Discourse in a Conversation between Women

Our next conversation is between two women in their early 30s. The experiences of women often diverge from men in highly-policed communities (Ritchie 2012; Jones 2004; Stuart and Benezra 2017). Studies show that compared to their male counterparts, women are more likely to contact police and are less likely to be stopped by them; but black women are not necessarily more likely to trust them, or are more likely to have what sociologist and legal scholar Monica Bell refers to as "situational trust", where trust is contingent on particular forms of police engagement (2016b). These trends play out across our sample, and to a certain extent in the following conversation. The Chicago participant, a Black woman who identifies as a college graduate, reports never being

stopped by police but maintains low trust in police nonetheless. The Milwaukee participant, a black woman who describes herself as having attended some college, reports having been stopped between five and seven times in her life (the most recent time being in the past month) and also has low trust in police. She lives in a neighborhood of very high levels of incarceration and policing and indeed a police siren loudly interrupts the conversation.

This conversation includes a wide range of pointed critiques of policing and the criminal justice system, many of which are based in direct experience. Specifically, both participants attribute their distrust in police to how police have treated their family members, a trend common among female participants:

M96: As far as policeman, I always say – and my community…reason when I really express distrust in mine started too with my family. Yeah, I had some family members who were like, you know, in the streets doing bad stuff but it's ways around that, you know what I'm saying? Because I done seen things happen with a black boy and a white boy, and they gave the white boy – even though they did the same crime – they did the white boy, community service where he was able to change his life, change his ways. But they didn't do that with the black boy.

Their critiques, rooted in familial experiences and made by both participants and numerous points throughout the conversation, include the complaint that cooperating with the police leads one to be accused of a crime; that police originated from the slave patrol and are still "just all out for blacks" today; that police prefer to punish people than rehabilitate them ("they don't look for solutions. They look for lockups"); that police rape; that they murder; that they create crimes in order to stay in business; that they are capricious ("Y'all just being, you know what I'm saying, making stuff up so y'all could fuck with us"); that they know little about the community they are policing (one participant makes a comparison to the military occupying another country); that their purpose is to protect businesses and property rather than human beings; and that their presence causes increased crime. The collective autonomy argument borne out of these critiques is concerned with self-reliance: the notion that communities should turn inward to enable safety.

Prior to the excerpt presented below, the woman in Milwaukee had been talking about cases in which the police seemed to both target black youth and disproportionately punish them. She concludes, "instead of them trying to have a type of where they can rehabilitate these kids, they rather lock 'em up…Police always look at the bad part of you." Now, as the excerpt below shows, the woman from Chicago builds on this critique to make a more general statement, portraying the police as an external force, a "third party," similar to a military occupation. As in the prior conversation between men, a central complaint is being surveilled by an institution that "don't know us." The solution, then, is to recognize that police position them as an enemy and to stop trusting them. That, in turn, requires developing the capability to solve our own problems – a capability black people used to possess but now have lost.

C27: I think police are a third party military type source...and shouldn't really be in the neighborhood unless there's a war zone. So, basically, stationed there like we are the enemy.

M96: Yeah.

C27: And regardless of how much we think we trust them, we are their enemy.

M96: Yeah.

C27: So, it doesn't matter if it's a good boy, a bad boy, a old man, a young woman, a baby.

M96: Yes.

C27: It's a war zone. So, they need to leave. How did we used to do it in the old days when something happened in the house, something happened in the hood? We know who to speak to, we know who to go to. Now we gotta have the police who's a third party that don't know us, don't know the community, don't know- and we trusting them?

At this point the woman from Milwaukee makes an additional critique, which is that some individual police are both mentally unstable and racist, leading them to become violent. She references a case in which a police officer woke up a man sleeping on a park bench and, in the ensuing confrontation, shot and killed him. In the below excerpt, the woman from Chicago responds by extending her recommendation to build collective autonomy, arguing that "we, as a community" need to learn the history of police, stop engaging them, learn what power we have to

dismantle them, and replace them with our own police force. To this the woman from Milwaukee agrees, and even extends this idea further, advocating for a refusal to pay taxes for the police salaries, going on strike from jobs if necessary, for a reliance on the community for protection based in communal knowledge ("I can get my own black brothers and sisters to protect me."), and a reclamation of the community's strengths.

M96: And we have a lot of cops like that, that we don't even know about. And I always tell people this, like, if you got people in your family that's ADHD, schizophrenic, suicidal, guess what? The police force does too. We don't need those type of people running around our cities killing us. Cause them the type of people that's killing us. That's like the third cop that done said that they had a mental, you know, thing going on with his self. So y'all let mental people protect and serve?

C27: Well, that- that's the piece is that we, as a community, have to know how they came into existence.

M96: Right.

C27: We have to also make sure that we know what our authority and their authority is. Sometimes they come in as if we gave them the permission to. And if we keep calling 'em and keep giving them permission to come, then they're gonna continue. We have that power and authority to dismantle the police in our community and the thing is that how do we teach and let people know in those community that they have the power to do so. We have the power to have our own, I guess, patrol...

M96: Yeah.

C27: ...that we design, that we create. So that's the one thing. It's like, how did they come into existence? Did they get corporate, unincorporate? Are they part of the government as a municipality? What are the legal ramifications for the existence of a police force?

M96: Right.

C27: Then we can do the exact same thing. So, we no longer need that force. Whoever paying you- if you saying it's a taxpayer thing- if it's a taxpayer, then we have the right to dismantle and create our own.

M96: And look...

C27: And that's a whole 'nother piece.

M96: And really, in real life, taxpayers, us, we do pay for them. They salary coming off of the lower class. The lower class people pays for policing, firefighters, hospitals. Taxpayers pay for a lot. That's why I was telling people, like, we, us, as taxpayers, we do not have to fucking pay them. If they want to keep shooting us down and gunning us down, guess what? We all go on strike. Leave our jobs and how the fuck they gonna get paid? They not never gonna get paid because we the ones who pay them. The middle class pays for our aldermen, our governor...

C27: [laughs]

M96: ...so the police officers, and the fire fighters, and the doctors, they pay for the aldermen. Then they kids go to college, the pay for the governors, the congressmen. Now, we pay for the police, the fire fighters. They don't understand that. So, if we have to keep giving y'all our money and y'all gunning us down, guess what? I don't have to deal with that. I'm gonna be an entrepreneur where my money don't even go to the force.

C27: Yeah we gonna have to do something else. And that's the thing is that...

