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**Towards a Psychological Science of Abolition Democracy:
Insights for Improving Theory and Research on Race and Public Safety**

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Abstract

We call for psychologists to expand their thinking on fair and just public safety by engaging with the “Abolition Democracy” framework that Du Bois (1935) articulated as the need to dissolve slavery while simultaneously taking affirmative steps to rid its toxic consequences from the body politic. Because the legacies of slavery continue to produce disparities in public safety in the U.S, both harming Black people and the institutions that could keep them safe, psychologists must take seriously questions of history and structure in addition to immediate situations. In the present article, we consider the state of knowledge regarding psychological processes that contribute to discriminatory public safety. We also identify ways in which theorizing about discriminatory public safety can be improved by appreciating the historical and socio-political context in which policing occurs.

Towards a Psychological Science of Abolition Democracy:

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...the history of American police strategies cannot be separated from the history of the Nation as a whole. Unfortunately, our police, and all of our other institutions, must contend with many bitter legacies from that larger history. No paradigm—and no society—can be judged satisfactorily until those legacies have been confronted directly. (Williams & Murphy, 1990, p. 13)

Social psychology has supplied actionable theories in the aftermath of uprisings sparked by patterns of anti-Black state violence. In 1999, four New York City Police Department (NYPD) officers shot 41 times at Amadou Diallo—killing him—because they believed he was reaching for a gun. In fact, he was following their commands to identify himself by drawing his wallet from his pocket. This perceptual error inspired canonical studies of visual tuning (Eberhardt et al., 2004) and so-called “shooter bias” (Correll et al., 2002), illustrating how implicit racial biases can shape perception and behavior with deadly consequences. The resulting literature helped shape the language of civil rights advocacy and policy in the years afterwards, with implicit bias training becoming a *de rigueur* response to public concerns about racially disparate policing.

Fifteen years later, Michael Brown, Jr. died after being fired upon 12 times by a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri, sparking a national outcry around police behaviors that were misaligned with community values. The literature on procedural justice seemed written exactly for the moment. Volumes of studies provided answers about how misalignment between police behaviors and community values decreases community willingness to obey the law or collaborate on solving crimes, harming public safety (Tyler & Huo, 2002; Sunshine & Tyler, 2003). As a result, the threat of legal deterrence wains and crimes often go unaddressed—or worse, addressed through community violence (Brunson & Wade, 2019; Wilkinson et al., 2009). Recognition of this science produced a significant number of policy responses, most notably that procedural justice became the first principle articulated in the recommendations produced by The Presidential Task Force on 21st Century Policing (2015).

But a mere six years after community outrage lit the skies of Ferguson, people all over the

world watched video of Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin squeezing the life out of George Floyd over suspicion surrounding a \$20 crime, and social psychology was largely silent. There was no off-the-shelf theory nor obvious social psychological interventions that were responsive to the event nor to the demands of affected communities. This was, in part, because the loudest community demands focused less on how to make policing better and more on how to remove policing from the places it causes harm—potentially everywhere. In other words, rather than pointing to interpersonal or institutional factors to explain why Chauvin murdered Floyd, some diagnosed the problem as systemic: the consequence of the nation's political indifference to policing that was initially intended to further the aims of White supremacy.

Social psychology has a rich tradition of critiquing itself for its failure to consider structural context (Gergen, 1973, 1992; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Nelson et al., 2013; Prowse & Goff, in press; Rucker & Richeson, 2021). Instead, the field often addresses socio-political problems at the interpersonal level—excluding historical, institutional, and structural drivers of those problems. The result is there are less rich social psychological literatures on which to draw when institutional and/or structural solutions are needed. Some might say this is appropriate. Social psychology—especially in the wake of the cognitive revolution—has focused on micro-level framings of socio-political problems and mostly abstained from engaging with macro-structural issues. But the history of social psychology as a field militates against this conclusion. Seminal studies on cult behavior (Festinger, Riecken, & Schachter, 1956), prejudice (Allport, 1954), and attitude-behavior (in)congruence (LaPierre, 1934) engaged a far wider world than university laboratories and considered interpersonal and systemic factors simultaneously. Further, the research conducted on the situational risks of racial discrimination can often reveal structural problems—both within policing and within the broader context of racial inequality.

