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Grieving Labor: Maternal Bereavement, Race, and Gender

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Grieving Labor: Maternal Bereavement, Race, and Gender

by

Ina Kelleher

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in the

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of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Juana María Rodríguez, Chair
Professor Ula Y. Taylor
Professor Evelyn Nakano Glenn

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Abstract

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Doctor of Philosophy in Ethnic Studies

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Although national crime rates have declined in recent years, African American and Latinx mothers still experience the homicide of a child twice as often as White mothers. Unlike much of the scholarship that describes grief as a universal experience, my work shows how economic, racial, and gender inequities compound and complicate bereavement for historically minoritized groups. My dissertation draws on data collected between 2012 and 2018 in Oakland and Salinas, California and Chicago, Illinois. During this time, I partnered with several community organizations advocating for families impacted by violence. I organically grew closer to four mothers who had lost children to homicide and who became the key participants in my study: Anjanette Albert, Demitra Barnes, Debbie Aguilar, and Princess Beverly Williams. This small sample size of Black and Latina mothers allowed me to observe variation in mothers' bereavement processes closely. In four case studies, we see how surviving mothers endure at least two forms of symbolic violence. Firstly, they are burdened with sanitizing their children's public representations, which appear as one-dimensional or criminal or both. Secondly, maternal grief is commodified by members of the media, the not-for-profit industrial complex, and political apparatus for personal and professional gain. Materially, these participants' labor is exploited, and the stress they experience because of being overworked and underpaid exacerbates the negative symptoms of their already-complex trauma. Mutual aid, nurturance culture, and grief therapy provide frameworks with which to envision new ways of responding to racialized and gendered violence. As the experiences of all the mothers in this study illustrate, it is only by being nurtured and cared for by others that we move through grief.

This dissertation is dedicated with love to

Anjanette Albert,

Demitra Barnes,

Debbie Aguilar,

Princess Beverly Williams

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sisters—Nora, Magda, and Lola—believing in me and loving me no matter what. We continue to go through so much together. I hope this dissertation is an invitation to each of us to know our own resiliency.

INTRODUCTION

Although national crime rates have declined in recent years, African American and Latinx mothers still experience the homicide of a child twice as often as White mothers.[1] Unlike much of the scholarship that describes grief as a universal experience, my work shows how economic, racial, and gender inequities compound and complicate bereavement for historically minoritized groups. My dissertation draws on data collected between 2012 and 2018 in Oakland and Salinas, California and Chicago, Illinois. During this time, I partnered with several community organizations advocating for families impacted by violence. These groups include Causa Justa / Just Cause; North Oakland Restorative Justice Council; 1000 Mothers Against Violence; Catholic Charities of the East Bay; and A Time for Healing and Grieving. My participation introduced me to dozens of families who had lost a child to violence. I organically grew closer to four mothers who became the key participants in my study: Anjanette Albert, Demitra Barnes, Debbie Aguilar, and Princess Beverly Williams. This small sample size allowed me to observe variation in mothers' bereavement processes closely. As I developed trust with each of my research participants, I gained entrée into their everyday lives, conducting semi structured interviews and observations in a variety of settings.

As I observed mothers in their everyday lives, I also conducted interviews with their families, friends, and other community members who had experience working with bereaving families, including social workers, homicide detectives, leaders of local neighborhood councils, members of the faith community, first responders, and community activists. I found that the mothers, three of whom are Black and one Latina, experienced racism in their interactions with law enforcement and revictimization in the criminalizing portrayals of their children in the media. Low-income Black mothers with histories of incarceration were particularly vulnerable to legal discrimination, as well as financial and housing instability, which complicated and prolonged their bereavement.

Key Terms

The mothers in my investigation engaged in what I term *grieving labor,* which entails the unpaid carework of keeping the memory of their children alive through memorials, fundraisers, and community events. For mothers, grieving labor is a refusal to accept official narratives that ignore, criminalize, or normalize their children's deaths. While middle-class Black and Latina women engaged in grieving labor as a form of community service, poor and working-class women relied on the relationships they forged while participating in these events to meet their basic needs such as economic stability and housing. The rise of neoliberal policies has resulted in dramatic divestment from the social safety net, including state sponsored programs such as California's Victim's Compensation. These measures have left families impacted by violence with fewer resources to cope with the emotional, social, and economic turmoil following the death of a loved one. The slashing of social welfare programs is one of the key factors that led to my participants' reliance on interpersonal relationships and community-based organizations for their basic needs. Although this mutual aid created opportunities for cross-cultural, cross-class, and inter-racial friendships and solidarities, it also placed the labor of caring for bereaving families on under-funded community organizations staffed primarily by women of color and immigrants, thus reifying the gendered and racialized division of labor.

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[1] *National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) Redesign: Technical Background* (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1994).

For decades, feminist scholars have shown how women are disproportionately burdened with carework in the form of reproductive and emotional labor. However, carework is still expected of women, as an extension of their "natural" feminine instincts, and uncompensated in both the workplace and the home. For women of color, this oversight has been long standing and severe, compounded by both racism and xenophobia. My work expands upon this scholarship to show how the emotional labor of grieving is underacknowledged and often exploited by these mothers' families, communities, and the state. The performance of maternal grief is used to galvanize the public for a range of political ends; whether mothers are invited to speak at neighborhood council meetings to advocate for more police patrols or to march with anti-gun advocates, their stories of loss are appropriated by players across the political and social spectrum.

The mothers' bereavement was compounded by the stigma and racism they faced as their children were publicly misrepresented in the media and by politicians as criminals. Sanitizing their children's legacies in the wake of their violent murders is a unique form of emotional labor that I term *policing memory.* Policing memory describes the ways in which highly criminalized communities tailor depictions of themselves and their families in order to receive legal justice and public sympathy. Central to mothers' efforts to prove their children's worth is the reification of normative constructions of maternity and femininity, emphasizing selflessness, and obedience to the rules of society. This iteration of respectable Black and Latina womanhood also bolsters the nuclear, White-American family ideal, even when it is also reflective of their lived realities of women of color. The lives of African American and Latinx youth are only valued if and when their and their mothers' images comply with normative conceptions of what constitutes a "worthy" life. The mothers' stories illuminate how race, gender, and class structure the murders that are seen as tragic versus those that are seen as predictable, as well as whose lives are commemorated or forgotten.

Despite multiple and overlapping forms of institutional violence and neglect, the mothers in this research project continued to advocate for themselves. I observed a group process which I term *community carework*. Carework is best defined as the physical, emotional, formal, and informal labor of maintaining the social fabric. In addition to caring for children, the elderly, the sick and disabled, carework also entails the fostering of relationships in the home, workplace, and public sphere.[2] More often than not, carework goes unrecognized and undercompensated, as it is largely carried out by feminized and racialized subjects who are vulnerable to the exploitation of global capitalism. I use carework to describe the considerable amount of physical, social, and emotional labor community organizations took up in supporting grieving mothers in the aftermath of their children's murders. Community carework is a sustained, collective effort to provide emotional and material support to individuals in crisis. What connects the individual in need to this network of caregivers is a shared investment in a particular community as well as the project of community building itself. Additionally, community carework entails a strategic use of individual and collective positionality, access, and privilege to support those most directly impacted by crisis. It includes but is not limited to the sharing of resources and skill sets, providing essential needs such as food, transportation, housing, medical, and legal aid as well as deep caring for one another's mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being.

Care labor is typically discussed within the context of the home or caring professions such as nursing, housekeeping, and childcare. Scholars have also noted the emotional labor required of service and sex workers who are hired to create a particular kind of emotional

[2] Evelyn Nakano Glenn, "Creating a Caring Society," *Contemporary Sociology* 29, no. 1 (Jan. 2000): 84-94.

experience for their clientele. I seek to expand the analysis of care labor as it pertains to community organizing. While organizing is still largely regarded as a masculinist venture carried out in the public sphere, my research illuminates how caregiving is a central aspect of political organizing. Feminist scholars have critiqued the devaluation of carework in the formal job market. However, the care labor that occurs in progressive organizing circles remains largely invisibilized and uncompensated as well.[3] This work contributes to the carework literature to show how care labor reaches beyond the confines of the home, health, social, sex and commercial service spheres to the broader community. It reveals how even in the context of community carework, the emotional and physical labor of caring for others continues to fall on racialized, feminized, and queer subjects. Additionally, rather than view community-led responses to violence as new initiatives, it contextualizes these efforts within broader histories of LGBTQ, Black, and women of color-led organizing.

Methodology

As an interdisciplinary scholar, I use both critical ethnography and cultural studies analysis to understand how my respondents derive meaning from their life experiences. I use this method to understand the behaviors and belief systems of my research subjects within historical, cultural, and social frameworks. Through the juxtaposition of ethnographic and cultural studies analysis, I highlight how the experience of loss is conveyed and translated across various mediums. Using ethnographic interviews, legal testimony, street memorials, documentary film, and social movement—I analyze these forms of cultural production to elucidate how the racialized and gendered bereavement of inner-city mothers is performed discursively. Comparing how various modes of communication and forms of technology represent bereaving mothers provides a robust data set to analyze the discursive power of maternal grief within discourses of inner-city violence.

In the tradition of Black feminist and woman of color thought, I acknowledge how my observations in the field and critiques of culture are mediated by my positionality. Rather than objective facts, the knowledge is situated and derived from the interactions between myself and my respondents in the field. In contrast to conventional ethnography, which describes what is, my work seeks to challenge what we conceive as "reality" in order to illuminate how tacit power relationships create the conditions in which social, ethnic, racial and gender inequalities are maintained. As a researcher, I see myself as intrinsically linked to my respondents, while also socially, economically, and racially distinct. My mother immigrated to the United States from Argentina when she was 29 years old, and she raised me and my three sisters as a single parent. I grew up predominantly on the Lower West Side of Manhattan—in a White, Latina, middle-class household—where we spoke both Spanish and English at home. Rather than attempt to remain detached in my reporting and analysis, I aspire to an ethic of care that represents my respondents in all of their complexity.

The bulk of my data is derived from interviews and field notes from my participant observation. Through my work as a volunteer and participant in grassroots and not-for- profit organizations based in the East Bay, I connected with mothers and other stakeholders (e.g., counselors, pastors, doctors, police and detectives, and teachers) who are impacted by the effects of violence on communities of color in the San Francisco Bay Area; Salinas, California; and

[3] For more on this, see Charles Payne, "Men Led, But Women Organized: Movement Participation of Women in the Mississippi Delta," in *Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers, 1941-1965*, eds. Vicki L. Crawford, Jacqueline Anne Rouse, and Barbara Woods (Brooklyn, NY: Carlson: 1990), 1-12.

Chicago, Illinois. In the field, I participated in grief groups, public memorials, protests, vigils, faith-based gatherings, support groups, and school and community meetings where I observed how mothers negotiate their role as mourners and activists. I transcribed my interviews and maintained detailed and copious field notes, which I wrote up into memos to identify trends and inconsistencies across time. These memos developed into papers, chapter sections, and chapters. Additionally, I maintained an archive of newspaper articles, obituaries, televised news coverage, social media, speeches, and films that feature mothers who have lost children to urban violence. This was the means through which I tracked how the trope of the racialized grieving mother operates in public discourse. I also conducted close readings and analysis of relevant cultural production (e.g., site-specific memorials, memorial T-shirts, posters, poems, songs, social media posts, and photographs). Together these methods provided sufficient data to analyze the mothers' lived experiences coping with grief and the broader social and political implications.

Community Sustainment in the Midst of Structural Violence

Despite institutional discrimination, poor and working-class Black and Latinx families have sustained themselves in the midst of interpersonal and structural violence. Writing in the 1970s, scholars like Carol Stack described how (in spite of entrenched racism and poverty), Black families were able to survive because of high levels of mutual aid and cooperation in their tight-knit social networks.[4] A decade later, William Julius Wilson argued that economic restructuring, the relocation of middle-class residents out of African American urban enclaves, and the high rates of incarceration among African American men contributed to the erosion of these social ties. He observed that this left "the truly disadvantaged" without social safety nets or cultural institutions to support them through particularly distressing times.[5] At the height of the crack epidemic in 1994, Elijah Anderson described how the code of the street organized the social worlds of city residents in underserved areas of Philadelphia, encouraging violent retaliation and a culture of fear and suspicion. At the same time, Black feminist scholars critiqued both the limited and derogatory representation of Black women and girls in mainstream narratives of the Black ghetto.[6]

Divestment in social programs, urban renewal efforts, and gentrification have made the cost of living in urban centers impossibly high for most working class and poor Black and Latinx families, severing and straining their social networks even further. As a consequence, as Mathew Desmond has observed, there is an increased reliance on immediate, short-term relationships among distressed urban residents during times of crisis.[7] Robert Sampson's notion of collective efficacy acknowledges the importance of re-activating social ties among neighborhood residents in order to achieve public safety. The capacity of a group to regulate its members according to their shared principles, he argues, both inhibits crime and encourages pro-social behaviors.[8] Rather than impose social order through foreign entities and authority figures like police, Patrick Sharkey suggests that community residents should lead efforts to maintain peace and order in their neighborhoods. In his most recent book, Sharkey discusses the pivotal role organizations

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[4] Carol B. Stack, *All Our Kin: Strategies for Survival in a Black Community* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975).

[5] William J. Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

[6] Elijah Anderson, "The Iconic Ghetto," *The ANNALs of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 642, no. 1 (July 2012): 8-24; Ula Y. Taylor, "Making Waves: The Theory and Practice of Black Feminism," *The Black Scholar* 28, no. 2 (1998): 18-28.

[7] Matthew Desmond, "Disposable Ties and the Urban Poor," *American Journal of Sociology* 117 (2012): 1295-1335.

[8] Robert J. Sampson, *Great American City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021).

play in keeping the peace in urban communities impacted by violence. Starkey aptly identifies the need for violence prevention initiatives that are led by community "insiders."[9]

Although caring for people outside of the nuclear and biological undoubtedly builds systems of accountability within communities, Sharkey and his contemporaries do not address the work of Black and Indigenous feminist scholars, whose work on "other mothers" and "community mothering" similarly describes how and why violence-impacted communities have needed to create their own systems of community accountability under the violent surveillance of slave owners, white supremacist vigilantes, and police and in the absence of state protections.[10] Although the impacts of violence on systematically neglected communities is empirically shown by sociologists Desmond, Sampson, Sharkey, and others, they largely neglect to identity how or why the networks of kin and their systems of reciprocity that had previously protected vulnerable families have been strained or severed. Furthermore, they do not discuss the U.S. government's destruction of activist groups such as the Black Panther Party for Self Defense, which sought to autonomously care for their community through police patrols, free breakfast programs, sickle cell clinics, and early childhood education, among many other initiatives.[11] My work bridges the sociological literature with that of African American, Indigenous, and Latinx feminist scholars who explore the root causes of violence and the importance of community-led safety and accountability initiatives.

Neoliberalism, Mass Incarceration, Policing, Violence

Neoliberalism is an ideological discourse characterized by the free market, individualism, and small government. The culture of work enforcement, paired with the dismantling of public safety nets and organized labor unions, has substantially restructured family life for low-income people. The rise of neoliberalism has resulted in the simultaneous neglect and increased surveillance by the state. While social services and public goods have continued to shrink or be privatized, the police and carceral state has grown exponentially. The war on drugs, championed first by President Richard Nixon in 1971 and carried forward by Presidents Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton, led to radical changes in crime control and sentencing policies—which have resulted in an unprecedented proliferation of the prison population in the last 30 years. Increasing incarceration of first-time nonviolent offenders has culminated in the political and economic disenfranchisement of African Americans and Latinos with low educational attainment. Additionally, mass incarceration has taken a serious toll on family and community life. In neighborhoods where imprisonment is concentrated, there is a cumulative impact of mass incarceration that strains both familial and social ties.

An incarcerated family member's absence from the home is incredibly disruptive and traumatic for families. For children, the separation from imprisoned parents can have grave psychological consequences, including depression, anxiety, feelings of rejection, shame, anger, and guilt. Children of incarcerated parents are more likely to have behavioral problems and difficulty in school. This is a serious issue when we consider that the majority of state and federal prisoners have children under the age of 18, and nearly half of prisoners lived with their children prior to their incarceration. The imprisonment of a parent has a disruptive effect on a

[9] Patrick Sharkey, *Uneasy Peace: The Great Crime Decline, the Renewal of City Life, and the next War on Violence* (W.W. Norton & Company, 2019).
[10] Taylor, "Making Waves," 18-28.
[11] Donna Jean Murch, *Living for the City: Migration, Education, and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

child's life. Parents' inability to care for their children physically or financially places more economic and emotional burdens on remaining family members.[12] While there are a growing number of incarcerated mothers, the majority of inmates are male. The result of this phenomenon is more single, female-headed households, where women are left to care for their families, both inside and outside the prison walls. Beth Richie describes the enormous burdens that women caregivers shoulder: "Women struggling to manage budgets consumed by addictions; women trying to hold families together when they are weakened by prolonged absence; women attempting to manage the shame and stigma of incarceration and women trying to prevent children from becoming casualties of the War on Drugs."[13] Richie illustrates the milieu of hardships faced by caregivers to the incarcerated. Not to mention, there is an exorbitant financial cost to supporting an inmate, including phone calls, visits to distant facilities, court and lawyers' fees, and sending food and toiletries.

The economic tolls continue to accumulate long after inmates are released. The formerly incarcerated are highly discriminated against in the workplace and are barred from receiving a number of services, including public housing. This places a bigger financial burden on families who are already struggling to make ends meet. Providing for an incarcerated loved one causes intense levels of stress, both from worry about an inmate's well-being but also tension among relatives as they struggle to survive the ordeal.[14] Mass incarceration strains extended networks of kin and friends that traditionally sustained poor communities of color in difficult times. Mass incarceration overwhelms the small, isolated kin networks prevalent in low-income communities, making it more difficult for residents to form expansive networks that provide financial, emotional, and social support.[15]

Neoliberalism's steady divestment from federally funded social programs has widened inequality. While socially- and racially-privileged women may increasingly advance in their professional careers, it is not without the labor of poor women and women of color working in the service sector, caring for their dependents, and cooking and cleaning that their lifestyles are possible. While there is increasing evidence on the importance of a nurturing adult in sustaining children's future success, welfare mothers are required to spend their time in dead-end second sector jobs rather than with their children, in order to receive federal aid. Immigrant women who are hired as domestic workers do not fare much better, as they spend their days caring for the affluent—rather than with their own children—in order to send basic resources to their families. If the lack of social supports was not enough, poor families of color increasingly face the loss of a loved one to incarceration and deportation. The emotional, social, and financial toll of family members' absence disproportionally falls on the shoulders of low-income women and children.[16] The rise of free markets and deregulation has cast a long shadow over low-income families in the United States, which might be lifted if we reinvest in universal healthcare and child and elderly care, regardless of citizenship status or criminal history.

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[12] Donald Braman, *Doing Time on the Outside: Incarceration and Family Life in Urban America* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004).

[13] Beth Riche, *Arrested Justice: Black Women, Violence, and America's Prison Nation* (New York: New York University Press, 2012).

[14] Marc Mauer and Meda Chesney-Lind, *Invisible Punishment: The Collateral Consequences of Mass Imprisonment (* New York: New Press, 2002).

[15] Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2012).

[16] Jeremy Travis and Michelle Waul, *Prisoners Once Removed: The Impact of Incarceration and Reentry on Children, Families, and Communities* (Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute Press, 2003).

While the majority of women will enter the labor market at some time in their lives, the expectation that they should remain the principal nurturers and homemakers remains largely intact. Research shows that employed women continue to do the majority of domestic and carework, undermining any hope that women entering the workforce would result in a more equitable distribution of domestic labor. The unequal distribution of reproductive labor is even more pronounced when race, class, and citizenship are considered. The labor force has reinforced the subordinate status of the poor, immigrants, and Black, Indigenous, people of color (BIPOC) for centuries. Despite their long histories as laborers, BIPOC women are exploited in the formal economy through both inferior wages and jobs. In an effort to limit their earning potential and keep them in their subordinate social location, women of color are confined to domestic and institutional service work and manual labor. In her foundational 1985 study, Judith Rollins reveals how three structures of power—capitalist class structure, the patriarchal sex hierarchy, and racial division of labor interact—are reproduced through the interactions between African American domestic workers and their white employers. She argues that the domestic-employer relationship is one of exploitation, both materially and interpersonally. Domestic workers are exploited through low wages, lack of benefits, or opportunities for personal growth. Rollins emphasizes the psychological incentives that motivate affluent whites to hire a domestic worker. According to her, there exists the self-enhancing satisfaction that comes with being in the presence of "an inferior." The second is that the domestic worker validates the employer's lifestyle, ideology, and social world, reifying broader historical social hierarchies in terms of race, class, and gender. Rollins's documentation of the relationship between employers and domestic workers exemplifies how economic and social structures shape our everyday lives.[17] While Rollins conducted her research in the early 1980s, when African American women continued to be mistreated in the homes of well-to-do Whites, particularly by their female employers.[18] As politicians were touting the promise of free trade and a global economy, working class African Americans remained limited to service, agricultural, and industrial jobs. Eventually, even these jobs would become scarce as U.S. firms moved overseas in search of cheaper labor.

Today, significantly fewer African Americans are employed as domestic workers than before.[19] While it is increasingly the norm for both parents to work outside the home, there has been no federally sponsored program to address the needs of the dual-earner household. So professional women manage the competing demands of home and work by outsourcing the reproductive labor and carework to domestic workers from the Caribbean, Latin America, and Asia—specifically the Philippines.[20] The majority of these jobs are highly exploitative; the women work for less than minimum wage, with no job security or benefits. Most insidious of all is the way unauthorized domestic workers are threatened with deportation or being reported to immigration officials by their employers. In this way, the success of socially, economically, and

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[17] Judith Rollins, *Between Women: Domestics and Their Employers* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1985), 156, 193.

[18] For more recent work, see Evelyn Nakano Glenn, *Forced to Care: Coercion and Caregiving in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012); Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, *Domestica: Immigrant Workers Cleaning and Caring in the Shadows of Affluence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

[19] Linda Burnham and Nik Theodore, *Home Economics: The Invisible and Unregulated World of Domestic Work* (New York: National Domestic Workers Alliance, 2012).

[20] Laura Dresser, "Valuing Care by Valuing Care Workers: The Big Cost of a Worthy Standard and Some Steps Toward It," *Roosevelt Institute*, October 7, 2015, https://rooseveltinstitute.org/publications/valuing-care-by-valuing-care-workers/

racially privileged women who enter the professional world is predicated on the exploitation of poor immigrant women of color. This demonstrates how the racialized and gendered division of reproductive and care labor persists, despite neoliberalism's claims of upholding a fair and free market where all individuals may prosper.[21] The widespread hiring of domestic workers is one clear example of how neoliberal policies have restructured the organization of family life and the distribution of reproductive labor. The steady divestment from federally funded social programs, such as child and elderly care, has widened inequality. Families with the means can afford to invest in the social and emotional well-being of their families through the use of hired help, while others go without this crucial support.

North American Free Trade Agreement: Globalization & the Feminization of Migration

Migration is one of the most defining and contradictory characteristics of neoliberalism. While neoliberalism touts the unrestricted flow of goods and services, the accompanying flow of migrants has been met with a tightening of borders and increased policing of unauthorized individuals. Free trade policies, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), expose individuals from around the world to U.S culture and products by recruiting them to work in their assembly plants. However, their familiarity with the United States is limited to these individuals either consuming or producing US goods in their countries of origin. The moment migrants leave their respective homes in search a new life in the United States, they are actively denied political, social, and cultural citizenship. Ironically, as the circulation of goods, migrants, and services increases, so has the patrolling of national borders and policing of unauthorized immigrants. The 1994 Operation Gatekeeper, a brainchild of the Clinton administration, classified the unauthorized border crossing of the Mexican nationals as a threat to national security, and it began pouring billions of federal funds into militarizing the U.S./Mexico Border. The tightening of the border and the building of the wall has pushed migrants into the desert peripheries, making their journeys more costly and deadly.[22]

The dangers of being an unauthorized immigrant in the U.S. have also increased. Beginning in 2008, President Bush instituted the Secure Communities Act (SCA), a wide scale deportation program that relied on the cooperation of federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies. Approximately 88,000 families that included U.S. citizens had a family member arrested under the Secure Communities program. Although Secure Communities was presented as an innocuous information-sharing program, it functioned as a dragnet to funnel more people into the newly-created US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention-and-removal system. Furthermore, none of the SCA regulations were publicized, and little information was made publicly available about the program. The limited information that was released indicates that ICE was not in fact executing its stated enforcement priorities. For example, only 52% of Secure Communities arrestees were scheduled to have a hearing before a judge. Among Secure Communities arrestees who had an immigration hearing, only 24% had an attorney. Finally, ICE wrongly arrested roughly 3,600 United States citizens through the program. Thus, SCA functioned to create a sense of panic and eminent fear of deportation among immigrant communities.[23] The increased surveillance of immigrant communities and heightened

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[21] Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russell Hochschild, eds., *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids, and Sex Workers in the New Economy* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2003).

[22] Joseph Nevins, *Operation Gatekeeper: The Rise of the "Illegal Alien" and the Making of the U.S.-Mexico Boundary* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

[23] Douglas S. Massey, Jorge Durand, and Nolan J. Malone, *Beyond Smoke and Mirrors: Mexican Migration in an*

xenophobia has pushed immigrants into the shadows. The militarization of the border combined with the criminalization of those who were undocumented has discouraged immigrants from demanding more political, social, and cultural visibility. Operation Gatekeeper and Secure Communities exemplify the irony of neoliberal policies, where markets are liberated at the expense of individual rights to mobility, safety, and the unification of families.

Despite the more recent immigration and homeland security policies, migrants continue to seek opportunity abroad. The more recent flows of migrants to the U.S. have been distinct in that they are comprised of more women, including those with children. While the male sojourner model has defined immigration for decades; in the last 30 years, more and more women are leaving their homes in search of employment. This shift in migration demographics has important consequences for the organization of family life and the distribution of reproductive labor and carework. The expectation that women will act as the principal caregiver and nurturer of their children follows them on their migration journeys. Despite their physical distance, women continue to feel the double burden of having to both earn money abroad while remaining in close contact with their families.[24] Migrant women often express feeling emotionally divided by physically residing in one place but remaining emotionally tethered to their loved ones back home. At the same time, children, spouses, and family members left behind express more feelings of resentment and abandonment towards migrant mothers than absent fathers. Rather than freeing women from their caregiving responsibilities, women migration intensifies the expectation that they should act as the principal caregivers and nurturers. Even when migrant women become the central or sole breadwinner, they are still expected to live up to the "cult of true womanhood," whereby they remain emotionally and physically available to their spouse and offspring. The splitting of immigrant households comes with detrimental consequences for children left behind, who are often deprived of adequate parental nurturing.[25] The contradictions and paradoxes of neoliberalism are amplified when we consider the role of migrant women who leave their families abroad to work as elderly care workers and domestics. As the United States and other so-called developed countries continue to divest from social care provisions, women's carework requirements have intensified. As poorer women migrate to provide for their families, wealthier families pass down the burden of domestic and caregiving labor to poor women, whose work remains undervalued economically and socially.

As immigrant women have stepped in as the principal caregivers and homemakers, we are witnessing the reification of the same racial, class, and gender hierarchies that characterized domestic work for centuries. Women are the least valued members of society (particularly women of color), and they are expected to carry out the most essential, and yet least valued, work of caring for the young, sick, and elderly. Simultaneously, the increased surveillance and deportation of immigrants is eroding the social and familial ties that sustain im/migrant groups in the face of social isolation and poverty. The forced removal and policing of immigrants denies their paramount role in providing the reproductive labor that maintains our society. Until this inconsistency is addressed through the federal provision of universal health, child, and elderly

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Era of Economic Integration (New York: Russel Sage Foundation, 2002).

[24] Jennifer S. Hirsch, "'*Que, pues, con el pinche NAFTA*?': Gender, Power and Migration Between Western Mexico and Atlanta," *Urban Anthropology and Studies of Cultural Systems and World Economic Development* 31, no. 3/4 (Fall & Winter 2002): 351-87.

[25] Claudia Lahaie, et al., "Work and Family Divided Across Borders: The Impact of Parental Migration on Mexican Children in Transnational Families," *Community, Work & Family* 12, no. 3 (2009): 299-312.

care—as well as comprehensive immigration reform—we will continue to reproduce the same racialized, classed, and gendered social hierarchies that have sustained inequality in our country.

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act: Welfare Reform

While affluent women can turn to domestic workers to meet their need for child and elderly care, poor women do not have this option. Poor women who rely on public assistance face more challenges in balancing their domestic and family responsibilities, as federal aid increasingly overlooks how the demands of dependent caregiving interfere with women's ability to maintain employment. Clinton's 1992 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act is partially responsible for this intensified burden on poor women. The adoption of "workfare" requires individuals to secure employment in order to receive government aid. This mandate moved a substantial number of adults into narrowly defined work activities. Those who do not comply with the work requirements face strict penalties. Over the last several decades, the workplace has undergone several changes, resulting in the decline of high paying industrial jobs for low skill workers. Service sector jobs have grown; but they offer lower pay, less security, little employment mobility, and fewer benefits. Women make up the majority of those in the secondary sector, low paying technical jobs. Most welfare recipients transitioning to employment will be absorbed into the secondary job sector, which makes it very difficult for them to generate a sufficient family income through paid work.

Even in the best of economic circumstances, caregiving responsibilities conflict with employment activities—resulting in stress, diminished well-being of children, and limited career advancement and earnings potential. Indeed, while advocates of workfare laud the incentivization of work, the poor quality of these jobs blocks upward mobility among welfare recipients. Rather than provide educational waivers and job training, welfare recipients are instructed to apply to any job they qualify for, thereby confining them to their current social class. Furthermore, the stipulation of job acquisition presents a major challenge to women with dependents, as long hours away from home compromise their ability to watch over their children and elderly and disabled family members. The expansive literature on adverse childhood experiences details how critical having a nurturing, safe and supportive home is to the well-being and future success of a child. Studies describing how welfare mothers balance child rearing and the demands of their work placements show that children are often without adequate supervision making them vulnerable to community and interpersonal violence. Work mandates also prevent mothers from being physically, emotionally, and mentally available for children's day-to-day needs, which hinders the parent/child bond. In this way, workfare is amplifying inequality, as mothers must choose between spending ample time with their children or meeting welfare work requirements.

The emphasis on employment for poor mothers has increased in policy discussions over time, despite mounting evidence that forcing women into the labor market may have negative consequences. Public assistance does not facilitate balancing both kinds of work. For example, childcare programs are underfunded and do not necessarily provide acceptable arrangements for mothers who wish to be employed long term. Furthermore, because assistance is reduced in proportion to the amount one earns, mothers on welfare may be less well off financially when they are formally employed than when they are not. Also, because they risk losing medical and food stamp benefits if they begin earning, regular work may leave poor women worse off. Researchers found that moving poor mothers into the labor market requires either a massive infusion of federal funds for support services such as education and child and dependent care or

the creation of a vast new network of jobs that pay a livable wage to support a family may worsen the situation for millions of poor individuals.[26]

The discourse of work enforcement that is embedded in neoliberal changes to welfare manifests in poor women's lives through the denigration of welfare receipt and the valorization of independence, paid work, and market-oriented understandings of social entitlements. This discourse draws women into the labor force, providing them with rationalizations for undertaking low wage work while raising children. Most Americans juggle work and family life; but for low wageworkers, it is more than an issue of juggling. In many cases, it requires sacrificing the needs of one's family to have a job. Additionally, poor mothers must navigate the competing demands of formal and unpaid carework in the midst of very difficult circumstances that are beyond their control, including gang violence, health problems, an illogical and punitive welfare system, and an unreliable and discriminatory criminal justice system.

The transformation of welfare receipt from a public resource into a market relationship frames poverty as an individual rather than structural problem. By holding the self-sufficient individual as the model citizen, rather than acknowledging our interdependency and inevitable vulnerabilities, we leave individuals and families to fend for themselves, thereby widening inequality. Federally subsidized programs that provide social support for the elderly, children, and dual-earner households are in fact a critical step towards mitigating the detrimental effects of the global service economy and poverty. These historical shifts form the economic context that inform the lives of the mothers that I engaged and also form part of the larger discourse around racialized motherhood that these women had to navigate.

The Political Possibilities in Performing Maternal Grief-Motherist Activism in the Americas

The grieving mother—as both a cultural and political trope—remains a powerful tool in struggles for racial, sexual, and economic justice. The maternal figure has been effectively used to expose state-sanctioned violence in a variety of social and historical contexts. Mothers continue to be seen as natural "experts" on their children's characters; as such, their testimonies have provided indisputable counter narratives to "official" accounts that denied or ignored that such violence ever took place at the hands of the state. Whether their children were deemed criminals or political subversives, the protests of mother-activists have successfully challenged state claims that their children's annihilation, incarceration, or disappearance was a result of their immoral character or inherent deficiencies. As protesters against the state, mothers have succeeded in exposing social injustice, in large part because they present themselves as apolitical, non-threatening victims. Rather than appealing to the public through political rhetoric, mother-activists have used the affective power of personal testimony to convey their grievances and justify their demands. While their explicit goal has been to save their children from inexplicable disappearance, unjustified detention and state violence, and public vilification, also couched in this plea are a range of impassioned political critiques and demands, including the desire to redeem their children's reputation after death.