M96: And I can get my own black brothers and sisters to protect me. And police my own community.

C27: Yes.

M96: Cause we strong black brothers and women out here. They could do way better than what they doing and they know what's going on in our community.

C27: Yes.

M96: See what I'm saying? I'd rather for a person who to protect and serve us, they really know what's going on with Tyrone and Tasha. You know what I'm saying?

Note that many of the statements made in this last excerpt might, if considered out of context, seem like an anti-politics, a unilateral withdrawal from government, such as "if we keep calling 'em and giving them permission to come, then they're gonna continue." But in fact, the disengagement recommended here is strategic, part of a larger strategy of building power. Not calling the police, not paying taxes, not going to work; all these are suggested tactics in order to move for a community-controlled police force: one in which police officers "really know what's going on with Tyrone and Tasha."

"Y'all can't police our city for us. I should be making sure the shorties safe":
<u>Collective Responsibility Nested in Individualist Orientations and Collective Guardianship</u>

In this final dialogue, we observe how collective autonomy discourse develops in a conversation strongly anchored in ideas of individual responsibility: the importance of respect and compliance in one's interactions with police, appreciation for the difficulty of police work, and the location of policing problems in individuals, not institutional or historical arrangements. This exchange is between two middle-aged Black men who coincidentally both grew up in the Altgeld

Gardens (which they colloquially refer to as the Wild Hundreds, known for being home to many of Chicago's gangs and suffering acute safety deprivation).

The Chicago man establishes his general regard for the police at the outset, saying he "actually trusts the police" and "I don't have a problem with them." He gives a hypothetical scenario of being stopped if police "want to see what I'm up to" and explains that he would comply ("it's all about just giving them what they want and going on your way"), a recurrent theme in the ensuing conversation. Being stopped here for inconspicuous activity is not critiqued or rejected, but adapted to. Fault lies with those who don't know to just "give them what they want."

He then offers the first explanation for police violence, one that will be affirmed by his conversation partner: "youth" who "don't respect the police enough so that's why the police react the way they do." But then, turning from hypothetical to an actual personal story about his sister's experience as an Uber driver "just yesterday," he voices a critique of police behavior (that they did not exercise proper judgment) and questions the police practice of putting their hand on their gun, a critique that is housed within a general appreciation for the job police must do:

And so, she asked the one police officer who was getting her credentials why did this other man, this other police officer have to come stand next to her car because they're scaring her now. She was scared. Well, I explained to my sister this: with the police these days, they have to protect themselves also. They have a job to do. I'm well aware of the job they have to do out on these streets. Um so one, two, three- however many police it takes to protect their fellow officer from being hurt, I understand that. But, in the same, in the same you know sentence that I'm using right now, you don't have to you know- you gotta make your proper judgment when you're pulling over people. My sister is not someone that's gonna hurt you, ok? So therefore you don't need your hand on your gun, or your taser, or nothing like that. Ok? Do what you gotta do and move around. Don't scare people like you're doing. A lot of people are scared of the police right now.

The Chicago man explains that the police have taken him to jail a few times, but he accepts responsibility and acknowledges they did their job properly. Despite an abiding faith in compliance, he then levels a second critique through a fierce and pointed questioning of police who protect themselves with guns ("you don't have to kill 'em all the time!"). More broadly, he criticizes some police for resorting to violence unnecessarily ("they don't respect their training"), as in the case of

choking Eric Garner. However, his critique remains located in an individual 'bad apples' framing and directed at those officers who have disregarded their training and are "doing they own damn thing."

But if you give the police what they want when they ask for it, I feel that they are doing their job properly. And, and uh you know, it's a shame that they have to you know protect themselves from these kids these days the way that they do, you know? With their guns…You could use a taser, you could use a nightstick, you know bust 'em in the knee, knock 'em down, you know? You don't have to kill 'em all the time, you don't have to shoot 'em all the time! You don't have to do these things man. The guys selling cigarettes, they choked him half- choked the man out. For what? He's selling cigarettes man, that ain't no damn- that ain't nothing else but cigarettes! Why you choke him out? It's crazy man, it's crazy. Those are the bad police that I'm talking about. They shouldn't be on no force. They should not be on the force, simple as that. Because you know what? They don't respect their training that they had when they were in class. They doing they own damn thing. That's all I got to say about it bro.

The Milwaukee man then describes his recent visit to Memphis and his touring of Beale Street, where it "grieved" his heart to witness police bedecked in artillery for a warzone. He laments police militarization before agreeing with his conversation partner that these days he "don't have nothing against the police"; once he started living "righteous," he stopped regarding the police as "the enemy," voicing his appreciation "as long as they're not corrupt and they doing they job."

I agree with you that you know what I'm saying me personally, I don't have nothing against the police. Today I don't because you know, uh, back in the days when I was a wicked individual, evil individual you know what I'm saying living the street life, living a life where I didn't care about nothing ... To me they was the enemy then. So it was like, you know what I'm saying, me against them. You know what I mean? So ... So being a upright citizen today and being a righteous endeavor today, you know what I'm saying- to not being a knucklehead as I was as a youth, you know what I'm saying- and being a mature adult you know what I'm saying, I see it different now. I see it like you know what I'm saying as long as they're not corrupt and they doing they job, I have no issue with 'em. I done shook they hand and said, you know what I'm saying, I appreciate you keeping our streets safe and things like that … I've had a chance to see they side of the view…

The Milwaukee man then puts forward his main argument, recounting the statement he made to Milwaukee police in a community discussion: "Y'all can't police our city for us." He plainly asserts his community's authority to police themselves, based on their continual presence. When the police end their workday – even after a job well done – they leave the neighborhood and city behind. "I'm here everyday, 24/7." Thus, his community cannot rely on police not because police aren't doing a satisfactory job, don't have enough manpower, or have racist intentions; rather, external patrols operate at a remove and return to homes in distant suburbs and are no substitute for the people that

are actually in the neighborhood on a constant basis. This authority is stated also as a responsibility –

"I should be making sure the shorties safe." His conversation partner from Chicago agrees.

M13: What I said- what I expressed to them police was that y'all alone can't police Milwaukee, you know what I'm saying? Y'all can't police our city for us. I said it's up to us to police our own city and make sure...

C19: What you said, what you said, what you said.