Consequently, we suggest that social psychology has much to offer the present moment. As at previous times of tremendous social unrest on the issues of race and policing, there is relevant research that reveals useful truths about sources of inequity in policing. But unlike the periods after the Amadou Diallo or the Michael Brown, Jr. shootings, George Floyd's murder suggests it is (perhaps

past) time we take seriously an intellectual tradition not normally associated with psychology: That of abolition democracy.

What is Abolition Democracy?

In the weeks after George Floyd's murder, many activists demanded that cities "defund the police," a tactic often articulated as a path towards police abolition. Their pleas for change were met with significant controversy—and confusion. Many opposed to the slogan launched arguments that revealed misperceptions about police work and public safety, while many in favor used the same slogans to advocate for a range of changes in the delivery of public safety, from incremental to fundamental. Even prominent progressive policymakers (e.g., U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders, Marantz, 2020) spoke out against abolition while simultaneously echoing abolitionist demands, including calling for "transformation" with regard to who should police, the kind of work they should do, and the need to remove police from crises like mental health entirely (see Mental Health Justice Act of 2021; Goff & Porter, 2021). All of this begs the question: What does abolition really mean in the context of policing and public safety?¹

To demystify the contemporary police abolition moment, we—like others before us (e.g., Akbar, 2020; Davis, 2005; McLeod, 2019)—apply the historical lens of Abolition Democracy. This framework was first articulated by W. E. B. Du Bois in his 1935 book *Black Reconstruction*. Du Bois described the abolition democracy movement of the 19th century as recognizing that the "moral fight against slavery" would not be won solely by eradicating slavery (p. 189). Rather, for four million formerly enslaved Black people to be truly free, they must be given the entire range of civil and

¹ In addressing this question, we focus primarily on anti-Black racism in policing, following prior scholars in understanding "the antiblack punitive tradition as a crucial historical phenomenon that exemplifies the perpetual criminalization of a constellation of marginalized, minority-identified populations" (Hinton & Cook, 2021, p. 262; see also Clair, 2021; Davis, 2005). We recognize that, throughout time, the U.S. also has criminalized other racial, ethnic, and national groups, including Native Americans (Cunneen & Tauri, 2019; Seguino & Brooks, 2021) as well as Latinx (Tate et al., 2021) and Asian people (Lam et al., 2021), whether born in the U.S. or elsewhere (Willis-Esqueda, 2020). Policing in the U.S. discriminates not only on the basis of race and ethnicity but also on the basis of economic resources (Way & Patten, 2013), gender (Buchanan & Goff, 2019), sexual orientation (American Civil Liberties Union, 2016), and mental illnesses and other disabilities (Morgan, 2021). Those who hold identities that intersect across multiple racial, class, gender, sexual, and disability categories are at especial risk of maltreatment (e.g., Lanionu & Goff, in press). Psychological theory and research would be improved by considering the macro-structural conditions that generate disparate and burdensome policing for all of these populations.

economic rights due them as U.S. citizens, including capital through labor and land ownership, access to political power through the ballot, and education through public schools. As Du Bois put it, “The abolition of slavery meant not simply abolition of legal ownership of the slave; it meant the uplift of slaves and their eventual incorporation into the body civil, politic, and social, of the United States” (p. 189). Thus, abolition required both ending the oppressive institution of slavery and establishing and supporting new institutions that could fulfill the promise of democracy.

Of importance, Du Bois (1935) connected the anti-slavery abolitionist movement to the anti-capitalist labor movement that was taking hold in Europe and the Northern U.S. at the same time, although he noted that leaders of the two movements only rarely recognized their shared goals or united to advance them. To Du Bois, however, it was clear that the interests of both profit-seeking Southern planters and Northern industrialists opposed those of free and newly emancipated Black people as well as poor White people. Thus, he understood that the abolition-democracy framework was not uniquely matched to the problem of slavery, nor would it be satisfied in full by the legal end of that institution. With this broad perspective, Du Bois conceived of abolition democracy as the project of critically analyzing structural conditions that generate restrictive, oppressive, and/or violent control over people, and then actively dismantling those conditions and developing mechanisms that encourage equity and freedom for all.