The effectiveness of mother-activism is in part due to its contradictory nature. At its core lies the notion that mothers' politics stem from their experiences as life-baring nurturers. Their public life, as citizens taking to the streets to demand justice, always begins with their private one in the family. This point of origin is fundamental to mother-activism and its strategy for

[26] Jane L. Collins and Victoria Mayer, *Both Hands Tied: Welfare Reform and the Race to the Bottom of the Low-Wage Labor Market* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2010).

diffusing political hostility to its actions. It is an activism that plays upon the patriarchal concept of the matronly woman as inherently apolitical and the direct opposite of the ostensibly subversive male. By presenting themselves as mothers rather than activists, they appear innocuous to governing elites even if their demands challenge both the political and economic power structure. In this way, mother-activists embed their radical demands within the conservative demeanor of women-as-mothers, a part of the patriarchal family structure that demands that women remain in the home caring for their husband and children. While this image is oppressive in its limited view of both femininity and motherhood, it is both politically and affectively powerful.

Black Maternal Grief Emancipation, Civil Rights and Black Lives Matter

In her groundbreaking work, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," Hortense Spillers lays out how slavery forever transformed the meaning of kinship and motherhood for Black subjects. She writes that "motherhood as female blood-rite is outraged, is denied, at the *very same time* that it becomes the founding term of a human and social enactment… [and] a dual fatherhood is set in motion, comprised of the African father's *banished* name and body and the captor [or White] father's mocking presence." Spillers argues that this places African American women "*out*[side] of the traditional symbolics for female gender."[27] From the time of slavery to the present Black maternal grief has been a galvanizing political force. The prevalence of the police killing of unarmed African American men has galvanized mothers of the victims to join together in protest throughout African American history. The performance of Black maternal grief as a rhetorical strategy demands judicial action by highlighting the racial power imbalance embodied by their murdered children. Because Black mothers have been denied legal rights over their own children—both during and after slavery—performing their affective attachments to their children has proven to be an effective way to have their humanity nationally and legally recognized.

One of the most iconic instances of African American mother activism is Mamie Till-Bradley's public response to the murder of her son Emmett Till. Emmett Till, a 14-year-old youth murdered by two White men in Money, Mississippi in 1955, has become a Civil Rights icon in large part due to the activism of his mother. By demanding that her son's maimed body be both photographed and publicly displayed so that "everyone can see what they done to my boy," Till-Bradley exposed the brutality of his killing. After being beaten, his eye gauged out, shot, and drowned, Till's body was only identifiable by initialed jewelry he was wearing. When the perpetrators were acquitted by an all-white jury, the African American magazine *Jet* published photos of Emmett's funeral and of Mamie Till-Bradley inconsolably weeping over her son's casket. By making her private pain a public form of protest, Till-Bradley exposed the institutionalized bigotry and terror of the segregated south. According to his assailants, Emmett Till was beaten for whistling at a white woman.[28] The display of Till-Bradley's maternal anguish juxtaposed with images of Emmett as a happy child positioned his death as an unthinkable tragedy that should never happen again. Till-Bradley went on to work with principle Civil Rights

[27] Hortense J. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (1987): 80.

[28] Carolyn Bryant Donham, the White woman at whom Emmett Till supposedly whistled, admitted in 2017 that she had lied about this. See Richard Pérez-Peña, "Woman Linked to 1955 Emmett Till Murder Tells Historian Her Claims were False," *New York Times,* January 27, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/27/us/emmett-till-lynching-carolyn-bryant-donham.html

organizations such as the Southern Poverty Law Center, where she inspired other racial justice activists such as Rosa Parks and Morris Dees. Her legacy is one that highlights the unique power of mother-led efforts to expose racial and legal injustice.

Mamie Till-Bradly's public performance of maternal grief and racial injury reveals the utility of the injured black body to American self-making and demands for social justice. Performance studies scholar Myiesha Priest argues that the use of the maimed body seeks a closure that it cannot achieve.[29] Priest highlights how the repeated appearances of Till's body expose a collective desire for racial healing, even as it simultaneously asserts its impossibility. While there is a desire to protect and codify particular uses of the Black body as well as achieve justice in the face of racial harm, Till's grave remains a haunting marker of crisis. In this way, Till's body functions as a battleground where both racial rage and grief are waged against each other.

Drawing from the work of Anne Anlin Cheng, Judith Butler, and David Eng, Rhasia Williams offers a historical analysis of Black maternal grievances that were nationally recognized for their expressions of both racial and gendered injury.[30] Like Priest, Williams analyzes Mamie Till-Bradley, among other icons, and juxtaposes these examples with the story of Williams's own paternal grandmother, whose grief due to her daughter's suicide did not adhere to socially acceptable narratives of loss. When the loss of life is socially illegible or taboo, it is often ignored, much like the ways my participant's children were ignored or blamed for their deaths because of their assumed criminality. Williams's discussion offers insight into the necropolitics of maternal suffering within African American history. Both Priest and Williams ask: What does it mean to move from being a subject of grief to an object of grievance? The distinction they assert is that grievance is often lodged in legal claims for reparations, which must be expressed in ways that are legible to the legal system and the larger public. Grief, on the other hand, can take many forms and is fundamentally unsettling, challenging every aspect of our realities, as we once knew them.

A number of scholars have explored the political potential of grief, identifying it as an opportunity to build community. Judith Butler describes the destabilizing effect of grief in that it challenges how we understand ourselves before and after a loss, as well as how we think of the person, place, or object that is now gone. When we experience loss, she argues, our worlds—as we once knew them—are never fully restored. This experience forces us to contend with the social vulnerability of our bodies and the political implications of particular bodies and subjectivities being more or less vulnerable on a global scale.[31] Like Butler, José Esteban Muñoz rejects the notion of melancholia as pathology. Communal mourning, Muñoz notes, is a complex text to read. For we do not mourn just one lost object or other, but we also mourn as a whole or a contingent and temporary collection of fragments, that is experiencing a loss of its parts. He elucidates how for queer people, people of color, and women, melancholia is a structure of everyday feeling that shapes the identities of entire groups, particularly those that experience disproportionate amounts of loss and violence.[32] Anne Anlin Cheng also writes of the

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[29] Myisha Priest, "The Nightmare Is Not Cured": Emmett Till and American Healing," *American Quarterly* 62, no. 1 (2010): 1-24.

[30] Rhaisa Kameela Williams, "Toward a Theorization of Black Maternal Grief as Analytic," *Transforming Anthropology* 24, no. 1 (2016): 17-30.

[31] Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004).

[32] José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

constitutive role grief plays in racial/ethnic subject formation. She notes how melancholia, as a critical framework, helps us understand how grief and loss on the part of the aggrieved is not just a symptom but also a dynamic process with both coercive and transformative potentials for political imagination. Cheng helps us to think critically about the process through which individuals go from being subjects of grief to being a subject-speaking grievance.[33] Additionally, as David Eng and David Kazanjian point out, grief and mourning allow us to appreciate our interconnectedness, as grief compels us to confront how deeply we are defined by and in relation to one another. They write, "As both a formal relation and structure of feeling, a mechanism of disavowal and a constellation of affect, melancholia offers a capaciousness of meaning in relation to losses encompassing the individual and the collective, the spiritual and the material, the psychic and the social, the aesthetic and the political." At the heart of melancholia, Eng and Kazanjian assert, is a militant refusal to let go, and this is where melancholia's productive political potential resides.[34] In this way, these authors all agree that grief offers a new formation for political community, as it brings to the fore the relational ties that reveal our fundamental dependency and ethical responsibility.

Unacknowledged histories and emotions can contribute to the erasure and forgetting of particular individuals and groups deemed socially unworthy. Lisa Marie Cacho draws on her own cousin Brandon's death—a young Latino male killed in a car accident—to illustrate the devaluation of racialized and minoritized subject. Cacho's cousin was deemed "unproductive," "deviant," and thus invaluable even in his death.[35] Yet, as the families mourn his death and that of the two other young men killed in the accident, they discover that "value is ascribed through their friends' and relatives' public mourning, their performances of explicit caring, profound pain and deeply felt depression, desperation and despair."[36] By expressing and confronting what is felt, the family gave value to their loved one's life and express frustration about their perceived invalidity and erasure. Cacho explains, "They resisted the erasure of their loved ones and made a statement: these were valuable young men, and they are missed. Their audiences were not given the opportunity to ask why." Cacho emphasizes that some forms of remembering are acts of resistance to the collective amnesia surrounding the lives and deaths of young men of color. She describes memorial t-shirts, a roadside altar, and other quotidian forms of memorialization as actively "working against Brandon's absolute erasure."[37] The mothers in my dissertation research participated in similar forms of remembrance, challenging the dominant narratives that insisted their children were "no good." Like Cacho, I read these mothers grief as deeply political, tethered to collective struggles for civil rights, abolition, and radical inclusivity, both in the U.S and beyond.

Influence of *Las Madres* on Contemporary Motherist Movements in U.S. Latinx Communities

Latin America and the Caribbean and the U.S. Latinx community similarly has a rich legacy of social movements centered around the maternal. One of the most recognizable political

[33] Anne Anlin Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).
[34] David L. Eng and David Kazanjian, "Introduction: Mourning Remains," in *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*, eds. David L. Eng and David Kazanjian (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 3.
[35] Lisa Marie Cacho, "Racialized Hauntings of the Devalued Dead," in *Strange Affinities: The Gender and Sexual Politics of Comparative Racialization*, eds. Grace Kyungwon Hong and Roderick A. Ferguson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 25.
[36] Ibid, 34.
[37] Ibid, 37.

campaigns that utilized the trope of the grieving mother is *Las madres y abuelas de la Plaza de Mayo*, the mothers and grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo. They are an association of mothers and grandmothers of the children and grandchildren who were secretly abducted, tortured, and killed by the military dictatorship in Argentina between 1976-1983. Meeting by chance as they waited in lines at police stations and government buildings to demand the whereabouts of their loved ones, these women resisted the state silencing of the disappearances by staging weekly protests in public spaces where they held up the names and photos of their missing family members. Through their performance of the culturally appropriate role of the "good" mother, *las madres* became an ethical reference point in the eyes of the public and were therefore able to expose the hypocrisy of the state.[38] Their sorrowful and seemingly apolitical rhetoric asking *"donde estan?"* (Where are they?) distanced them from the sort of political subversion that was so violently eradicated by the military dictatorship. *Las madres* use of *testimonio* also challenged the "official" government narrative about the disappeared being dangerous guerrillas.[39] Their detailed and loving recollections of children, as well as the pain with which they recalled their violent abductions, encouraged an emotional understanding of the disappearances and gave authenticity to their movement.

The Argentine mothers and grandmothers have since incorporated other social causes into their struggle, including affordable housing, economic reforms, and unions. While the interpersonal violence of the disappearances is seen as the focus of *las madres'* efforts, their critique of the neo-conservative political and social plan the dictatorship put in place equally exposes the structural violence of neoliberalism. The liberalizing economic plan implemented by the government under the auspices of the International Monetary Fund has led to continued corruption, state led repression, escalating unemployment, and impoverishment among the working and middle classes.[40] Argentina has long been regarded as one of the more successful Latin American countries because of its historically high level of industrialization and educated populace. Ironically, the very free market policies that were put in place during the military coup caused the economy to collapse in 2001, leaving Argentina is severe public debt.[41] At its core, *las madres* movement is about contesting Argentine narratives about the past as a way to make fundamental economic, social, and political changes in the present and future. By expanding their call for human rights to include comprehensive economic, educational, and political reform, *las madres* have successfully drawn connections between the violence of the disappearances, neoliberalism, and present-day economic inequality.

Despite their grassroots beginnings, *las madres y abuelas* have been criticized for working too closely with the government, specifically in sponsoring national commemorations of those who perished or were disappeared during the Dirty Wars. Some of the mothers I spoke with also experienced having similar critiques leveled against them. In Argentina, the gradual incorporation of *las madres y abuelas* into the official history of Argentina shows some of the limitations in using a normative framing, such as the "grieving mother," in social movements that seek to expose state sanctioned violence and impunity. The palatable messaging of mothers in search of their children was eventually embraced by the state, and the subversive elements of

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[38] Fernando J. Bosco, "Mother-Activism and The Geographic Conundrum of Social Movements," *Urban Geography* 28, no. 5 (2007): 426-431.

[39] Diana Taylor, *Disappearing Acts: Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina's "Dirty War"* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).

[40] Ibid., 131.

[41] Ibid., 142.

las madres movement have dropped out of mainstream narratives. Despite these challenges, *las madres y abuelas* are one of the most enduring and globally recognized motherist movements in the history of the western hemisphere.

The passing of NAFTA in 1992 enticed international firms to establish assembly plants along the U.S./Mexico border; these plants welcomed young women as employees, which threatened cultural norms of labor and saw aggressors respond by murdering many of these women. Indeed, thousands of women migrated from Mexico's rural and impoverished interior to Ciudad Juárez in search of jobs in the multinational industrial parks, or *maquiladoras.* The influx of single, wage-earning women created a shift in local gender norms, and it became increasingly normal for young women to live on their own. The visibility of financially autonomous women in public spaces became the subject of cultural hysteria. Popular tabloids and news programs accused the young women working in the *maquiladoras* of undermining family values and tarnishing the integrity of their community by being sexual promiscuous and morally inferior. When hundreds of women—the majority of whom were employed in the *maquilas*—began disappearing or being found murdered, authorities pointed to the feminization of labor and its subsequent cultural ramifications as an explanation.

Rather than investigate these murders, municipal and national leaders maintained that the young women who were killed were prostitutes or gang members and therefore deserved their violent ends. The femicides—as these brutal murders would later be named—became a spectacle of racialized and gendered violence in popular culture. The hyper-sexualized killings (victims' bodies often showed evidence of rape and sexual mutilation) were displayed in popular tabloids, magazines, and television. Images of the maimed, nude corpses both titillated and repulsed viewers, functioning as both pulp entertainment and a warning of what befell "fallen women." As with the victims of violence in the stories these mothers shared with me, in media accounts, the morality, reputation, and future value of the victim frequently became the target of investigation.

Families of the femicide victims faced great adversity trying to uncover what became of their loved ones. Many of them came from humble backgrounds and lacked the resources to attain adequate legal representation. Meeting by chance in front of police stations and coroners' offices, victims' families would share stories and exchange information about their experiences. They had all been horrified by the shoddy police work that had gone into their investigations. Several families had to confront the authorities when the body provided to them was not in fact their daughter. Police reports, when available, were full of inaccuracies, making thorough investigations impossible to complete.[42] This shared response of mothers reaching out to one another for support as well as justice is also an experience that was echoed by the women I spoke with in this study.

In Mexico, once families became aware of their shared struggle, they banded together to raise awareness about both the femicides and government impunity. *Nuestras hijas de regreso a casa* was one such group, composed of a group of mothers whose daughters had been abducted or killed. These women created some of the most visible and provocative demonstrations around the femicides. For example, in weekly silent marches, these mothers would walk through Ciudad Juárez, erecting pink wooden crosses with the names of their daughters. They would sing and chant as they walked, causing people to come out of their homes and offices to join them in their walking memorial. Donned in black veils, holding photos of their daughters, their protest was

[42] Rosa Linda Fregoso and Cynthia L. Bejarano, *Terrorizing Women: Feminicide in the Américas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

evocative of a funeral procession. Intermingled with the photos, crosses, and rosaries were large hand-painted signs that criticized local government officials for their silence and accused them of corruption. The crosses that appeared all over the city were one of the only representations of the murders that were not graphic or sexual. The sheer number of crosses brought light to the gravity of the problem, which was often minimized within public discourse. This ongoing demonstration was powerful in that it presented the lives of these women as sacred; the religious connotations of the crosses, in addition to their pink color, emphasized their femininity and sanctity. Despite the municipal government's efforts to remove the memorials, the mothers continued to march and erect them with each new body that was found. Like *Las madres de la Plaza de Mayo, Nuestras hijas de regreso a casa* transformed their private grief into public protest.

Despite the similarities in their expression of political dissent, the issue of racialized violence and disposable labor was more salient in the Mexican femicides. The majority of the victims came from rural Mexico and had indigenous features. Women with long dark hair and dark skin were especially cautioned against walking alone or at night for fear that they too would be targeted.[43] The violation of these women's bodies came to symbolize the ongoing violence and displacement experienced by Mexico's poor and indigenous communities since colonization. Occurring in the midst of NAFTA, the femicides were a more explicit demonstration of how free trade had brutalized indigenous people. NAFTA, combined with the increasingly pressure from local drug lords to produce marijuana and other narcotics, made their agrarian lifestyle impossible to sustain. Despite claims that free trade would democratize the economy, the manufacturing jobs that awaited rural migrants were exploitative and lacking fair compensation, union representation, and benefits. The physical exploitation of women's bodies illuminated the disposability of female labor within the new economic order that arrived with NAFTA.[44] The femicides revealed that the promise of prosperity associated with neoliberalism was not accessible for poor, Brown women living in the developing world.

The racial and ethnic undertones of the femicides gave way to a series of protests that made explicit the connections between structural racism, free trade, economic disenfranchisement, and women's and indigenous people's rights. U.S.-based cultural workers, such as documentary filmmaker Lourdes Portillo, brought the femicides into the global consciousness. As the femicides gained international attention, there was growing interest among international news syndicates and NGOs. As a result, competition rose among local groups as they sought resources and funds. Gradually, the femicides were packaged as a "women's issue"; and race, class, and labor struggles became parenthetical to their representation abroad. Over the years, members of *Nuestras hijas de regreso a casa* splintered into different groups along ideological lines. One such group, Ni Una Mas*,* partnered with globally recognized NGOs such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and V-Day to establish Casa Amiga—Juárez's first and only women's health and rape crisis center. The other factions of *Nuestras hijas de regreso a casa* remained more grassroots, focusing their efforts on labor reforms and indigenous people's rights. The pink crosses erected by *Nuestras hijas de regreso a casa* are still visible expressions of resistance to the violence—gendered, racial, and economic—that occurred in Juárez in the dawn of neoliberalism.[45]

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[43] Melissa W. Wright, "Urban Geography Plenary Lecture—Femicide, Mother-Activism, and the Geography of Protest in Northern Mexico," *Urban Geography* 28, no. 8 (2007): 816.

[44] Melissa W. Wright, *Disposable Women and Other Myths of Global Capitalism* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

[45] Joanna Swanger, "Feminist Community Building in Ciudad Juárez: A Local Cultural Alternative to the Structural Violence of Globalization," *Latin American Perspectives* 34, no. 2 (2007): 108-23.

Conclusion

These mother-led political mobilizations mentioned here are just a few examples of activism that continues to influence the demands of the mothers I interviewed and observed throughout my research in California and Chicago. As in the cases I present below, the particulars of race and class are central to these narratives, shaping how accounts of both victims and mothers would be conveyed to the larger public. Across these historical and geographic expanses, and despite divergences in political orientations, the mothers I present here are tethered to a common affective symbol of the maternal as sacred and deserving of her right to nurture future generations.

Violence doesn't just impact those that are killed or wounded; it has rippling material, social, and emotional toil throughout communities, a burden that is always imagined as gendered. The impact of violence on the everyday lives of women and girls remains an under-researched area of study. While we know more about the ways mass incarceration, hyper-policing, and economic restructuring have made young men of color vulnerable to violence—the experiences of their mothers, daughters, sisters, girlfriends, aunties, and wives are written out of both scholarly and mainstream accounts of urban violence. By focusing on the mothers and families left behind in the aftermath of violence, my project illuminates how mothers take up grieving labor—not as an instinctual or sentimental impulse, but out of political, social, and material necessity. Soon after losing their children, mothers find that if they leave their children's legacies to be told by the media or legal system, they will be reduced to criminals, statistics, martyrs, or worse, forgotten entirely. My research provided an opportunity for women to tell their stories of loss and remember their loved ones on their own terms. This expands the legacy of grassroots feminist activism done in the name of motherhood.

CHAPTER ONE

The Commodification of Black Maternal Grief: Anjanette Albert's Story

At 1:12am on February 1, 2019, Anjanette Albert posted the following on her Facebook page: "*So I will be the first to say happy happy birthday in heaven Derrion Albert. Amen."* A decade had passed since the death of her son, Derrion, who would have been 26 years old that day. But on September 24, 2009, 16-year-old Derrion was beaten to death while walking home from school. Throughout that 2019 day of remembrance, Anjanette's post received 122 likes, 2 shares, and 83 comments. Twinkling hearts, dew covered roses, and burning candles covered her Facebook page in a dizzying array of colors and animated GIFs. A few hours after posting, Anjanette got up and went to work at the local grocery store where she spent the day restocking produce and shelving the "take-backs." After an eight-hour shift, she took the number three bus back to her small apartment on Cottage Grove on the southside of Chicago. She fed her cat before taking a shower. Later she drank a Colt 45 on the couch and scrolled through her Facebook feed. She smiled and replied to those who commented on her post and took note of who was absent from this digital memorial. "It's like people be forgetting," Anjanette says on a late-night Facetime call with me: "...they say time heals all wounds but to me it's like yesterday, it's like it's still here. And all those so-called fake friends who said they had my back when the whole thing started, today they don't have the common courtesy to even offer their condolences. People just forget. They forget I am still here, and I have another child to raise that I can't let down." Shortly after hanging up the call, I see a new post by Anjanette. A meme of a freshly lit match with the following words appears at the top of my newsfeed: *SOMETIMES YOU JUST HAVE TO TURN AROUND, GIVE A SMILE, THROW THE MATCH, AND BURN THAT FUCKING BRIDGE DOWN*. It is nearly 3am in Chicago, and in a few short hours Anjanette will have to again catch the bus and leave for her 5am shift. After another sleepless night posting on Facebook and calling out "fake friends," Anjanette's actions once again demonstrate all the ways she continues to feel unseen and abandoned by her extended family and community. The number of likes, reposts, and shares signify the endurance of her son's memory in the hearts and minds of those she hoped would support her through the aftermath of Derrion's death. However, as the years passed and the number of people interacting with her posts has dwindled, Anjanette has questioned the authenticity of people's sympathy for her.

The Murder

The most consistent understanding of the events surrounding Derrion's death—as articulated by community organizations, the teacher's union, and faith-based groups—is that a fight broke out because of mounting tension between students from Fenger Academy High School and transfer students from Carver, a nearby neighborhood high school that had recently turned into a military academy in hopes of improving its academics. Students at Carver who did not want to attend a military academy were transferred to Fenger, which had recently undergone a "turnaround," a large-scale firing and re-hiring of teachers, administrators, and staff. The lack of student/teacher relationships was another reason the various community stakeholders offered as to why students aware of the rising tension had not approached adults at the school for support. Fenger was one of several High Schools in underserved African American and Latino neighborhoods to be revamped under US Secretary of Education Arne Duncan's educational reform act "Renaissance 2010."

An unanticipated effect of these educational reforms was the exacerbation of long-standing tensions between rival groups affiliated with either Fenger or Carver High Schools, which are located in neighboring Roseland and Altgald Heights—areas that have struggled with poverty, crime, and unemployment for the last 30 years (due to economic restructuring and deindustrialization, as well as cuts to social services). Carver's conversion into a military academy and Fenger into a turnaround school reveals how top-down educational reforms disrupt the internal organization of communities like Roseland and Altgeld Gardens. Both transformations also point towards two growing trends within educational policy. First, the concerted recruitment of underprivileged students of color for the military. Second, the use of punitive measures, such as large-scale termination of teachers and administrators who fail to meet state benchmarks in standardized testing. The combination of these two changes contributed to increased interactions between rival groups of youth, resulting in a violent conflict that took Derrion's life.

The Video

Still frame of bystander video of the melee where Derrion Albert was fatally beaten on September 24, 2009. (My Fox Chicago/CBS/AP Chicago news)

Derrion's murder was recorded on a camera video. The video shows him being beaten to death on his way home from school, when a clash between two groups of young men from Altgeld Gardens and Canaryville (two neighborhoods on the Southside of Chicago) erupted a few blocks from Fenger, where Derrion was a 16-year-old junior. Watching the fight unfold on video, we see Derrion caught in the fray, hit in the head with a wooden plank and repeatedly punched and kicked. Once Derrion fell unconscious, several bystanders called 911, and he was transported to Roseland Community Hospital, where he was pronounced dead several hours later.

The anonymous videographer sold the video to WLFD-TV, a Fox-owned and operated television station based in Chicago. WLFD gave the video to law enforcement, where it was analyzed for identifying information and evidence. WLFD-TV aired censored clips of the video throughout several months of reporting. Viewers uploaded segments of the video to social media platforms, where they shared commentary on the fight and offered condolences to the Albert family. The rapid circulation of the video recording compelled cultural, political, and social figures to speak out about the violence they had witnessed on screen. After viewing the video, President Barack Obama sent U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder and Secretary of Education

Duncan to Chicago to support Mayor Richard M. Daley in quelling the public outcry that followed the release of the video.

The recording was played over and over throughout the legal proceedings, news coverage, social media feeds, and community meetings. Anjanette's most painful loss was instantaneously an object of social and political commentary and speculation, which significantly exacerbated Anjanette's bereavement process and impeded her ability to authentically mourn. Her experience illuminates how grief becomes commodified when incidents of traumatic loss are widely circulated and evaluated through news and social media. Although Derrion's high-profile murder provided Anjanette with widespread public acknowledgement of her loss, it also commodified her grief and created a dependency on external forms of validation.

As the years passed and Anjanette's tragedy was less circulated in the public eye, she felt forgotten and exploited. The lack of consistent external sympathy and support was retraumatizing for Anjanette, as it confirmed a deep-seated belief that people did not genuinely care about her or her son but rather used her loss to benefit themselves. This sense of being used and discarded occurred on an institutional and individual level, within her private sphere of family and friends as well as in the public with social, political, cultural and spiritual institutions, and leaders. Today, over a decade since Derrion's murder, Anjanette's everyday life is driven by the desire to prevent outsiders from exploiting his death or her personal tragedy. The ways Anjanette's grief was mediated by external forms of representation offers insight into the long-term consequences of widespread circulation and co-option of Black trauma.

Social media is central to the circulation of otherwise underrepresented injustices. For African Americans, the use of social media outlets has enabled everyday acts of racial terror to be widely circulated and acknowledged. Preceding the Black Lives Matter movement, Derrion's death was one of the first cases where an amateur cell phone video became a national media spectacle. Although Derrion was not killed by the police or White vigilantes, the image of his maimed body evoked the racial trauma of the lynch mob. The looping video of Black adolescents beating one another was also mobilized as another example of "Black on Black" crime—a term popularized by conservatives to describe what they deemed "pathological" violence in the Black community. This notion was a victim-blaming strategy used to justify tough-on-crime policies of the 1980s through the 2000s.[46]

Methods

In this chapter, I draw on critical ethnography and media studies to show the disparities between dominant narratives surrounding inner-city violence and its emotional toll on everyday people. While news and documentary film accounts depicted Derrion's murder as a uniquely violent incident, this research analyzes his death within the larger context of his mother's life to illuminate how structural inequality manifests in ongoing interpersonal violence that uniquely impacts the emotional lives of low-income African Americans. I base my analysis on over 50 news articles and 20 televised news segments featuring Derrion's murder between the years 2009-2016. These items appeared in mainstream news sources including *The Chicago Tribune*, *The Chicago RedEye*, *The Chicago Sun-Times*, *The New York Times*, CNN, Fox, and CBS. In this chapter, I also use my interviews with Anjanette to highlight her experience navigating the public and private sphere to show the unique challenges faced by Black mothers who lose a child

[46] Bernard D. Headley, "'Black on Black' Crime: The Myth and the Reality," *Crime and Social Justice* 20 (1983): 50-62.

to a high-profile murder and the ways their trauma is potentially subject to exploitation by others for political, social, and economic gain.

The ethnographic component of this research is based on biannual in-person interviews with Anjanette over a four-year period. I also maintained consistent contact with her via phone and instant messaging. As my relationship with Anjanette developed, I noticed a shift in her tone and demeanor. At our initial meetings, she appeared very similar to her media appearances: sad, soft spoken, and tearful. However, as we spent more time together, she grew more comfortable expressing her anger, particularly around her feelings of betrayal and exploitation. Speaking with Anjanette in her home also exposed me to other factors that complicated and compounded her grief including the housing instability, unemployment, and parenting her teenage daughter Rhea. The dissonance between Anjanette's public and private expressions of grief exemplify how race informs the figure of the grieving mother represented in the media.

Policing Memory: From "Gang Banger" to Honors Student

As Derrion's murder developed into a national news spectacle, Anjanette was repeatedly called upon to testify to the moral character of her son. In the process of gaining public attention, Anjanette was asked to verify that Derrion was not involved in gangs, that he was an upstanding student, a gentle and adoring son—in other words to suggest all the ways he was undeserving of his violent death. She did so by opening herself to the media, sharing stories about her family and children. However, she quickly learned what aspects of their private lives could jeopardize their public image as a law-abiding, respectable family—an image upon which both financial and legal resources were contingent.

The concerted effort Anjanette put into sanitizing her son's legacy is something highly criminalized communities must do in order to appeal to an otherwise skeptical public. Poor families and families of color who rely on donations and free or low-cost legal representation are repeatedly called upon to police the memory—or the official circulated account—of their loved ones as a means of survival. Policing memory is one of several strategies Anjanette devised while navigating both the legal system and the media in the aftermath of Derrion's murder. In addition to becoming more vigilant about her and Derrion's public image, she also became more selective of the television appearances she made and journalists she engaged with.

The policing of Anjanette's own image reveals how essential the public performance of legible maternal grief and respectable Black femininity is in proving the innocence of young Black men killed in the inner city. For example, on the day following Derrion's murder, CNN reporter Joe Johns, microphone in hand, approached a tearful and distressed Anjanette as she left her home.

> Johns: Tell me about your son; what kind of per… what kind of student was he?
> Anjanette: (crying) He was an honor student; he…he loved school.
> Johns: He was a good boy then?
> Anjanette: Yeah…never a problem out of him.
> Johns: Not a gang banger?
> Anjanette: (sobbing) No.

With every question, Johns moves closer to Anjanette. While the audience witnesses Anjanette's acute emotional pain, Johns mines for sound bites that will prove that Derrion was an innocent law-abiding citizen. Johns begins his interview by asking "What kind of person" Derrion was.

However, before saying the word "person," he replaces it with the question, "What kind of student." Anjanette's responds by saying her son was an honors student. In this exchange "honors student" is synonymous with being a good person. Identifying Derrion as an honors student codifies him as an individual who was law-abiding and non-gang affiliated. In the segment following the brief interview with Anjanette, Johns walks alone and speaks to the camera:

> So who was Derrion Albert? A junior and honor roll student at Fenger High School on Chicago's Southside. Friends say he was headed to college, not a gang banger, so why did he die? Police are still looking for the answer, but what we do know is that even kids who are not involved in the street life here can still get caught in the middle of it.

In this news segment, Johns makes a point to show Derrion's compliance with parental and school expectations. The identification of Derrion's academic achievements and aspirations of college and social mobility are meant to distance him from any gang activity. In doing so, Johns creates a false binary between "good kids" and "bad kids," young people with college aspirations and those committed to the street life.

The reality is that the identities of these young people, as with all individuals, are far more complex and interrelated than these dichotomies suggest. Both Anjanette's personal reflections on her son's character, as well as the scholarly literature on inner-city youth identity formation, confirm that "honors students" and "gang-banger" do not work as discrete social groupings but rather are always intersecting and competing with one another. In personal correspondence, Anjanette described how Derrion challenged her authority and made mistakes. Over time she hesitantly shared some of the struggles she faced while raising him:

> They [the media] can say whatever they want to say. But I know Derrion. He was a pretty good kid. Like any other kid, he did some crazy shit. We argued, fussed, and fought and threw stuff, and we lived in a home together. He got a little taller than me, and I think he thought he was my big brother (laughs). You know, so. We had our ups and downs and stuff. But I would never give up the opportunity to be Derrion Albert's mother. I would do it all over again, even if I knew I was going to lose him at 16 years old. I probably would have done better myself; I would have done a little bit more for him."[47]

Anjanette challenges the media's exceptionalizing portrayal of Derrion and normalizes his feelings of anger and his struggles with authority. The emotional complexity we glean from Anjanette's reflection was absent in media accounts. Anjanette recalls their conflictual and sometimes tumultuous relationship, expressing remorse for not having resolved their interpersonal troubles. Feelings of guilt are common among bereaving parents, partly because taking on responsibility affords them some level of control over the death of their child.[48] Additionally, parents, particularly those from minoritized groups, are often the first targets of public shaming following violent acts perpetrated by minors. Neoliberal discourses of personal responsibility frequently fault parents for not doing enough to prevent youth from resorting to violence. Having to defend themselves in the face of public scrutiny prevents parents from feeling safe enough to voice the remorse and feelings of inadequacy and powerlessness that are

[47] Anjanette Albert, in discussion with the author, July 2014.
[48] Kenneth J. Doka and Joyce D. Davidson, *Living with Grief: Who We Are, How We Grieve* (Routledge, 1998).

commonly associated with parental bereavement.[49] The dissonance between how Anjanette described Derrion in front of reporters and in private reveals the labor required of African American mothers in creating acceptable public presentations of their children.

This affective labor also translates to how the mothers publicly present themselves. The mental and emotional toll around policing the memory of Derrion's image, along with worries about how she would be represented by the media, was particularly detrimental to Anjanette. This intensified the stigma and shame surrounding her identity as a working class, single, African American mother. The erasure of the challenges she faced in raising Derrion without adequate resources wrongfully attributes her emotional anguish to the isolated incident of her son's murder, rather than her prolonged struggle to survive in the face of joblessness, violence, and social isolation. Anjanette's closing comment, "I would do it all over again, even if I knew I was going to lose him at 16 years old," shows how the possibility of raising her children without the threat of violence is not even imaginable to her. Rather, she expresses regret and personal responsibility for not doing more for Derrion. Unlike bereaving parents from other social and class locations, inner-city African American mothers are tasked with the burden of proving their children's social worth. Honest reflections on their relationships with their deceased children or any detail that might detract from a sanitized public image are buried for fear that they will jeopardize any possibility of sympathy or support.