M13: You know what I'm saying? We live here daily. Y'all may live in Waukesha, or Racine, Kenosha, wherever y'all stay y'all gotta come down here to work. I'm here everyday, 24/7. Therefore- if I'm in the city 24/7 and I'm on the streets 24/7- then I should be making sure the shorties safe; I should be making sure that the elders safe; I should be making sure my mother, father, that my family safe; and making sure I'm safe. Because when it's all said and done, they go home after eight hours and do whatever they do. But I'm here 24/7. So it's- I should be the police of my city, not the police.

C19: Exactly. I feel you.

The conversation moves to a deeper critique of police; reliance on them is ill-advised not because they leave at the end of their shift, but because they inflict harm. It is here that more solidaristic framings emerge, with the community now positioned as victimized by police. "I" becomes "we"; importantly, the argument is refashioned from a focus on individual behavior ("I know how to conduct and carry myself") to a collective identity group claim ("we done negotiating").

This begins a more intense part of the conversation as the Milwaukee man begins to give an impassioned sermon against police killing and routine disrespect. His earlier easygoing stance, one where he says he "has no issue" with police, moves toward an uncompromising, unrelenting position toward police injustice: "it ends here." There is no room for concessions - the police "can get right or get rolled on." Of the arguments he tries on, this one is the most emotive, if unspecific. The stakes are higher ("we got too many of our kids dying"), the terms are hardened ("by any means necessary"), the language more authoritative ("I got the right"). But the statements are high-flying, unconnected to any specific methods of how he envisions confronting police and reclaiming authority and somewhat nondescript about the actual scope of the injustices taking place.

A complicated picture of police comes to the fore. On one hand, police as a whole are legitimate even if some within the ranks are corrupt. On the other, the injustice has "been going on for all the years that it's been going on" and has reached an unacceptable point, with too many innocent kids dying, too many elderly people in his neighborhood facing police disrespect. Earlier in the conversation, he took on the role of a collective guardian of the community's safety from within; now, he takes on the role of a guardian against injustice from without. In this refashioned role, it is not his "24/7" presence in the neighborhood but his voice (and status as an upstanding, taxpaying, working family man and student) that he provides. He claims authority for those black brothers who cannot speak, silenced by being confined or killed by the state. His authority is also his inheritance, carrying forward his ancestral line of Black Panthers and gang overseers who stood against injustice. In his rearview is Malcolm X, in one of the few references to historical black thought. His blame also shifts; now, he divides his scorn between corrupt officers and those in the community who would remain passive, preferring to commit crimes than fight oppression. Finally, we also observe his recognition of the limits of his power; he seems to accept that police will come in to his neighborhood. But if pushed too far, he will "lose myself behind standing against injustice" and can rely on some in his community to stand with him.

M13: I been all through the city and I don't have no issue wherever I go.

C19: Exactly.

M13: Why? Because I know how to conduct myself and carry myself, you know what I'm saying, as the outstanding members and I don't got to concern myself with that. But like I said, as far as policing in Milwaukee you know what I'm saying and policing in general, I have no issue against just- you know- just police. Righteous police. But the corrupt ones? I'ma always stand against injustice. I was raised...I'm a son of a retired Black Panther, I'm the son of a retired Blackstone Ranger. I'm a retired Black Disciple myself. Any injustice, I'm gonna stand against it. Period.

C19: Right.

M13: If I could lose myself behind standing against injustice, I'm gonna do that 'til the day I die. So I'ma be the...So I'ma be the voice and I'ma be the man who stands for those who want to keep...who can't communicate or who can't talk because they either in prison or they dead. I'm the voice, you know what I'm saying, that's alive and well and kicking, you know what I'm saying, and walking when I'm talking. I ain't just- I ain't one of those individuals that's

behind closing doors um smoking, drinking, you know what I'm saying committing crimes. No. I don't commit crimes. I stopped committing crimes in '99.

C19: Right.

M13: I'm a upstanding- I pay taxes. I'm a college student, you know what I'm saying? I work, I take care of my family. So I got the right to stand against injustice. I got the right to say what I'm saying today, you know what I'm saying, let these powers that be know it ain't gonna happen. Its...The stuff that's been going on for all the years that it's been going on, this comes to an end right now. And it's by any means necessary, as Malcolm would say. They...they got two options: get right or get rolled on, period. That's all to it.

C19: [laughs]

M13: That's all to it. Ain't no in between. Ain't no- we not negotiating man. We done negotiating. We got too many of our kids dying, we got to many of innocent uh people dying, we got too many of our elders being disrespected. I ain't standing for it no more and I got people- I got people that's willing to stand with me and make sure it don't happen no more either.

C19: Right.

M13: So all I could say is, man, the police do what they can do, do whatever they need to do but in the meantime, between time- when they eight hours over with- I'm still here in the hood. I'm gonna make sure that the hood be safe as long as I'm in the hood. Period.

C19: There you go, there you go. Hey man, it's been a marvelous conversation man. But you know what, like I said, I'ma- I'm gonna end it with this man. Uh, I see me and you got the same view as far as the police go: you know, all the corrupt ones need to just get on and go on all up out of here. And like you said, they go and do they job for eight hours but we still there in the community. You know?

The remainder of the conversation ricochets between themes of individual agency and structural obstacles, optimism and peril. The Chicago man gives more insight into his perspective and personal story; rescued from addiction through the abiding commitment of a mentor, he places faith in giving kids a better chance by mentoring them and shepherding them. Like the Milwaukee man, then, while disparaging some individuals' behavior, he embraces a collective responsibility to help younger people through, to show them the way and provide love (similar to the expressions of black love and mentorship in the first conversation). He places faith in this guardianship strategy as one that will yield a detente: "Once that stop them police will stop." In his own life, he helped build a small center in his neighborhood in Chicago. Returning to Beale Street in Memphis, he offers an explanation for what the Milwaukee man witnessed, which centers both senseless, reckless violence

and inescapable poverty and the high walls thrown up to achieving economic security ("they don't

give nobody a opportunity down there"), particularly those with felon convictions who desire work.

C19: The Wild Hundreds: that was our area man. So, you know uh, it was crazy, corrupted. But like you said, we was knuckleheads back then. They had the right to come and get us.

M13: That's right.

C19: They had the right, ok? It's up to us to change man. And these little guys man, you know, I try to talk to little guys all the time.… I helped put this [center] together... And the man that runs this center, me and him been together for 18 years.[7] Now, I'ma tell you just a little something about him. This man stuck by me through my drug addiction for 13 years. 13 years. Gave me a chance, gave me a change, gave me a chance. Didn't never falter. And so that's what we need to do for some of these kids out here: give 'em a chance man! Show 'em some love man! Take 'em out to dinner, do something with 'em man! … we love you man and we need y'all to straighten up!