As an example of how abolition democracy might be enacted, consider the development of the Freedmen’s Bureau just prior to the conclusion of the Civil War in 1865 (see Du Bois, 1935). The U.S. Congress recognized the displacement and suffering the war had inflicted upon newly emancipated Black people and poor Southern people—Black and White alike. Congress then established the Bureau to provide the formerly enslaved and refugees with essentials such as food, shelter, and medical treatment; oversee their contracts with employers to ensure labor wages and conditions were fair; set up schools for their education; and facilitate their transportation to work and school, among many other efforts. Although the program succumbed to ongoing racist politics in 1872, Du Bois lauded the Bureau as “the most extraordinary and far-reaching institution of social uplift that America has ever attempted” (p. 219). The rise and fall of the Bureau exemplify how abolition

democracy requires commitment not only to identifying social problems and taking measures to provide relief from those problems, but also to supporting people so they have equal rights and access to opportunity and full participation in society thereafter. The institution of chattel slavery had come to an end, but with it the political will to improve Black people's circumstances and elevate their status subsided, and progress toward racial equity stagnated. This is the intellectual tradition and historical context from which contemporary abolitionist intellectuals draw.

Why Abolition Democracy Now?

In her 2005 book *Abolition Democracy*, Angela Davis stated that, "the challenge of the twenty-first century is . . . to identify and dismantle those structures in which racism continues to be embedded so freedom can be extended to masses of people" (p. 26). How, then, is racism entrenched in policing?

From the beginning, enslaved Black people were criminalized by the enactment of Slave Codes designed to protect the "property" and economic interests of Southern planters. They were surveilled to ensure they were compliant, and those who resisted or escaped were captured and punished. Law enforcement then mainly involved "slave patrols": White men "watching, catching, or beating [B]lack slaves" (Hadden, 2003, p. 4). Yet even free Black people were oppressed as they were interrogated about their status and scrutinized as potential allies to slave rebellions. Chattel slavery ended when the Thirteenth Amendment was ratified in 1865, but the first section of the amendment included a caveat: "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, *except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted*, shall exist within the United States . . ." [emphasis added] (U.S. Const. amend. XIII). In response, Southern White legislators enacted the Black Codes, including vagrancy laws that made it illegal for newly emancipated Black people to be unhoused or unemployed, thereby coercing them into accepting exploitative working conditions. Those who violated the laws were penalized with fines or imprisonment, and then hired out to the state or private parties to work off their debt. This practice of convict leasing pervaded the South in the years following formal emancipation. (See, generally, Davis, 2005; Du Bois, 1935; Hinton & Cook, 2021). As the legal means of controlling Black people evolved, so too did the state's coercive means. The patrols

that had been used to control enslaved Black people and oppress free Black people before the Civil War began enforcing the new Black Codes and, over time, became formal police forces. Meanwhile, policing organizations also developed in the North and West to serve the interests of wealthy White people (Du Bois, 1935; Hinton & Cook, 2021), for example, by returning escaped Black people to slavery in accord with the Fugitive Slave Acts, and by enforcing the physical separation of racial groups that was mandated by “Jim Crow” laws, which originated in Massachusetts in 1838 (Luxenberg, 2019).

By the turn of the 20th century, mass criminalization and incarceration of Black people was well under way throughout the U.S. (Hinton & Cook, 2021). Statistics showing racial disparities in evolving criminal legal systems were subsequently used as evidence that Black people were inherently prone to crime. Despite cogent arguments that the statistics “...picture only the *apparent* and not the *real* criminality of the Negro” (Sellin, 1928, p. 53, emphasis in original), they were used to justify the proliferation of Jim Crow laws and more and more discriminatory policies and practices (Hinton & Cook, 2021; Muhammad, 2019). President Lyndon B. Johnson doubled down on the toxic and illogical inference that Black pathology was responsible for crime when he launched the War on Crime in 1965. To assuage White people’s fears in the face of uprisings during the civil rights movement, Johnson sought to maintain control over Black people by expanding the number of police in urban communities as well as the scope of their work. This agenda was continued in the later part of the 20th century as U.S. presidents and policymakers pushed “tough-on-crime” laws, the War on Drugs, and broken-windows and zero-tolerance policing, all contributing to dramatic expansion of police and policing powers. (See Hinton & Cook, 2021.)