Playing the Good Mother: The Construction of Anjanette's Public Image

In addition to safeguarding Derrion's legacy from racist attacks that constructed him as already guilty, Anjanette had to protect her own public image or risk having her character and integrity as a mother attacked by the media. She worked hard to keep the fact that she had been incarcerated out of the hands of reporters and the plaintiffs defending Derrion's assailants. Her lawyers told her she could risk losing the case entirely should this information be leaked. She recalled concealing her past from the media with me: "Everything I did, they would try to use it to crucify me. If they had found out that I had been to jail, they would have said, 'Well, she went to jail, so no wonder her son was out here acting a fool if his mama be out here acting a fool too!' you know what I am saying? You got to watch every little thing you say! I couldn't say a damn thing." After a while, the intense scrutiny Anjanette faced compelled her to withdraw from public appearances all together. She said:

> Eventually, it had gotten so bad that I just said, 'No more TV.' Because if I hadn't, I would have just cussed the TV people out because they were just so aggressive! But I didn't want to run the chance of ruining Derrion's case, so I said, "No more TV." I tried to make a transition here at home as normal as possible. When I left court, I would go pick up my daughter from school, come home, make dinner, we would talk about our day, she would do her homework, clean up, go to bed. I just tried to make our lives as normal as possible.

Anjanette reveals how navigating the media and legal system was taxing on her emotional well-being, demanding constant vigilance over what she could and could not share. She also shows how much is at stake for inner-city, African American mothers who enter the public as advocates

[49] Deanna Van Ligten, "Grief and the Foreclosure of Hope: A Phenomenological Investigation of Violent Loss among Inner-City African American Women," PhD dissertation (The Wright Institute, 2005), 1-10.

for their children in the aftermath of their murders. Failing to conceal aspects of one's past has the potential to undermine hundreds of hours in court and thousands of dollars in legal fees.

Emotionally depleted from their grief, African American mothers are additionally burdened with the task of shielding themselves and their children from racist and classist attacks from outsiders. Juxtaposing the characterization of Derrion in the media with Anjanette's memory of her son illuminates the oversimplification of their experience in the media. It highlights the sort of personal attributes, such as scholastic achievement, African American youth must possess in order for their lives to garner public sympathy. Unlike their more socially and economically privileged peers, the murder of an African American, inner-city youth is only publicly recognized when and if they are seen as exceptionally productive citizens.[50] Unlike John's portrayal of Derrion as an obedient, honor roll student, Anjanette described Derrion as "as a pretty good kid" who "did some crazy shit," humanizing his flattened representation in the media. In sharing this reflection, Anjanette dismantles the binary constructed by journalists like Johns where honor roll students take on a saintly status free of moral missteps.

Simplified Characterizations of Derrion's Assailants

Derrion was not the only victim of the media's overly simplistic characterizations of good students and gang bangers, as that same flawed binary was also used against the Derrion's assailants—Silvonus Shannon, Eric Carson, Eugene Riley, Leopold Colbert, and Eugene Bailey. In the process, these media accounts crystalized the opposition of law-abiding honor students like Derrion on the one hand and ruthless criminals like his assailants on the other. Unlike Derrion, who was represented as both sympathetic and exceptional, these young men were stripped of their humanity. In the process, the circumstances and life experiences that Derrion shared with his assailants were either ignored or manipulated to amplify the eventual distinctions that left Derrion dead and his assailants in custody.

The public villanization of Derrion's attackers was constructed in large part through the absence of their families in media reporting. While journalists conducted numerous and extensive interviews with Anjanette, when she recalled Derrion's commitment to his church and showed pictures of her family on vacation and at church, there was no coverage of the assailants' loved ones. While some of the young men had grown up in foster care, the majority were raised by their biological families, who (like Anjanette) tried to advocate for their children. During the trial, Silvonous's cousin Leona Shannon pleaded for a lighter sentence, saying that Silvonous was a good person who "wanted to go to college too." Dreams of social mobility and educational attainment are shared among young people growing up in Chicago's Southside. Leona's words help us remember all that Derrion and these young men shared before the fight that changed the course of all their lives forever.

Carson, Colbert, Riley, and Shannon were charged with first degree felony murder and sentenced to up to 32 years in prison. Although none of the young men had criminal records, tough-on-crime policies beginning with The Violent Crime Control Act and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 encouraged municipal and state courts to lengthen prison sentences even in cases where defendants showed no previous threat to public safety. Trial transcripts reveal that the defendants were caught in a complex and longstanding conflict between neighboring communities on the far southside, whose feud was exacerbated by structural inequality and institutional neglect.

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[50] John Márquez, "The Black Mohicans: Representations of Everyday Violence in Postracial Urban America," *American Quarterly* 64, no. 3 (2012): 625-651.

Familial pleas like Leona's were ignored in media reporting, replaced instead with mug shots and accusations. Despite being identified as "thugs" and "gang bangers" in news reporting, none of the four young men convicted of Derrion's murder had any prior criminal records or gang associations. The repeated citing of Derrion's academic achievements and adherence to institutional expectations reflects the media's effort to place Derrion in opposition to the young men who killed him. Implicitly, Derrion's distinctiveness as a "good boy" and "honor roll student" is what the media used to explain why his peers targeted him and to make a case for increased security and police presence in Chicago Public Schools. As Derrion was "softened" into a likeable, tragic victim through Anjanette's sharing of details from his personal life, the young men who killed him were "hardened" into unsympathetic criminals.[51] By juxtaposing the ways all five men were represented, we learn how the stock characters of "honors student" and "thug" are mutually reinforcing and how they ultimately result in the flattening of all of their individual complexity and humanity.

Despite the simplified portrayal of Derrion and his assailants in the news media, Ameena Matthews—a mediator with antiviolence program *Ceasefire* who supported Anjanette throughout the aftermath of Derrion's murder—was one of the few public figures who complicated the narratives of "innocent victim" and "violent thug" that pervaded mainstream news coverage. In an interview with reporters, Ameena deflected questions that tried to neatly package Derrion and his assailants into either gang or non-gang affiliated groups. Like many kids, Ameena said, Derrion did hang out with some of the same boys involved in the fight that took his life. "That's the way it is," Ameena said. "You hang out with who lives in your neighborhood. Kids are not going to say, 'Oh, this kid is a gang banger. I better stay away.' All of them want to be friends with the kid who lives next door or in their project. That's the way it is," she said. "You hang out with who lives in your neighborhood."[52] Ameena's insights resonate with Prudence Carter's research on "cultural straddlers"—young people who develop skills to straddle two worlds, meeting the expectations of the schools' cultural codes and co-creating meaning with their peers.[53] These subjects are able to "hold on to their native cultural style but also embrace dominant cultural codes and resources."[54] By refusing to categorize Derrion and his assailants, and providing an explanation that complicates and humanizes the relationship between these boys, Ameena's statements demonstrate how Derrion and his assailants could be seen as having similarly complex, fluid identities impacted by similar patterns of poverty, reduced opportunity, and environmental violence. Both Ameena and Carter's insights reveal the overlapping qualities of both Derrion's and his peer's identities. Derrion, an honor student, could have been friends with peers involved with criminal activity.

Similarly, his peers shared Derrion's academic and future aspirations. Victor Rios expands on the notion of cultural straddlers in his work with Oakland youth to show how, contrary to common narratives, youth who do well in school are not shunned by their peers for their academic achievements but often praised for their accomplishments. Instead, Rios found that tension only arose between youth when high achieving individuals were perceived to be participating in the surveillance and control orchestrated by the police and school officials. The

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[51] Nikki Jones, conversation with author, April 2, 2014.

[52] Ashley Fantz, "Beaten Teen Had 'Different Attitude' than Other Boys, Activist Says," CNN, September 29, 2009, http://www.cnn.com/2009/CRIME/09/29/chicago.teen.profile/index.html.

[53] Prudence L. Carter, "Straddling Boundaries: Identity, Culture, and School," *Sociology of Education* 79, no. 4 (2006): 304-28.

[54] Victor M. Rios, *Punished: Policing the Lives of Black and Latino Boys* (New York: New York University Press, 2011).

media's insinuation that Derrion's lawfulness and academic achievements are what sparked the tension with his peers is simply not supported by research into urban school dynamics;[55] instead, this inaccurate and misleading narrative helped uphold the narrative of good and bad racialized subjects.

Constructing the Respectable Black Family

The representation of the Alberts as a nuclear American family was essential to Derrion being seen as a "worthy victim."[56] Like many African American families, Anjanette was part of an extended kinship network that provided both material and emotional support to Anjanette as a single mother. While news coverage represented the Alberts as a loving, well-to-do, Christian family, in private interviews Anjanette accused her extended family of exploiting Derrion's murder as an opportunity for financial gain. According to Anjanette, several members of her extended family went to the church where a collection was being made for Derrion's funeral expenses and requested the funds be dispersed to them, without Anjanette's consent. Anjanette shared the following in an interview:

> "My family... they got their money, and they went to Vegas just a week after I buried my son. They were trying to self-make off his name. That's not fair! *That's not fair!* We all had a hand in his upbringing because we were all supposed to be family. I know your child. You know my child. You know? You can't step up and say you did it all. You didn't do it all. You probably didn't even do half! But I am not gonna not acknowledge you for at least stepping up, but they tried to go in and say they were the only ones. Well where was I?!"

Anjanette's family's effort to "self-make" off of Derrion's legacy resulted in Anjanette further distancing herself from them. Previously, Anjanette had relied on her extended kin to help raise her two children. However, the way they used their status as "family" for personal gain following her son's death caused her to sever ties with them.

The impact Derrion's death had on Anjanette's familial relationships raises the question of how poor families survive severe crises. In the past, researchers such as Carol Stack noted how poor African American families immersed themselves in extensive networks of kin and friends for survival; more recent studies show an erosion of these relationships.[57] For Anjanette, self-imposed isolation became the alternative to the risk, disappointment, and conflict that accompanied her relationships with relatives. However, this strategy did not solve the problem of making ends meet, which in that particular moment of widening inequality, rising joblessness and stagnant wages was especially difficult. Mathew Desmond observes in his research on evictions, that poor people rely on "disposable ties"—short lived but intense relationships with acquaintances that temporarily provide housing, food, and other necessities in times of dire need.[58] In Anjanette's case, Derrion's murder captured the attention of political and spiritual

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[55] Ibid.; Martin Sanchez-Jankowski, *Islands in the Street: Gangs and American Urban Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

[56] Lisa Marie Cacho, *Social Death: Racialized Rightlessness and the Criminalization of the Unprotected* (New York: New York University Press, 2012).

[57] Matthew Desmond, "Disposable Ties and the Urban Poor," *American Journal of Sociology* 117 (2012): 1295-1335; Robert J. Sampson, Great American City (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021); Carol B. Stack, *All Our Kin: Strategies for Survival in a Black Community* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974).

[58] Matthew Desmond, "Disposable Ties and the Urban Poor," *American Journal of Sociology* 117 (2012): 1295-

leaders who were able to provide her immediate, short-term financial assistance. For Anjanette, these gifts were critical to her survival in the aftermath of Derrion's murder.

Anita Alvarez Re-election Ad Campaign

When Anjanette first learned that distant family friends were fraudulently collecting money in Derrion's name, she contacted the State Attorney Anita Alvarez's office. Learning that their actions were a criminal matter, Anjanette hoped to have her family members held legally accountable and the donated funds returned. However, after several attempts to reach Alvarez's team, Anjanette never received a response. Anjanette eventually learned to accept that this injustice was never going to be resolved and she moved on. However, years later, Anjanette lay awake one night watching television and something caught her eye. It was election season in the city of Chicago, and political campaigns ran into one another on late night TV. Suddenly she saw her own tear-stained face flash across the screen. State's Attorney Anita Alvarez's re-election ad showed Alvarez running through an urban neighborhood with intermittent images of victims of violence, their families, and street memorials.

State's Attorney Anita Alvarez (left) joins Derrion Albert's mother Anjanette Albert and grandfather Norman Golliday at the Cook County Criminal Courthouse after Lapoleon Colbert was sentenced to 32 years in prison in Albert's death. (Michael Tercha / *Chicago Tribune*)

The image of them together was taken on August 29, 2011, at the sentencing of the fifth and final defendant of Derrion's trial, where Anjanette and Alvarez met for the first time, surrounded by swaths of journalists photographing and filming them. The photograph shot by Michael Tercha of the *Chicago Tribune* was widely circulated in the press and displays Alvarez standing beside Anjanette alongside Norman Golliday (Derrion's grandfather). Their eyes are downcast, their shoulders slightly forward, and their faces long. Anjanette wears narrow glasses and a simple white tee shirt; her hair is short and simply styled. Around Anjanette's neck is a pendant in the shape of a key and, upon a closer look, a cross. Norman, standing to her right, wears a short-sleeved turquoise shirt and a white undershirt peeking through the open collar. The pain in their expressions is undeniable and the sense of their vulnerability is augmented by their submissive body language and clothing that suggests a lower-class status compared to Alvarez, who is wearing a professional suit. Although she is slightly out of focus, Alvarez is in the foreground, standing in front of Anjanette and Norman, facing a swath of microphones.

1335.

Alvarez's mouth is slightly ajar in mid-speech baring teeth. She stands erect and looks directly into the crowd. Her physical posture in front of the family and addressing the crowd connotes her leadership and power. We understand that she is speaking on behalf of the family, after the sentencing of the final defendant to 32 years in prison for the murder of Derrion Albert.

Enraged at seeing her image used without her permission, Anjanette contacted Alvarez's office. Again, Anjanette made several attempts to reach the State Attorney's office, but none of her calls or emails were returned. Robin Robinson, a local TV journalist who landed the first exclusive interview with Anjanette during the murder trial, urged her to reach out to local news journalist Maudlyne Ihejirika of the *Chicago-Sun Times*. Ihejirika emailed Ken Snyder, the spokesperson for Alvarez, who admitted that Albert had not been contacted before airing the ad. Snyder said: "We used [the photo] in good faith. It was an effort simply to depict Anita at a press conference. If Ms. Albert contacted us, we would have been happy to replace the photo in question had she asked us to." After being informed that Anjanette had in fact attempted to contact Alvarez's office several times, Snyder replied that he was not aware. In an interview with me, Anjanette expressed her outrage and disbelief:

> The worst part is that it makes it seem as if I support her candidacy, and I don't. First, I'm not a political person, and I definitely would never use my son's murder to promote anybody or anything. But more than that, this is someone I reached out to for help a few years later, and I couldn't even get a call back.

The non-consensual use of Anjanette's photo by Alvarez exposes how Black victims' grief becomes commodified and co-opted by political leaders who use images of the suffering in their campaigns to signify their commitment to serving the Black community. As the only Latina to hold the State Attorney's office, Alvarez is a native of the majority Mexican and Mexican American community in Chicago. She often describes herself as a racial and ethnic minority, the daughter of immigrants from a low-income, urban community who can identify with Chicagoans who live in distressed neighborhoods with high rates of violence. Coming up during the 1980s war on crime era, Alvarez made her career off of prosecuting violent criminals and prides herself as being a strong defender of zero tolerance and harsh sentencing, policies that have had devasting consequences for Black and Latinx populations in Chicago and elsewhere. The ad campaign in which Anjanette appears seeks to portray Alvarez in a more nurturing light, where she defends and cares for surviving victims of violence. But to Anjanette, Alvarez's actions only served to exploit her personal suffering, not to uplift the community, and to promote Alvarez's own political aspirations. As the years went on, Anjanette continued to try and forge relationships with concerned leaders, who approached her after Derrion's death and offered her much-needed emotional, political, and monetary support. Like with Alvarez, these unlikely alliances presented both opportunities and challenges that Anjanette navigated with both hope and suspicion.

Linked Fate

Some of the more notable figures who offered Anjanette significant monetary support included Reverend Jesse Jackson and Minister Louis Farrakhan, leader of the Nation of Islam. Anjanette readily accepted their gifts, feeling that their shared racial identity is what enabled them to understand her predicament. Anjanette's interactions with Jackson and Farrakhan reveal that they made concerted efforts to perform their racial solidarity through large and immediate

donations, the use of local Black colloquialisms when speaking with her, as well as the use of "we," "us," and "ours" in public appearances with her. This quote describes one such interaction:

> Right off the bat Jesse Jackson called me and asked if my family had been pocketing the donation money we got for Derrion. He straight up asked me "Dem *iggas be stealing?!" (Laughs) and Lois Farrakhan said the same thing. Jesse Jackson paid the cemetery. I only had $12,000 in insurance; the school said that they were going to pay $5,000 and that they were gonna help out. They never did. We thought that all we had to pay was $2,400 for the funeral home. The rest of the money was to put him as close as possible to my mama in the cemetery. Farrakhan sent his son out to us with a check of $11,000. He said to me "Is that it? Is that all that needs to be done? Is that really all you need?" But at the moment I couldn't think. I didn't do the headstone. I couldn't even think about it. That was the only thing that didn't happen.

Anjanette appreciated the ways in which both Jackson and Farrakhan understood the necessity of immediate financial support in the days following Derrion's murder. Jackson's question "Dem *iggas be stealing?!" exemplifies how he both understood some of the unique issues that arise for Black families who have lost loved ones and his desire to relate to Anjanette as a close "insider." By shifting from "professional" to "street" vernacular when speaking to Anjanette, Jackson shows how he too altered his demeanor, language, and tone when discussing the murder publicly and privately in order to appear more relatable and palatable to those outside of his race and to represent himself as more connected to the "street life."[59]

Jackson and Farrakhan made numerous media appearances alongside Anjanette in the days and months following the murder. They both spoke at Derrion's funeral, drawing a large crowd as well as press. They spoke of Derrion's death as a call to action, encouraging parents to reclaim and protect their children. Farrakhan said he was bothered to hear a father say on a TV report that young people were not salvageable. "I believe all of us can be saved," Farrakhan said. "Derrion's righteous life served as a redemptive force to make us get up and save our children." Jackson added that students have the right to attend the "closest and safest school possible" rather than have to take multiple buses to get home. "Why send these children into harm's way every day?" Jackson asked. "These are war zones. This wasn't an incident, it's a pattern." While never explicitly calling out systemic racism, Jackson in particular alludes to the racial dynamics that contribute to urban violence. Identifying Derrion's death as part of a bigger social problem and using "our" to describe the children impacted by violence, Jackson subtly performed his racial solidarity. Anjanette's acceptance of Jackson and Farrakhan, despite her generalized feelings of distrust, exemplifies Michael Dawson's concept of linked fate, whereby African Americans are more willing to place trust in Black leadership out of a sense of shared struggle for racial equality despite occupying different socio-economic classes.[60]

While there were obvious and immediate benefits to receiving this financial support, it did not significantly improve her ongoing socio-economic status and also presented some challenges. For example, Anjanette expressed feeling frustrated by the way people equated her relationships with community leaders and her visibility in the media with economic success. She

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[59] Elijah Anderson, *Code of the Street: Decency, Violence, and the Moral Life of the Inner City* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999).

[60] Michael C. Dawson, *Behind the Mule: Race and Class in African-American Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

shared the following reflections with me: "Like the other day, my friend was like 'Yeah girl you famous!' And I was like 'Nah, you know what they say about the rich and the famous? Well, I would rather be *rich* than famous, so don't even look at me like I am a celebrity—I ain't got nothing!'" In this excerpt, we learn that Anjanette felt the need to correct people's perceptions of her as having financially benefitted from her son's murder. The reality is that she continues to struggle financially, as she did long before she and Derrion were catapulted into the spotlight. Anjanette said: "People don't understand that I lost my son. I try to smile as much as I can, especially when I am out in the sunshine. I try to smile, but I think they forget that I still have a kid that I can't let down. You know, I think they forget. They look at me and they be like, 'Oh, she's okay. The media loves her.' But they don't know that I don't love the media." Here we see how the amount of media and political attention received by Derrion's death occluded the stress and anxiety that pressed upon Anjanette as she struggled to provide for her surviving daughter Rhea. We likewise see in Chapter Three how Debbie Aguilar concurrently disliked the media and mobilize it to her benefit. The imperative to *police* Derrion's image illuminates how the public's embrace of Anjanette is by and large symbolic, never resulting in a sustained effort to improve her or Rhea's life chances. The family is a powerful institution and discourse connoting social stability, morality, and civic engagement. But its use within public discourse surrounding Derrion's death was not representative of Anjanette's lived experiences. Depicting the family as unified around the tragedy of Derrion's death was important to elicit public support. And while it shaped Derrion into a sympathetic victim in the eyes of the public, that same image was instrumental in severing the few family ties that Anjanette still had.

Race and Mourning: "I guess I'll just stick with the Black people"

As evidenced in both Jesse Jackson and Lois Farrakhan's public discourse, grief is operationalized to form a political community. Loss brings to the fore the relational ties that reveal our fundamental dependency and ethical responsibility to one another. In keeping with the pressures to perform her grief in such a way that would appeal to a mass base, Anjanette framed the loss of Derrion as a tragedy that became an impetus for unity among parents. This concept is illustrated in one of Anjanette's news appearances with CNN reporter Don Lemon. In this video, the viewer witnesses a tearful conversation with Anjanette where she recalls the horror of learning Derrion had been killed and having to identify him at the morgue. Lemon then asks what she wants to say to parents. She responds, "We need to come together, unite, do something! I'm ready. Because you know, if I'm afraid, she's afraid, we are all afraid—you know what I'm saying? I'm sad it took this to make people come together, but I am glad it's happening." In this exchange Anjanette's loss is seen as motivating her to join with other parents to end community violence.

This narrative of progress and hope stands in stark contract with the despair she expressed in her ethnographic interviews. For example, I asked Anjanette what advice she would give other parents going through similar circumstances. She responded: "I can't tell 'em nothing. Nothing. All I can say is it's gonna be a long trip, sister. Get ready. That's why I don't like to meet other moms. Because I don't wanna tell them that. You know? I just don't want to. It's just so sad, and I have no advice for them." By refusing to give parents advice, Anjanette resists the pressures to cast her loss as an opportunity for personal growth and community empowerment. At the same time, Anjanette is the only mother profiled in this project who does not go to group meetings to process her grief. Additionally, she rejects the long-held ideal that trauma is what makes Black women strong. In doing so, she reveals how portraying the murder of her child as

serving a larger purpose (to combat violence) responds to the outside expectation that Black and Latina mothers' grief should be socially productive in its ability to join people around a tragic loss. As we'll see in future chapters, Demitra Barnes, Debbie Aguilar, and Princess Beverly Williams faced similar pressures to contextualize their sons' deaths within larger political agendas. For example, Debbie's loss was used by police to rationalize a larger, pro-policing agenda in Salinas, California.

While historic icons of maternal grief, such as Mamie Till-Bradley, used their despair to catapult racial justice movements, issues of racial or economic inequality were completely absent from Anjanette's publicly aired interviews. Unlike today, where the Black Lives Matter movement has put anti-Black racism at the center of public discourse, there was not a nationally recognized language around how violence disproportionately impacts low-income African Americans. As such, Anjanette largely avoided bringing racism into the discussion of why Derrion was murdered. Instead, she made vague requests for less violence and more unity without making any specific demands. However, in private interviews, racism and the structural obstacles they posed were at the forefront of our conversations.

Anjanette recalled that before deciding to no longer engage with the media, she attempted to only speak with African American journalists, in hopes that they would be more respectful and understanding of her pain. She also pointed to race being an issue when Father Michael Pfleger—a White, Irish-Catholic priest revered for his racial and economic justice activism—actually reached out to her extended family instead of to her in the aftermath of Derrion's murder. Anjanette shared the following:

> I was really mad at Father Pfleger because he went over there to my family's house when he could have easily have just said "I wanna talk to his mother." I don't have anything to do with my family, and him being the distinguished man that he is, how can he go over there instead of to me and make it seem like I am the bad person, the bad mother, like I did something wrong? So I just said, "Well, I dunno how I feel about Father Pfleger. I guess I'll just stick with the Black people."

Anjanette's belief that Father Pfleger's race was the reason why he made the mistake of reaching out to her extended family indicates that she experiences race as a dividing force, rather than a non-issue, which the absence of race in her public statements also implies. It also highlights how Black people, although imperfect, are the lesser of two evils to Anjanette. The complexity of her views on race points to Anjanette's awareness of the polarizing effect of race and racism. Rather than risk losing potential supporters, she did not share her feelings on race outside of private conversations.

Not discussing race explicitly and publicly in relation to Derrion's murder illustrates another constraint on how Black mothers can express their grief. While acutely aware of how racial difference impacted people's ability to empathize with her pain, Anjanette had to conceal her true feelings when appearing in the media. To point to racism would run the risk of losing the public platform she needed in order to win legal justice for Derrion. Her anger and distrust towards outsiders would have been an inappropriate form of Black grieving. So she and the Black leaders who came to her aid concealed their true feelings and found subtle ways to acknowledge their shared struggle amongst themselves.

The Interrupters

The news media was not alone in its desire to mold Anjanette's experience into a narrative of social progress and community unity. Progressive and educational film media also drew upon Derrion's killing to showcase the effectiveness of their respective organizations. *The Interrupters* (2011) directed by Steve James and written by Alex Kotlowitz is one such film.[61] This documentary showcases the work of Ceasefire, a conflict mediation organization based in Chicago. Ceasefire, the brainchild of Dr. Gary Slutkin, views violence as a public health epidemic. Its objective is to alleviate violence through community-based conflict mediation led by former gang members. Shot in various violence-afflicted neighborhoods in Chicago, Derrion's murder is one of the central case studies featured in the film. The scenes that discuss Derrion's murder highlight Ameena Matthews, one of Ceasefire's leading conflict mediators. Ameena is shown working tirelessly to prevent violent retaliations following Derrion's brutal murder. Ameena befriended Anjanette during this time and supported her during the immediate aftermath.

Despite Ameena's support, Anjanette felt that the filmmakers exploited her son's murder. A moment of intense bitterness arose while I was interviewing Anjanette when she recalled being asked by someone (in the flurry of interviews she did in the weeks following Derrion's funeral) what Ameena Matthews meant to her. Her response to this question, which made it to the final cut of the film, shows a tearful Anjanette offering heartfelt praise for Ameena for remaining by her side after Derrion was killed. Anjanette tells the camera, "Ameena is *very* important to us. Every day she was right there by my side." It was not until seeing the film did Anjanette understand that she was asked that question to showcase Ceasefire's work. Anjanette shared that there had been so many cameras around after the murder she didn't realize that *The Interrupters* film crew was interviewing her. It was only after the movie came out that she realized how prominently her son's murder was featured in it. Anjanette claims that she was never asked if she wanted to be in their film and never received any royalties for participating. She felt used by the filmmakers and pointed out that while her story was important to both the film's plot and the promotion of Ceasefire's work, she personally did not benefit from the film at all. While Anjanette appreciated Ameena's encouragement and protection in the days following the funeral, like so many other relationships forged in that moment of crisis, their friendship evaporated as time passed. Anjanette's interactions with Ceasefire and her appearances in *The Interrupters* illuminates how Anjanette's loss was used by the filmmakers to promote the work of their organization's conflict mediators. The fact that Anjanette was not approached by filmmakers to discuss how she would be portrayed in the film provides another example of the "disposability" of her ties to supposed allies in the aftermath of Derrion's murder. It also highlights how African American mothers' grief is co-opted, even by cultural workers who ostensibly wish to end the violence that plagues underserved, urban communities.

One illustration of community responses to violence have been site-specific and institutional forms of memorialization—such as personalized street signs. Yet in the case of Anjanette, these efforts become another mode through which racism obstructed Black bereavement. In a desire for closure, Anjanette spearheaded a campaign to have the street where Derrion was murdered named after him. Anjanette told *Chicago RedEye* journalists: "I think that the children—they should remember what happened out there that day. It would remind the kids. All I'm trying to say is, 'You don't have to do this. Remember what happened.'"[62] However,

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[61] *The Interrupters,* directed by Steve James (Cinema Guild, 2011), DVD.

[62] Leonor Vivanco, "Derrion Albert's Mother Fights for Honorary Street Name," *Chicago RedEye*, December 2, 2013, Http://articles.redeyechicago.com/2013-12-02/news/44670318_1_anjanette-albert-derrion-albert-mother-

creating a street sign for Derrion quickly became another way in which her efforts to commemorate his life were complicated by race, place, and class-based discrimination. In Chicago, city ordinance gives aldermen the authority to arrange honorary street signs. Ald. Carrie Austin, whose ward includes the area around Fenger High School, was resistant to create Derrion's street sign, as she felt it set a precedent. She said in an interview:

> "I've had quite a few young people in my area die from violence, not in the same manner, because in Derrion's case it was national. But that doesn't lessen anyone else's loss. What would I say to the other children that have lost their lives in my ward? Am I to do an honorary sign on every street? I mean I love that child because he went to my school. He did nothing wrong. But what would I tell every other mother?"[63]

Austin's feeling that honoring Derrion would set a precedent highlights how the murders of young African American men are not regarded as discrete, individual lives but as an ongoing crisis facing an entire group. Holding up the death of one young person, even in an effort to deter violence, is seen as having the potential to eclipse or devalue others that have been lost.

This in turn presents an added burden to victims' families who take on the labor of fighting for their loved one's memory to be honored. While Austin describes having "love" for Derrion because he attended a high school in her district, she felt embattled when faced with the decision to honor Anjanette's request for a street sign. According to Anjanette, she and Austin would quarrel about the street sign for years at community meetings. Eventually, Anjanette, in partnership with a variety of community organizations, got Austin to agree. However, rather than experiencing this as a victory, Anjanette described it as being somewhat disappointing and bittersweet:

> It was kinda like--I was glad it was getting done, but I wish I didn't have to. There are so many other children who lose their lives, who probably deserve honors but who get nothing. There are so many moms, so many moms. It's so sad, it's so sad. I know a mom that she been looking for who killed her daughter for 20 years. She's sick. She has been through chemo twice; and she out here, and I have much respect for her because she might be one of the ones that will never know who killed her baby.

Anjanette reveals how even establishing Derrion's honorary street sign was weighted by the reality that the majority of parents who lose their children to street violence will never have their lives' publicly recognized. However, rather than allowing Derrion to become yet another "statistic," Anjanette fought for the street naming. When Austin left her post as Alderman, Anjanette no longer had the political clout to keep the street sign. Several months after it was erected, it was removed. It now stands perched on a shelf in her home among family photos and school portraits of her children. Through Anjanette's struggle for Derrion's street sign, we see that for African American inner-city mothers, publicly and institutionally honoring their murdered children is yet another battle they face in bringing a sense of complexity and individuality to their children's legacies.

Conclusion

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fights.

[63] Ibid.

Anjanette's experience offers a window into the aftermath of urban violence. Shortly after learning of their children's sudden and violent deaths, African American mothers are faced with proving their children's innocence and social worth. They do so by publicly grieving, hoping that by embodying a legible form of maternal love and adhering to the White nuclear family ideal that they will dispel racist assumptions about their children's criminality. However, the labor of "setting the record straight" is costly as it denies both mothers and their children the right to complex personhood. The centrality of Anjanette's grief in the narrative of Derrion's death reveals how the "iconic ghetto" is co-constructed in the minds of the American public. This is done by constructing notions of rampant Black criminality in need of policing, as well as one-dimensional, African American victims who—despite their best efforts at "playing by the rules"—are victimized by their own community.[64] Both Derrion "the honors student" and Anjanette "the bereaving mother" embody the exceptional minority of the Black inner city who are deemed worthy of public mourning.

However, the narrative of Black exceptionalism surrounding Anjanette and Derrion proves to be both divisive and unfounded. As Anjanette's words reflect, she and Derrion shared the ordinary struggles of any parent and child living on Chicago's South Side. Their lives were shaped by the constraints imposed by racism and structural inequality, and they both used their resources and agency to build their lives in spite of them. Anjanette's experience shows us that even when the public acknowledges the deaths of African American youth, it is accompanied by a unique set of responsibilities that are shouldered by their mothers. Anjanette had to challenge the racist assumptions about the moral inferiority of her and her son by ascribing to narratives that denied her complexity, agency, and resiliency. Anjanette's story also reveals that even when families' losses are acknowledged, they still receive inadequate support from law enforcement, the legal system, and society as a whole. Despite her visibility in the public, Anjanette continues to experience isolation, as well as financial and emotional hardship. Her experience illuminates how the performance of collective mourning following the deaths of African American youth do not culminate in sustained attention or care for those who survive them. Research and policy change are needed to develop and implement comprehensive and non-exploitative systems of support for families like the Alberts.

[64] Anderson, *Code of the Street,* 22.

CHAPTER TWO

Black Single Motherhood and Homicide's Impact on Upward Mobility: Demitra Barnes's Story

On Sunday, April 19, 2010, while celebrating his eighteenth birthday, African American Davante Riley was fatally shot. He and four of his friends were at a family member's home in East Oakland when a young partygoer accidentally set off a firearm that hit Davante. Demitra Barnes, Davante's mother, found out about the shooting while celebrating a friend's birthday in a nearby suburb. Davante's father called Demitra to tell her the devastating news. She says,

> All I remember is dropping my phone right there and running for the door. I drove so far that night. I remember the tunnel going into the city, and it kept going and going, and I felt I would never make it. I was praying, just praying he was still alive. I had been drinking that night. It had been a party, ya know, but no, not anymore. Now I don't drink, not for anything. Not since that night.

With this memory, Demitra articulates the responsibility she felt about Davante's death to violence. Had she not been drinking, she thinks, would he have been killed? In response to this guilt, Demitra self-isolated and made her world small in order to survive. No longer did she go to baby showers or church. She stopped drinking and became controlled and hyper-vigilant. Demitra worried what would happen if she were to drink and let go of control again. In this way, she found a new way to live in a world that was nothing but triggers and reminders of her perceived failure to protect her son. And this radical strategy worked, for a while.