M13: That's right.

C19: So go talk to some of your little guys that you hang out with and say hey, we need to stop this clique thing and straighten up. Once that stop them police will stop. They'll stop. They'll just go looking for the real niggas that's down here doing the wrong.

M13: That's it, that's it.

C19: Ok? The ones that's out here committing murders and breaking, and robbing, and stealing. They'll go after them instead of messing with these guys that's out here just walking the street.

M13: That's right.

C19: Now, as far as Memphis go, you said you was down on Beale Street. I want to help you out a little bit about them machine guns that they was carrying. It's necessary. They down there killing on Beale Street.…I don't even go on Beale Street. I'm scared to go on Beale Street cause these guys ain't go no sense of life man.

M13: Yeah I ... I gathered that. I seen a guy get knocked out while I was down there.

C19: Yeah, they ain't go no sense of life. They- they don't care man! And you know what? I'ma tell you another thing about Memphis: it's so poor that that's why they do what they do.

M13: Yes sir.

C19: They don't- they don't give nobody an opportunity down there. Ok, they got all these temporary jobs going on and things but you know a lot of these got felonies. A lot of these guys got a lot of stuff hanging over they head. But a lot of 'em want to go work and change they life but they can't get in there because they got this background. Something need to change about that to get these guys to working so things could change.

M13: That's true, that's true.

C19: Ain't nothing gonna change until they start letting these guys get them some jobs. And work. And making them some honest money.

M13: That's right.

C19: You know? So the police is doing they job man, I ain't got nothing against the police. I really don't have nothing against the police. I like what they do. I walk through the- I walk around uh Memphis, Tennessee at my job. You know, they come in. Hey man, I appreciate you man. If I'm out just seeing one- hey man I appreciate you man, I shake their hand. Go into Walmart- they got 'em all over in Walmart- hey man I appreciate you man, keep on doing what you doing, stay safe, you know? I talk to 'em all just like yourself man.

M13: Right, that's right.

C19: You know? They got a job to do and people need to understand. They have a job to do and they job is hard to do. These days, at these times right now, it's a hard job for them.

M13: Yes sir.

C19: So people just need to just relax, and let them do they job, and hopefully they'll do it in the proper manner sooner. Instead of later.

There are three centripetal ideas in this final exchange. First is a strong current of individual responsibility and compliance. This rules-based perspective means that the Chicago man takes exception when either party - youth or police – fails to act rightfully. At the same time as moments of policing overreach are recognized, both return to an emphasis on the importance of knowing how to conduct oneself and the imperative of compliance (i.e. "give the police what they want when they ask for it"). Neither puts forward a critique of the institution, its historical foundation, or its connection to an aggressive legal system, unlike in many other Portals exchanges. Both men deride youthful offenders (themselves included) who "don't got no sense of life" and emphasize the singular importance of individual conduct. As the Chicago man recounts his own socialization of his son in strategic distancing after he began to have some run-ins with the law (his two sons are involved with the carceral state, one currently in jail for carrying a pistol and the other on probation related to guns): "All you need to do is listen to me and you won't have no problems. Get your ass up, go to work, come home, eat you something, take a shower, go to bed, get up, and do it again." While avoidance of police is less prominent in this conversation than the others (and they even

make efforts to shake hands with police and convey gratitude), they are older men who have fewer encounters in this part of their lifecourse so aversion to stay safe is less urgent.

Second, there is a high level of respect for and acceptance of the police role accompanied by a significant individual history of interaction with police beginning in early to late adolescence. They both regard police oversight as appropriate (in hindsight) during their own adolescence - "police had the right to come and get us." A considerable faith in police (both say they have confidence on the survey, which is an outlier in Portals conversations, and particularly so in the Milwaukee/Chicago sample) is paired with statements about admiration for the police and showing their gratitude by shaking hands with police. Unlike the prior two conversations then, the role of the community is prioritized *without* limiting the police role or envisioning an alternative to police altogether. At no point do we witness ideas that animated other conversations prioritizing a disavowal of police – "stop believing in their paperwork" or "stop giving them permission to come in" – even in the highest pitched moments of negative police appraisal. The turn to community is not a turn away from police.

However, these two themes are situated in complexity. Regard for and understanding of police sits alongside a biting critique of "unrighteous police." Statements about police suddenly turn critical and anger about police actions, corruption, and excessive response comes to the fore more than a few times. And while they miss no opportunity to wag their fingers at youthful "knuckleheads," they are pained by the social and economic death of their brothers who are locked up or are saddled with records and preach that they need "love" and mentorship. A focus on individual conduct, therefore, does not preclude support for activism against police disrespect and killing of innocent youth, and these both are located amidst a recognition of state failure to provide a way out of grinding poverty and the need for collective guardianship of young boys and men.

Third, a discursive argument about collective authority of the neighborhood is asserted early on and defended: "Y'all can't police our city for us. I said it's up to us to police our own city." What distinguishes this conversation from many others that also argue for collective agency is that the collective autonomy stance here *is not connected to a need to build a separate base of power in order to strengthen the community against police but is connected to a safety imperative.* The communal discourse we witness here is less concerned with solidarity and unity; we see fewer calls for building together and no proclamations to "control our narratives" or "invest" in our own businesses. Rather, the collective responsibility to police is squarely connected to the immediate goal of community safety, and its rationale is presence in the community ("I'm gonna make sure that the hood be safe as long as I'm in the hood.") The idea that the community is really the central authority in crime prevention, control, and policing is also strongly attached to individual accountability, being righteous, and collective responsibility: "it's up to us to change." Thus, despite strongly individualistic orientations in this conversation compared to the others we've seen, this pair arrives at a similar route that prioritizes their community's agency and authority to govern and protect.

As a result, comparatively less attention is paid to how police see them or position them in negative ways or the institution's historical legacy and foundations in slavery. And yet this exchange also illustrates that community control and authority to police one's neighborhood travels the gamut of ideological perspectives and is not reducible to a particular attitude or attribution. It is an orientation that encompasses many different perspectives on policing.