The result is that Black people have been and continue to be subjected to intense police attention and brutality in the supposed interest of public safety. Compared to their White counterparts, Black youth and adults are targeted for more police surveillance; more likely to be stopped, searched, handcuffed, detained, ticketed, ticketed with higher penalties, and arrested; less likely to be spoken to with respect during interactions; more likely to be threatened with, threatened earlier during encounters, and actually subjected to police force; and, like Amadou Diallo, Michael Brown, Jr., and

George Floyd, more likely to be killed by police (e.g., Brame et al., 2014; Buehler, 2017; Camp et al., 2021; Davis et al., 2018; Dunn, 2013; Edwards et al., 2019; Fagan & Davies, 2000; Fagan et al., 2016; Goel et al., 2016; Gonclaves & Mello, 2021; Kahn et al., 2017; Kramer & Remster, 2018; Seguino & Brooks, 2021; Schwartz & Jahn, 2020; Voigt et al., 2017). Although narratives arguing that racial disparities are driven by greater incidence of crime among Black people remain popular to the present day, a great wealth of social psychological and criminological evidence exists now to support claims of racial discrimination. Racial disparities persist even after statistically controlling for relative crime rates among racial or ethnic groups or in neighborhoods, police precinct characteristics, community context, socioeconomic factors, demeanor, mental health symptomatology, history of prior criminal legal involvement, and despite the fact that White people are more likely to be found in possession of contraband, armed, or attacking officers prior to fatal shootings (e.g., Ayres & Borowsky, 2008; Baumgartner et al., 2018; Beckett et al., 2005; Compton et al., 2014; Fagan et al., 2016; Gelman et al., 2007; Hetey et al., 2016; Jetelina et al., 2017; Levchak, 2017, 2021; Mitchell & Caudy, 2015, 2017; Morrow et al., 2017; Nix et al., 2017; Pierson et al., 2020; Ross et al., 2021; Schanzenbach et al., 2016; Scott et al., 2017; Stansfield et al., 2021). As one example, Goff et al. (2016) measured racially disparate use of force with data from 12 U.S. law enforcement agencies and found that Black residents experienced use of force at a rate that was 3.6 times higher than White residents when compared to their representation in census data (2.73 versus .76 per 1,000 residents). However, Black offenders were still 1.3 times (30%) more likely to experience use of force than their White counterparts relative to their representation in arrest data (46 versus 36 per 1,000 arrests). Moreover, five of the 12 agencies studied exhibited disproportionate use of force against Black people even when data were benchmarked to local rates of violent arrests. To be clear, these racial disparities in use-of-force incident rates emerged even after accounting for the overrepresentation of Black people in arrest data in general (e.g., in 2014, 70.31 per 1,000 Black people were arrested compared to 31.01 per 1,000 White people; Snyder et al., 2021) and for violent crimes specifically, and despite the fact that those statistics themselves are influenced by bias in surveillance, stops, etc.

Other indications that disparities stem not from provocative behavior but rather discrimination

include studies showing that White officers tend to be more likely than Black or Latinx officers to over-police Black people (Ba et al., 2021; Fagan et al., 2016), and even off-duty police officers appear to be at greater risk of being shot and killed by other officers when they are Black rather than White (Charbonneau et al., 2017). Also, within samples of Black people, those who appear more stereotypically Black—for example, having darker skin, fuller lips, and broader noses—are at greater risk of being shot (Kahn & Davies, 2011) and experience worse criminal legal outcomes (Eberhardt et al., 2006). In contrast, police use less force against White people who look “Whiter” (Kahn et al., 2016). At the same time that Black people are over-policed, they also feel under-protected, perceiving that police treat their victimization experiences less seriously and are not concerned with serious crime in their neighborhoods (Boehme et al., 2020; Brunson & Wade, 2019; Jacoby et al., 2018; Smith Lee & Robinson, 2019). Indeed, analyses comparing police and census data show that police are less likely to clear (i.e., solve) crimes when they are committed against Black victims or in neighborhoods with more Black residents (Vaughn, 2020).