Methods

This chapter draws on five years of field research I conducted in North Oakland, California from 2013-2018, specifically semi-structured interviews with and observations of Demitra. I first met Demitra at the Purple Gala, an annual event held by 1000 Mothers to Prevent Violence. This nonprofit was created in 2006 by Lorrain Taylor, who had lost her twin sons, Ablade and Obadiah, in a drive-by shooting six years before. 1000 Mothers to Prevent Violence serves families and individuals directly impacted by violence by facilitating peer-led grief groups and working closely with the police. The Purple Gala, then, is an opportunity for families, community leaders, police, and faith leaders to come together and honor surviving family members of homicide victims. In 2013, the event was held at St. Columba Church in North Oakland, and Demitra, her mother, and I ended up seated next to each other. When I explained my research to Demitra, she was interested and wanted to talk more. We continued to meet over the next five years, coming together twice a semester to chat on the campus of Holy Names University, where Demitra was taking classes towards her Master of Social Work. The hillside campus is one of the most serene and picturesque places in Oakland; and we would have long interviews next to the shrines in the gardens. In my research, I supplemented these interviews with local news about the events Demitra describes, to give context to how she showed up publicly and used her grief to effect change. In the below photo of Demitra Barnes, taken the day she graduated with her MSW from Holy Names University, she wears a cap—adorned with a framed picture of Davante and the words, "She turned her can'ts into cans and her dreams into plans."

Violent Crime in Oakland

Overall, in American cities, violence has drastically diminished since the 1990s—but not for everyone. African American men without high school diplomas living in policed areas, like Oakland, are the most vulnerable to gun violence than any other racial group. Over the last 25 years, Oakland's crime rates have been higher—and in some years significantly higher—than the state average for the four types of violent crimes (homicide, robbery, aggravated assault, and rape).[1] Cities like Oakland are experiencing a widening disparity in wealth—as illustrated by the construction of more high rises and increasing numbers of people making more than $100,000 per year—and the entrenched poverty, lack of resources, and the way violent crimes impact working class Black, indigenous, people of color has remained the same or gotten worse.[2] In the case of homicide, working-class African American men without high school diplomas are particularly vulnerable to victimization. Contrary to claims of improvement, Oakland continues to have one of the highest crime rates of all California cities, particularly for violent crimes.[3] Statistics that do not control for race, class, gender, and education level produce results that are merely reflections of middle-class, White residents' relative protection from the threat of gun violence. Davante was clearly not protected by the "low" homicide rates. He was the 28th

[1] Magnus Lofstrom, "Gun Deaths Drive CA's Largest-Ever Rise in Homicides," *Public Policy Institute of California*, July 13, 2021, https://www.ppic.org/blog/gun-deaths-drive-californias-largest-ever-rise-in-homicides/.

[2] Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (New York: Liveright, 2017).

[3] Magnus Lofstrom and Brandon Martin, "California's Major Cities See Some Increases in Crime," *Public Policy Institute of California,* October 9, 2020, https://www.ppic.org/blog/californias-major-cities-see-some-increases-in-crime/

homicide in Oakland that year. Of the 95 total victims in 2010, 74 were African American, and the majority were young men between the ages of 18 and 30 years old.[4]

Using Michael Burawoy's method of the extended case study, I describe the longer arc of Demitra's grieving life by acknowledging and tracing the losses she endured from childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. I also mark as significant the personal and professional losses that preceded the death of her son, including the loss of her home and job during the mortgage crisis of 2008.[5] Demitra's story offers a window into the pervasiveness of unacknowledged grief in Black women and girls' lives, as well as the resilience they are required to cultivate. This research adds to the growing body of literature led by Black feminist scholars who center their work on the internal, psychic, spiritual, and emotional worlds of Black women and girls.

Writing Demitra's life story is a fraught project. The racist narratives of the dysfunctional Black family that circulate her story are so pervasive that it proved particularly difficult to tell her story without falling into the trap of these destructive narrative frames. Conservative discourses already haunt the project I am writing, as do the history of academics exploiting the suffering of the Black community in the name of science.[6] Having been entrusted with these stories in the hopes that they might allow others to know the multiple dimensions of what these mothers frequently suffer in silence, I also aim to expose the tensions that make sharing their stories so difficult. In order to provide the context in which to fully grasp the injustice of what mothers experience, I offer some insight into Demitra's upbringing and background. Personal histories were a critical way in she understood her own experience and the place grief held within her life. For these reasons, I chose to include parts of the stories where Demitra (and the other mothers too) do not always appear perfect. For the participants, these were simply parts of their identities that made them the women they are today.

Socially Legible Grief

The death of Davante was a socially legible loss, at least initially. Demitra's family, friends, and extended social networks understood that as a mother, Demitra was robbed of something precious and profound; and they "gave her permission" to grieve. However, when Demitra's pain did not seem to ease at the pace that others expected, they shamed her for being vulnerable and pressured her to move on. I interpret Demitra's inability to stop grieving within normative time as a refusal to be ignored and have her emotions repressed. She understood it as an expression of her undying love and commitment to her son, despite others demanding that she cease grieving and start a new family. The murder of Davante exposed Demitra to peer-led grief groups where family members of homicide victims—almost exclusively mothers—shared their experiences.[7] Participating in these circles eventually led her to seek individual counseling in addition to her support group. Through therapy, Demitra finally had the opportunity to mourn without the social stigma.

Equally as important, Demitra also began acknowledging, with her counselor, other losses she had experienced but never had the language or container to name and process. Some of these challenges she confronted only after Davante's death included the emotional

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[4] Harry Harris, "Homicides, overall crime in Oakland dropped in 2010," *East Bay Times*, December 30, 2010, https://www.eastbaytimes.com/2010/12/30/homicides-overall-crime-in-oakland-dropped-in-2010/.

[5] Michael Burawoy, et al., *Ethnography Unbound* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

[6] Dorothy E. Roberts, *Killing the Black Body*: *Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty* (New York: Vintage, 1998).

[7] Terry L. Martin and Kenneth J. Doka, *Men Don't Cry—Women Do: Transcending Gender Stereotypes of Grief* (Philadelphia: Brunner/Mazel, 2000), 4-6.

abandonment she experienced as a young child, even as she also witnessed poverty and substance abuse growing up in East Oakland. At this time, Demitra says she processed the regret of never having a strong group of friends in high school, or supportive teachers and mentors. The loss of never marrying or co-parenting her son was only compounded by the subsequent loss of her home and her job. Demitra mourned not only the loss of things that had happened but also experiences she had always dreamed of having. Becoming a grandmother was the most poignant loss—an experience that she felt would have be reparative for her. As a grandmother, she had hoped to embody the tenderness and patience she was unable to express when she was raising her son as a single mother. All of these losses compounded the pain of losing both Davante and her identity as a mother.

Demitra's case highlights how Black mothers are systematically and interpersonally denied the right to be vulnerable. And while some are allowed a small window in which they can articulate losses related to their role as mothers, the other heartbreaks and losses of their lives are expected to go unacknowledged. As Black women, they are expected to simply persevere and endure. Analyzing Demitra's life through the lens of grief, we understand how her son's death compounded previous losses that were not as socially legible to others as cause for grief (e.g., the loss of a home or the loss of the opportunity to become a grandmother). The insight Demitra gained in acknowledging the pain and disappointment she felt at various stages throughout her life points to the transformative power of allowing the bereaved to simply be present, accommodated as opposed to repressed or denied.

Social and Political Context in which Demitra was Born

Demitra Barnes was born in the early 1970s in a struggling, working-class household in East Oakland, California at the height of the Black Power Movement. Like many African Americans families, her family had migrated during World War II to escape the racial terror of the U.S. South.[8] Once sharecroppers, the Barnes family settled in the Bay Area where work in the railroads and shipyards was plentiful. Of course, the Golden State was not immune to anti-Black racism and anti-immigrant sentiment. Job and housing discrimination, as well as inadequate schooling and healthcare, constrained southern migrants' access to upward social mobility.[9]

Both free and enslaved Blacks had relocated to California in the early years of the Gold Rush (1848-1855), paving the way for Black families—such as the Rustins, Dykes, Howards, and Andersons—to subsequently accumulate wealth and afford assistance to African American newcomers.[10] Located in North Oakland and South Berkeley, the Black elite established cultural and economic centers to serve the growing Black population. The incorporation of Black southern migrants by the well-to-do strengthened the Black community, paving the way for the East Bay to become (like Los Angeles) a Black metropole of the West. The Black Power Movement of the 1960s and 1970s was possible in part because of these long-established African American families. The implementation of Black owned businesses, banks, residential

[8] Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: the Epic Story of America's Great Migration* (New York: Vintage Books, 2011).

[9] Natalia Molina, *Fit to Be Citizens? Public Health and Race in Los Angeles, 1879-1939* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

[10] Jan Batiste Adkins, *African Americans of Monterey County* (Charleston, South Carolina: Arcadia Publishing, 2015); Susan Anderson, "In the Library: Hidden Histories of African Americans in the Bay Area" (presentation, North Baker Library, California Historical Society, San Francisco, CA, February 18, 2020); Rudolph M. Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977).

properties, schools, churches, and cultural centers created physical spaces where the question of attaining collective Black liberation could be debated.

These institutions, as well as the flow of Black migrants from the U.S South, East, and Midwest to the Bay Area, created a hub where African Americans from across the country began agitating for racial and economic justice. It was this very mixing of ideological and creative ideas that precipitated the Black Power movement. Demitra entered the world just after the term "Black Power" became part of the Civil Rights movement and following the establishment of the Black Panther Party for Self Defense, led by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale. Black students—the children and grandchildren of the sharecroppers, car porters, and shipyard workers—mobilized to challenge the dismal living conditions and police brutality universally experienced by Black communities.[11]

The ideals of the Black freedom struggle challenged structural racism, but they had yet to manifest in tangible ways for Demitra or her community. East Oakland was a segregated neighborhood, and its residents were relegated to low-wage jobs with inflexible hours and few benefits. Demitra's father and mother kept jobs throughout their lives, her father as a janitor and her mother as a factory worker. Her parents worked opposite schedules, and the home was a place of transience; one family member arrived while the other was asleep or leaving for work or school. When Demitra's mother and father were home together, they fought bitterly. Infidelity, alcohol, and money problems fueled the cycle of domestic abuse that imbued Demitra's childhood memories with fear and despair. In the home, Demitra learned to be quiet so as not to wake one of her sleeping parents, or to retreat to her room to avoid being caught up in one of her parents' fights. In her bedroom, she was somewhat protected from both the domestic arguments and the neighborhood violence. Demitra rarely left the house if she was not going to church or school; and even then, she moved cautiously, always on the lookout for potential threats to her safety.

Although the Black Power movement was happening in the streets just outside her parent's East Oakland apartment, Demitra lived worlds away—emotionally and mentally. As long as Demitra could remember, she has kept to herself and rarely had close friends. Instead, she entertained herself playing with her paper dolls, where her love of fashion and style began. Demitra reflects, "We never had enough money for Barbies, but that was okay because with the paper dolls they come with so many more outfits! And that's what I really liked anyways." When she was not absorbed in the glamor of her paper dolls, Demitra engrossed herself in popular television sitcoms, mesmerized by the settings, props, and costumes. In one of our interviews, she remembers,

> DB: I always loved how they could make these worlds come to life and how they matched a character's clothes to their personality.
> IK: Hm, like costume or set design?
> DB: Yeah! See, I didn't even know that was a thing someone could do as a major or for a career. Back then, teacher's didn't really ask you what you wanted to do or what you liked. I just tried to keep out of trouble.

Social isolation was a strategy used by Demitra's parents to protect their daughter and prevent her from developing close relationships with young people in the neighborhood. Such a

[11] Donna Murch, *Living for the City: Migration, Education, and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

friendship could pull their daughter into potentially dangerous situations, where the code of the street would force her to show loyalty by defending a friend or fighting their enemy.[12] A precocious child, Demitra remembers feeling saddened by the poverty and drugs she saw around her. Indeed, Oakland in the 1970s saw a surge in homicides—including the 1973 murder of Oakland's first Black school superintendent, Dr. Marcus Foster, at the hands of the Symbionese Liberation Army.[13] Even as a young girl, Demitra was preoccupied by the pain in her community. The suffering Demitra felt in her own life resonated with the experiences of the people in her community. The despair she felt coincided with the recognition that she had no power to alleviate her community's problems.

Loneliness followed Demitra into middle and high school. She never excelled in academics and drifted between social groups, never feeling that she was "a school type person." Demitra's sense of non-belonging in school paralleled her isolation at home. Although her parents loved her, their own traumas and coping mechanisms (compounded by limited time to spend with Demitra) left her with a profound sense of being unseen and heard at home. With the limited freedom she had to roam and explore her neighborhood, Demitra rarely developed lasting friendships with other neighborhood kids. Social isolation, as promoted by her protective parents, was a strategy Demitra continued to use to protect herself from having to defend and protect others. While Demitra ensured her physical survival with techniques passed down to her from her parents, she also inhabited a lonely world without the sustenance of community.

Sociologists Elijah Anderson and Nikki Jones observed this tactic of social isolation in their research on African Americans living in distressed urban centers.[14] Anderson posits that in some of the most economically depressed and socially abandoned urban enclaves, the rules of civil law do not hold sway. He shows how years of police harassment, brutality, and impunity, leave residents of drug and crime-ridden neighborhoods to protect themselves. Anderson found that residents follow the code of the street: a set of informal rules of behavior organized around a desperate search for respect that governs public social relations. The code of the street, or personal responsibility for one's own safety, begins where the influence of the police ends. This code holds would-be predators accountable by promising "pay back." Individuals draw on their close family, friends, and associates to aid in their defense and retaliation. In a similar vein, by observing African American girls in Philadelphia, Jones discovered that strategic avoidance and social isolation were key tactics used by young women to avoid being seen as unfeminine when pulled into public altercations.[15] Unlike their male counterparts, young women are expected to be "ladylike" and submissive, while at the same time being a "ride or die," meaning loyal and ready to defend. The greater threat of physical and sexual assault accompanied by social stigma, Jones argues, encourages young women to avoid interpersonal conflict.

Like the Philadelphia girls of the aughts, Demitra was raised with and internalized conservative gender expectations of how to be a "good girl." Without a large extended family of cousins or siblings to defend her, Demitra refrained from developing close social contacts, thus becoming a loner who sought anonymity above all else. In adolescence—a critical developmental period where young people strengthen their sense of ego, identity, and group

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[12] Nikki Jones, *Between Good and Ghetto: African American Girls and Inner-City Violence* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2010).

[13] John P. Spencer, *In the Crossfire: Marcus Foster and the Troubled History of American School Reform* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

[14] Elijah Anderson, *Code of the Street: Decency, Violence, and the Moral Life of the Inner City* (Norton, 2000).

[15] Nikki Jones, *Between God and Ghetto: African American Girls and Inner-City Violence* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2009).

belonging—Demitra described how she imagined herself melting into the floor of the school or fading into the wall, so great was her effort to blend into her surroundings so as not to be called out or bullied. Feeling unseen, Demitra entered her last years of high school understandably unsure and uninspired about her future. In her junior year, she became romantically involved with another student, a young man known for his charm and athleticism. During her senior year, she became pregnant with her first and only child. On April 27, 1992, Davante was born at Children's Hospital in North Oakland.

Not long after Davante's birth, his biological father became involved with another woman and left his relationship with Demitra. When I asked Demitra how she felt about this, she shrugged and said, "It is what it is. I've never been a bitter type of person. It's common where I come from; and I didn't see the point of staying mad." Despite this seeming indifference, Demitra does prioritize normative values and the nuclear family structure, at least for herself. She added that it was hard for her as a single woman to raise a boy and wished that Davante had a father figure in his life. Demitra certainly recognizes that many different types of family forms can exist and be healthy; but as a cis, straight woman, she wanted a man with whom to share her life, even while it seemed out of reach because of the hard boundaries she set to protect herself. While Demitra yearned for a romantic partnership, she said in hindsight, "No man or relationship will jeopardize my mental health or peace."

By limiting her expectations of what she desired in a partner, she repressed the anger and grief of not receiving the love she had hoped for in a partner and the father of her child. The protective mechanism in Demitra's response also suggests that she may have repressed feelings of sadness for a childhood and adolescence without community or familial ties. Literature on the adultification of Black women supports this claim, as Black girls are always seen as adults and not children.[16] Thus, the "loss" of one's childhood, girlhood, and adolescence is generally not acknowledged as a grievable loss. Yet, losses such as those expressed by Demitra frequently set the stage for the suppression of other forms of loss that Black women are simply expected to endure.

The Ghettoization of Teenage Pregnancy in Public Policy

During the 1980s and early 1990s, teen pregnancy—particularly among poor Black and Latina adolescents—was a touchpoint through which the culture wars were discursively fought. Conservative scholars such as Samuel Huntington attributed high rates of adolescent and "pre-marital" pregnancy to the denigration of Anglo-American Christianity in the United States. Cloaking their xenophobia with faux concern, conservative critics bemoaned the destruction of White America by Black and Latino families who ostensibly tainted the true America with their dysfunction and pathology. Huntington, among other conservative analysts, used Daniel Moynihan's 1965 report on "The Negro Family" to prove that the roots of the so-called "teen pregnancy crisis" could be found in African American cultural deficiencies. Black social scientists—such as William Julius Wilson and Joyce Ladner—pushed back, arguing that economic restructuring had so stressed Black families that it was longer financially possible to continue their traditional practice of encouraging young couples to marry and raise their child in a nuclear family.[17] Carol Stack, Jacqueline Jones, and Patricia Hill Collins asserted that the

[16] Monique Morris, *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools* (New York: The New Press, 2016).

[17] Joyce Ladner, *The Ties that Bind: Timeless Values for African American Families* (New York Wiley, 1998); William J. Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

historical use of other-mothering and large kinship networks to support child rearing also declined as joblessness, the high cost of living, and the proliferation of incarceration ruptured Black communities. In short, while narrated as a culturally deficient issue, teen pregnancy was simply visible in a different way, a product of larger structural stressors impacting the African American community.

The sentiment Demitra expressed about the departure of her partner resonates with Ladner's findings that many Black teens saw as unavoidable the hardships encountered due to the birth of a child, illustrations of the realities of life over which they had little control. A lifetime of economic deprivation as a result of structural racism, Ladner posits, instilled a profound sense of powerlessness in the adolescents she studied throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s. This was a remarkable shift from the hope she found in teenagers from similar socio-economic statuses in the early 1970s.

While not all Black women, of course, yearn for a monogamous, long-term relationship like Demitra, those who do desire this family form have struggled because of the devastation that neoliberal economic restructuring has had on working class Black Americans, about which both Ladner and Wilson write. In Oakland, deindustrialization was especially devastating for the African American community, many of whom had migrated from the South for work funded by the wartime defense money. In 1958, 25% of the city's total population had lived under the poverty line and nearly 10% made less than $2,000 a year.[18] Union discrimination, work in temporary wartime industries like shipyards, and entrenched patterns of employer discrimination relegated the growing Black population to secondary labor markets. As a result, the enduring class of Black underemployed and unemployed began to emerge. The growing ranks of the jobless and working poor became a displaced population that was alienated from the traditional means of labor organization and civil rights protests. African Americans, and in particular the recent migrants, found themselves vulnerable to economic decline and intensifying police hostility. This was the climate into which Demitra was born in the early 1970s.

By the late 1980s and 1990s, there was a shift from direct aid to "workfare" measures that placed the burden of attaining basic needs on individuals. As described in the Introduction, Clinton's 1992 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act moved a substantial number of adults into narrowly defined work activities with few to no health, educational, or retirement benefits. The stipulation of job acquisition also presented a major challenge to women with dependents, as long hours in low-wage employment has made it difficult to care for children and other family members dependent on them. Inequality has only expanded as the federal government has abandon funding for social programs.

It is not difficult to see how these larger social forces impacted Demitra's life specifically. The outsourcing of manufacturing jobs left working Black families like the Barnes family with fewer quality job possibilities. Public housing and other social programs were left to deteriorate, inviting crime and other threats to public well-being. Well-to-do, African American families departed segregated Black neighborhoods, leaving neighborhoods like East Oakland without business or cultural centers. Growing up, Demitra was often alone as her parents had to

[18] Juan C. Herrera, "Unsettling the Geography of Oakland's War on Poverty: Mexican American Political Organizations and the Decoupling of Poverty and Blackness," *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race* 9, no. 2 (2012): 375-393; Miriam Zuk and Karen Chapple, eds., *Case Studies on Gentrification and Displacement in the San Francisco Bay Area* (Center for Community Innovation at UC Berkeley, July 2015), https://www.urbandisplacement.org/sites/default/files/images/case_studies_on_gentrification_and_displacement-_full_report.pdf

work multiple jobs to make ends meet. The isolation she felt made her vulnerable as well as desirous for connection and intimacy, which resulted in her getting pregnant with Davante.

But with the help of her parents, Demitra was able to give Davante a comfortable life. She worked hard, moving up in the real estate world. Her parents would help by picking up and dropping off Davante at school, giving him dinner, and generally filling in while Demitra was working to provide for them. Eventually, Demitra saved enough money to move out of Oakland to San Ramon, a nearby suburb with a significantly higher mean annual income of nearly $130,0000 compared to Oakland, which is $76,000.[19] Of course, Demitra (like her parents) had to work over 70 hours a week to save enough money to move out of East Oakland, where increased policing heightened tensions and posed a looming threat to her and her son's safety.

With a high-interest mortgage loan, Demitra was able to purchase a home in a middle-class community in the suburbs in 2006. The house provided stability and security but also intensified Demitra's need to work hard to keep up with the mortgage payments. The mortgage crisis of 2008 was devastating for working families like Demitra, who lost her hard-fought-for home, a victim of a subprime loan and inflation. The house, which once held so much promise for Demitra's future, now represented another failure and foreclosed dream. Like many in the housing industry, Demitra was laid off; and again, she found herself under immense pressure to work multiple jobs to provide for herself and her son.

Just two years after the loss of her home, Demitra also lost Davante. In retrospect, Demitra feels regret and powerlessness, wishing she had spent more time with her son instead of responding to the stress and demands of finding new employment and recovering from the foreclosure of her home. Since Davante's birth, she had been committed to building a career in real estate and buying a home in a safe neighborhood. She had been committed to achieving the American Dream, but she was now left with nothing except rage against an economic and social system that had sold her false promises.

"Being a Statistic": Becoming a Single Black Mother

Becoming a mother marked a profound shift in Demitra's worldview that realigned her multiple and intersecting identities. Coming of age during the 1970s and 1980s, Demitra was inundated with stigmatizing portrayals of single Black mothers. Mythical figures like Linda Taylor were used to criminalize welfare recipients, thus promoting neoliberal ideologies that emphasize individual responsibility over state support for basic needs such as housing, education, healthcare, and childcare.[20] Although it was common for women to raise children alone, the stigma surrounding single motherhood intensified with the rise of the conservatives' rhetoric on "family values" and "personal responsibility." As Amanda Freeman's 2017 study shows, having a child and becoming a single mother creates a resounding shift in a woman's identity, there which her behavior, values, and lifestyle are deeply altered.[21] This is especially true for single mothers committed to upward social mobility and financial security. Davante's birth motivated Demitra to strive for a higher socio-economic status. Her son was inextricably linked to the shift in her identity from an isolated wanderer to a self-reliant breadwinner, one

[19] "Quick Facts Oakland, California," U.S. Census Bureau, https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/oaklandcitycalifornia

[20] Josh Levin, *The Queen: The Forgotten Life Behind an American Myth* (New York, NY: Little, Brown & Company, 2019); Evelyn Nakano Glenn, Grace Chang, and Linda Rennie Forcey, eds., *Mothering: Ideology, Experience, and Agency* (Routledge, 2016).

[21] Amanda Freeman, "Moving Up and Out Together: Exploring the Mother-Child Bond in Low Income Single-Mother Headed Families," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 79 (June 2017): 675-689.

capable of providing for her growing family. The following section draws on a comment that elucidates this developmental shift in Demitra's identity formation. I asked Demitra, "How was it for you living with your parents while working and going to school?" and she responded:

> I mean, it was hard. And pretty quickly I saw I needed to work, and I didn't really see the school thing happening. My parents didn't force me out, but I really needed to work to be independent, ya know, and just do my own thing. Having my son at such a young age, I had to do that. I've always managed to have great jobs and make a good living for us, for me and my son, and um, it was good. I never enjoyed what I did, but the pay was good; and I just thought, "Well, what else am I going to do?" If I start somewhere else at the bottom, I won't make as much money, and being a single parent is really hard, so I didn't do it.

Having a child motivated Demitra to pursue a career and leave her parents' home, seeking financial independence and a safer living environment for herself and her son. Demitra worked many jobs in retail, customer service, hospitality, and cleaning. She worked as often as she could, as she was desirous to get independence from her parents and the growing toxicity between them. The decision to prioritize working and growing her savings caused a delay in her own professional development and educational attainment. However, at the time, Demitra felt she had no better option than to work as hard as she could in whatever industry that would hire her.

The sacrifices and subsequent losses experienced by single mothers are socially constructed as being morally and financially justified, due to their supposed moral lapse in getting pregnant. To give up their own ambitions and desires is often expected of women, particularly Black women and other women of color. It is regarded as a necessary sacrifice for the greater good of their community and the family. It is essential to acknowledge Demitra's decision to prioritize earnings over dreams, as it expands our understanding of the ongoing sacrifices expected of Black girls and women. Framing her decision as such also helps us comprehend the catastrophic nature of her son's killing, as it also rendered her sacrifices as a young parent obsolete and devoid of meaning.

Financial constraints prevented Demitra from having the time and money to invest in her own education or a more fulfilling career; but she had not time to process these losses, as she was raising Davante. For grieving mothers like Demitra, the death of a child can be a catalyst to reflect on all the unaddressed grief they had not fully acknowledged. Nina Armstrong, a social worker and grief counselor at Catholic Charities in the East Bay explained the compounding of mothers' grief in the following way:

> Grief works like a melting pot. If you have all these life events and traumas and things that go into this melting pot, it's like the stuff in there begins to settle at the bottom and life is OK. And then suddenly something happens, like this sudden death or another significant, life altering event happens, and it starts to boil over. A lot of stuff at the bottom of the pot starts overflowing. So, while an individual may come to me because of loss to a homicide, we often start talking about their five-year-old selves. Because all that stuff, all that unresolved stuff that we never got help for, that we never figured out completely.

After Davante was killed, Demitra was allowed (for the first time in her life) to express pain, sadness, rage, and remorse, and mourn all of the disappointment she had experienced throughout her life; and she became overwhelmed with hopelessness.

The Dream of Social Mobility

Social media stifled Demitra's efforts to physically distance Davante from the dangers of growing up in Oakland:

> My son was really popular, and he had good friends and not so good friends. Growing up where we did, even though we moved away, and with social media—the kids they can keep in contact. He was still in touch with friends he's had since first grade, I don't have any first grade friends, but he was just a very outgoing person, so he knew people from both sides of the fence.

Moving Davante out of Oakland was her attempt to shelter him from the violence in East Oakland. "I tried to get my son away from Oakland and out of harm's way, but it didn't even end up mattering in the end because he was still killed."[22]

Davante was not just popular; he was a bright and happy child. He was well-loved by everyone he met—grocers, mailmen, schoolteachers, and children at the park. Everyone, it seemed, knew and loved Davante. An acquaintance of his who Demitra met while attending community college once said, "If you didn't know Davante, you wanted to know him." Davante adapted easily to his new neighbors and classmates and made many new friends (and also kept his old friends). Demitra recalls spending her evenings picking up and dropping off carloads of Davante's friends because he always invited everyone anywhere he went. As a middle schooler and high schooler, Davante was athletic, and he often talked about becoming a sports commentator. While Davante's father had been estranged from them for many years, he eventually reconnected with Davante, and they developed a caring relationship. Davante loved his half-siblings and often visited with them. Life was busy for Demitra and Davante.

Demitra recalled long hours commuting around the East Bay for house showings, to pick up and drop off Davante at sports practice or his grandparents. Demitra's day began around 4am as she prepared herself and Davante for the day. After preparing breakfast and lunches, dressing, washing the occasional leftover dinner plate and making beds, Demitra would hurry off to beat the early morning traffic while Davante slept in the car. His grandmother would then pick him up when she got off the night shift and watch him at her apartment in East Oakland until Demitra could pick him up after work. They rarely arrived back home until 8:30 or 9pm. After preparing dinner, supervising Davante's homework, cleaning the house, doing laundry, getting exercise, completing work-related calls or paperwork, Demitra would fall asleep past midnight. "It was just go, go, go. I didn't stop, and now I wish I had taken more time just to be with my son." When they are not going to school or working, they dedicated much of their free time to church. Davante attended Sunday school, and Demitra volunteered as a praise dance instructor. Their lives in San Ramon were full and their community growing; at times their lives felt hurried, as Demitra attempted to juggle her demanding work with raising Davante and being a part of her church. All in all, things were peaceful and Demitra felt hopeful for their future away from Oakland.

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[22] Prudence L. Carter, *Keepin' It Real: School Success Beyond Black and White* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

Moving out of Oakland came with its own set of challenges for Demitra. Davante attended majority White and Asian middle and high schools but continued to see his friends from Oakland when he spent the evenings or weekends with his grandparents while his mother worked. Davante and his mother continued to go to their family's church in Oakland, where he had been baptized and where she taught bible study and praise dancing. As social media grew in popularity, remaining in touch with friends from his pre-k and elementary school days became easier. Davante was popular with everyone, Demitra explained, and he had "good friends and not so good friends from both sides of the tracks."[23] Despite having a new zip code, Demitra and Davante never really left Oakland. They maintained relationships with people and institutions in East Oakland, while going to school and working in San Ramon. Drawing on resources from both the suburbs and the city, gave Demitra the feeling that they were "getting the best out of both worlds." She made sure Davante kept his distance from the dangers of East Oakland, while still drawing on her parents and church for connection and support.

Despite her best efforts, structural and interpersonal obstacles impeded Demitra's ability to fully realize her dream of upward mobility. She was the first single person in her family to own property, a pivotal moment in her and her family's life. Scholars affirm the obstacles faced by African Americans who attempt to advance their social class, observing that Black people experience substantially less upward intergenerational mobility than White people. Multiple factors impede their upward mobility, such as parental income, education, and family structure, so much so that Black Americans not only fail to move up but are more likely to down slide.[24] For example, Black men make 56¢ for every dollar earned by a White man.[25] For every dollar that Whites have in net worth, African Americans have about 10¢.[26] To maintain middle class status, one must have wealth holdings to withstand unexpected expenses, such as the loss of a job, a family member, or increase in tuition fees. With such meager wealth holdings in the African American community, maintaining a recently elevated class status is particularly difficult.

The ability to earn, spend, and save money is increasingly how Americans measure their self-esteem—something we also see reflected in Demitra's life. Davante's death occurred shortly after she lost her home and job in the financial crisis of 2008. With her son's death, Demitra's sense of self-worth also died; she could no longer believe in the idea that with enough work and dedication she could elide the obstacles of race and class. The mortgage crisis of 2008 unlodged (dislodged) many Americans' sense of safety. The collective feeling of chaos, betrayal, and failure were intensified for Demitra, who experienced financial devastation only two years before Davante was tragically killed. She recounted:

> In 2008, I got laid off. I had already taken pay cuts; and um, I owned property and lost it, and pretty much everything else too. I thought I was depressed at *that* time because that was something big; and so then after losing my house and job, I decided to go back to

[23] Not-so good friends referred to young people in East Oakland who may have been involved in "cliques," drugs such as marijuana, and under-age drinking.

[24] Bhashkar Mazumder, "Black-White Differences in Intergenerational Economic Mobility in the United States," *Economic Perspectives* 38, no. 1 (2014): 1-18; Melvin Oliver and Thomas M. Shapiro, eds., *Black Wealth / White Wealth: A New Perspective on Racial Inequality,* 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006).

[25] Eduardo Porter, "Black Workers Stopped Making Progress on Pay. Is It Racism?" *New York Times*, June 28, 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/28/business/economy/black-workers-racial-pay-gap.html2021

[26] Kriston McIntosh, et al., "Examining the Black-white wealth gap," *Brookings Institution*, February 27, 2020, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2020/02/27/examining-the-black-white-wealth-gap/

> school to be a high school counselor. I had enjoyed working with young people at my church, who were like me, who were driven and just needed that support, ya know?

However, just as Demitra enrolled in community college courses to pursue her degree in secondary school counseling, Davante was killed. After losing him, it became untenable for Demitra to be around young people, as they reminded her of her son. Sharing a classroom with young adults elicited feelings of anger and despondency, and rather than expose herself to more emotional harm, Demitra withdrew from school. Once again, her aspirations were no longer the focus of her life. Survival was the best Demitra could hope for, as the threat of triggering events and memories required that she remain hypervigilant. She once again she self-isolated from a social world that proved to be unconscionably cruel.

Demitra's attempt to improve her and Davante's life by moving from Oakland to San Ramon paralleled similar decisions by African Americans in the Bay Area and across the United States. San Ramon has a population of a little over 79,000 in 2019. Nearly 48% of households are White, 42% are Asian, 7.9% Latino, and 2.3% Black.[27] Demitra's experience was part of a growing trend in the Bay Area and across the United States, where African Americans are leaving urban centers for the suburbs. Seeking better schools, safer neighborhoods, affordable housing, and social and cultural amenities, African Americans have left northern and western cities with remarkable speed. San Francisco, for example, lost 23% of its African American population from 1990 to 2000.[28] In Oakland, it is estimated that by the year 2030, the Black population will fall to as few as 70,000 people—from 140,000 in 2000, declining from roughly 35% of the city's population to a mere 16%.[29]

When Davante was killed, so too was Demitra's dream of escaping the difficult upbringing she had, despite her parents best efforts to provide for her. Her hope had always been that Davante would go to college, get married, have children, and continue on the path to upward social mobility. His death made the futility of her sacrifices come into full view, obscuring any hope for her own future. Capitalist accumulation constructs the cycle that Demitra experienced. It creates the imperative to work, in order to make earnings to afford individual's basic needs, such as housing, medical treatment, transportation, childcare, education, and food, as well as a host of other non-essential commodities. The increased need to work takes time away from working people to be with their families and to care for themselves. What Demitra describes is the loss of quality time, experiences, and a sense of presence with her son when he was still living. As a working person, paid time off for grieving is often limited to one or two days off. What we know about the long-term effects of traumatic loss and the lengthier grieving processes means that a couples of days off work are insufficient accommodations for the bereaved and their families. In Demitra's case she, had to file for disability in order to take the time she needed to begin to process Davante's death, and even this came with significant economic and professional setbacks. Of course, the ability to file for disability can be considered a privilege, as not all mothers are eligible for or have the resources to access disability benefits.