Conclusion

The dialogues we trace here should be seen within their broader historical context, part of the decades-long "stunning challenge to the legitimacy of state power in Black communities" (Singh 1998, 131), and part of a longer tradition of ideological discourse and thought in the black counterpublic (Alexander-Floyd 2007; Dawson 2001; Harris-Lacewell 2004; Price 2009; Robinson

2000). Half a century after the police monitoring projects that were discussed at the beginning of this paper and the broader mobilization surrounding them, how is discourse developing in a similar political era of targeted surveillance, state violence, and a liberation movement to counter it? What anchoring narratives are present across difference?

Just as "the core concepts of African-American political thought have developed out of the experiences of slavery and the forced separation of the races during the period of retrenchment that followed" (Dawson 2001, p. 23), so too has much of black political discourse emerged as a response to police oppression, especially in areas that were the central battlegrounds of prior state violence and resistance. However, many in our field have construed criminal justice as unilaterally leading to withdrawal and alienation, even though this perspective flies in the face of both a well-theorized tradition of black thought and the history of police opposition movements. The Portals conversations analyzed here pose a powerful rejoinder. Specifically: The conversations reveal that the political significance of police interactions begins with demobilization and strategic distancing but does not end there. Avoidance of domination is a political strategy and communal practice, and many policed populations embrace a discourse centered on a logic of collective autonomy (and based in an analysis of illegitimate state action) in their resolve to preserve self and community. Active detachment from the state and affirmations of attachment to the group thus go hand in hand – together conveying a consistent political response. We locate this discourse in the largest archive of policing narratives to date, dialogues that themselves move across large ideas of how government works to the logic of police action to specific memories of police, move across history and place and generation, within individual experience but also beyond – as witnesses to Freddie Gray, Tamir Rice, Rekia Boyd, and Samuel Dubose.

The search for community control, protection, and resilience is expressed across difference, crossing boundaries of city, community, and individual identity, and among those with more and less

radical orientations, and who are more and less skeptical of the state. Indeed, Portals conversations and participants differ on much: on the precise role of police and of themselves, on the necessity of a particular course of action, on the precise vehicles to realize community power, and on how they imagine "coming together." And yet a common thread of collective autonomy runs through these disparate conversations as well.

We are struck by the unique texture of the ideas expressed in the Portals conversations but also the historical resonance of this political stance. Here, as before, black communities argue that they stand little chance of staving off public violence when the police force is insulated from the community. Here, as before, they promote ideas of black self-determination, arguing that representation is not enough to ensure protection in their situation – they need authoritative, democratic power over police. In a familiar recollection, they see police as abetting communal disorder, in the conservative version, and as instruments of oppression, in the radical version. Here, as before, black Americans argue that "control of institutions within the Black community is a must if we are to survive" and offer up an alternative framework of safety grounded in black communal self-protection and knowledge, reimagining a police role that would be not only *in*, but *of* the community (Russell 1972, A5).

As scholarship on the criminal justice system continues to develop, we would do well to emulate scholars of black political thought and historians who have chronicled expressions of black political agency despite, and also because of, centuries of subjugation (see also Michener 2019). Specifically, we ought to consider how this discourse revises or amends older concepts and movements for self-determination. How is collective autonomy different from the past? How does it pattern by generation, gender, and experiences with police? What other commitments, liberal and nonliberal, does it embrace? How does its expression map on to informal labors and organized mobilization to protect communities from police violence and shift power to neighborhoods? How

is the turn to communities situated amongst other responses to local racial orders? Our findings also serve to remind scholars working in this area: those who are rightly concerned with the consequences of predatory, authoritarian actions of government in a nominally democratic society should also remember that the human beings it interacts with are not merely victims whose politics have been foreclosed, but also political agents, who historically have, and continue to expose American democracy's greatest deficits.

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[1] Additional studies also give reason to suspect that residents of highly-policed communities respond to involuntary encounters with the carceral state in constructive ways. For instance, institutional accounts have suggested that individuals and organizations often do mobilize but are burdened by the limited jurisdiction of their cities (Miller 2008) and the resource scarcity of grassroots organizations, particularly those which are minority-run (Jones 2018, Owens and Walker 2018). Behavioral accounts, including Hannah Walker's (forthcoming) work on proximal contact suggests that individuals with incarcerated family members, when motivated by a sense of injustice, will engage in political mobilization. Owens and Walker find that when we look beyond voting and to civic engagement, individual criminal justice contact sometimes leads to more, not less, particularly when there is an anchoring community-based organization. Other contemporary empirical research suggests that those whose interaction with the state is punitive and coercive are more likely to espouse political strategies and outlooks that include ideas about community control, self-determination, and autonomy. For example, one study finds that blacks who are angry about racial injustice are more likely to support community nationalism, donate to indigenous black organizations, and engage in protest actions (Banks, White, and McKenzie 2018). Other studies find that racial disillusionment and intense perceptions of racism and mistreatment are associated with black nationalist views (Block 2011; Davis & Brown 2002). Among those blacks supportive of nationalist views, political responses are less likely to focus on working within the existing system; Carey (2013) argues that nationalism leads to "distinct forms of political activity" while Davis and Brown (2002) find associations between intense perceptions of mistreatment and "less support for systemic means for combating perceived racial injustice."

[2] Collective autonomy is also a concept theorized by philosopher Steven Wall, who contends that "collective autonomy rights…concern the group's interest in regulating its own affairs by exercising political control over the public environment in which its members reside" (Wall 2007, 236-7)

[3] For some examples: http://www.fightbacknews.org/2018/12/22/chicago-city-council-candidates-support-community-control-police

https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/tiffany-caban-the-public-defender-running-for-queens-district-attorney-and-her-feminist-coalition

[4] This section draws heavily of a number of accounts of mobilization efforts and civic discourse of that time (Preusser 2018; Seale 1970; Spencer 2016; Widener 2009; Williams 2013; Witt 2013))

[5] We use Dedoose, a qualitative coding software, to code conversation excerpts.

[6] Despite our effort to select for diversity, all three of these conversations are selected from the Milwaukee and Chicago sites, and they skew toward young adult and middle-aged participants. To address this limitation, we excerpt dialogues from our Baltimore, Los Angeles, and Newark sites, and from participants across a wider range of age groups.

[7] Certain elements of this conversation have been modified to de-identify the participant.

Appendix

A. About the Portals Policing Project

A Portal (from the inside and outside):

About:

The Portals Policing Project was a project in collaboration with Amar Bakshi, artist and founder of Shared Studios. Bakshi invented the Portal as a means of connecting geographically distant places around the world with one another to foster conversation and collaboration on topics such as art, food, entrepreneurship, and politics. The Portals currently operate in more than 40 sites across six continents.