Thus, 150 years later, one of the nation’s “original sins” continues to stain policing policies, practices, and outcomes (Alexander, 2010; Hinton & Cook, 2021; Muhammad, 2019). The most influential theorists on racism in criminal legal systems recognize that the laws and policies that have been implemented to criminalize and punish Black people were and continue to relate to racial disparities in power, economic exploitation, and hierarchy maintenance, each of which is inextricably linked to the other (Akbar, 2020; Alexander, 2010; Bell, 2017; Davis, 2005; Loader, 2020; Prowse & Goff, in press; Rucker & Richeson, 2021; Swencionis & Goff, 2021; Western, 2006). In the interaction between the systems and the people, police are the front-line defenders of the status quo, which they maintain predominantly through control over non-White people and poor people. By understanding the role of racism and oppression in the evolution of policing—that is, policing as “both produced by *and reproducing* the historically determined conditions” (Dilts, 2019, p. 241, emphasis in original)—it becomes clear that “policing is not broken” (Akbar; 2020, p. 1824); rather, “the system is working the way it is supposed to” (Butler, 2016; see also Hansford, 2015; Hinton & Cook, 2021; Kaba, 2017; Rodríguez, 2019). At no point has this pattern been formally recognized and corrected by the state.

Applying the abolition democracy framework to this problem requires commitment to locating and dismantling the structural conditions that are legacies of slavery and which facilitate disproportionately restrictive, oppressive, and violent policing of Black people. At the same time, abolition democracy demands investment in new systems that enhance safety and well-being fairly and equitably to advance freedom for all. It is important to acknowledge that contemporary abolitionists endorse a variety of views regarding the best next steps to eradicate racist policing, ranging on a spectrum from calling for total elimination of policing (and criminal legal systems more broadly) on one end to focusing only on its most destructive impacts on the other. Among those favoring the former position, central concerns are that prior efforts to reform policing have failed and further efforts will result in investments that increase the institution's power and relegitimize it without actually addressing its role in producing inequality and harm (e.g., Akbar, 2020; Kaba, 2020). As described by Davis (2005, p. 69), however, abolition democracy "is not only, or not even primarily, about abolition as a negative process of tearing down, but it is also about building up, about creating new institutions." Thus, even abolitionists who support the goal of literally and wholly eliminating police and prisons often argue that the project must begin by shrinking the scale, scope, and impact of the systems (e.g., Kaba, 2020).

Engaging with Abolition Democracy to Improve Research and Policy on Race and Public Safety

We propose that attending to issues related to history, structure, and power in line with the abolition democracy tradition can improve theorizing, science, and policy relating to race and public safety. Next we will review what research already has revealed in this domain and consider how abolitionist thinking might broaden psychologists' conceptualizations about situations. Following Burke et al. (in preparation), we organize our discussion using the social-ecological framework, a model that has been in development for decades but which remains underutilized in social psychological theorizing related to power and intergroup processes. Bronfenbrenner (1979) first conceptualized the ecological framework as a set of embedded and interdependent social contexts. Individuals and their physical and psychological characteristics are situated at the center of a series of systems that

become increasingly distal, ranging from the microsystem (i.e., immediate settings) to the macrosystem (i.e., cultural and subcultural power dynamics that convey information and ideology). Later theorizing emphasized the important interactional relations between people and their environments which are molded by connections to the “immediate and more remote” contexts, “social continuities and changes,” and the “historical period” in which people develop (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, p. 996). As Vélez-Agosto et al. (2017, p. 900) noted, “culture is not a separate system operating from a macro level, but it is within everyday action (activities, routines, practices) and part of communities of practice through a language mediated meaning-making system.”