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[27] See the demographics of the City of Ramon, https://www.sanramon.ca.gov/business/srbusiness/why_san_ramon/demographics

[28] Shawn A. Ginwright and Antwi Akom, "African American Out Migration Trends Initial Scan of National and Local Trends in Migration and Research on African Americans" (San Francisco, CA: College of Ethnic Studies and Public Research Institute at San Francisco State University, 2020).

[29] Darwin BondGraham, "The East Bay's Changing Demographics," *East Bay Express*, February 14, 2018, https://www.eastbayexpress.com/oakland/the-east-bays-changing-demographics/Content?oid=13262928.

“See, Black People, We Don’t Do Therapy”

After Davante’s death, Demitra’s life took a shift, as the communities and institutions she once relied on for support were not able to provide the emotional container, she needed to process her grief. Once a devout churchgoer, Demitra stopped attending her bi-weekly prayer groups and sermons. The adages offered by well-meaning parish members—such as “he is in a better place” or “God has a plan for you”—worsened her feelings of isolation and anger. Although Demitra and her parents had raised Davante together, Demitra still felt that her pain was a burden to them. Knowing her parents used drugs and alcohol to cope with stress, Demitra hid from them.

> IK: Why didn’t you feel you could go to your parents with your grief?
> DB: I knew they were hurting as much as I was. My son was blessed to have his grandparents in his life, and him being killed was a blow to all our lives. I never told them how much pain I was in because I thought, well, what if they are having a kinda okay day and I go over there and make them feel worse and kinda bring them down? Ya know, so I just kept it all in. Not that it was good. It was just what I had been raised to do.

As their only daughter, Demitra was socialized to care for her parents and to avoid bringing up emotions that could potentially trigger their unhealthy coping mechanisms or intensify the tension that was always in the home. Similarly, her extended family did not know how to care for Demitra in her time of need. They offered happy distractions of family parties, birthdays, graduations, and baby showers but were unaware of how triggering those events were for Demitra. Without her church, parents, or family Demitra became socially cut off from the world. She was unable to move through her regular routines or punctuate her days and months with faith-based or family rituals. After some time, Demitra saw that her health was declining: her hair was falling out, she never slept, and she no longer recognized her own sunken cheeks or hollow eyes when she looked in the mirror. She knew she needed a change, and gradually she began taking steps to rebuild her life and create what she calls her “new normal.”

For the first time, Demitra began therapy, which she kept from her family due to the stigma surrounding it. She explains, “Black people, we don’t go to therapy. We go to church, we pray. But that wasn't working for me. I think it is changing now with the younger generation, but at the time, it was seen as weak or like you were putting your business out there, to a stranger no less.” It was through counseling that Demitra learned to relinquish some of her caregiving responsibilities. She finally had a place where she would express her pain without being told that it was too much and time to move on. Having her emotions validated helped grow her confidence and eventually begin building a new career path. Demitra recounted:

> It was not until much later, after I had been in therapy for a while [several years] that I thought about Counseling Psychology. I was in therapy for so long and support groups and I realized that I wanted to work with people like me, and even if that meant working with young, single moms or teens.

Although being around young people at community college was triggering enough to nearly deter Demitra from pursuing her undergraduate studies, having a transformative experience in therapy provided a window into a new calling that would enable her to use her pain for good.

Seeing her own story in the case studies in psychology classes showed her that there was a new place for her in the world, one where she could play a pivotal role in helping others like herself.

Demitra's pursuit of a degree in Clinical Psychology marked a profound shift; for the first time in her life, she was pursuing work that truly interested her. Demitra knew that being a therapist would never bring in as much money as when she was a realtor, but her values had changed. Counseling allowed her to use her grief to serve others and to gain new insights into herself. For example, while completing her clinical hours as a social worker, Demitra encountered mothers that reminded her of how she used to be when Davante was alive; mothers who were "doing it all"—going to school, raising children, working, and all on their own. It was through her relationships with these clients that Demitra began to reflect on the hidden costs of striving so hard for a better life.

> I worked with a 13-year-old boy once who was very unmotivated. But we got close to one another. On our last day together, he did not show up, and I knew it was because it was too much for him, saying goodbye. So, I called his mother and let her know that he didn't make it to our session. She was very upset, very angry, and she said "Oh, I'll make sure he makes it there next week. Trust me." And I just felt for her, like I identified with the mom, who I know has another kid, who is working, who is going to school, and that's what I used to do. I used to do it all like that, and it's hard. It wears on you. And I also felt like the mother was not savoring her time she had with her son, because I know I didn't. I was just go, go, go, trying to make things work, make things right, and I just think so often like these parents, they don't know what they have. They don't know the pain of losing the opportunity to just have time with your kid.

Conclusion

As we have seen with both Anjanette and Demitra, wealth disparities and systemic racism compound Black mothers' grief. The eradication or privatization of social benefits and high cost of living has forced American families to work so much they spend significantly less time together. For poor, working-class people, this is even graver; and for Black single headed, households even more so. As Ruth Wilson Gilmore asserts, the resource of life is time. When time is extracted from bodies, through exploitative labor or inactivity—as is the case with incarceration—the process "opens a hole in life."[30] For Black mothers, the hope that this work will culminate in upwards social mobility for their children, especially for their sons, is diminished as disproportionate numbers of young, Black men are killed before age 25. Demitra's story elucidates this grave social injustice and highlights the structural obstacles that impeded her efforts to change her circumstance. As a teenage mother in the early 1990s, Demitra had no choice but to put work before quality time with her son to achieve some sort of social mobility. Like other single, Black mothers raising children in the shadow of Reaganism, Demitra had to actively resist the stigma impressed upon her through stereotypes, such as the jezebel and the welfare queen. Harsh, conservative backlash against welfare dissuaded some young mothers—like Demitra—from drawing on the resources that were available, in order to prove their self-worth. Demitra felt a constant pressure to work harder and not accept "handouts" in part to counter stereotypes that characterized young, Black mothers as inherently lazy and exploitative. The psychological impact of countering these social deceptions was a pervasive

[30] Ruth Wilson Gilmore, "'The People Who Keep on Going': A Listening Party, Vol. I," in *Futures of Black Radicalism*, eds. Gaye Theresa Johnson and Alex Lubin (Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2017).

feeling of unworthiness and inadequacy. Demitra sacrificed her ability to enjoy the present in order to secure a good life for her son in the future. The killing of Davante was devastating for Demitra materially, mentally, and spiritually. The personal development that followed was hard-earned, as Demitra, for the first time in her life, began living for today. So too did she refocus her attention on others, deriving benefits from therapy, both her own and by providing it to others.

Chapter Three

Driving an Empty Bus or Organizing the Bereaved: Debbie Aguilar's Story

On November 16, 2002, 17-year-old Stephen Aguilar was shot and killed in a drive-by shooting. Earlier that evening, he had gone to the movies to see *Lilo and Stitch* with his girlfriend, Vanessa. After dropping her off at home, Stephen picked up his cousin, Beto. The two of them drove to a local 7-11 convenience store off North Main St. and Curtis in East Salinas, CA. As Beto and Stephen made their way home, an unidentified vehicle opened fire. Stephen was driving and lost control of the car, crashing into a tree. Beto survived with injuries. But Stephen was killed when a bullet struck him in the back of the head. When the fire department arrived, Stephen was pronounced dead.

In the local news, Stephen was identified only as "Hispanic male in late teens or early twenties; possibly gang affiliated."[1] Two weeks later, an article penned by his mother—Debbie Aguilar—named the victim as Stephen Joseph Aguilar—a young man who was "college bound" and "never in trouble," survived by his three siblings, mother and father, and loving girlfriend.[2] In the article, Debbie asked that any information related to his death be shared through an anonymous tips phone number. Had Debbie not published this article, Stephen would have remained a nameless "Hispanic man," just one of the dozens of anonymous victims killed in Salinas that year. Throughout this chapter, we will see how Debbie continued to advocate for her son, in search of Stephen's assailant and to honor his memory, and in support of other grieving mothers who had lost their children to violent crimes. However, her story also highlights the tremendous emotional and social toil of her efforts to address the injustices that surrounded the loss of her son. These mutual aid and advocacy efforts kept her away from home and family, who expressed frustration at their perception that she was more committed to her work outside the house than to them at home. Once again, her story illustrates the competing personal, familial, and social demands placed upon grieving mothers.

Homicides and Demands for Police Accountability

Stephen was killed in late 2002, a time when homicide rates were climbing and law enforcement was unable to contain or solve the majority of violent crimes in the Salinas community. Nationally, murder rates have been falling since the early 1990s, and a similar trend is true of California. But in Monterey County, just south of the San Francisco Bay Area and where Salinas resides, homicides continued to increase at this time, before peaking in 2009 with 51 murders.[3] (In 2015, a new high was reached with 60 murders.) Although this data represents the entirety of Monterey County, the majority of murders occurred in the city of Salinas.[4]

In 2014, several high-profile incidents of police brutality against Latinx residents caused community uproar and demands for police accountability. The Department of Corrections faced

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[1] "Hispanic Male Shot and Killed in Drive By," *The Salinas Californian*, Nov. 22, 2002, 11.

[2] Debbie Agular, "Family Mourns Stephen J. Aguilar Beloved Son and Brother," *The Salinas Californian*, Nov. 30, 2002, 5.

[3] Roberto Santos, Rick Gregory, and Leocadio Cordero, "Collaborative Reform Initiative: An Assessment of the Salinas Police Department. Salinas," Institute for Intergovernmental Research and the U.S. Department of Justice, 2016, https://cops.usdoj.gov/RIC/Publications/cops-w0799-pub.pdf

[4] According to the Department of Justice, over the past 50 years, 66% of homicides are solved nationally, while only 53% are solved in Monterey County. Ibid, 10-12.

pressure to reconcile their relationship with the Latinx community, which made up two thirds of the population in Salinas. Unsurprisingly, they responded by partnering with the federal government, which provided more funding for surveillance and identification technology, weapons, and special forces training. This is a typical—although ineffective—response by the police, whereby acts of violence and local demands for action merely result in intensification of policing practices rather than investment in other forms of community accountability or social programs. Additionally, the Salinas Police department sought to strategically partner with individuals from the community (like Debbie) who could deescalate protestors' anger about the police harassing, using excessive force, and incarcerating Black and Latino men in particular.

For the police, Debbie represented an opportunity to demonstrate their commitment to the "right" kind of Latinx victim. Debbie embodied the qualities of respectable, mainstream society. She was a homemaker, who was married with children. Debbie was also a Christian, sober, feminine, and had no history to anything gang related. Debbie was meant to exemplify the promise that if families assimilate into dominant, White Anglo, conservative culture, they too would be protected by the police and the state. Unfortunately, this logic perpetuates the notion that violence and crime are inherent qualities of racialized groups, rather than the consequences of social structures and institutions that perpetuate and maintain inequality. For Debbie, however, partnering with law enforcement in their community outreach was an opportunity to keep Stephen visible to the public and keep alive the possibility of finding his perpetrator. It also presented an opportunity for her to be a leader, something she had never felt invited or empowered to do.

Debbie proved a reliable advocate for grieving parents undergoing similar losses. For 17 years, from 2002-2019, Debbie represented the victimized families of Salinas at community listening sessions, rallies, and in the media. Debbie was called upon by police and city officials to provide insider expertise as a community liaison on anti-gang and violence prevention task forces, even though she had no previous relationship with gangs—except as a victim to violence. But despite being at the forefront of these efforts, Stephen's case remains unsolved. On the 18th anniversary of her son's murder, in November 2020, Debbie admitted that she felt betrayed—both by the gangs who killed her son and the state who failed to make good on its promises to help her.

With no investigative leads, the Salinas Police department had closed Stephen's case in 2015. Although this is standard police procedure, the new administrative classification triggered feelings of powerlessness and abandonment in Debbie, similar to what she experienced in the immediate aftermath of Stephen's death. This incentivized her to alter her approach to coping with his passing. Since 2004, Debbie had facilitated a weekly peer-led support group for grieving families. Under Debbie's guidance, bereaving family members would volunteer to host reunions at their homes or local churches—sharing food and advise and holding space for victims to vent and strategize for upcoming court dates or meetings with detectives. These meetings were well-respected, well-attended, and often one of the first places people went when they were in search of care and support after the murder of a loved one. However, once Stephen's case was closed, there was a shift in Debbie's approach to her community-based work.

While the grief groups were rooted in principles of mutual aid, the next phase of her organizing took the form of more mainstream advocacy. In 2017, Debbie and several other families launched a website called the Cold Case Campaign, through which people could post information about unsolved murders and collect anonymous tips from visitors. The website did not garner enough traffic to sustain itself and was closed in 2019. Nevertheless, it was important

step in Debbie's work, as it was the first time that she personally pursued her son's killer, rather than just relying on the police for information relating to her son's case.

In the United States, the murder clearance rate, or number of solved homicides, is strikingly low compared to nations with similar demographics and resources. Based on research conducted by the Murder Accountability Project, more than one third of American murders go unsolved annually. Since 1980, over 220,000 homicides in the US have been unsolved.[5] Police claim that the biggest reason for the low clearance rate is the culture of silence that dissuades individuals from sharing information with law enforcement. However, Debbie's experience tells a different story. After decades of closely partnering with law enforcement, Stephen's murder remains unsolved. Debbie's experience is not unique. A lack of police responsiveness, communication, and transparency are routinely expressed by family members of homicide victims. Mothers like Debbie who have actively supported and advocated for grieving families in her community find that law enforcement is unwilling to invest in them as must as they invest in law enforcement, especially when we consider the emotional labor and support the mothers offer to grieving families. This leads to feelings of resentment and betrayal that compound their grief. Surviving victims are frequently called upon by the state to represent innocence and victimhood. Victims are also expected to model practices of good citizenship and are thus portrayed as the opposite of criminals, specifically gang members. The incorporation of survivors into law enforcement efforts for increased law and order creates the illusion that the community, and not law enforcement, is to blame for rampant neighborhood violence and gang impunity.

Drawing on Debbie's experience as a case study, this chapter exposes how surviving victim's grief is co-opted by the state in order to refute accusations of police neglect, racism, and corruption. In the city of Salinas, having highly visible relationships to family members like Debbie, a Mexican American woman, is critically important to leaders in the state and local police and government in order to counter accusations of racism within the predominantly White police force. Ultimately, for Debbie, partnering with the police negatively impacted her relationships to her family, her community, and the state, eventually intensifying her feelings of isolation and grief.

History of Racial Formations and Intra-Ethnic Struggles in Salinas, CA

European dominance and racial violence have characterized Salinas Valley since the arrival of Spanish settlers in the 18th century. Spanish missionaries forcibly removed Esselen, Ohlone, and other native groups from their land and forced many into slavery in the missions. Native labor was used to produce products such as hide, tallow, wool, and textiles and then sold throughout the Americas for a profit. Following the Mexican Secularization Act of 1833, land was parceled out to Mexican military commanders and in time developed into large ranchos. Twenty years later, the Rancho Nacional of Vicente Cantua and the Rancho Sausal of José Castro (what is today the city of Salinas) were purchased by Jacob Leese and James Bryant Hill. And Hill was the first to use the land for the cultivation of grains, beans, and sugar beets with the use of modern agricultural technology. By the end of World War I, the large-scale production and distribution of lettuce, broccoli, and artichokes would make Salinas one of the wealthiest cities in the United States. Today, Salinas astoundingly produces over 80% of the country's artichokes and lettuce, amongst other crops.[6]

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[5] Thomas K. Hargrove, "Data & Docs," *Murder Accountability Project*, www.murderdata.org/p/data-docs.html.
[6] "Salinas History," City of Salinas, https://www.cityofsalinas.org/visitors/salinas-history

The land reclamation undertaken by Chinese laborers to clear and drain the swamps was a major reason for the agricultural and financial success of Salinas City in the late 19th century. They were the laborers that made the land suitable for commercial agriculture. By the 1870s, Chinese migrants had developed their own ethnic enclave in the downtown neighborhood now known as Chinatown. Irrigation and the railroad allowed for quicker transportation of goods; dairy and agricultural production boomed; and more migrant workers from Japan, the Philippines and Mexico arrived.[7] Governed by European settlers and Anglo Americans, Salinas enforced strict housing segregation based on ethnicity and race. The Japanese and Chinese were crowded into slums in Chinatown on the east side of Salinas. When the development of refrigerated railroad cars enabled farmers to grow and sell more row crops, Filipino farm workers were recruited, and they too began to put down roots in the neighborhood east of Chinatown—what is now known as Little Manilla. Despite all their contributions and their establishment of many cultural, educational, and spiritual institutions, Asian residents have faced intense discrimination and legalized racism. At the outbreak of World War II, for example, Japanese American residents of Salinas were interned at the California Rodeo grounds before being incarcerated in detention centers off the coast.

Although Salinas' production and marketing of produce remained relatively stable throughout the Great Depression, there were significant intra-ethnic labor strikes. Dust Bowl migrants such as the Okies, as well as other economic and political refugees and migrant laborers, worked and lived in close quarters in camps and cramped urban enclaves. Business and governmental leaders objected to the establishment of these labor camps, claiming they invited disease and the proliferation of leftist organizers. In fact, Filipino workers were one of the first to establish a farm labor union in the early 1930s and pressured agricultural owners to increase wages. This set the groundwork for mid-western Dust Bowl immigrants, who challenged the Associated Farmers over wages as members of the newly-formed Vegetable Packers Association. The farm strife of the 1930s gave way to conciliation during World War I and II, as labor and management worked to meet the common goal of producing "Food for Victory." Labor shortages due to the war effort gave way to the recruitment of Mexican field hands under the Bracero program in 1942.[8]

The close of World War II brought other changes to Salinas. Discharged soldiers returned to town. With the help of the G.I. Bill, many veterans attended Hartnell College as well as vocational trade schools. This led to the establishment of a large, White, middle class population, and to a lesser degree some social mobility for the few Asian, Native, Latinx and African American families who served and were now eligible to attend institutions of higher learning. Of course, lawmakers who created the G.I. Bill purposefully made it more difficult for Black veterans, in particular, to access benefits. At the same time, returning White veterans were threatened by the growing presence and increased establishment of migrant communities of color, and interracial and class tensions grew. The 1943 Zoot Suit Riots between Chicanx *pachucos* and White soldiers are one such example.[9] Mexicans continued to settle in California during and shortly after the war years. In the 1950s, they were heavily recruited to work in the

[7] The Southern Pacific Railroad arrived to Salinas in 1872, and the arrival of the railroad was a catalyst for downtown development and the development of more businesses.

[8] Lori A. Flores, "A Town Full of Dead Mexicans: The Salinas Valley Bracero Tragedy of 1963, the End of the Bracero Program, and the Evolution of California's Chicano Movement," *Western Historical Quarterly* 44, no. 2 (Summer 2013): 124-143.

[9] Kathy Peiss, *Zoot Suit: The Enigmatic Career of an Extreme Style* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

labor-intensive, low-paid farm labor camps, where their exploitation led to the development of the United Farm Worker (UFW) Movement.

Led by César Chávez and Dolores Huerta, the UFW and The Delano Grape Strike—led by Filipino leader Larry Itliong—began with migrant pickers in the Salinas Valley. These social movements were deeply influential, creating a sense of multi-ethnic and cultural pride among migrant farm laborers. Chávez's movement, however, was exclusionary—as contemporary historians of the UFW note. Chávez rejected undocumented laborers and had nativist sentiments.[10] The UFW and other civil and workers' rights movements certainly made gains, but Mexicans and Mexican Americans were still routinely subjected to racist policies, including frequent deportations and repatriations to Mexico—even for those born in the United States. Xenophobia, as well as anti-indigenous and anti-Black sentiment, from the White/Anglo political and economic elite maintained unofficial segregation in schools, hospitals, and housing through the 1960s. Ever since, de-facto segregation and inequality has persisted, creating some of the widest racial and ethnic health disparities in the country. These forms of social inequality continue to this day in Salinas and are well-documented by a range of scholars.[11]

At midcentury, African Americans also migrated to California in great numbers, seeking to escape racial oppression in the South and to find labor opportunities in the auto and meatpacking industries, in particular. But structural racism was not restricted to the South. Red lining and other segregationist policies forced Mexicans, African Americans, and other marginalized and immigrant communities to live in close proximity, and in areas that were all but abandoned by the state and municipal governments. In the case of Salinas, many of these groups were concentrated on the east side, on the periphery of the city closest to the fields and farm labor camps.

Economic restructuring and outsourcing made quality blue collar jobs scarce in urban centers, such as Los Angeles, and interethnic and interracial tensions rose as poor communities of color faced deteriorating housing, schools, and hospitals—as well as increased surveillance and harassment by the majority White police force. During this period, radical organizing efforts such as the Black Panther Party, the Brown Berets, the Black Berets, the American Indian Movement, and occupation of Alcatraz garnered increased support and visibility, particularly among young high school and college students. Protests such as the Watts Rebellion of 1965, the student-led walkouts of 1968, and the Chicano Moratorium Against the Vietnam War were historical, people-of-color led political breakthroughs that threatened the White power structure. In an effort to curtail their influence, the FBI infiltrated and sabotaged these activist groups using undercover law enforcement efforts such as COINTELPRO.[12] The federal, state, and local governments would use similar tactics, such as Operation Black Widow in the 1990s and 2000s, to undercut powerful Black and Latino gangs.[13] Such government sponsored espionage was expensive and had a dubious impact. A clear outcome, however, were the violent repercussions for the residents of Salinas, who saw their city become increasingly terrorized by both gangs and

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[10] Randy Shaw, *Beyond the Fields: César Chávez, the UFW, and the Struggle for Justice in the 21st Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

[11] See for example, Seth M. Holmes, *Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies: Migrant Farmworkers in the United States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013); Julia Reynolds, *Blood in the Fields: Ten Years Inside California's Nuestra Familia Gang* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2014); Patricia Zavella, *I'm Neither Here nor There: Mexicans' Quotidian Struggles with Migration and Poverty* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

[12] Luis Rodriguez, "The End of the Line: California Gangs and the Promise of Street Peace," *Social Justice* 32, no. 3 (2005): 12-23.

[13] Ibid.

law enforcement. We see, thus, how the current police presence in Salinas has been building since earlier periods of civil uprising.

Gangs, Prisons, and Police Brutality

Neoliberalism and economic restructuring in the 1970s had even more of a detrimental impact on Salinas. California's Proposition 13, passed in 1978, lowered property taxes used for socially funded programs such as day care and youth and community centers. Like in other U.S. urban communities, Salinas experienced massive cuts to social programs that had provided a safety net for the large number of working-class and poor families that sustained the agricultural industry. In 1981, when Governor Ronald Reagan reduced the educational budget and thus eliminated afterschool, enrichment, athletic, and pre-professional and trades programming, he left many teenagers without sufficient adult supervision or mentorship. At the same time, Vietnam veterans (the majority of whom came from working-class and poor backgrounds) were returning to the same communities with severe war-related trauma and substance use disorders. Veterans had a major influence on young adults who taught them how to use weapons and military drives and tactics. They were also exposed to new and more dangerous drugs. Simultaneously, the release of former *pachucos*, who had been targeted by police in the 1940s and 1950s, introduced more sophisticated criminal tactics and organizations the Mexican men had learned in prison. Intricate ties between prison gangs and streets gangs were made during the late 1960s and 1970s, which were even more compounded by the closure of vast industrial complexes throughout California.

Located midway between San Francisco and Los Angeles, Salinas has long been caught in an embattled gang war between the two major criminal factions. The illicit drug trade that creates economic avenues for these gangs only intensifies violence in the Salinas Valley. Tensions between the primarily Chicanx/Latinx gangs and the predominantly White/Anglo police force and political infrastructure reinforces the sense of mistrust and fear. The code of silence—a culture of not disclosing information to the police for fear of retaliation from the gang—is reinforced by these powerful California gangs that violently punish police informants.[14] However, sociologist Victor Rios also observes that community reluctance to speak to police stems from long-standing feelings of distrust towards law enforcement. With the rise of proactive policing and Three Strikes Law (1994), civilians in hot spot neighborhoods are increasingly deemed suspicious by police who infringe upon their rights. Since police treat them as if they are guilty until proven innocent, residents maintain their distance from police for fear of being further criminalized.[15]

At the same time, the safety of Salinas residents is compounded by poverty. In 2010, the Census Bureau found that the unemployment rate in Salinas was 2% higher than the national average. Similarly, the child poverty rate was 6.5% higher. And Salinas school children tested 20% lower on average than their peers in the wider Monterey County.[16] Low academic achievement significantly increases the risk of gang involvement for youth, who are recruited into gangs as early as elementary school.

Geographically, Salinas is also positioned between two prisons, Salinas Valley State Prison and the Correctional Training Facility. Both are located 30 miles from Salinas, and the

[14] Elijah Anderson, *Code of the Street: Decency, Violence, and the Moral Life of the Inner City* (Norton, 2000).
[15] Rios, *Punished*.
[16] Community Alliance for Safety and Peace, "Salinas Comprehensive Strategy for Community-wide Violence Reduction, 2010-2012," City of Salinas, https://youth.gov/docs/Salinas%20SWP_03-16_rev2.pdf

proximity of the prisons to Salinas strengthens their ties to the larger community. Gang associates and their families live in Salinas to be closer to incarcerated gang members. The flow of visitors and inmates in and out of the prisons facilitates multi and intergeneration gang ties, giving rise to families with deeply entrenched ties to gangs. 91% of homicides in Salinas were gang related. According to local law enforcement, there are 5,000 certified and affiliated gang members in Monterey County, and 3,000 live in Salinas alone. Additionally, there are approximately 71 gangs, and 16 of them are youth-led.[17]

The two prison gangs—the Norteños and Sureños—are housed at the Correctional Training Facility and the Salinas Valley State Prison, respectively. The roots of these gangs are tied to an earlier era of social uprising. The Norteños, run by the Nuestra Familia gang, was formed in Monterey County during the 1960s at the Correctional Training Facility. They dominate Northern California, and the majority of gang members in Salinas are Norteños. Nuestra Familia were informed by the UFW movement, and incorporated aspect of it into their visual culture. Also known as the Sureño Prison gang, the Mexican Mafia formed in southern California prisons and has presided over Los Angeles and southern California within the California Department of Corrections. There is now a rise in Sureños in Salinas, due to overcrowding in Southern prison facilities and more migration of laborers from Central American.

Against this growing backdrop of increasing gang violence, Monterey County has also witnessed numerous charges of police brutality, racism, and corruption. In 2014, between March and July, police officers killed four civilians, all of whom were Latino. The nine officers involved were White.[18] Several bystander videos, circulated in social and news media, offer irrefutable evidence of law enforcement's inappropriate use of force against Latino community members. Despite this, law enforcement personnel were acquitted. In response, community members rallied to protest, accusing the Salinas Police Department of covering up excessive use of force and further eroding community trust of the department. The lack of Black and Latinx officers within the Salinas Police Force has exacerbated racialized resentment against policing efforts. While 75% of Salinas identifies as Latino, and 15% percent as White, the majority (60%) of the police force is White (as of 2010).[19] The scholarly literature of implicit bias affirms that such racial disparities contribute to strained community police relations, racial discrimination, and more incidents of excessive force and brutality. All of these factors have dangerous consequences for poor and socially stratified communities of color, who have a long history of strained relations with police. Likewise, the specter of two nearby prisons looming nearby and local street gangs warring with each other and the authorities, all serve as the background for the 2002 murder of Stephen Aguilar and Debbie's subsequent cooperation with the police.

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[17] Roberto Santos, et al., *An Assessment of the Salinas Police Department*, United States Department of Justice (2016).

[18] Lydia DiPillis, "First Person: Salinas could've been Ferguson. Here's why it wasn't," *The Washington Post*, August 22, 2014.

[19] Allison Gatlin, "Analysis: Latinos underrepresented on police force," *The Salinas Californian*, February 27, 2015, https://www.thecalifornian.com/story/news/local/2015/02/27/analysis-latinos-underrepresented-police-force/24149189/

From Private Grief to Public Outcry: Debbie's Changing Relationship with the Community

It was, in fact, the lack of energy and attention that law enforcement directed towards Stephens's case is what motivated Debbie to make her son's murder a public matter. The first few years following Stephen's murder, Debbie rarely left the house for fear she might miss a call from the detectives or information from a possible informant. But Debbie heard less and less from the investigators who would grow exasperated with her requests for meetings and returned calls. "They were too busy fighting a war on the drug lords and gangs to bother much with *my* son," Debbie recalled. Like many families, Debbie took her son's investigation upon herself, going door to door asking neighbors for information, hanging wanted signs, conducting her own research, and hiring private investigators (despite the cost). None of her efforts proved successful, and the process took a toll on her own mental, emotional, and physical well-being.

Black and white photocopies of Stephen's high school portrait still flap against the trees that line North Main Street. Until her death in 2021, Debbie Routinely drove through the neighborhood—stapling to the trees fliers that offer a reward for any information related to her son's murder. Although she has little faith they will produce viable leads, Debbie still does it to intimidate those who know who killed Stephen. In her mind, these signs demonstrate to the community that she hasn't given up the search for her son's perpetrator. Debbie told me in 2018,

> I always say, the streets know. The streets know. The guys on the corner, the *cholos*, you know, and the men and women in the prisons, they know who did it. But they stay quiet because they know that they could get beat or killed if they spoke up.

Debbie believes that fear of retaliation, as well as loyalty to gangs or cliques, have silenced potential informants. The few leads that investigators received were uncorroborated, as informants retract their information as soon as it came time to make a formal statement. Knowing who killed Stephen would be enough to put her mind at ease, Debbie believes. But without this information, Debbie's perception of the world has become increasingly fearful. Everyone she passes, friends or strangers, are deemed suspicious or dangerous. The conviction that those around her are co-conspiring with Stephen's assailant (by actively withholding information) is maddening. The deep-seated distrust she feels towards the world has grown, resulting in intensified isolation and fear. For example, Debbie shared the following in an interview in 2017 (15 years after Stephen's murder):

> Even now, after all this time it gets to me. I'll be in line at the Safeway, right? I'll be there waiting to check out and I'll look at the young father ahead of me pushing his son in the cart, and I'll think—What if that's him? What if that's the guy who killed Stephen? Or I'll be driving the kids, like I was the other day, and I will just feel someone staring at me. And I look, and sure enough there's a man in the car next to me just grilling me and it scares me. It really does. Because we don't know. We don't know if he is still out there or what he could do."

Debbie has not had a full night's sleep in 18 years. The slightest rattle or screech summons images of Stephen's faceless killer standing over her or the children, ready to shoot.

In the early days after the shooting, a cold heaviness constantly pressed down on her chest. Taking a deep breath felt hard, even painful. Drinking was initially a familiar coping

mechanism for Debbie. For most of her life, she had used it to soothe painful memories from her past. After her son's murder, she turned to alcohol to soothe the pain and rage inside of her. In this excerpt, Debbie recounts how this distrust disrupts her daily life. Activities as mundane as driving or shopping are imbued with a subconscious sense of threat. Paired with substances such as drugs or alcohol, hypervigilance can result in paranoia and psychosis. Below Debbie describes one such incident:

> A day or two after my son was killed, a police officer came to the house because I was actually hallucinating, off of alcohol. I was thinking that the neighbors were involved in the murder, because they were fighting *boom, boom, boom*, husband and wife. And I said, "Wait, a minute... my son used to hang out with them." I was thinking all these weird, paranoid things, and I wasn't on drugs or nothing like that and the cop came, and I shared this with him. And he told me "Alcohol is not your friend." He was like "Please, I know. Alcohol is not your friend." It was magic. I was paranoid. I was. I barely touched alcohol since. I am 16 years sober.

Alcohol, as with other mind-altering substances, can intensify symptoms of grief—at times manifesting in misperceptions and exaggerated behaviors.[20] To take another example, the Christmas after her son's death, Debbie went to purchase a book on grief at a local shopping center. While entering the mall, she saw a crowd of teenagers. She immediately spotted Stephen standing among them, laughing, and joking. She ran towards him. "I never ran that fast my whole life! And I was crying, ya know, with tears and everything like, 'Son! Son! *Hijo*, I'm here!'" Once she discovered that the young man was not her son, panic ensued. She began hyperventilating, halting the throngs of holiday shoppers. As security personnel approached, she ran from the mall, sobbing. After this incident, Debbie was shaken; "I realized I needed help, and I was on my own because my husband, Stephen's dad, was checked out. He was checked out. He was working all the time, and just couldn't deal with the pain. So, I was all alone." Debbie's description of Oscar's turn to work to survive the pain of his son's loss highlights how socially constructed gender roles can actually inhibit male partners from expressing their own grief or providing support for their female partners, who are allowed to be more emotive.

After trying several grief counseling groups in the area, Debbie reached out to Dehlia, the mother of Stephen's closest friend, Antonio. Dehlia was also grieving because Antonio had been killed just a few months before Stephen.