After observing the Portals method, Vesla Weaver and Tracey Meares collaborated with Bakshi to initiate the Portals Policing Project. The Project collected and video-recorded dialogues for two years, beginning in April 2016 and concluding in April 2018. At some sites, the Portals remained and continue to connect local communities on topics related to policing and beyond. We are seeking funding for a launch of new Portals and a new phase of the project, but this phase will be less about collecting data and more about using the Portal as a "civic infrastructure" that helps to build power within and across communities.

The Portals sites were selected largely because of convenience and connections – the existence of community partners who would help run the Portal and share space. We often partnered with local nonprofit organizations that have an artistic and justice-oriented mission; they typically provided the Portal a physical space in a central location with high foot-traffic as well as an enduring connection to the community. They were deeply involved in Portals programming beyond our criminal justice dialogues, including facilitating "shared meals," movie nights, and art initiatives.

For more on the Portals Policing Project, please go to the website, portalspolicingproject.com. For more about the Portal technology, go to sharedstudios.com.

Table A1. Portals Location Descriptions.

City	Neighborhood	Total Participants	Dates	Dominant Race/ Ethnicity	Neighborhood Type	Site Type
Milwaukee (227)	Amani/COA Goldin Youth and Family Center	227	April 2016–March 2017 (minimal thereafter)	Black	Segregated	Community Center and public park
Chicago (250)	Grand Boulevard/ Harold Washington Cultural Center	53	September 2016–December 2016	Black	Segregated	Cultural Center
	South Chicago Christian Center	94	December 2016–May 2017 and August 2017–October 2017	Black	Segregated	Small thrift store
	Little Village/Instituto del Progresso Latino	58	November 2017–February 2018	Latino	In Transition/ Educational	Alternative School
	Back of the Yards/ LetUsBreathe Collective	45	March 2018	Black	Segregated	Activist
Los Angeles (521)	South Los Angeles/ Mercado la Paloma	217	December 2017–March 2018	Latino	Downtown	Community Market
	Boyle Heights	9		Latino	In Transition	Community Arts
	LA Law Library	188	June 2017–September 2017	Majority Black	Downtown	Public library
	California State University Dominguez Hills	107	November 2017–December 2017	Latino	Educational Institution	College campus
Baltimore (462)	Downtown/Lexington Market	162	February 2017–October 2017	Black	Downtown	Community Market
	Station North/ Ynot Lot	301	November 2017–March 2018	Black	In Transition	Activist/ Arts
Mexico City (118)	Chapultepec Park	118	June 2017–March 2017	Latino	Downtown	Public park
Newark (100)	Lincoln Park and Military Park	100	April 2016–October 2017	Black	In Transition	Public park

B. iPad Survey Questions

Surveys were typically administered orally by the Portal curator. Questions were delivered in the following order:

1. Age
2. Gender
3. Race
4. Are you Hispanic or Latino?
5. Highest Level of Education Attained
6. Have you ever been a victim of a crime?
7. Has anyone in your family ever been a victim of a crime?
8. Have you ever been stopped by the police for something other than a traffic violation?
9. How many times in your lifetime?
10. How old were you when this first happened to you?
11. When was the last time this happened?
12. I have confidence that the local police department can do its job well
13. In general, how much do you trust the police?
14. Have you participated in a Portal dialogue before?
15. If yes, how many times?
16. How did you hear about the Portal?

C. Participant Characteristics

Table C1: All black Portals participants, by gender

	FEMALE	MALE	OTHER
N	253	542	8
Mean age	36.711	37.178	24.875
Education (%)			
Grades 1-8	0.90	0.70	0.00
Some high school	17.80	17.70	12.50
High school graduate	35.20	35.20	50.0
Some college or technical school	20.60	26.60	12.50
College graduate	18.20	13.40	25.00
Post graduate degree	6.70	5.70	0.00
No response	1.58	.60	0.00
Have you ever been a victim of a crime?	60.3	72.60	37.50

Trust in Police (%)			
All of the time	.20	1.50	0.00
Most of the time	10.70	36.70	12.50
Sometimes	28.10	29.00	25.00
Rarely	24.50	20.30	50.00
Never	23.30	36.70	12.50
No response*	11.10	7.00	0.00
Confidence in the local police department to do their jobs well (%)			
Strongly agree	3.50	4.40	0.00
Agree	17.50	17.70	37.50
Neither agree nor disagree	24.10	18.60	12.50
Disagree	24.10	22.30	25.00
Strongly disagree	25.90	29.00	12.50
Don't know	3.50	6.50	12.50

No response	1.32	1.90	0.00

*Newark participants did not respond to this survey question, as it was not included in the survey during the pilot's phase

Table C2: Police contact of black participants by gender

	Female	Male	Other
N	253	542	8
Police stops in one's lifetime (%)			
Never stopped	35.60	12.50	0.00
1 to 2 times	26.10	10.90	25.00
3 to 4 times	13.00	14.00	25.00
5 to 7 times	7.10	12.70	25.00
More than 7 times	17.40	49.60	25.00
Last police stop (%)			
Never stopped	35.60	12.50	0.00
More than 5 years ago	13.40	11.10	12.50

In the last 5 years	13.80	14.60	12.50
In the last year	16.60	28.00	37.50
In the last month	11.10	17.70	37.50
In the last week	8.80	14.40	0.00
No response	1.80	1.80	0.00
Age first police stop	16.269	15.296	9.250
SD	(11.009)	(13.593)	(2.659)
Stopped as a minor (%)	72.50	86.20	1.00

Police Stops in One's Lifetime by Gender

Figure includes all black particpants in the Portals project (n=806)

Figure C2

Age of First Police Stop Among Those Stopped by Police

Figure includes all black particpants in the Portals project (n=806)

Figure C3

I have confidence that the local police department can do its job well

Figure includes all black particpants in the Portals project (n=806)

Figure C4

In general, how much do you trust the police?

Figure includes all black particpants in the Portals project (n=806)

Table C3: Gender pairings*

Gender Pair	Count
FF	21
FM	99
MM	108
Other Pairings	6
Total	234

Note: Newark-Milwaukee pairings are excluded as a result of missing data during the pilot phase of the project.D. City Level Comparisons

D. Participants by City

Table D1: Conversation pairings by city between black participants

City A	City B	Count
Baltimore	LA	24
Chicago	Baltimore	25
LA	Baltimore	29
Milwaukee	Baltimore	41
Milwaukee	Chicago	92
Milwaukee	Newark	59

Figure D1

How many times have you been stopped by the police in your lifetime?