Despite prior acknowledgment of the interconnectedness between people, environments, systems, and culture, psychologists often neglect to address that reciprocity, thereby misusing the social-ecological framework (Tudge et al., 2009) and generally providing incomplete accounts of social phenomena. Indeed, many researchers have worked to identify the psychological processes and situations that generate and exacerbate racially disparate policing but they rarely have considered what abolitionists have articulated: The very task of policing is oriented toward supporting and sustaining racism (e.g., Bell, 2017; McLeod, 2019). Instead, psychologists have typically endorsed a view of the problem constrained to momentary interactions without regard to the full context in which those interactions are embedded. This has rendered solutions incomplete, attempting to remediate predominantly micro-level and sometimes meso-level problems without regard to the macro-level factors that constrain potential for change.

We suggest that by contending with the Du Boisian notion of abolition democracy, psychologists might incorporate socio-political background and systemic factors into their thinking about the immediate settings in which policing occurs. In particular, by accounting for the macrosystem-level legacies of slavery and how they filter down through other systems to affect Black people, we seek to reveal gaps and paths forward so that psychologists might generate a more complete understanding of why Black people experience worse police treatment and outcomes than others. In the below sections, we review social psychological literatures that engage with micro-, meso-, and macro- levels of socio-political organization of racism within policing. In each, we highlight

opportunities to pursue research agendas and policies that are consistent with abolition democracy in that they represent a range of tactics to achieving the goal of a fully inclusive set of public safety systems. While some of these potential pathways cleave more closely to harm reduction than to the ultimate goal of dismantling our current criminal legal systems, it is worth noting that harm reduction has always been understood as a necessary complement to the project of abolition (Davis, 2005; Kaba, 2017).

The Microsystem Level: Focusing on the Bad Apples Without Seeing the Rotten Trees

The vast majority of social psychological work on race and policing has aimed its attention at the microsystem—the immediate settings in which non-White people experience bias and discrimination. Within this level, an individual’s race serves as a demand characteristic (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998), such that the color of one’s skin is a stimulus that immediately influences police officers’ expectations and affects unfolding interactions. In fact, law enforcement and political representatives often invoke officers’ race-based psychological reactions to explain negative police treatment of non-White people, with an argument to this effect: “[t]here are a number of ‘bad apples’ in every police force—authoritarian, racist bullies who take pleasure in pummeling defenseless [B]lack men” (Brooks, 2020, para. 6). One of the attorneys prosecuting Derek Chauvin for the murder of George Floyd even alluded to this position, arguing during the trial that “there’s nothing worse for good police than a bad police who doesn’t follow the rules. . .” (McEvoy, 2021, para. 8). These kinds of rationalizations are predicated on the erroneous assumption that racist, rogue officers and discriminatory police violence are rare and exceptional.

A century of research contradicts the bad apple argument: Beliefs and attitudes that incline people toward racially discriminatory behavior have been (e.g., The Chicago Commission on Race Relations, 1922) and continue to be prevalent among police. Recent studies using nationally representative data collected over decades suggest that police professionals, especially White men officers, are more likely than other people to resent policies that assist Black people, deny that anti-Black discrimination exists, and endorse stereotypes depicting Black people as violent, even after controlling for respondents’ age, education, income, and political ideology; community type and