> I knew that someone was feeling the way I was. The other support groups, they weren't bad. I just couldn't connect with the other people there. Not that their pain was any less. I am not saying that, but no one was dealing with a murder. And it's just different. So, I go to the phone book, and I call Antonio's mom. And I says, "You don't know me, but I went to your son's funeral. Our sons, they were like this (makes a gesture with her fingers intertwined). And I am just wondering, is this normal what I am going through?!" And she goes, she was buzzed, she was buzzed; but I didn't care, she goes, "Oh yeah, it's normal what you are feeling, and the pain doesn't go away. What you need is a drink!" And I laugh and says, "Oh no, I am trying not to do that anymore." Because I was a big drinker. I was. I learned to drink at a very young age, because well, a lot of things happened to me, a lot of trauma. But we didn't talk about that back in the old days, so I

[20] Kenneth J. Doka and Joyce D. Davidson. *Living with Grief: Who We Are, How We Grieve* (Routledge, 1998).

> used to drink, but I've been sober now for 14 years. Because I thought—why would I hurt myself on top of everything I am going through? But anyways, so I ask her: "Can we meet?" And she says "Sure." We didn't meet right away. It took a couple months, but after we did, we said, you know, why don't we get all the moms together? Because only we can understand. And that was in 2003, and we have been meeting every month since. We are very consistent because the homicide, the violence, is consistent, and we have to keep up with it.

Like with Princess Beverly, who is discussed in the following chapter, Debbie found that it was only others who had undergone a similar experience who could truly relate to what she was going through after the death of her son.

Bereavement following the violent death of a child is uniquely painful for parents when the death is sudden and violent. This manner of death presents specific obstacles in parents' recovery. My research shows that mothers believe only those who experience this kind of loss can truly understand it. The depth of their despair is so great that is it only legible to the few who have personally experienced the unexpected, violent death of a child. Debbie discovered this after attempting more general grief treatment in other settings, such as the hospital and church. While the members of these groups shared her experience of bereavement, they did not understand how the manner of her son's death impacted her healing process. As research by Mary Rae Peach and Dennis Klass affirmed, parental bereavement to homicide is indeed a "special" grief. After conducting interviews with members of Parents of Murdered Children (POMC), a national support group, Peach and Klass identified four compounding factors that differentiate this form of bereavement from others: anger, the criminal justice system, fear, and stigma. Powerless to bring their children back, parents direct their rage towards the perpetrator. Thoughts of retaliation provide an imaginary means of reasserting their power after "failing" to protect their children. Families who seek justice through the criminal justice system are often disappointed by the results. Victim's parents begin the process with high expectations, only to discover that they have no legal standing. Provided with little guidance on how to navigate the legal system, survivors are distraught when they discover the extent to which they are barred from information pertaining to the case. And although survivors are excluded from the investigation, they are regularly asked to come to the stand and undergo questioning. Trials are long and exhausting, and parents are exposed to disturbing evidence. Because the burden of proof lies with the prosecution, the rights of the accused—not the survivors—are protected. When the accused are acquitted, released early, given short sentences, or are never brought to justice, families are demoralized.[21]

The phone call between Debbie and Delia was the impetus for A Time for Healing and Grieving (ATHG)—a survivors group that Debbie convenes every month, beginning in 2003. Shepherding this network of mourners has been slow and gradual. There were a number of potential risks Debbie faced in connecting with similarly victimized families, namely reopening her wounds by sharing her story. The days without intrusive thoughts were few, and the thought of spiraling again was frightening. The sorrow and isolation she experienced in the aftermath of her son's death compelled Debbie to seek out other mothers who had lost a child to gun violence,

[21] For more recent work on parental grief following the violent death of a child, see Erica S. Lawson, "Bereaved Black Mothers and Maternal Activism in the Racial State," *Feminist Studies* 44, no. 3 (2018): 713-735. Mary Rae Peach and Dennis Klass, "Special Issues in the Grief of Parents of Murdered Children," *Death Studies* 11, no. 2 (1987): 81-88.

and in the absence of a group she could relate to, she formed her own. Over the years, Debbie became a leader of sorts for bereaving families in Salinas—organizing to bring awareness to their unique struggles.

Creating ATHG became the catalyst for Debbie's new life as a community activist. As ATHG reached more families, their work attracted the attention of the media, chief of police, and the municipal government. Only a year after losing Stephen, Debbie was catapulted into the public eye, becoming the voice of the victimized families of Salinas. Media appearances and press conferences became commonplace. Her phone was always ringing with requests from the likes of the mayor, chief of police, and journalists. The dining room table disappeared under piles of newspaper clippings, certificates of appreciation, gilded plaques, and ATHG banners covered in the faces of murdered children. Debbie was now a public mother, grieving on behalf of her community. Stephen's murder was also the first time Debbie took the lead in family affairs, by initiating interactions with the police, investigators, and legal representation. Her husband Oscar, meanwhile, continued to work as a union welder and took more and more work away from home.

In her struggle to find her son's killer, Debbie encountered a poorly-managed, neglectful, and uncaring justice system. She initially felt alone and defeated in her fight to find closure in the aftermath of Stephen's homicide. Only after Debbie began ATHG did she see the breadth of violence in Monterey County and the impact it had on families across the socio-economic spectrum. As Debbie shared: "Before my son was killed, I really thought—and I am ashamed to say this but—all this stuff, the violence, the shootings, stabbings, only happened to gang members. Now I know better, but it took a long time for me to see that. I was in denial—I was." Learning that her negative experiences with the justice system were not isolated events, Debbie and other members of ATHG began organizing monthly demonstrations outside City Hall. Holding up photographs of their children, the mothers of ATHG began getting noticed by the local media. Bringing her private pain into the public sphere was the catalyst for Debbie's new life as a leader. For once, *she* was the expert. No one could speak to her son's character with the same credibility, nor to the experience of losing a son to gun violence. Being a mother with no political affiliations gave Debbie's grievance a poignancy and legitimacy that drew activists and politicians across the political spectrum.

Members of A Time for Healing and Grieving and other community members gather in this December 2005 photo in front of Salinas City Hall to remember the loves ones they have lost to homicide. (Scott MacDonald/ *The Salinas Californian*)

As young men of color continued to die without sufficient investigation into their murder, mothers like Debbie charged into the Salinas public sphere, demanding answers and justice. Determined to stop their child from disappearing from public memory and becoming "just another statistic," Debbie and her fellow mothers reconfigured their lives to take to the streets. During the years of this study 2012-2018 they routinely held up photos of their children alongside the rush hour traffic and on the steps of City Hall. They called their children's names into broken microphones, hoping that their children's bright smiles and long musical names would restore their dignity.

Over time, this political and affective strategy of publicly advocating for justice for their slain children—used by mothers across the world—was coopted by Salinas politicians and law enforcement. Government officials and police chiefs began relying on Debbie's presence and connections to the bereaving families of Salinas for "photo ops." At these events, community, and police cooperation was performed to quell the anger of frustrated and disillusioned Salinas residents, who had seen many public officials come and go with little to no change. As Debbie described,

> I was moving in grief survival mode, and these projects can help distract you. I went to all the police chiefs, to this chief and that chief. I would go to all of them and say: "What can I do? Can you help me get a reward the way other cities do?" And I was going one-on-one and thinking with my own good works that they would do the same for me, that they would help, you know. It's kinda embarrassing to say that. But they told me I was an asset to the community, and I kinda got a lot of attention from the media and all the pats on the back, the recognitions and awards and stuff like that. It kinda felt good, for that time, and it kinda cushioned my pain. And they knew that that's what happened, and they said, "Just keep her going, keep her happy," and I used to say you know, "Rewards are

> nice and all this, but there's got to be something more. I really need some help here! I don't got the education or knowledge to write a grant. Make us a 501(c)(3) [nonprofit] or make real change." I don't. I just don't.

Debbie highlights in this statement how she initially had hoped that her unpaid labor as the unofficial face of the police would result in real change for her and the ATHG. She admits her naivete in thinking that the police would make it easier for the ATHG to raise money or gain non-profit status. But this was not to be.

With the encouragement of movements like Black Lives Matter and as descendants of the United Farm Workers, Salinians have grown increasingly vocal about their experiences of neglect, brutality, and racial profiling at the hands of police. Although lesser known, racism also impacts the rate of homicide clearance rates, and surviving family members began to vocalize that more in Salinas.[22] At times, this has come at Debbie's expense. For example, one afternoon Debbie met with several mothers from her grief group at a popular diner. They had gathered to discuss what demands to bring to the next Public Hearing.

> These mothers were very angry and felt like a lot of us feel, that if our kids were White instead of Brown, they might have gotten more attention and their cases would be solved. And they were pressuring me to say that to representatives. Usually, I try not to be too aggressive because, well, they are the government, and we need to work with them. How does it help to start a fight? But I got what these ladies were saying. Anyway, word got around, and the detective who was working my son's case stopped calling. We were pretty tight before, and I would meet with him once in a while when I demanded it. But yeah, he just turned on me. And so I finally asked him, "Are you ignoring me?!" And he said, "I heard what you said about me, Debbie, being a racist. You really shouldn't turn your back on us. We are not the bad guys." Thank god he has retired now, but for a long time there I was heartbroken. I didn't have anyone on the inside helping me.

The statement of the retired detective revealed just how conditional (White) police support for her had been. As the unofficial liaison between survivors and law enforcement, Debbie was not permitted by the police to show any doubt for, or critique of, their (lack of) results. Her dream of laying Stephen's case to rest was obfuscated by competing political agendas and the detective's demand that she stand by him, or else.

While city officials attempted to ameliorate worsening police/community relations by including Debbie, she came to see over time how their relationship was hollow, even exploitative:

> I get invited by a lot of people to partner with them and their organizations. And a lot of good people have come into my life to help. But the ones that I would really like help from, they are not really willing to help. And I am going to tell you—it's the local government. The city, I don't know what it is. They like me around, for the photos, so they can get grants and look like they are actually doing something about the violence. But I let it happen. I do. Why do I let it happen? Maybe because I want my son's picture out there, because everywhere I go, he is right here. Like this one time, the mayor and the

[22] Nick Petersen, "Neighborhood Context and Unsolved Murders: The Social Ecology of Homicide Investigations," *Policing and Society* 27, no. 4 (2015): 372–392.

> councilman of the district, they called me the day before Christmas to do this tree planting ceremony with the mothers. I told him it was last-minute, but I got the ladies together. But as a leader, I have to stop being so nice, because once I finally started opening my mouth, doing everything. And the community can suck you dry, and so can the politicians. They will if you let them. I am a little bit of a pushover, and people still mistake my kindness for weakness.

Overtime, Debbie (like Anjanette) became increasingly aware of the ways her story and her advocacy was being manipulated by others for their own agendas.

Calls for Debbie to politicize the murder of her son in order to address the frayed relationship between government, law enforcement, and the community came just as much from the right as from the left of the political spectrum. Critical legal scholars have long critiqued the conservative co-option of victim's rights to justify mass incarceration, harsher sentencing, and hyper policing. But it is equally important that abolitionists and reformers do not make the same demands to the image and voice of survivors in our own work. Debbie recalls one example of a challenging demand from a local Restorative Justice organization, which asked her to join them in their prisoners' rights advocacy efforts, and then the pushback she received from police, who opposed Debbie's work with prisoners.

> They call me asking me to come in and speak with the guys in prison, you know, so I can share what it was like for me losing my son. Most of them are in there for murder, and that's asking a lot from me, it really is. But you know, I do it because well, for one, they pay me, and we really need the money. The question I always get is, "Do I forgive him? The man who took my son's life. I tell them yes, yes, I would forgive them because I really feel that. I am a Christian, and I do believe in second chances. That doesn't mean that I don't want justice for my son or want to know who killed him, but I do forgive them. Anyway, somehow it gets back to [the police] about me saying that I could forgive [Stephen's murderer], and they got really upset with me. They said, "How could you do that, Debbie? How could you do that to us?" And the chief, the chief of police at the time, he scolded me pretty bad, telling me, "That's why they are called con artists, Debbie. They con people. You got conned." And that really hurt me. It really did. I started doubting myself like, "Do I really forgive them? What was that all about? Were they just trying to get over on me?" I don't know, but I would really like to partner with someone who wanted the same things I wanted and could really help [us] get on our feet.

In this example, we see how pressures from the Left are different from those from the Right. While the Right believes it knows best for Debbie—no matter what she might say otherwise—Restorative Justice asks for Debbie's hard-given forgiveness, for her to empathize with assailants, and for her to somehow demonstrate that prisons are obsolete. If surviving families can forgive assailants, prisoners should then be set free, reasons the Left. In addition to straining her relationships with her now-deceased husband Oscar and surviving children, Debbie's participation in this advocacy work has also caused jealous rifts between members of ATHG, who see Debbie's work in the prisons as a betrayal and her mounting celebrity as a distraction from their collective suffering. At the same time as Debbie was unable to satisfy her family and community, she also struggled to take care of her own needs and be tender with her own pain.

Family Ties and Public Mothering

Gender roles shape bereavement processes within the family structure, something we see reflected in the grief of Debbie and Oscar Aguilar. Family is a social construction that is inseparable from its social and historical context. During the 1950s, the Mexican American and Chicano family was informed by heteronormative gender roles, such as the bread-winning patriarch and the care-giving mother. Debbie and Oscar were both born in the late 1950s and were descendants of the Braceros. Assimilation into the dominant European-American culture was one way that Mexican Americans, like theirs, protected themselves from the prejudice they faced. It also was a way to distance themselves from *paisanos* or recently arrived migrant workers. By the time Debbie and Oscar were in their late teens, the Civil Rights Movement was underway, as students rallied for Ethnic Studies curricula, workers' rights, women's rights, and reclamation of their Aztec and Mayan ancestry. In the midst of multiple and co-occurring social movements, Oscar and Debbie remained on the assimilationist path created by their families. Once young parents themselves, they settled down in Salinas. At 18 years old, Oscar joined the welders union, where he remained until his death in 2013. His union wages allowed Debbie to stay at home with their growing family. But Stephen's murder, and the couple's divergent responses to it, challenged their normative way of life. When Stephen died, Debbie found some relief in peer-support groups and later advocacy, while Oscar found remained committed to his work, which afforded him respect for adhering to the social control of the patriarchal family. Although Oscar supported Debbie and accompanied her to community vigils, peace walks and grief groups, Debbie never felt that he embraced it to the same extent that as she did.

Debbie's private life now came second to her public commitments as the leader of ATHG. For the first time in her life, Debbie felt like a leader. She recalled,

> Before a Time for Grieving, I never felt like a leader, no one ever asked me what I thought. Sure, I was a leader in my home with the kids, but never to other people. Looking back, it really has put a strain on everything: my marriage for one, my health, my children. In the beginning, they were still too small, but as they got older, they would come with me—my little advocates wearing our t-shirts and leading the marches holding up our little candles. They were always by my side. I have clippings to show you. But they got tired of that real quick. They didn't like seeing their mom get taken from them. My daughter, she's more the type to say what she thinks, and we are not as close anymore. But she is coming back around again, but for a while she was angry because all of this took a lot of mom time away from them, and wife time from my husband. And now he is gone, and they lost a father. I think about that, how I can't change it.

By prioritizing advocacy and mutual aid through ATHG, Debbie was challenging the gendered order to the home in which she and her family had invested for so many years. No longer was she there when her three surviving children got home from school or when it came time to put dinner on the table. New routines had to be created to ensure the laundry was washed and dried, the groceries picked up, and the appointments scheduled. Debbie's comment, "They didn't like seeing their mom get taken from them," underscores the loss her children experienced—not just with the death of Stephen—but also with Debbie's investment in the community, which took her away from being exclusively theirs.

Debbie's surviving children, now beg her to leave Salinas and begin a new life, free of the dangers and demands of her community work in Salinas. But, somehow, despite years of disappointment, she cannot bear to leave.

> If I leave, I guess, I will have to feel it. Feel the grief of losing him and never knowing why it happened or who did it. Without my community work, what am I really? Just Debbie. Just little old Debbie. This movement made me, and I can't let all these other families down. Because a lot of them have waited longer than me for answers. And that kills me. I know I haven't grieved yet. I know. But I feel like if I start crying, I won't ever stop.

Prior to establishing ATHG, Debbie did not consider herself an expert on anything that might interest city or state officials or the larger public. She never concerned herself with politics and rarely watched the news, read the paper, or even voted consistently. Her world revolved around her four children, husband Oscar, and their extended family. Oscar was a member of Local 62, and Debbie had thought herself content with domestic life as wife and mother. But all this changed when she started ATHG, and Debbie attributes her strained relationships at home to her work with the group. She describes her time advocating for grieving families as being "stolen" from her family. Debbie implies that were it not for her involvement with ATGH, her relationship with her daughter would not be as tense. She also suggests that her time away from the home was in some way to blame for Oscar's death. Here we see the double bind for public mothers—their activism and community carework is seen as a form of emotional abandonment from their more intimate familial and social connections.

In her mutual aid and carework, Debbie was able to access some healing—as well as internal and external judgement about her time away from family. But Oscar faced a different type of double bind. Gender expectations for men allow them fewer opportunities to grieve and heal. So, Oscar responded to Stephen's murder by emotionally withdrawing, becoming increasingly depressed, and drinking heavily. Although Oscar was financially supportive of Debbie, she feels like he did not approve of her efforts in the community. While Debbie pushed for further investigation into Stephen's killer, she says that Oscar became reclusive and irritable. His frequent work-related travel widened the breach between him and his family.

Interestingly, Debbie never mentioned to me Oscar's community involvement or advocacy work; but Oscar's public obituary prominently cites his "legacy of Volunteerism" and his work alongside Debbie "to help a father or mother who've suffered a homicide in the family."[23] It is hard to reconcile these two pictures of Oscar—active community member and isolated husband and father. I suggest that as a public document, the obituary sought to maintain the appearance of a unified family unit, emphasizing the Oscar and Debbie were united in the work to support suffering Salinas' families. But as I came to know Debbie in the years after Oscar's death, she revealed to me how the family privately splintered in their grief, a truth that was not illustrated in the public obituary.

Ambivalent as Debbie feels today about her choice to prioritize work in the community, it has for over 18 years met some of her needs to feel helpful, to feel seen, and to be appreciated—even if today she finds it difficult to fully accept those needs as valid. Part of what makes it challenging for Debbie to come to terms with her decision to take on a public facing

[23] "Oscar Sergio 'Clam' Aguilar, 1958-2013," Obituary published by Legacy.com, https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/thecalifornian/name/oscar-aguilar-obituary?pid=167805325

role following the murder of Stephen is the fact that his perpetrator was never found. At times, this makes her feel ashamed particularly around her peers. What's more, her living children—Sergio, Francesca, and Christopher—all witnessed their mother giving of herself, without getting an answer to her most pressing question. Although they express their feelings in varied ways, her children also believe that their mother's attention should be focused on them. And their feelings of anger and resentment only intensify Debbie's sense of inadequacy and remorse.

These interpersonal tensions surfaced at different points during the interviews I conducted with Debbie, exposing the strain her public facing role had caused with her children. In fall 2018, during one of my trips to Salinas, I was relaxing in the family living room with Debbie when her 17-year-old daughter Francesca walked in. This was an unusual occurrence, as I only encountered Francesca a handful of times during my fieldwork, and the majority of those encounters were short. Unlike her mother, who flat irons and dyes her hair, Francesca's hair was unstyled and curly, hanging loosely around her face. She had donned a camouflage military-style jacket with jeans and sneakers. She wore no makeup and had a serious expression. Her affect was one of a woman far beyond her years. Francesca responded to my presence by mumbling a "hi," without making eye contact and walking straight into her room and closing the door. My analysis of this interaction derives from a statement Debbie made in our interview that day. She disclosed that she felt exploited by journalists and politicians, like Anjanette, while also feeling obligated to maintain relationships with them, with the hope that they might help her find her son's murderer. Debbie would prefer to leave her advocacy work, but her role and identity are bound to her visibility and availability to the public she serves. For this reason, I see Francesca's limited engagement with me as an illustration of precisely what Debbie yearns to do. Debbie's desire to resign from public motherhood, as it did not produce what she desired, finds an echo in Francesca's choice not to fully acknowledge me and to close to door on the interview, to create boundaries between her public and private life.

One late afternoon in April 2017—a year and a half before my aforementioned encounter with Francesca—Debbie introduced me to her youngest son Christopher and recounted a story about when Christopher begged her to stay home instead of going out to support a grieving family. We were chatting in the living room, as usual, when Christopher (age 15) walked in bouncing a basketball. He was skinny, baby-faced, and dressed as a skater. After Christopher shook my hand, he lingered in the living room, balancing the basketball on his head. Debbie asked Christopher if he remembered the story she had been telling me, about a night she received a call from crisis intervention, notifying her about a murder that had happened on the Eastside. Debbie recalled putting on her hat and gloves to leave the house and go to this murder scene in the middle of the night to when Christopher stopped her at the door. Fearing that it was too dangerous, Christopher pleaded with her to stay home. With me sitting next to her in the living room, Debbie asked Christopher several times if he remembered that evening that he stopped her. Without looking at us, he mumbled, "Yes, mom," and continued to play with his ball. Unlike Francesca who would go straight to her room without engaging with me, Christopher obliged his mother by remaining in the room and confirming Debbie's story. Debbie concluded the story by saying that Christopher had convinced her to stay at home, adding that he was "like an angel sent from God." At this point, he asked his mom's permission to go to his room. Nodding, Debbie continued, "God sends messengers, and Christopher intervening that night was the third message I received to stop me from going to the crime scenes."

In this story, Debbie highlights the importance of listening to Christopher and staying home that night, because by doing so she is fulfilling her central role as a mother. Debbie does

not feel she can say no to external obligations directly, or for her own sake. But when her son asks, that is reason enough to be a mother to three in private, not a mother to many in public—at least for the evening. In this scene, Debbie finds value in allowing herself to be swayed a man (i.e., her son) in her life. Although Christopher is still her son, and a young man, his desire that she remain at home seems to be the only thing that was powerful enough to convince her. Indeed, when Debbie's daughter Francesca's expressed frustration with the way the community "used" her family's tragedy and how Debbie was always "choosing everyone else over us," that did not appear to Debbie as a message from God. Rather, Francesca's anger seemed to manifest in conflict between Debbie and her daughter. Debbie's differing responses to Christopher and Francesca might suggest her willingness to accept as legitimate the concerns of a (young) man in her life, rather than the dismissal with which she responded to Francesca's worries.

Conclusion

Debbie's experiences offer a window into the world of grieving mothers whose pain becomes a site of embattled political debate. Since she began ATHG in 2003, Debbie has served on state and municipal anti-gang task forces, she has worked with several mayors on violence-prevention programs, she was recruited as an emergency first responder, and she has traveled through-out the country advocating for victims' rights. As described, this work has given her space to grieve alongside other mothers of children killed by violence. Despite this, her support group is always at the brink of collapse due in-fighting among its members and lack of funds. Debbie also felt empowered as a leader and unofficial representative at police functions. But this labor came at a cost; police support for her was conditional and they never did identify Stephen's murderer. Indeed, the police needed Debbie more than she needed them, and they took advantage of her grief and advocacy to rationalize inflated budgets and affirm their connection with the "community." At the same time, Debbie's family felt her mutual aid and advocacy work kept her from her rightful place at home with them. But, somehow, despite years of disappointment, she cannot bring herself to abandon the work.

Unfortunately, the tragedy that has defined so much of Debbie's family continued; Debbie Lynn Aguilar died on January 23rd, 2021, from complications due to COVID-19. Numerous obituaries and articles praise Debbie for her life of service to the city of Salinas, her lifelong home.[24] They describe her work advocating for families who lost a loved one to violence. Whether through grief groups, vigils, or direct action, Debbie was a consistent presence, demanding that the murder victims of Salinas not be forgotten and that their surviving family members be honored. In later years, she visited prisons and juvenile detention centers to speak on behalf of victims and their families, asking that prisoners consider the consequences of their actions. Debbie's death to COVID-19 was another loss for the Mexican American and Latino community that has lost an unprecedented number of lives to the pandemic.[25] Her passing

[24] See for example, Angelica Cabral, "Salinas Advocate Dies of COVID-19 Complications. Her 'Legacy Will Live on Forever,'" *Salinas Californian*, January 25, 2021, https://www.thecalifornian.com/story/news/2021/01/25/community-family-saddened-death-debbie-aguilar/4247913001/

[25] The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention finds Latinos have been infected by COVID-19 at three times the rate of Whites in the United States. The *New York Times* reports that coronavirus cases among Latinos in the United States is 73 per 10,000 people. Among African Americans, the rate of infection is 62 per 10,000 people. But the infection rate among Whites in the U.S. is much lower: 23 COVID-19 cases per 10,000 people. Debbie was in her late fifties when she contracted COVID-19. Like so many Latinos who have died from the coronavirus, 1 in 4 was 60 or younger. White people in the same age range comprised only 6 percent of deaths.

was a shock and tragedy but also part of the larger loss and collective grief in the Latino community, particularly in Monterey County. Debbie's death is a great personal loss for Serio, Francesca, and Christopher, who first "lost" their mother to her work and then secondly lost her to COVID 19. Let us remember Debbie and Stephen both as we continue Debbie's work to memorialize those who society would have us forget.

COVID patients in the Latino community between the ages of 40 and 59 have been infected at five times the rate of their White counterparts in the same age range. See Jill Cowan, "Why Covid-19 Is Deadlier for Black and Latino Californians." *The New York Times*, Apr. 28, 2020, www.nytimes.com/2020/04/28/us/coronavirus-california-black-latinos.html; James E. Garcia, "NYT: Latinos Have Highest COVID-19 Infection Rate in The Country," *Latino USA*, July 8, 2020, www.latinousa.org/2020/07/08/nytstudy/.

Chapter Four

One of the Blessed Ones: Princess Beverly Williams's Story

Princess Beverly Williams was at Dawn Phillips's house in East Oakland when her cell phone rang. Dawn—a housing organizer with Causa Justa / Just Cause (CJJC)—was hosting a colleague's birthday party.[1] On this warm autumn night in September 2012, the small house pulsated with music, laughter, and the clatter of plates and glasses. Princess Beverly could not make out what her niece Ivakia was saying on the phone. She moved from the sofa into the foyer, hoping it would be quieter. Pressing her cell phone to her ear, she could hear Ivakia crying: *"*Zo's been shot!*"* Princess Beverly recalled,

> The whole world went quiet for me after that. I couldn't hear or see *nothing*. I couldn't even feel my legs! Later they told me I let out a holler something ugly, but I don't remember that. All I remember is us piling into the cars and me telling them to drive, drive, drive! We was quiet the whole way. We was praying he was still alive.

Princess Beverly quickly arrived at the corner of 54th and Genoa, the block where she had grown up, with ten of her co-workers from CJJC. A crowd of neighbors, many of whom Princess Beverly knew, had come out of their homes to witness the scene. The car belonging to her son Lorenzo Ward (or Zo) was riddled with bullets. An ambulance and several police cars blocked the street.

As soon as the car stopped, Princess Beverly ran to see Zo but was stopped by law enforcement as she reached the yellow tape. Brain matter, flesh, and blood were spread across the asphalt. But Zo's body was nowhere in sight. She pleaded with the police officers to let her through:

> I tried to get to him; but when I got there, the police told me that I would be interfering with the crime scene if I went over the tape to see my baby. All I wanted was to feel my son before he turned cold. That is *all* I asked of them. But they told me the coroner had to come first; but then the coroner came, and they *still* didn't let me in! So I got mad, and they said they was going to arrest me for interfering with the crime scene. But thank God Dawn was there holding me back, calming me down, because I was ready to sock those police! Dawn took my car keys and everything, he told me to calm myself because I was going cuckoo for Cocoa Puffs for real. Dawn kept tryin' to reason with me *"Princess Beverly if you get arrested, we don't have the money to bail you out!"* So I had no choice but to stand there quiet while they took him away. After all that time of them not letting me pass to see my son, Dawn went on up to the police and told them, *"She's the mother! Have some respect!"*

As an organizer, Dawn already had experience dealing with the law and with authorities and was thus able to help Princess Beverly navigate the rush of feelings and official demands in this heightened moment of tragedy and grief. This interaction encapsulates how relationships with key members of community organizations were central to Princess Beverly's survival throughout

[1] Causa Justa/ Just Cause is an anti-gentrification, racial justice, and housing rights organization based in San Francisco and Oakland. More background on this organization will be provided later in the chapter.

the aftermath of her son's murder. Advocating on behalf of Princess Beverly at the site of Zo's murder exemplifies the relationship-centered and nuanced approach Dawn and others took while supporting Princess Beverly. Dawn's words—*"She's the mother! Have some respect!"*—illustrate how organizers with Causa Justa / Just Cause recognized the complexities of such crisis interactions. On the one hand, they opposed the institutional violence that prevented Princess Beverly from being with her son as he died; on the other, they understood the danger for Princess Beverly if law enforcement escalated. The depth of understanding and fluency in such community and police conflicts were the result of CJJC's decades-long work advocating for tenants and workers in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Princess Beverly's friends and fellow organizers mobilized these skills while caring for Princess Beverly. Because of them, Princess Beverly was able to navigate Lorenzo's death with social support that few victimized families are able to access. Although state sponsored social services, such as California Victim's Compensation, provide resources to eligible families, CJJC's care was not contingent upon legal distinctions. It was holistic, personal, and informal. By having a social container in which to grieve, Princess Beverly emerged from her bereavement, in her words, "feeling more loved than ever before." This statement stands in stark contrast with dominant narratives of grief and mourning, including those recounted earlier about Anjanette, Demitra, and Debbie, where survivors describe acute feelings of isolation and betrayal. This chapter is an attempt to highlight the conditions that allowed Princess Beverly to experience the aftermath of her son's killing with unprecedented community support. I will outline the specific support services provided by the CJJC to sustain Princess Beverly throughout her grieving process, and it is my hope that the empirical evidence in this case study will inform how we support survivors in the future.

Drawing from my interviews and fieldnotes, I analyze specific instances where Dawn and Rose Elizondo shared their unique skill sets as anti-poverty, immigration, and housing rights organizers and Restorative Justice practitioners to support Princess Beverly. We see in their actions the local intimacies, including friendship and mutual aid, that buoyed Princess Beverly and permitted her to experience the end of Lorenzo's life as a time when she felt deeply connected to community. Like Anjanette, Demitra, and Debbie, Princess Beverly experienced long periods of bereavement—characterized by acute isolation, hopelessness, and despair—but she also felt in the process gratitude, joy, and love. The relationships that developed between Dawn, Rose, and Princess Beverly during the aftermath of Lorenzo's killing expand our current understanding of what constitutes carework. Princess Beverly is an African American cis woman in her 60s; Dawn is a transgender man and immigrant to the United States from Cambodia; and Rose is a White-passing, Mexican American and Navajo cis woman in her 50s. They thus represent a diverse set of identities joined together by their employment at various local non-profit organizations (NPOs) and their political commitments. Analyzing these acts of kindness within a community organizing setting understandably necessitated that I establish trust across social and economic differences.

Methods

This project is based on six years of participant observation research conducted in North Oakland, California between 2012-2018. North Oakland has nearly 40,000 residents and borders the cities of Berkeley and Emeryville. While living in this community, I was troubled by the repeated violence against young Black men. It seemed that every couple of months, a new altar appeared on a nearby street corner—showing a photo of a smiling young man surrounded by

deflated balloons and empty Hennessy bottles. These memorials stood in contrast to the seemingly carefree lives of the well-to-do White professionals who frequented the nearby (and newly-arrived) hipster cafes, brew pubs, and yoga studios.

As I spent more time in the community, attending neighborhood meetings and striking up conversations with neighbors, I became aware of a moral dilemma facing homeowners in the Lorin district about when to call the police. Some of these White newcomers and established African American residents sympathized with the homeless people and youth of color who were the main targets of police harassment in the neighborhood. Other homeowners complained that BIPOC youth and the homeless loitered and lived in their cars or were prone to public drinking and violence. These residents were the most vocal at neighborhood meetings, where they demanded more police patrols and security cameras in the neighborhood. While homeowners aired their grievances, a smaller contingent of neighbors began rejecting these calls for more policing. With the high-profile police murders of Trayvon Martin (2012), Tamir Rice (2014), Michael Brown (2014), Eric Garner (2014), Freddy Grey (2015), and Sandra Bland (2015) fresh in people's minds, these residents called for alternatives to policing and incarceration. Over time, this group of neighbors established the North Oakland Restorative Justice Council (NORJC). As a council, they set out to support families impacted by violence—organizing fundraisers, providing means, holding vigils, mural painting, and block parties—as ways to both destigmatize and honor those who had passed.

These memorial block parties were an organizing tool that NORJC used to bring neighbors together, particularly those who otherwise would not interact offline because of social and economic differences. When incidents would occur in the neighborhood—such as noise disturbances, parking violations, fights, or shootings—newly arrived homeowners would often take their complaints to hyperlocal social networking communities such as Nextdoor*,* which has close ties to the local police. Neighborhood groups on Facebook were other online spaces where new residents would air grievances about access or safety issues in the community. The language used in these posts relied on racially-coded terms such as “hoodlums,” “gang members,” and “delinquents”—as well as derogatory terms such as “winos” and “crackheads.” NORJC hoped that these block parties would encourage neighbors to get to know one another in person and build relationships, as opposed to relying on social media or law enforcement to address their conflicts. Princess Beverly was one of the first mother’s in the neighborhood to approach NORJC to request a block party in honor of her son Zo.

Princess Beverly had grown up in North Oakland and was fighting the foreclosure of her mother’s home with Causa Justa/Just Cause when she first became aware of NORJC. Having recently lost Lorenzo, she asked if the council could help organize a memorial block party for her son. Through NORJC, Princess Beverly and I worked closely together over the years, and I witnessed her transition from being a recipient to a provider of care. I also saw how both giving and accepting support energized her and made her feel more connected to others. Princess Beverly exemplifies the importance of relationship and community building as both an individual skill and community value. She was able to receive the support of members of local grassroots organizations, in part, because she was familiar with relying on others for care during difficult times. The notion of the collective and beloved community was ingrained in her early enough, that—despite experiencing many betrayals and hardships—Princess Beverly still turned to others in her time of need. The following is an extended case study of Princess Beverly through which I situate the roots of her resilience in her ongoing experiences with mutual aid networks.