Figure includes all black particpants in the Portals project (n=806)

Figure D2

When was the last time you were stopped by the police?
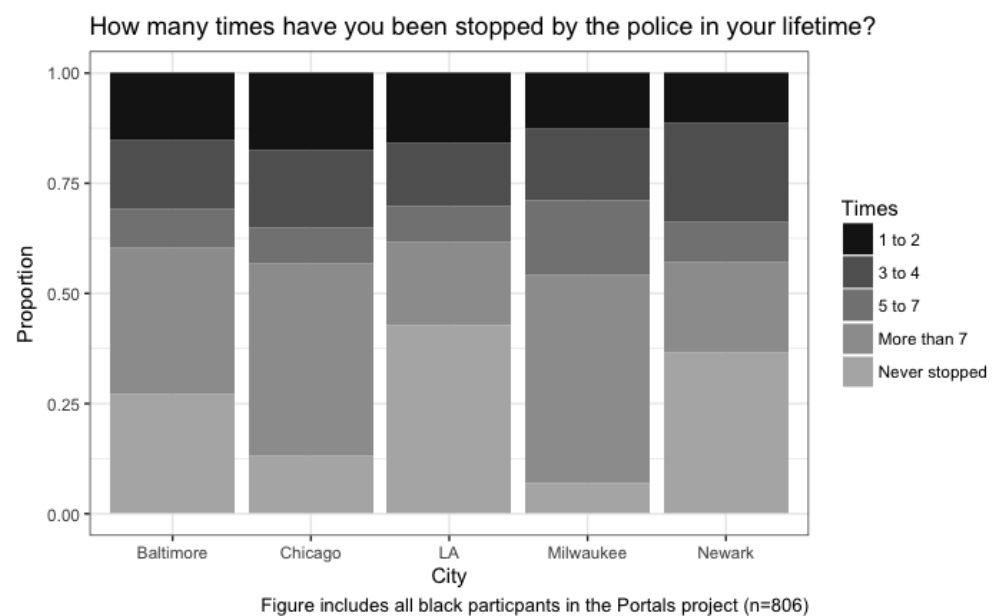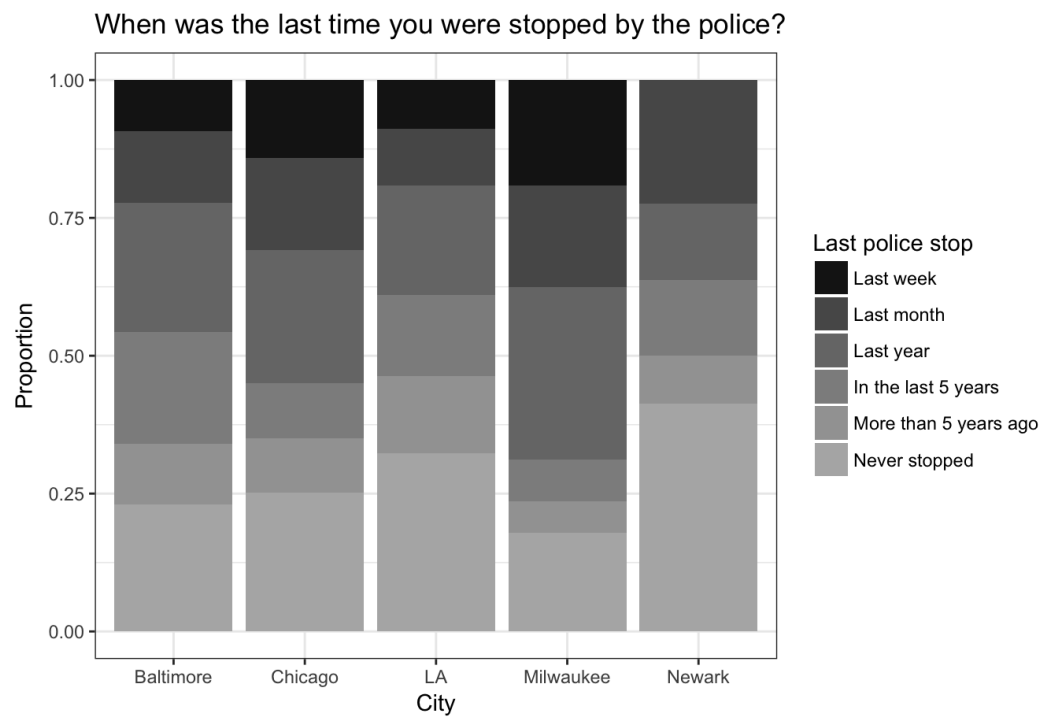
Figure includes all black participants in the Portals project (n=806)

E. Extended Discussion on Coding and Conversation Analysis

One researcher coded the initial set of participant responses in the conversations using the coding software Dedoose, and these coded excerpts were later read and when necessary revised by other members of the research team. Next, we worked with a research assistant to group the coded excerpts thematically then returned to the data to explore how these excerpts unfolded in 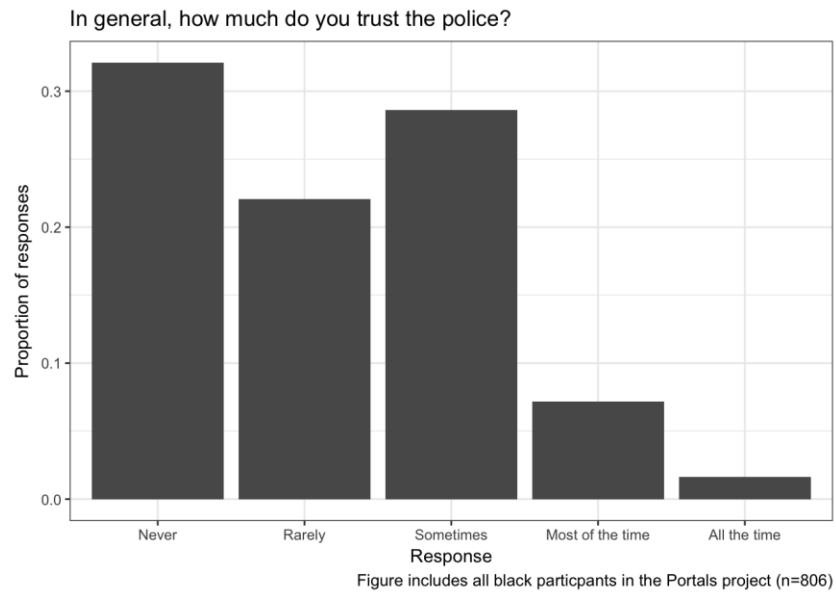context. It was here we began to notice a difference in responses both with regard to substance and the action implied by the responses.