geographical location; and year (LeCount, 2017; Roscigno & Preto-Hodge, 2021). Studies also have investigated the degree to which officers exhibit social dominance orientation, which relates to support for hierarchical inequalities between social groups, and right-wing authoritarianism, which is the tendency to be socially conservative, submissive to authority figures, and aggressive toward people who are viewed as deviating from norms. In general, the higher people are in these dispositions, the more likely they are to stereotype and exhibit prejudice against marginalized social groups and endorse beliefs that marginalized groups are less human and more like animals (Costello & Hodson, 2011; Guimond et al., 2003; Kteily et al., 2015; Osborne et al., 2021; Whitley, 1999). One study conducted by Sidanius and colleagues (1994) found that Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) officers were higher than both university students and other criminal legal actors (i.e., jurors and public defenders) in punitiveness, social and political conservatism, social dominance orientation, caste-maintenance orientation, and racial superiority. White officers scored higher in group dominance attitudes than officers from other racial/ethnic backgrounds, but even non-White officers were more dominance oriented than White (and non-White) civilians. Differences along these problematic dimensions exist between criminal justice students and other students (Boyles & Dempsey, 2020; Owen & Wagner, 2008) as well as newly recruited police officers and community members (Gatto et al., 2010). Also, officers, particularly White officers, become increasingly authoritarian, dominance-oriented, intolerant, and racially prejudiced as they spend more time in their professional role (Gatto et al., 2010; Sidanius & Pratto 1999; Teahan, 1975; Wortley & Homel, 1995).

It is also important to note that anti-Black attitudes and stereotypes can be explicit or implicit. That is, people may be consciously aware of and able to control their negative feelings, beliefs, intentions, and ideas related to Black people, or such affective reactions and cognitions may operate outside of people's conscious recognition. Additionally, an individual may hold contradictory explicit and implicit attitudes (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2010; Dovidio et al., 1997; Greenwald & Banaji, 1995; Nosek, 2007). This means it is possible for police officers to report a neutral or favorable attitude that is belied by more subtle indications of an anti-Black attitude. Indeed, implicit racial associations and stereotypes about Black people tend to be more negative than explicitly reported attitudes, and they

are pervasive, some even among Black people (Nosek et al., 2007). Implicit anti-Black associations are also prevalent among police officers, with studies using implicit association tests revealing that 73% of officers automatically linked Black race to negative concepts (Andersen et al., 2021) and 96% exhibited racial bias on a weapon categorization task (James et al., 2016).

Together, these studies suggest that, rather than it being the case that only a limited number of bad apples hold prejudiced attitudes, there are trends in the direction of overall selection and/or socialization effects: People who hold more anti-Black attitudes and support inequalities between social groups are either drawn to careers in policing and/or engagement with the job facilitates the development of those attitudes (see also Sidanius et al., 2003). Moreover, even if officers do not consciously endorse racial prejudice, the vast majority implicitly associate Black people with negative and crime-related concepts. Thus, police officers are attitudinally and cognitively predisposed toward racist decision-making and behavior.

In fact, reports link negative racial attitudes and dehumanization to excessive use of force (e.g., as noted by an Independent Commission that investigated the LAPD after four officers beat Rodney King to the ground in 1991; Christopher et al., 1991) and less serious regard for Black crime victims (e.g., officers in Los Angeles and Miami ascribed the acronym “NHI”—short for “no humans involved”—to crimes involving Black victims in the 1990s; Njeri, 1992; Wynter, 1994). Rigorous scientific studies also show that laypeople who endorse more dominant and authoritarian beliefs are more supportive of police use of excessive force (Gerber & Jackson, 2017), and White officers who are higher in social dominance tend to use more actual force against people they encounter than officers from other races or those low in social dominance (Swencionis et al., 2021). And compared to explicit, consciously accessible attitudes, implicit negative racial associations and dehumanizing beliefs may be an even more significant driver of racially discriminatory behavior (see Dovidio et al., 2009; Goff et al., 2014; Greenwald et al., 2009). In particular, implicit anti-Black attitudes and stereotypes can have subtle influences on police officers’ attention, perceptions, and judgments that translate into conduct that disadvantages Black people. For instance, people perceive Black men as physically larger, stronger, more capable of harm, more threatening, and more tolerant of pain than