Birth and Early Childhood

Beverly Williams was born on June 7, 1963, in the back of a Rolls Royce belonging to King Louis H. Narcisse, a spiritual leader in Oakland. Born in Louisiana, King Narcisse was a Christian minister who had founded Mount Zion Spiritual Church in Oakland in 1945 under the credo, "It's nice to be nice." At its peak, church membership included nearly 200,000 people. Mt. Zion was a formidable Oakland institution with a weekly radio show and an elaborate church hierarchy of saints, princes and princesses, and queens. As historian Donna Jean Murch notes, "Through contributions of money and time, ordinary people could ascend to the highest ranks of church leadership... offering members status and social recognition denied them elsewhere."[2] Historian Shirley Ann Wilson Moore adds that "newcomer" churches like Mt. Zion in Oakland "provided the means by which Black newcomers could regulate the degree, quality, and pace of assimilation into the urban environment."[3]

Beverly (not yet a Princess) spent her childhood in this church, where her mother—Barbara Turret—was employed as King Narcisse's personal secretary. While her mother worked long hours for the King, Beverly was left in the care of his many maids, butlers, and drivers. Beverly recalls running through the "Pink Palace"—his four-story mansion in the Oakland hills, playing in every room but the King's bedroom because she "was scared of it." By age ten, Beverly was one of the many devout princesses, princes, bishops, and queens that composed the temple's congregation. King Narcisse's royal "court" was maintained by mandatory member dues, which paid for his lavish lifestyle. Dressing in fur coats, gold jewelry, and a crown, King Narcisse delivered impassioned sermons; and music rang through the church at all hours of the day and night. The grandeur and beauty of Mt. Zion was a respite from the poverty of segregated West Oakland. While surrounded by dilapidated buildings and empty lots, Beverly's spiritual community was rich and nurturing, except when it wasn't.

The fairytale of her early childhood at Mt. Zion came to an end at five years old. It was at this age that Beverly was molested by one of King Narcisse's workers. A few years after Beverly's abuse, her mother was terminated for *allegedly* stealing $50 from the King's funds. Leaving the church in the early 1970s was devastating for Beverly's mother, Barbara, and she began drinking heavily. Her binges were accompanied by fits of rage directed at Beverly. She recalled,

> My mom used to beat the hell out of me all the time. I used to have extension cord marks and all kinds of stuff all over my body. The worst of it was that she whopped me a lot for no reason, especially when she was drunk. She was hurt that my daddy left her for another woman, and she was hurt that the King took another lady's word over hers. So I guess she took that out on me.

Despite her best efforts to work hard and provide for her daughter, Barbara's emotional and financial security was repeatedly jeopardized by the men in her life: first by Beverly's father and then by King Narcisse. Beverly bore the brunt of her mother's anger with these men's decisions, taking beating after beating from her angry and devastated mother.

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[2] Donna Jean Murch, *Living for the City: Migration, Education, and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 29.

[3] Shirly Ann Wilson Moore, T*o Place Our Deeds: The African American Community in Richmond, California, 1910-1963* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 143.

Despite her alcoholism, Barbara would soon find work as a secretary at the World Savings and Loan in downtown Berkeley. Typing at 140 words a minute, she was a much sought-after typist and secretary. Until her death, Barbara made enough to support herself and her family. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Barbara traversed racial and gender boundaries, eventually working her way up at the World Savings and Loan and later at UC Berkeley's Bancroft Library. As Barbara rebuilt their lives, Beverly continued to attend Mt. Zion Spiritual Temple with her godmother.[4] Meanwhile, Barbara sought alternative places of worship, eventually landing a spot in the Voices of Christ, a gospel group led by the acclaimed conductor Reverend James Cleveland.

Beverly recalled that she was "blessed with the best of both worlds," thanks to Barbara's involvement with the Voices of Christ and her godmother's membership in King Narcisse's royal court. (It is unclear if Beverly's godmother knew about her abuse at the church.) Both King Narcisse and Rev. James Cleveland took a special interest in Beverly, providing her with extra money for school supplies, food, and clothes. Because of this, Beverly had many of the material privileges her classmates and cousins did not. She remembers her toy box full of dolls, Easy Bake Oven, and many perfume bottles.

While materially provided for, Beverly felt emotionally deprived of love, due to her mother's abuse. Describing herself as "a showcase kid," Beverly felt that she was just a prop in a well-orchestrated performance her mother put on to show off to friends and family. Barbara rarely let Beverly play freely with her things. Her beautiful room and precious toys were more like scenery than gifts she could enjoy. "My mom gave me everything I wanted," Beverly recalled. "I didn't have to cook. I didn't have to iron. She wouldn't even let me in the kitchen. '*Princesses don't cook,*'" she used to say. But she would beat me, so I didn't understand the logic." The physical abuse and emotional neglect Beverly experienced at the hands of her mother cultivated a traumatic home environment, despite what it may have looked like to outsiders who only saw that Beverly was well-cared for.

One aspect of Barbara's life in which Beverly took great enjoyment was Voices of Christ. Barbara's house was the "hot spot" where everyone would go to party after rehearsals and concerts. But in addition to being a world-renowned gospel choir, Voices of Christ (founded in 1969) was also a hub for gay, lesbian, and bisexual African American singers. It was only after Barbara joined Voices of Christ that Beverly became aware of her mother's bisexuality. While her mother's sexual orientation confused Beverly as a child, she developed a close bond with one of Barbara's partners, Carla Alexander. Carla was the sister of then-famous musician, Danny Thomas of Con Funk Shuns, which was one of Beverly's favorite R&B and soul group. Seeped in the complex blend of music, faith, drinking, and partying, Beverly was exposed to many different lifestyles. Like her mother, Beverly grew to love singing and bringing people together.

Childhood and Adolescence

Despite having a vibrant social network, Barbara's alcoholism, distrust of others, and anger issues led her to become more reclusive as the years progressed. She strictly defined insiders and outsiders to her family. While Princess Beverly was close with the Voices of Christ community, Barbara raised Princess Beverly to view outsiders with suspicion and friends as potential threats. Having unfairly lost her position at King Narcisse's Temple because of a deceitful co-worker and lost her husband (Princess Beverly's father) to a conniving friend,

[4] Princess Beverly did not reveal to me why Barbara allowed her to continue attending Mt. Zion Spiritual Temple after Barbara's termination.

Barbara taught Beverly to watch her back and trust no one. As a result, Princess Beverly had few friends growing up. A self-described loner, Princess Beverly perhaps counterintuitively also became the classroom bully. In an attempt to try and "get all that mess my mom put in my head out," she began picking fights in school.

Princess Beverly's Uncle Otis was one of her few allies. Whenever he could, Uncle Otis would take the blame for household mishaps, always to save Princess Beverly from another one of her mother's beatings. While very loving and caring of Princess Beverly, Uncle Otis also exposed her to drugs and alcohol at an early age. Beverly remembers,

> I used to keep myself when I was a kid. I was very curious, like my Uncle Otis—he smoked cigarettes, so I smoked cigarettes. My uncle used to drink alcohol, so I drank alcohol. He used to drink Bourbon Deluxe and Reindeer Ale. We were very close. I was my uncle's only niece. He didn't have kids. I was it. He died in 1979 of cirrhosis of the liver. I was 16 years old. I think that's another reason why I ran away [from home].

Devastated by the loss of her favorite uncle and fed up with her mother's unpredictable and abusive behavior, Princess Beverly ran away from home at age 16. For several weeks she stayed at friends' houses, including the home of Carla, her mother's former lover. At the time, Princess Beverly was running with a gang called the Broadway Hustlers, and they provided protection on the streets and opportunities for making money by selling drugs and sex.

Two weeks after leaving her mother's home, Princess Beverly met a man who would change her life forever. Beverly met Bill Albert or Mr. Bill in 1979 on a street corner in West Oakland. One afternoon, Princess Beverly's friend Sporty told her she could make as much money as he did if she engaged in sex work. Sporty was encouraging Princess Beverly to start working with a john, an old man standing on the opposite corner with his dog. Mr. Bill overheard their conversation and warned Princess Beverly away from working the john because he would make her do sexual things with his dog. Princess Beverly took Mr. Bill's advice, and the two of them began to have a pseudo-romantic, sexual relationship. In a way, Princess Beverly recalled, Bill Albert saved her from the pain and loneliness of her childhood:

> My mother was very strict. She was mean. She was an alcoholic and beat me. Mr. Bill was the first person that was ever nice to me. He was the most handsome man I had ever seen. He had green eyes, a green Cadillac, and a green suit. Living with him, staying in motels in Oakland and Salinas it was a dream. It was like a fairytale.

Albert offered love, companionship, and safety at a moment when Princess Beverly's life was in upheaval. Homeless and grieving the loss of her uncle, Princess Beverly found in Bill the support she needed. He and Princess Beverly would continue to date on and off for over a decade. Albert was not always as caring as he was in the beginning. At times he even resorted to physical violence. However, he remains a consistent, though imperfect, source of nurturance for Princess Beverly.

Six months after meeting Albert, Princess Beverly was arrested by the Oakland Police Department on a search warrant her mother had put out for her shortly after she ran away. Princess Beverly was sent to Ventura Youth Correctional Facility for Girls. She spent one year and four months there. Perhaps surprisingly, Ventura was one of the better experiences of Princess Beverly's adolescence. She learned to sew, earned her high school diploma, and sang in

the choir. She would travel to other correctional facilities with her singing group, performing at co-ed socials. Princess Beverly's incarceration complicates our understanding of juvenile detention whereby correctional facilities, while oppressive, can also provide individuals with structure and rehabilitation. Upon release, Princess Beverly was sent back to her mother's house, only to run away again shortly afterwards. This time she left with Arthur, the youngest of the notorious Ward brothers, a family of pimps.

After a year living on the streets, running with various gangs, and selling drugs and sex, Princess Beverly finally returned to her mother's home in 1981— pregnant with her first and only child. This excerpt describes an unexpected shift in Barbara and Beverly's relationship:

> When I got pregnant. I came to my mama's house. I didn't know nothing about being pregnant. I conceived Lorenzo on my 19th birthday, I didn't know nothing. But that was the best time we ever had in our whole life experience. She was my best friend for the whole time I was pregnant. I was different then because my hormones were different. I didn't wanna do nothing but be up under her. I didn't wanna be around nobody but my mom. I don't know why because once I had Lorenzo, I couldn't wait to get away from her. But when you are pregnant, you are different. When you're pregnant, you do unusual things. But I had to learn that; I didn't know. But now I do. I didn't do anything but stay in the house with her. I didn't want no man. I didn't want nobody but my mama. My mom took me to the hospital when I went into labor. She stayed in there with me as I kept pushing Lorenzo out and sucking him back into me, and they eventually they had to take this plunger type thing and pull him on out of me. My mom, she sat in the delivery, she was my delivery coach. Me and her was best friends while I was pregnant. That was the only time we ever been close since.

Barbara had abused Princess Beverly throughout her childhood, but while Princess Beverly was pregnant, her mother provided care and security. Perhaps, as Princess Beverly suggests, her hormonal changes helped deescalate their typically volatile dynamic. Perhaps also their shared desire to bring a healthy baby into the world united them in a common goal. The closeness Princess Beverly shared with her mother during her pregnancy remains one of her fondest memories.

Beverly and Lorenzo, Oakland, CA (1984)

Lorenzo's Birth and Coming of Age

Princess Beverly and Barbara were united when they welcomed Lorenzo Lamar Ward into the world on March 7, 1982, at Children's Hospital in North Oakland. But their relationship soon deteriorated again. Both grandmother and mother did their best to care for Lorenzo during his infancy. However, a few months after giving birth, Princess Beverly experienced a series of traumatic events that placed tremendous strain on her family and left Lorenzo in the sole custody of Barbara. Princess Beverly shared the following with me:

> After Lorenzo was born, I used to spend a lot of my time at my boyfriend Dennis's place. He lived like maybe four blocks away from me, and then I'd come back to my mama's house. He used to let me drive his car. He'd take me places. He was supposed to be my first husband, but really he was just like any other man in my experience. I went over there one day and found another woman in his bed. All he said to me was "Let me give her what she wants," which was sex, of course. I heard that. And I just ran off from him. He didn't abuse me. He didn't hit me. He didn't do *nothing.* But he told me that, and it *hurted*. It *hurted*. So that's what ran me off and into the streets. I left Lorenzo with a baby-sitter and took off to street hustle to make some money. But then, this dude named Jaboo from West Oakland hit me in my face, held a gun on me, and kidnapped me and took me to Las Vegas. He was using me as a money vessel. He took all my money. He didn't let me out of his sight till we got on Phoenix, Arizona, and then I ran off. I called my mother and told her where Lorenzo was, and she went and got him, and then that's how he came to live with her.

While Princess Beverly managed to escape Jaboo, it would be many years until she regained custody of Lorenzo. After surviving sex trafficking, Princess Beverly began to hustle her way to California. But en route, she met Sampson, who would become her first husband. They lived in Tennessee for a year before moving back to California and marrying. Gradually, Lorenzo began again spending time with his mother and Sampson. But Princess Beverly's newly gained domesticity was tainted by a bill for $50,000 in overdue child support that Barbara claimed she

was owed. While Princess Beverly was gone, Barbara had reported her to Child Protective Services (CPS) for abandoning her son. After years of bitter conflict, Princess Beverly secured a loan and paid her outstanding child support fees. She finally regained custody of Lorenzo, now 11 years old. While certainly very different events, the pain of being reported to CPS was surely a reminder to Princess Beverly of Barbara reporting her to the Oakland Police Department at age 16 when she first ran away.

During the 11 years Lorenzo had lived with Barbara, he experienced the same abuse at his grandmother's that his mother had suffered. Like Princess Beverly, he was not expected to help around the house or do chores. Barbara had a fondness of taking Lorenzo on train rides to Sacramento or day trips to the horse tracks. Always wishing she had had a son, Barbara took great pride in her grandson, offering him as many gifts as she could afford. Perhaps these gifts were meant as apologies for the inevitable alcoholic rages that left Lorenzo beaten and often badly hurt.

The mid-1990s were particularly painful ones for Lorenzo. While the period saw the return of Princess Beverly from Tennessee, it also brought with it the passing of Barbara in 1991, a loss that Lorenzo felt acutely. On the cusp of adolescence, Lorenzo began running away and getting into trouble. At age 12, he was incarcerated for the first time and sent to Youth Authority. He would remain in and out of youth facilities, jails, and prisons for the remainder of his adolescence and early adulthood. Since almost all people incarcerated in the Unites States are survivors of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), including exposure to trauma or violence (compared with 64% of the total US population), Lorenzo's childhood of physical abuse cannot be isolated from his subsequent institutionalizations.[5]

Once again Princess Beverly and Lorenzo were separated, this time by the social neglect, abandonment, and punishment that defines mass incarceration. Like millions of African American men across the country, Lorenzo spent a significant portion of his young life locked up. When he wasn't behind bars, he was under the supervision of parole officers; and the rare times he was free, he was continually subject to harassment by Oakland Police. Princess Beverly tried her best to deter Lorenzo from the street life. She would often try to find him work and offer him a place to stay when he was released. She would pool her resources to make his bail, send him food and toiletries, as well as receive expensive collect calls. The painstaking efforts—and the financial and emotional cost—incurred by African American mothers like Princess Beverly to "mother from the outside" is well documented by scholars such as Megan Comfort, Donald Braman, and Ruth Wilson Gilmore.[6]

The struggle to retain her son's freedom sometimes culminated in direct political action through strategies she learned as a housing rights organizer at Causa Justa / Just Cause. For example, Lorenzo was once charged with a federal sentence of 12 years for possession of drugs with intent to sell. Princess Beverly made a plea for early release by storming the Mayor of Oakland's office (with a group of family, friends, and co-workers) and showing his team a binder she had made documenting all of Lorenzo's accomplishments. She left City Hall with her son's sentence being reduced to five years. But, as Princess Beverly said when I praised her for

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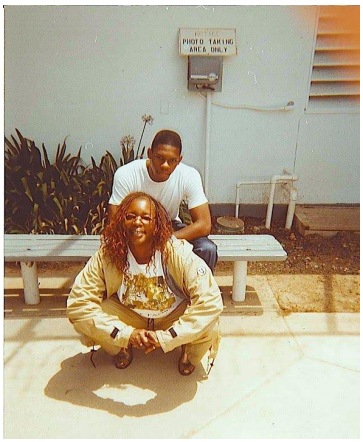
[5] " How Common Are Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)?" *The Compassion Project*, https://compassionprisonproject.org/childhood-trauma-statistics/

[6] Megan Comfort, *Doing Time Together: Love and Family in the Shadow of the* Prison (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Donald Braman, *Doing Time on the Outside: Incarceration and Family Life in Urban America* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004); Ruth Wilson Gilmore, "The People Who Keep on Going': A Listening Party, Vol. I," in *Futures of Black Radicalism*, eds by Gaye Theresa Johnson and Alex Lubin (New York: Verso, 2017).

advocating for her son, “I’ve been to jail. I know! Even two days is too long for anyone to be in there.”

Scholars such as Andrea Richie, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and Sarah Haley have provided ample evidence of how Black women and men have been disproportionately policed and incarcerated. This racialized connection to mass incarceration is often inter-generational, as we see the ways state intervention dominated the arc of Princess Beverly’s life and her son’s.[7] While Lorenzo moved in and out of institutions, he also suffered the loss of multiple close friends and cousins, the kinds of intimate social and kinship bonds that might have helped to make a difference. Between the ages of 14 and 20 years old, Lorenzo also lost at least 6 loved ones to murder. At times, Princess Beverly was relieved that Lorenzo was behind bars when he learned of another friend being killed, as she envisioned that had he been on the outside, he would have retaliated and end up with a longer sentence.



Lorenzo (16 years old) and Princess Beverly at the Youth Authority Facility, Stockton, CA (1998-1999)

Dawn Phillips and Causa Justa / Just Cause

Dawn Phillips is a Bay Area-based organizer engaged in a range of movements around social, economic, and environmental justice. He is currently the Co-Director of Programs at Causa Justa / Just Cause (CJJC) and Executive Director of the Right to the City Alliance, a formation of almost 45 community organizations based in 13 cities around the country. The Alliance is dedicated to building a strong housing and urban justice movement both nationally and internationally through an urban human rights framework. Dawn first met Princess Beverly in 1999 when he was hired at Building Opportunities for Self-Sufficiency, an agency that advocates for homeless, poor, and disabled residents of Alameda County. Princess Beverly was receiving services through their transitional housing program, and Dawn was one of the case managers. Dawn and Princess Beverly quickly connected as colleagues and friends. As Dawn remarked,

[7] Beth Richie, *Arrested Justice: Black Women, Violence, and America’s Prison Nation* (New York: New York University Press, 2012); D. Carbado, K.W. Crenshaw; V.M. Mays, and B. Tomlinson, “Intersectionality: Mapping the Movements of a Theory,” *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race* 10 no. 2 (Fall 2013): 303-312. Sarah Haley, *No Mercy Here: Gender, Punishment, and the Making of Jim Crow Modernity* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016).

> It has always been very natural for Princess Beverly and I to move seamlessly between organizing work and our personal relationship because we care about the same things and want better for our communities. Over the years, the general theme of all our conversations has been: How do we make our communities better for everyone, not just those who have money and power? Princess Beverly has always been, as long as I have known her, someone who is very charismatic, very loving, very engaged in community and the people in her life, which is what makes her an effective leader for sure, but also what makes her such an incredible friend.

After several years, Dawn moved on to other organizing opportunities and the two of them spent less time together. However, he and Princess Beverly re-connected in 2008, when her mother's home was facing foreclosure. Princess Beverly sought out legal resources through CJJC's foreclosure clinic, where Dawn had recently been hired.

At Dawn's encouragement, Princess Beverly became increasingly involved in the movement for affordable housing. Her skills as a group facilitator and speaker, as well as her kindness and deep community ties, made her an asset to the organization and the movement. Eventually, Princess Beverly was asked to come on staff as a housing rights organizer with CJJC. Princess Beverly and Lorenzo grew very close to their new CJJC community. CJJC held many social gatherings for staff, as well as retreats and opportunities to connect to one another on the weekends. For Princess Beverly, working at CJJC often felt like belonging to a large extended family. In addition to the large group of friendly staff, CJJC was closely connected to other social justice organizations in the Bay Area, with whom CJJC organized many rallies, marches, and events. For much of his adolescence, Lorenzo was cared for by the CJJC staff. Lorenzo and Dawn were especially drawn to one another for their complementary personalities, and Lorenzo even lived with Dawn for a time. The close relationship Dawn and others formed with both Princess Beverly and Lorenzo facilitated their central caretaking role in the aftermath of his murder.

The history and mission of Causa Justa /Just Cause illustrates the kinds of dynamic mutual aid organizations that were formed in response to the housing crisis that has devasted so many racialized communities in the San Francisco Bay Area and elsewhere. Formed in 2010, Causa Justa / Just Cause (CJJC) emerged from the strategic collaboration of St. Peter's Housing Committee[8] and Just Cause Oakland.[9] These two organizations represented more than 30 years'

[8] St. Peter's Church Parish, founded in 1985, is located in the Mission District. The church developed their housing committee to address the deteriorating housing conditions, rampant landlord abuses, and escalating rent burdens that the community was facing. The primary mission of the organization was to preserve affordable rental housing units and protect the rights of low-income tenants. For 25 years, St. Peter's Housing Counseling program aided tenants in retaining affordable rental units and improve housing that had fallen into disrepair. St. Peter's now functions as Causa Justa's Mission office. They continue to aid tenants experiencing problems with harassment, lease issues, illegal rent increases, and evictions. In 2001, their office became a membership-based and expanded its service model to include organizing directly on immigrant rights and housing issues in the city.

[9] In 1999, Just Cause Oakland was founded to head the effort to mobilize for a citywide Just Cause for Eviction Ordinance. In 2002, they successfully passed citywide tenant protections against eviction for illegitimate reasons, such as landlord greed or discrimination. From 2003 through 2005, Just Cause focused their efforts on protecting affordable housing in new Oakland developments, and it successfully secured the allocation of affordable housing set-asides and community benefits from new developments in West Oakland. In 2006 and 2007, Just Cause launched an ongoing campaign for an Inclusionary zoning ordinance with the People's Housing Coalition of Oakland. In 2008, they helped keep hundreds of affordable housing units from closing and won an eight-month moratorium on water shut-offs in tenanted foreclosed homes for which banks had defaulted on utility

experience working toward housing and racial justice for African Americans and Latinos. In 2015, CJJC merged with People Organized to Win Employment Rights (POWER), expanding their issue and geographic reach by establishing offices in East and West Oakland and in San Francisco's Mission and Bayview neighborhoods.[10] Over the past five years, CJJC has brought together thousands of Latino and Black residents of San Francisco and Oakland to fight for housing and immigrants' rights. CJJC successfully passed over a dozen tenants' rights ordinances in San Francisco and Oakland. It has fought deportations of our immigrant communities, winning sanctuary city status in both cities, and later helping to get motions passed by both counties pledging due process and not to cooperate with ICE on immigration holds. Their tenants' rights clinics have served more than 1,000 tenants each year, stopping hundreds of evictions, preventing rent increases, and forcing landlords to complete repairs. Their foreclosure clinics won reprieve for dozens of homeowners.

CJJCs unique approach to organizing is one of the things that has made them such an effective community-based organization. CJJC's organizing model is one that centers relationships, interconnectedness, and personal empowerment and growth. As an organization, they routinely appreciate and attend to the psychological, emotional, and spiritual aspects of their work. And they use trauma-informed and healing-centered frameworks in their training and meetings. Both CJJC's approach and Princess Beverly's proclivity towards community-building facilitated the development of strong friendships among Princess Beverly and her comrades. This model of distributing resources was in stark contrast to that of the Mt. Zion Church of Princess Beverly's early life. The CJJC also facilitated more trusting relationships, which over time expanded to include Lorenzo, who was a pre-teen when his mother first began working at CJJC. Of his relationship with Lorenzo, Dawn recalled the following:

> Lorenzo was 13 when I first met him, and, yeah, he and I were very close. I was one of a handful of adults who played a hand in raising him. He even lived with me for a while. Lorenzo was a lot like Princess Beverly in that he was incredibly charismatic, incredibly energetic, incredibly inquisitive, incredibly fun, and sweet, and yeah—just a really, really, really sweet boy.

Lorenzo's murder was devastating for the whole CJJC community, the majority of whom were present when Princess Beverly got the call that Lorenzo had been shot. Having such a close bond

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bills. They also helped democratize decision-making structures for public housing in Oakland by facilitating a process for resident input. In 2009, they launched an ongoing campaign to combat the foreclosure crisis in under-resourced neighborhoods.

[10] Garth Ferguson, Patty Snitzler, Regina Douglas, Brian Russell, and Steve Williams founded people Organized to Win Employment Rights (POWER) on May 1, 1997. After the federal government's passage of the welfare reform legislation in 1996, the founders realized that welfare recipients and most low-wage workers would be facing a new social and political landscape with more cutbacks to public services and fewer quality job opportunities. Because of this, an organization committed to economic, environmental, and racial and gender justice from the bottom-up was born. Together, POWER members waged more than 20 campaigns to improve the living and working conditions for welfare workers, domestic workers, low-income tenants, and other working-class people of color. As a result of the campaigns, San Francisco's welfare workers receive free public transportation and are protected by workplace health and safety protections, just like all other workers protected by the California Occupational Safety and Health Administration. In coalition with other organizations, POWER helped to create San Francisco's Living Wage Ordinance and later worked successfully to raise the minimum wage—twice! In recent years, POWER's youth program fought successfully to win free Muni (public transit) for youth and seniors.

with Lorenzo made his death especially difficult for Dawn. As a leader in the organization and the person who brought Princess Beverly into CJJC, Dawn felt responsible for making sure Princess Beverly was cared for not just as one of their employees, but also as a long-term friend and comrade. Dawn took it upon himself to organize systems of care for Princess Beverly and help her navigate social services.

As Princess Beverly asserts, Dawn was a critical source of protection and comfort following Lorenzo's death. Princess Beverly's experience illuminates how crucial it is for surviving family members to have an extended period of time to grieve. Also, the efforts of CJJC colleagues and friends reveals how much invisible, emotional labor that community organizations informally carry out as they attempt to support their clients and service recipients. The need for emotional and material support intensifies for Oakland families like Princess Beverly's when they are impacted by a traumatic violent event. This inevitably amplifies the unpaid work of organizers, case managers, and program directors. Increasingly, community organizations are hiring individuals who can personally relate to the experiences of clients and service recipients. This has been a powerful and effective change. However, it has also meant that working class, queer-LGBTQ, femme, disabled, Black, indigenous, and immigrant women are the ones carrying out unpaid and unacknowledged carework to support bereaving inner-city families. Additionally, Princess Beverly's close bond with Dawn speaks to the ways that organizational structures based on principles of mutual aid have the potential to cultivate lasting and sustainable relationships among diverse people. Trust and reciprocity shared between people across racial, social, and economic class enable the breakdown of institutional aid that upholds the hierarchies inherent in having "victims, volunteers, and experts."[11]

The North Oakland Restorative Justice Council and Lorenzo's Memorial Party

The other community based mutual aid organization that was central to providing Princess Beverly with support during this period was the North Oakland Restorative Justice Council (NORJC). Founded in 2007, NORJC is a multiracial, intergenerational organization, composed of members from a range of socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds. It draws upon Restorative Justice values to promote empathetic and culturally relevant responses to community violence. Throughout the years, NORJC has found that community building is the greatest non-violent weapon against gentrification and other forms of structural injustice. Through outreach and direct service, NORJC brings the diverse residents of North Oakland together to celebrate the lives of neighbors caught in the crossfire of interpersonal violence. The goal of their events is to rebuild trust and mutual support in communities ravaged by both structural and interpersonal violence. The NORJC council has several Restorative Justice circle keepers as members, including Rose Elizondo, who would support Princess Beverly in writing to Lorenzo's killer. However, NORJC also supported CJJC's efforts to provide material support to Princess Beverly, in addition to creating memorial events to honor Lorenzo. According to legal scholar Dean Spade, material assistance is critical, as symbolic gestures of solidarity amid crisis are only meaningful when accompanied with tangible resources.[12]

When Princess Beverly asked for help from NORJC to plan a memorial for Lorenzo, they enthusiastically agreed because her individual struggle reflected the very structural issues they

[11] Drawing from Cindy Patton's work, Juana María Rodríguez talks about how these categories functioned within the context of AIDS. Rodríguez, *Queer Latinidad: Identity Practices, Discursive Spaces* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 60.
[12] Dean Spade, *Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity during This Crisis (and the Next)* (Verso, 2020).

were fighting as an organization. Drawing together all their resources, NORJC provided the funds and materials to have a block party for Lorenzo and to plant a tree in his memory. (They also provided emotional, financial, and material assistance and support to Princess Beverly during the court trial.) Lorenzo's memorial fig tree was planted just outside his grandmother's foreclosed home, now occupied by White San Francisco transplants. NORJC spent several weeks meeting with the new homeowners to convince them to allow the tree planting ceremony to happen on their property. After some initial resistance for fear of retaliatory violence, the homeowners agreed and joined in the planning of the event. NORJC received permits from the city to block off the streets and have a block party memorial in celebration of Lorenzo's life. Using money fundraised by NORJC, Princess Beverly made t-shirts with Lorenzo's photograph on them, which she distributed at the event. Some neighbors and community members offered her donations for the shirts, which she then used to provide food to a homeless family she knew who lived in a nearby park. In this way, Princess Beverly was "paying it forward," an essential component of mutual aid. NORJC hired a DJ and a bouncy house, inviting all the children of the neighborhood to come out and celebrate Lorenzo. The event culminated in all the participants joining hands in a circle as Princess Beverly planted the memorial tree, which commemorates Lorenzo's life and is a reminder of the deep community roots he left behind. The loving relationships between members of grassroots organizations, like CJJC, and historical residents of Black neighborhoods, like Princess Beverly, illustrate the healing and transformative potential that is possible when we commit ourselves to an ethics of care at the community level.

Rose Elizondo and the Letter

As a NORJC councilmember, Restorative Justice circle keeper and friend, Rose Elizondo was instrumental in helping Princess Beverly find a meaningful way to take action after the death of Lorenzo. Traumatic loss often has an immobilizing effect on survivors, who describe feeling powerless to abate the pain they feel. Rose facilitated three critical interventions in the aftermath of Lorenzo's murder. She first helped Princess Beverly write a letter to the young man who killed Lorenzo (something Debbie Aguilar had longed for), and Rose was with Princess Beverly when she attempted to read it to him at the trial. Second, Rose co-facilitated Restorative Justice healing circles for Princess Beverly and other mothers from North Oakland who had lost a loved one to violence or incarceration. Third, Rose led a Restorative Justice circle at Lorenzo's memorial and participated in other healing rituals alongside Princess Beverly. Her skills as a Restorative Justice community practitioner offered alternative forms of closure for Princess Beverly and the community, outside of the criminal justice system.

Rose Elizondo grew up in South Texas and is of Navajo and Mexican descent. Growing up in the 1960s in South Texas, White-Anglo Texan culture was dominant; and non-White people were forced to assimilate. Within her predominantly Mexican and Tejano community, police harassment was common-place and English-only curriculum was enforced at schools. Like most families in her neighborhood, Rose's parents struggled to find and maintain stable employment. Native and Mexican people were relegated to jobs with the lowest pay and highest instability and risk. A profound sense of cultural alienation and self-hatred pervaded the community. And although Rose loved the food, music, sayings, and pastimes, she too grew up to believing that the ultimate goal was to leave her neighborhood and assimilate into mainstream White, Texan culture. It was not until going to college at the University of Texas at Austin and participating in student activism that she felt empowered to embrace her indigenous roots. Below

is an excerpt of an essay that Rose penned about the impact of the farm worker movement on her life in South Texas:

> I grew up in South Texas in the 1960s and 70s when the United Farm Workers Movement was very active. Farm workers are paid meager wages and often work in terrible conditions that are essentially economic enslavement. These drastic disparities of power and control, with racialized political power and religion as a tool of oppression, are painful. Historical trauma was repeated over many generations, and I carry intergenerational trauma in the very cells of my body from it. To counter this internalized inferiority, the farm worker movement developed a sense of cultural power through a beautiful revitalization of Mexican culture. They also created slogans like "¡*Si, Se Puede! Yes, We Can!*" to shift from internalized oppression to internalized resilience. This transformation came with an assertion of political power using Gandhian nonviolence.[13] It led to an economic shift as the organizing won new rights. During this time, the Chicanxs recognized that, although we were the majority, the white landowners held the political, religious, and economic power. Willie Velazquez had a vision of Latinxs moving from oppression and silence to having a vote, a voice, and actually leading democratic processes.[14] In small towns across South Texas, Chicanxs registered to vote, ran for office, and won![15] My father became a school board member. His best friend became the mayor. They flipped the apartheid-like model of a few people having power over the masses and demonstrated that we had power in numbers and in resilience. The cells in our bodies were collectively saying "*Si, Se Puede."*[16]

Rose's early years inspire her to bring Mesoamerican and Navajo conflict mediation and peacemaking practices into her work as a Restorative Justice facilitator in Oakland, where she now lives and works. In 2005, she co-founded the San Quentin Prison Restorative Justice Interfaith Roundtable, which partners with the UC Berkeley School of Law and is now one of the largest grassroots prison Restorative Justice programs in the United States.