To account for variation within collective autonomy, the research team mapped conversations between participants, noting each dialogue's key themes and structure, including how it progressed from start to finish. While doing so, we were attentive to how dialogues varied by the characteristics of each pairing, including age/generation, gender, trust in police, and education. We also compared conversations between black participants to conversations where only one or non-black participant was present to assess whether the themes we were identifying in black-black pairings were indeed unique. See the table below for some examples of this process.

Table E1: Conversation Mapping

Dyad Information							Conversation Themes and Content		
Date and Location	Cities	Race	Gender	Age	Police Contact	Education	Conversation Progression	Meta themes	Quotes
De-identified	C M	B B	M M	22 18	1-2 Never stopped	Some high school Some high school	The law isn't for us Family history Affirmations of Black worth Critique of the media's framing of Black life Retreat/"keep your head low" rhetoric Personal responsibility frames	Reliance on us Bolster awareness/knowledge/pride Our history as god's originals Re-definition Aspirations for solidarity and resilience Control our Resources Control our narratives Retreat	"Most of them required to be assholes because they hiding behind the shield of law" "We're pretty much predominant with natural athletes, things of that nature. We pick up shit. They don't like that about us, you know, we're not, we're not liked period. And they know that if we had the smarts that they had, if we played they game, we'd pretty much beat them. So, the rules have got to be set to the point that we lose. " "They [the media] parade us losing, losing ourselves." … "keep your head low."
De-identified	L M	B B	M M	18 38	1-2 Never stopped	High school Some high school	police are a central problem in the lives of their communities. Policing own communities Coming together	Bolster respect, regard for ourselves Be accountable, responsible for our communities Control our resources Third parties exerting authority Self determination Aspirations for Solidarity and Resistance	"They don't need no permission to do what they doing." "Shit. If it weren't for the police everything would be, it'd be, I ain't gonna say it'll be all, all great and shit, but it'd be better…" "it's like they just putting people on like they got their own gang like, okay, no you shouldn't be doing this, you should be doing this, you gotta do more of this, you know what I'm saying?" "We gotta come together, man. They got too much."

Dyad Information								Conversation Themes and Content		
De-identified	B C	W B	F F	29 48	1 -2 5-7	College College		Disagreement throughout this conversation on tactics Black woman: Police abolition Absolving hierarchies Coming together to creatively imagine solutions beyond punishment Creating communities that give people the resources they need White woman: Thinks the term abolition is appropriation Sees police as necessary to protect women and children Has served as an activist herself (helped elect Mosley Braun in Chicago) Critiques capitalism	Bolster awareness/knowledge/pride Our history as god's originals Redefinition Aspirations for solidarity and resilience Control our resources, communities Problems with third parties exerting authority Self-determination Control our narratives	Black woman: "I want to say that uh when we say police abolitionists we want to uh destroy the system that that was built that is on police the police system Um that mainly happens because there are resources lackin in that neighborhood and and so our collective focus is on on bringing those resources that are readily available so we focus on health care, nutrition, education, the art, um things like that restore the justice It just I can't see I can't see it being like a outwardly facing um um object that's coming in to and swoop in and save us like it has to be like a village type deal like if something happens in our neighborhood, in our community that those are the folks that have to deal with it" White woman: "Uh vigilante justice is is not the solution uh you know those often create far more problems than actually help or prevent and often it escalates dynamics that disproportionally affect women and children."
De-identified	B C	W B	F F	29 48	1 -2 5-7	College College		Disagreement throughout this conversation on tactics	Bolster awareness/knowledge/pride Our history as god's	Black woman: "I want to say that uh when we say police abolitionists we want to uh destroy the system that that was built that is on police the police system

Dyad Information							Conversation Themes and Content		
							Black woman: Police abolition Absolving hierarchies Coming together to creatively imagine solutions beyond punishment Creating communities that give people the resources they need White woman: Thinks the term abolition is appropriation Sees police as necessary to protect women and children Has served as an activist herself (helped elect Mosley Braun in Chicago) Critiques capitalism	originals Redefinition Aspirations for solidarity and resilience Control our resources, communities Problems with third parties exerting authority Self-determination Control our narratives	Um that mainly happens because there are resources lackin in that neighborhood and and so our collective focus is on on bringing those resources that are readily available so we focus on health care, nutrition, education, the art, um things like that restore the justice It just I can't see I can't see it being like a outwardly facing um um object that's coming in to and swoop in and save us like it has to be like a village type deal like if something happens in our neighborhood, in our community that those are the folks that have to deal with it" White woman: "Uh vigilante justice is is not the solution uh you know those often create far more problems than actually help or prevent and often it escalates dynamics that disproportionally affect women and children."
De-identified	B L	B B	M M	55 65	3 to 4 More than 7	Post-grad Post-grad	Affirmation of Black history/Black worth We gonna win We know our communities better	Bolster awareness/knowledge/pride Our history as god's originals Redefinition Aspirations for solidarity	"So, they don't know what happens in the urban city. I was raised in the projects, and around the projects, to so I know what time of day it is, and they come in looking like that, then they either selling drugs [inaudible 00:03:51]. Those cops up there I'm sorry, I know I'm talking you guys to death, but I gotta get this off my chest…"

Dyad Information								Conversation Themes and Content		
								Historical memory	and resistance Control our resources Problems with third parties exerting control Control our narratives	"if you look at the culture and the history of black people from Africa, we've always had dialogue, look at us, we've had communication, we had kingdoms. … "Ordinary people are not gonna do that. You know. But again, these conversations that we have, a lot of it is gonna have to come from us, as, as a people first. But you know what? I've, I've always said this, do you know I'm honored to be black." "So this whole thing with the policing, I know it's wrong and it's bad, but do you know, we still gonna win. If we won over slavery, and we won over the clan, and we won over Jim Crow, and we won over crack in the neighborhoods, and we won over everything that they did … … what they tried to … every time they tried to kill us … it's just like our old saying, you tried to bury me, but you didn't know I was a seed. And when you bury a seed it grows."

For additional discussion about the Portals method, questions of representativeness, and further details about participants, readers should see our elaborated discussion in Weaver, Prowse, Piston 2019.

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