Rose also co-founded NORJC in 2013, after the homicide of a young African American mother named Donitra Henderson. Donitra was shot near Dover Park in North Oakland in front of her four-year-old son. At the time, Dover Park was being used by Phat Beets and Planting Justice—two local NPO organic farms in their "edible gardens" program. Rose used to get a CSA from these organizations and heard about the homicide through their newsletters. As Rose recalled,

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[13] The leaders of the farm worker movement, including César Chávez, studied the nonviolent approach that Gandhi promoted as well as the way it had been taken up in the U.S. by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and intentionally employed nonviolent tactics. This is detailed in José-Antonio Orosco, *César Chávez and the Common Sense of Nonviolence* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008).

[14] Willie Velazquez's vision is portrayed in the documentary, *Willie Velasquez: Your Vote is Your Voice*, directed by Hector Galan (Latino Public Broadcasting, 2016).

[15] The obituary for Willie Velazquez published by Reuters notes, "from 1974 when we started to 1987, the number of Hispanic elected officials in the U.S. grew from 1,566 to 3,038, an increase of 82 percent," June 16, 1988.

[16] Rose Elizondo and Jovida Ross, "Building a Bigger We: A Conversation about Restorative Justice Movement Building," in *Listening to the Movement: Essays on New Growth and Challenges in Restorative Justice*, eds. Ted Lewis and Carl Stauffer (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers).

> Our collective response was to have a ceremonial tree planting, a potluck lunch, and talking circles. A Baptist minister shared stories about Donitra. A cousin shared how Donitra taught him his 123s and ABCs. African water libations created a sacred space. One by one, we offered shovels full of earth to plant a plum tree near the very place where Donitra's spirit went to a different realm. A spray-painted mural recreated her smiling grin on the redwood fence. In our talking circle, we each voiced what we could do to help bring about change in the community. As we did this, we co-created a circular altar with roses, sunflowers, pinecones, medicinal herbs, candles, and songs—in the tradition of Mexican indigenous people. Through these rituals, we created relationships. The community asked for more gatherings and to learn about Restorative Justice. Then several of us co-founded the NORJC.

Drawing from the Chicanx organizing she observed growing up in south Texas, Rose advocated that the members of NORJC join and run for office in the Neighborhood Crime Prevention Councils (NCPCs), police sponsored community meetings where residents discuss crime and safety with law enforcement. In Oakland, the NCPCs "have provided a space where residents who already have economic and political power can influence the police, while people of color and the poor are further criminalized."[17] Emboldened by this new strategy, members of NORJC—Mustafa Solomon and Max Cadji—ran and won the positions of co-chair at the local NCPC. NORJC's goal was to use the meeting space to introduce concepts of Restorative Justice and restorative economics to ultimately move away from punitive responses to crime. Since then, NORJC has cultivated relationships with local beat officers and neighbors, focusing their work on conflict resolution and education, with an emphasis on how crime is a symptom of larger systemic inequalities such as poverty and racism.

As the sentencing of Lorenzo's assailant drew nearer, Princess Beverly grew increasingly anxious and unsettled. She did not know if she could face the man who killed her son. A part of her did not want to be at the hearing, while another part of her wanted to express how much this individual had taken from her. Again, we see how Princess Beverly was given an opportunity to confront her son's assailant, something Debbie was denied. Using her insights from having facilitated Restorative Justice circles for over 20 years at San Quentin Prison, Rose proposed that Princess Beverly write the assailant a letter describing how his actions had harmed her. Too overcome with emotion to write for herself, Princess Beverly shared with Rose how devastating the loss of Lorenzo had been while Rose took notes. At times, Princess Beverly was overcome with anger and a desire for revenge; at other times, she described to me how she doubled over sobbing. It took several weeks of meetings and talking; but by the day of the sentencing hearing, Princess Beverly had a letter prepared to read to her son's assailant. Rose organized with members of CJJC and NORJC, as well as with Princess Beverly's family and friends, to make sure she had ample support that day in court.

In the early morning, over 50 people connected to Princess Beverly showed up outside the Oakland Courthouse with signs that read *"We Love you, PBW!"* and *"Lorenzo 'ZO' Ward is always in our hearts."* Carrying their signs, this groups of activists, friends, and loved ones packed the small courtroom. "We wanted to make sure that PBW knew we had her back and that if she decided to read her letter, we would be there," recalled Rose. Below is the final copy of the letter:

[17] Ibid., 11.

Hi, my name is Princess Beverly Williams. I am here today to tell you about my beloved son, the late, great Lorenzo Lamar Ward. He was better known as Zo, a person who was full of life, energy, laughter; and everyone who met him loved him. He was the class clown and a motor mouth that made everyone laugh. 1982, when I was pregnant with Zo, I was able to connect with my mother in a special way. He was the joy of his grandmother's life. Zo wasn't just my son, he was also my brother and my friend. Zo was a creative writer, he loved to Rap, he loved cars and liked driving them, although he wasn't a good driver at all. And everybody knew he loved to eat, especially hamburgers.

His death had many impacts because it was tragic. It changed my life substantially. To break it down a little more, the loss of my son made me feel like someone pulled my guts out. I literally lost my voice. That's right, I could not talk for approximately 18 months. I couldn't work, I couldn't sleep, depression hit, and I felt so lonely. I lost my only son. There is never a waking moment that I don't think of my son Lorenzo.

His death was such a surprise that we had to raise money for the funeral expenses and costs involved. Lorenzo had a baby daughter that was born after he died. Now she won't have a father. Who is going to take care of her and send her to college?

In May of 2014, 18 months after his death, at the celebration of my granddaughter's 1st birthday, I got my voice back. It was like the spirit of my son that lives in his baby daughter jumped in me and told me to speak about the violence in our streets. Not only did I get my voice back, I was able to inspire and motivate others to stand up and speak boldly as they ought to speak. I have not shut up since, and I'm speaking out and fighting against injustices in any way I can.

Thanks to the community of folks that have been supportive in my life, I am feeling resilient too. Here in this courtroom are the people who loved and cherished Lorenzo. And there are many more. He was loved and special to so many people. His light will shine forever.

To you, Terrance, I really want you to know that I met your Godmother at Dover Park, at the community garden where I was learning how to plant vegetables this past spring. She informed me that your mother died at a young age and that you moved out of state to live with your father and siblings. So, you must know what it means to lose someone you love.

The murder of my son is something I have yet to understand the logic of. If you knew him, you wouldn't have murdered him.

Are you remorseful? Are you remorseful for the murder of my son? Or are you remorseful for the fact that you were caught and are being sentenced?

For your sentencing, I ask that the judge give you access to transformative programming and resources that will help you to learn, change, and transform your life. I hope that you will take advantage of these resources.

> Black lives matter. Lorenzo's life mattered, and your life matters too.
>
> Because of the murder of Lorenzo, that bullet that took his life will always connect our two families. I can't forgive you now, you really hurt me, and you hurt our community. From my learning about the restorative side of justice and my spirituality beliefs, I know forgiveness is needed from me. I just don't know how to do that yet.
>
> My grief therapist, Causa Justa / Just Cause, The North Oakland Restorative Justice Council, Phat Beets, and Black Lives Matter continue to support me and help me in the healing process, and believe me, I want you to have a healing journey too.

There were several moments when Princess Beverly grew too emotional to read some of the words aloud. Rose stood beside her and helped her read the words until she was able to collect herself again. After many months of grief counseling, meeting with Rose and other grieving mothers, and learning the principles of Restorative Justice, Princess Beverly was able to confront the person who hurt her the most. Although she was honest about the pain he had caused her, she was also able to offer the possibility of future forgiveness for what he had done. Princess Beverly showed compassion for his struggles growing up and ultimately connected their struggles in the call to have all Black Lives Matter.

Tragically, this powerful moment was disrupted when Princess Beverly learned that the man to whom she had been reading the letter to was not in fact Lorenzo's assailant but instead another man unrelated to the case. The sentencing hearing had included several men from separate cases, and the court administrator had made an error in calling the name. At the same time, it soon became clear that Lorenzo's assailant would not be tried in court at all that day and wasn't even in the courtroom. Learning this caused Princess Beverly embarrassment, anger, and sadness once again. The court's disorganization and lack of sensitivity toward Princess Beverly denied her an avenue through which she had hoped to gain some form of closure. After months of gathering her community and family to appear in court and support her in offering compassion to her son's murder, Princess Beverly had even this denied to her. This disappointment caused her so much emotional anguish it eventually led her to give up all hope that the legal system could deliver justice to her or Zo.

Princess Beverly's letter was eventually given to Alicia Garza, a leader of the global Black Lives Matter movement. Alicia was so moved by the letter that she sent Princess Beverly personal condolences for her loss and remained in touch with her by phone and Facebook for several months thereafter. Although Princess Beverly's feelings of suspicion and disappointment for the criminal justice system only increased, connecting to such a powerful Black leader gave her a sense of purpose and confidence, which fueled her leadership in creating a new peer-led support for grieving family members like herself. Conversely, we see how Anjanette Albert's connection with Jesse Jackson did not push her into a leadership position.

After witnessing Princess Beverly's disappointment at not being able to share her words with Lorenzo's assailant, Rose suggested they create a healing circle with other bereaving families in the community. For 16 weeks, Rose and Princess Beverly co-facilitated a weekly healing circle with families who had lost a loved one to homicide or incarceration. In the group, they shared their feelings of anger, impotence, and regret. Sharing community with other grieving families eased Princess Beverly's frustration: "I felt that I could let go of the mess that

happened at the courthouse and just feel my feelings—by now knowing that I wasn't the only one, that I wasn't alone." With Rose as her co-facilitator, Princess Beverly went on to lead grief groups in Oakland for several years thereafter.

CJJC and NORJC-Community Carework

CJJC and NORJC's created and maintained a fluid, compassionate, social network for Princess Beverly to fall back on during her grief. They empowered her to move from shock and despair to anger and eventually through personal and political transformation. Their success had much to do with their roots in the San Francisco Bay Area—a community with a long history of radical social movements invested in nurturing the well-being of the community. The birthplace of the Black Power Movement, Oakland has a plethora of well-established social justice organizations that were deeply influenced by the Black radical movements of the 1960s and 1970s. The Black Panther Party, in particular, was a pioneer in mutual aid.[18] CJJC and NORJC were able to stand on the shoulders of organizing giants, which provided historical memory of what organizing tactics proved to be most effective. Also beneficial were their ties to sister organizations who offered support and advised, fluency in the city and state government programs and resources, and a large population of students, organizers, and residents invested in racial equality.

Princess Beverly's vulnerability—to homelessness, foreclosure, and mental and physical disabilities—as well as her resourcefulness, connected her to community organizations like NORJC and CJJC. These agencies then allowed her to develop caring relationships with key individuals, like Dawn and Rose, who supported Princess Beverly in the aftermath of Lorenzo's murder. This observation aligns with recent research conducted by Patrick Sharkey, who notes that community organizations play an increasingly central role in supporting underserved urban residents.[19] However, his analysis overlooks the racialized and gendered dimensions of carework. Starkey aptly identifies the need for violence prevention initiates to be led by community "insiders." While this sort of "community mothering" is essential, Sharkey does not place this within a genealogy of women of color organizing or critically engaging with the ongoing devaluation and divestment in carework in the United States.

In fact, the community carework carried out by CJJC and NORJC in the aftermath of Lorenzo's murder is rooted in a long history of Black feminist principals of carework that are simultaneously engaged with challenging underlying systems of oppression and community harm. Slavery denied Black women the right to protest when their children were sold, maimed, or killed.[20] Following emancipation, segregation and limited employment opportunities relegated Black women to service jobs. Many women worked long hours as maids and nannies in the

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[18] Donna Murch, *Living for the City: Migration, Education, and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

[19] Patrick Sharkey, *Uneasy Peace: The Great Crime Decline, the Renewal of City Life, and the next War on Violence*. (W.W. Norton, 2016).

[20] The conceptualizations of death and dying held by enslaved Africans were not homogenous. Historians have noted how some enslaved women saw their children's death as cause of celebration, as it marked a return to their homeland. Other women engaged in infanticide as a way to protect their children from the misery of enslavement. The suppression of grief was also a reality for some enslaved mothers, who expressed this in the form of apathy, neglect, and dissociation because of the labor demands put on them. Also, the mothers who had children sometimes had to give their children over to be raised collectively by "other mothers." See, for example, Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Sorrow, Labor of Love: Black Woman, Work, and the Family from Slavery to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1985).

homes of White families. This limited the time they were able to spend with their own children.[21] The denial of Black motherhood was not restricted to the racial and gender division in the political economy. Black women were also culturally stigmatized and stereotyped as violent and irresponsible mothers.[22] As the penal system grew, Black women were and still are disproportionality incarcerated. (As of 2009, Black women were nearly three times more likely to be incarcerated than White women.[23]) This is another way in which the state has little disregard for the grief of mother's separated from their children. Despite these compounding factors, Black women are still expected to be strong, to show no weakness or pain even in the face of their child's death.[24]

Through collective organizing and relationship building, CJJC and NORJC successfully created a space of support in which Princess Beverly was able to grieve and also advocate for lasting change in her community.[25] As an organizer, substance abuse counselor, mother, auntie, and friend, Princess Beverly had rarely made time to care for herself. Most of her adult life has been dedicated to nurturing and advocating for others. However, Lorenzo's death was a rare instance when Princess Beverly became the recipient, as opposed to the provider, of love and carework. As Dawn remarked:

> Princess Beverly has always been deeply immersed in the community, even way before I knew her. She has helped so many people throughout her life, people who were homeless or jobless or dealing with an addiction or whatever. She always offered the little she had; so when Lorenzo was killed, she got all that love back and then some. I don't know where she learned this or if this is just how she is; but she is someone who *really* shows up for people and is deeply and meaningfully embedded in community. And so when it came her time, that community showed back up for her.

Princess Beverly's experience underscores the importance of community support and caring relationships in mitigating the pain of traumatic loss. What distinguishes Princess Beverly's experience from other mothers in this study, is the unique social network that enveloped at the apex of her grief. Over the years, Princess Beverly remained intimately connected to her family and friends, despite undergoing long periods of instability due to poverty, homelessness, incarceration, and addiction. Although her close family and kin were unable to help her financially, she found resources at a number of community organizations. As a recipient of services and later as a volunteer and organizer, Princess Beverly forged caring friendships and political comradery with activists from a range of community organizations, such as CJJC and NORJC. She told me,

> I was one of the blessed ones, I think, because I had community to hold me up. With everybody I had in my corner, it was like I didn't have to do anything, they did everything for me, I mean, everything. They took care of me when I couldn't take care of

[21] Ibid., 35-36.
[22] Sarah Haley, *No Mercy Here.*
[23] Ibid; Marc Mauer, "The Changing Racial Dynamics of Women's Incarceration," *The Sentencing Project*, February 27, 2013, https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/the-changing-racial-dynamics-of-womens-incarceration/
[24] Patricia Hill, Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 1999).
[25] Conversation with Sima Belmar, July 2018.

> myself. They were there, and I can safely say that I truly have never in my whole life ever felt so loved.

Together, this eclectic network of people was well-equipped to both personally relate to Princess Beverly's grief and connect her to resources that may otherwise have been unavailable to her. Several members of Princess Beverly's family had lost a loved one to violence. Her nephew Zillion was killed before Lorenzo, and Princess Beverly's best friend Redaina had lost her son D'Andre only a year before Lorenzo was killed. The people who surrounded Princess Beverly knew her pain and were able to console her, as they were grieving themselves. Other African American and Latinx members of CJJC and NORJC had also grown up in Oakland and had been directly and indirectly impacted by violence. Still other members of these groups entered the work of supporting Princess Beverly through other experiences of grief and marginalization. Many leaders of CJJC were immigrants and refugees who had witnessed horrific violence in their countries of origin, as well as in the United States. These organizations grounded their work in a shared struggle for racial, gender, and economic equity, as opposed to identity formations. In this way, they created multi-gendered, multi-generational, multi-racial coalitions of care rooted in social justice.

For Dawn, much of his understanding of oppression and grief stemmed from being the child of undocumented Cambodian immigrants who struggled to accept him as a gender non-conforming, trans man. The ostracization he experienced, as well as the 20 years of experience he had working with underserved communities of color in Oakland, enabled him to connect with Princess Beverly. As Dawn shared: "Before becoming an organizer here in Oakland, I rarely went to funerals. Now I would say I go to as many funerals as I do birthday parties." With the range of life experiences and skill sets available to Princess Beverly through her social network, she was able to mourn among those who understood too well the pain of personal loss as well as structural oppression. Whether or not they shared the same language for this, both Princess Beverly's family and co-organizers understood the importance of care and reciprocity. For these activists, carework and political organizing are forms of labor that cannot be separated and are both motivated by a deep love for one's community.

NORJC and CJJC successfully relieved Princess Beverly of the many financial and institutional burdens that complicate and prolong bereavement for Black mothers who lose a child to violence.[26] Their skill sets as fundraisers and organizers and experience interfacing with law enforcement, attorneys, and judges, helped Princess Beverly navigate the cold and bureaucratic entrails of social services in the city of Oakland. They used a victim-centered approach—one that emphasized Princess Beverly's needs and prevented her from being forgotten—as so often happens in the aftermath of violence in the current criminal justice system that invests the majority of its time and resources towards punishing perpetrators as opposed to supporting survivors.

In the immediate aftermath of Zo's death, members of CJJC volunteered to coordinate daily home visits (both to Princess Beverly's apartment and to Dawn's home) where Princess Beverly would be encouraged to eat, hydrate, take her medication, and process the trauma of losing her only child to violence. These home visits provided routine and structure at a time when Princess Beverly's reality had been shattered. Dawn's home became the main gathering space for Princess Beverly and her kin, where they collectively mourned. Dawn's home was

[26] Elizabeth, Piazza-Bonin, et al., "Disenfranchised Grief Following African American Homicide Loss," *OMEGA (Westport)* 70, no. 4 (2015): 404–427.

invaluable to Princess Beverly's grieving process, as many of her closest friends and relatives whom she had grown up with in North Oakland had been displaced to nearby working-class cities such as Antioch and Stockton.[27] Without Dawn's home, Princess Beverly may have experienced more isolation from her family in her time of greatest need. Most central to Princess Beverly's healing was the empathic love and care that members of CJJC as well as her family and friends offered her. While the majority of the individuals' supporting her at this time were not formal or licensed caregivers or counselors, they were able to understand Princess Beverly's grief on an embodied level, as many of them had also lost children, nieces, nephews, close friends, and relatives. (This is in contrast to the healing found by Demitra with the help of grief counselors.) Even members of CJJC who had not been directly impacted by violence were trained in trauma-informed and healing-centered modes of relating as part of their employment at CJJC.[28]

As the months passed, Princess Beverly began to seek out ways to memorialize Lorenzo and find alternative, informal kinds of closure. NORJC, of course, worked with her to create meaningful rituals to honor his life. One of the most prominent was the assistance NORJC provided Princess Beverly in fundraising for her lifelong vision: a residential community designed to support people with dual diagnosis or mental health challenges compounded by substance use. Unlike similar programs, Princess Beverly's residence—the House of Angels—would not turn anyone away because of criminal histories or failure to remain sober. There is also no obligatory exit date for her clients. The House of Angels will be a place where the people who are unwanted by most residential facilities can thrive and remain indefinitely. The inadequacies of the criminal justice system led Princess Beverly to rely on mutual aid as an alternative form of closure around Lorenzo's death. Although she was never able to read her letter to Lorenzo's assailant, her connection to NORJC provided other forums for healing.

Conclusion

"Look! Look how many figs there are now!" Holding her digital camera in her good hand, Beverly scrolls through photos of the memorial tree planted for Lorenzo.[29] Planted on the corner of 51st and Genoa in North Oakland, the young fig tree stands just a few blocks from the home where both Princess Beverly and Lorenzo were raised. Once owned by Princess Beverly's mother, the California style bungalow is now owned by Adam and Zeke—a White, gay couple and San Francisco transplants. Their presence is a reminder of the complexities of understanding the multiple interlocking forms of displacement that gentrification in Oakland has inspired. As Princess Beverly looks through the photos, she describes how difficult it is to accept Lorenzo's death:

> Every waking moment, I think about my baby—that he's gone. It's been years now and there is not a day I don't think of him. Before I had all of this (gestures to the memorial tree and plaque) I did whatever anybody said, like *"Okay lead me this way, I'll go,"* because nothing even mattered. My whole insides were crushed. I couldn't do anything. I

[27] Karessa Irvin, "Maintaining community roots: understanding gentrification through the eyes of long-standing African American residents in West Oakland," MA Thesis (Smith College, 2016).

[28] There are multiple definitions of what constitutes trauma-informed Care. For the purposes of this chapter, I refer to the Department of Health Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's framework available at https://ncsacw.samhsa.gov/userfiles/files/SAMHSA_Trauma.pdf

[29] Princess Beverly suffered a stroke in October 2016. As a result, she lost the movement in her right hand.

> couldn't even talk. I felt like a puppet on a string. It took me years to just come back to reality. But the memorials and things like these, it helps, it really does. Because I wasn't alone, 1) because the spirit world never dies, and 2) just that people really cared—about Zo *and* me.

Princess Beverly's experience is a window into how networks of care forged through voluntary membership in community organizations offer relief for bereaving inner-city mothers. The network of co-workers and friends from NORJC and CJJC broke the isolation typically associated with traumatic loss through coordinated visits, transportation, food delivery, memorials, and other healing rituals. However, we cannot rely on the exceptional resiliency of individuals like Princess Beverly alone. Nor can we displace carework on overburdened and under-resourced community organizations. We need to build systems that value our interconnectedness and that view mutual support as essential to our collective survival.

Princess Beverly "truly never felt so loved" as during the aftermath of Lorenzo's death. The outpouring of care—both material and emotional—paved the way for Princess Beverly's own recovery. After years of abusing alcohol, Princess Beverly chose sobriety. Alliances with members of these community organizations also encouraged her to gradually re-channel her energies into helping others. A few years after Lorenzo passed, Princess Beverly co-facilitated a healing circle for grieving families who had lost a loved one to violence or incarceration. She later began fundraising for House of Angels—a refugee for the homeless. Princess Beverly's alliances with CJJC and NORJC, her faith in God, and her granddaughter Zyon all provide a sense of purpose and hope in the midst of her most tragic loss.

CONCLUSION

The work of keeping memories alive is difficult in a culture that tends to favor amnesia around anything that portrays the United States as less than democratic, fair, and safe. We have a culture of forgetting painful things. For the mothers in this story—Anjanette, Demitra, Debbie, and Princess Beverly—keeping their children's memories alive is as much personal as it is political. Because Black and Brown youth are not seen by our society as individual human beings, commemorating them is as much about remembering the lives they had as well as the lives they could have had. And this work, this grieving labor, is not easy or inevitable. The time of maternal grief in these moments of tragedy has no prescribed clock, and instead serves as a way for these women to insist on highlighting the pain and injustice of racialized motherhood. These mothers contend with the pain of who will meet them in that remembrance. They are constantly evaluating: Is it worth it, to keep this flame alive, especially if my inner and outer circles do not help me or meet me? Born from unimaginable tragedy and loss, this dissertation has served as a way for me to record the memories the mothers have shared with me—in the hopes that their sons' lives will be remembered for their complexity and inherent value. At the same time, this project is more than just a record; it is also a story of how mothers negotiate a world of grief and sorrow brought about by violence.

Each of the case studies I have presented in this project opens a window into the multiple ways that the maternal grief is racialized and gendered, as well as offers a glimpse into the issues that surround our understanding of the aftermath of violence. In the process, I have illuminated the effects of different individual and collective strategies for addressing the violence that permeates the lives of so many Brown and Black people. From Anjanette's experience, we learn how highly circulated images of Black violence, as well as Black grief, are commodified. As Anjanette was experiencing the traumatic loss of her child, she was also burdened with the responsibility of sanitizing her son's legacy and proving she was a "good mother," deserving of public sympathy and support. While Anjanette initially received external validation of her grief, this support eventually dissipated, leaving her to question how authentic people's sympathy had ever been. She even expressed dismay at the behavior of her own families members, who she accused of exploiting Derrion's murder for financial gain. We see in Anjanette's story how even for families whose children are collectively mourned, as Derrion was, sustained care is not guaranteed for their loves ones. Anjanette still lives in Chicago with her daughter Rhea, who is expecting a child later this year. She continues to memorialize Derrion through social media posts, and she regularly visits his grave. Although financial struggles still strain her, Anjanette feels she is healing from the exploitation she experienced when her life was catapulted into the public sphere.

Demetria Barnes's story as a single, Black mother—born and raised in Oakland, California—highlights the structural issues that prevent families from ever fully escaping the racialized violence that defines urban Black life. Demitra worked long hours to buy a home and provide her son with a stable, safe upbringing—unlike her own. Because violence is so pernicious, even middle-class African Americans are vulnerable to the kind of gun violence that took her son, Davante Riley, on the night of his 18th birthday in 2010. Demitra's story emphasizes one way that bereaving mothers cope in the long aftermath of their children's untimely deaths. Whereas she was once a social, family-oriented, and church-going mother, Demitra chose to self-isolate after the murder of Davante in order to survive the constant threat of triggers and painful memories. Without the institutions (family and church) that once

supported her, Demitra later took a therapeutic journey to recreate meaning in her life without her son. Today, she is a licensed social worker practicing at Santa Rita Jail, near where she purchased her first home. Demitra enjoys her work because it allows her to support African American men struggling to come to terms with their own traumatic experiences.

In Chapter Three, I describe how Debbie, a Mexican American mother of four children—who lost her son, Stephen, in a drive-by shooting in 2002—subsequently dedicated her life to supporting the bereaving families of her community in Salinas, California. She began by organizing peer-led grief groups at her local church. From there, she became a well-known figure in her community and was called upon by political leaders and law enforcement to help bridge strained relations between the mostly Mexican American and Mexican residents of Salinas and the majority White police force and local government. Her time outside of the home also left her children feeling abandoned by a mother who had previously been focused only on them. Although empowering, her role as community liaison also felt exploitative, as the police benefited from her presence but did nothing in return, such as identifying Stephen's killer or fundraising for her healing group. Debbie's experience challenges us to think about the role of survivors in healing communities and how we must care for the survivors, specifically women of color who take up community care work as they move through their own grief. As I write this conclusion, only six months after Debbie's death, I hope that her story will honor the tremendous work she did on behalf of violence-impacted families in Salinas, even as she occupied a complex and sometimes contradictory position—working in collaboration with a criminal justice system that did not solve her son's murder or put her grief to rest.

Finally, in my final chapter, I look at Princess Beverly Williams, who described the time following the death of her son Lorenzo Ward as a moment when she "never felt so loved." I discuss how community carework was possible because of the deep sustained relationships with mutual aid community organizations that Princess Beverly had developed prior to her son's tragic death in Oakland in 2012. Princess Beverly first encountered the grassroots groups that supported her when she was homeless and struggling with substance use. Through the camaraderie she forged with community organizer Dawn Phillips, Princess Beverly evolved from being a recipient of services to working as a lead organizer and respected activist. In this role, she spearheads calls to end poverty, cease homelessness, and implement harm-reduction programs. Unlike the other mothers in the study, she had relationships with peers who understood her pain and had a systemic analysis through which to understand her personal tragedy as a form of political injustice. Restorative Justice facilitators like Rose Elizando also provided emotional containers into which Princess Beverly could experience a wide range of emotions—such as rage, despair, and bitterness—and then transform them into meaningful action. Her case illustrates how mutual aid and relationships based in personal and political commitments can support bereaving mothers in ways that are affirming and healing.

In these four case studies, we see how surviving mothers endure at least two forms of symbolic violence. Firstly, they are burdened with sanitizing their children's public representations, which appear as one-dimensional or criminal or both. Secondly, maternal grief is commodified by members of the media, the not-for-profit industrial complex, and political apparatus for personal and professional gain. Materially, these participants' labor as activists, peer counselors, and advocates is exploited; and the stress they experience because of being overworked and underpaid exacerbates the negative symptoms of their already-complex trauma.

Collaborating with community advocates and surviving mothers has illuminated the ways that the loss of a child to violence has residual impacts on the entire community and in fact

becomes a form of intergenerational trauma. As Resmaa Menakem describes, "Trauma occurs in an individual body but also spreads between bodies. When trauma continues for generation after generation, this is called intergenerational trauma."[1] Although mothers are disproportionately burdened with the emotional labor of publicly commemorating—Black, Indigenous, and other people of color also face the additional work of sanitizing their child's criminalized representation in the public. This is compounded by the fact that so many women of color volunteer at community-based organizations, such as the peer support groups in which many of these mothers participated. Having experienced loss, they are then regarded as experts and take on the role of advocates, social workers, and counselors. Sometimes they receive compensation or acknowledgment (recall Debbie's certificates and plaques), which perhaps partially fuels their participation. And although many mothers begin this work wanting to serve families who were similarly victimized by violence, I found that they become burnt out over time and develop feelings of resentment and anger. Participants also described symptoms of secondary trauma, having absorbed so many stories and witnessed grief that resonates with their own. This project shows how grief is not a universal experience but one that is shaped by our positionalities. The lack of adequate support that families, including mothers, receive is another form of racial, economic, and gender inequality that demands our attention and care.

Mutual aid, nurturance culture, and grief therapy provide frameworks with which to envision new ways of responding to racialized and gendered violence. As the experiences of all the mothers in this study illustrate, it is only by being nurtured and cared for by others (including through grief therapy) that we move through sorrow. Loss becomes the impetus for powerful personal and even political transformation when this sustained care is accompanied by capacity building and systemic analysis. The notion of mutual aid encapsulates one form of crisis intervention and long-term community care. As Dean Spade writes, "Mutual aid work plays an immediate role in helping us get through crises, but it also has the potential to build the skills and capacities we need for an entirely new way of living."[2] More specifically, mutual aid—in conjunction with social activism—is what is needed to live with dignity and justice, while in relationship with others who are working in solidarity towards their own and a collective emancipation. At the same time, therapy with trained grief counselors is a resource that can sustain grieving family members who do not have access to mutual aid or for whom informal nurturance culture does not feel appropriate for their unique needs.

Each mother's life has been shaped by structures that determined their ability to move forward after the devastating loss of their respective sons. For example, the role of grandchildren is envisioned by some mothers as important for their healing. Demitra and Princess Beverly both lost their only child, which disrupted their identities as mothers. They had to consider what it meant to be a mother in the absence of a child. At the same time, Princess Beverly has been able to move forward in large part because of her grandchild, Zyon. Demitra, on the other hand, does not have a grandchild. She mourns this, partially because she believes a grandchild would have given her the opportunity to mother in a way that she was unable to with Davante, to shower the child with the time she was unable to give to her son because of work. (Debbie and Anjanette both have surviving children and grandchildren—or at least the prospect of a grandchild.)

The support of an understanding community was also essential for some of the mothers, and so too was professional therapy. Debbie and Princess Beverly are key examples of how

[1] Resmaa Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies* (Las Vegas, NV: Central Recovery Press, 2017), 38-39.
[2] Dean Spade, *Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity during this Crisis (and the Next)* (New York: Verso, 2020).

healing can emerge through community care and mutual aid, specifically in concert with other mothers. Princess Beverly's experience with grieving-as-healing is not surprising, as she had a history of relying on others and utilizing CJJC resources even before Lorenzo's death. Unlike Princess Beverly, Demitra had internalized individualism and the belief that hard work leads to success. Additionally, engagement with peer-led grief groups did not initially resonate with Demitra because she felt like she did not belong amongst the other members who were too "street." But over time, she changed her mind, going from believing that grief groups were "not my world" to recognizing that all grief is valid and that her pain was no greater than anyone else's pain. The positive experiences she had in the grief group led her to explore individual therapy. In Demitra's case, professional therapy helped her process the grief accumulated from her childhood of abuse and the death of Davante. Counseling of this sort might also be of benefit to Anjanette, who still questions the authenticity of people's sympathy for her.

In contrast to the other mothers, Debbie and Anjanette were both linked to public power in ways that were ultimately disempowering for them. Gaining access to a public platform allowed them to at first dispel criminalizing assumptions about their children, but it came at too high a cost. And the disappointment that followed was too painful. The alliances that Debbie and Anjanette built with politicians and community leaders did not provide them with relief from their pain or even increased ability to enact political change. In Debbie's case, her alliance with the police was contingent on her remaining silent about the racism within the police department. Anjanette was expected by politicians to allow her image to be mis-used in promotion of Anita Alvarez's run for office, despite Alvarez's lack of support for Anjanette following her family's theft of donated funds. At the same time, we see that public power does not always disappoint, as illustrated by the affirmation felt by Princess Beverly when Alicia Garza communicated with her.

The experiences of all four mothers in the aftermath of their children's deaths underscore the necessity of connection in discovering some kind of meaning and a sense of peace. Of course, situational and structural factors shape the grieving process, explaining why some mothers are able to receive (or not) community support. Princess Beverly's experience, in particular, reveals how nurturance culture—or models of care and accountability—allows us to dismantle systems of oppression, without resorting to public shame or state violence.[3] Although not as sustained or tight-knit, the times when Debbie felt connected to and empowered by her friends and co-facilitators in the ATHG group confirms how healing such communities can be. On the other hand, the intense fear of public shaming that Anjanette experienced following Derrion's death illustrates how detrimental it is when nurturance culture (including therapy) is absent. While Demitra did not count on the support of an informal community like Princess Beverly or Debbie, she did find relief with the aid of grief counselors, leading her to become a social worker herself. The lives of Anjanette Albert, Princess Beverly Williams, Demitra Barnes, and Debbie Aguilar show the power that lies within individuals who draw upon trained therapists, their community, or both to bolster their own emancipatory efforts. These women reveal the resilience of a human spirit that is loved and cared for by those who understand its struggles.

[3] Nora Samaran, *Turn this World Inside Out: The Emergence of Nurturance Culture* (Chico, CA: AK Press, 2019).

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