White men, even when judging Black and White men who are matched in actual bodily characteristics (Hester & Gray, 2018; Hoffman et al., 2016; Wilson et al., 2017). The taller and heavier Black men are, the more likely they are to be stopped by police relative to their same-sized White counterparts (Hester & Gray, 2018). Moreover, the more racially biased people are in their judgments of size and threat, the more supportive they are of police use of force against Black suspects (Wilson et al., 2017). Consider, too, that Derek Chauvin was recorded defending his unreasonable use of force against George Floyd to a bystander, stating “We gotta control this guy ’cause he’s a sizable guy” (Forliti et al., 2021a). Chauvin’s defense was illogical—Floyd had stopped breathing more than three minutes before he removed his knee from Floyd’s neck (Forliti et al., 2021b)—but it was right in line with psychological science. A host of studies have demonstrated similar negative implicit effects of Black race, negative racial stereotypes, and racial dehumanization on perceptions of hostility; judgments on age, maturity, innocence, culpability, and punishment deservingness; visual processing of crime-related objects; shooting decisions; and actual use of force (Correll et al., 2002, 2006; Devine, 1989; Eberhardt et al., 2004; Goff et al., 2014; Graham & Lowery, 2004; Rattan et al., 2012). These effects manifest regardless of conscious endorsement of racial prejudice and even when race-related stimuli are presented too briefly to be perceived consciously, suggesting they occur automatically, outside of officers’ cognitive control.

Moreover, decades of social psychological studies have demonstrated that human behavior is determined less by pre-existing attitudes and more by features of the immediate situation (for reviews, see Mischel, 1968; Ross & Nisbett, 2011), and the conditions that are inherent to policing and police-civilian interactions exacerbate the risk that police officers’ explicit and implicit anti-Black attitudes and cognitions will translate into discriminatory behavior. Police officers have immense discretion to make judgments about people’s behavior, decide whether the circumstances warrant an interaction, and determine the direction and outcome of that interaction in recognition that they “are often forced to make split-second judgments—in circumstances that are tense, uncertain, and rapidly evolving” (*Graham v. Connor*, 1989, p. 397). However, stereotypic associations and attitudes are more likely to shape interpretations and decisions when information and situations are ambiguous than when they

are not (e.g., Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000; Kunda & Sherman-Williams, 1993). Also, stereotypes and similar heuristics are often employed to simplify cognitive tasks and facilitate rapid judgments and decision-making when people are under time pressure, multi-tasking, cognitively fatigued, or stressed (Kahneman, 2011; Macrae et al., 1994). It is also more difficult to exert control over bias and discrimination when cognitive resources are limited (Bodenhausen, 1990; Correll et al., 2002; Govorun & Payne, 2006; Ito et al., 2015; Ma et al., 2013; Payne, 2005; Singh et al., 2020). Thus, the bad apple argument is further undermined by the fact that the complex and challenging nature of police work increases the likelihood of racially biased and discriminatory decision-making and behavior (see Butler, 2016; Swencionis & Goff, 2017).

Limited Potential for Improvement by Culling Bad Apples

As described, a wealth of evidence points to the conclusion that bad apples are far from rare in police departments, and the situations of policing produce chronic vulnerability for negative and burdensome treatment of Black people. Because anti-Black stereotypes, attitudes, and dehumanization negatively impact criminal legal outcomes for Black people, this problem has generated a great deal of attention from psychologists. The majority of problem-solving efforts have focused on remediating anti-Black attitudes at the level of individual police officers. However, the potential for these efforts to succeed at restoring or culling all the bad apples is limited.

Testing and screening is impractical, as relatively few individuals would be determined fit for policing in light of the prevalence of anti-Black attitudes and stereotypes in general (Nosek et al., 2007) and among those attracted to the field in particular (Gatto et al., 2010). Almost all critiques instead point to training as key to reforming police (although opinions differ as to whether the solution is more or different training, see Sloan & Paoline, 2021). Police departments are responsive to such calls—for example, 96% have invested in implicit bias training (CBS News, 2019)—but it remains unknown whether interventions that successfully reduce racial bias in the laboratory (e.g., Correll et al., 2007; Forscher et al., 2019; Plant & Peruche, 2005; Plant, Peruche, & Butz, 2005; Singh et al., 2020) generalize to improve officers' ability to exercise cognitive control and inhibit automatic associations or reactions in real-world police encounters (e.g., misperceptions of danger or automatic feelings of fear

in response to Black men), or whether they produce lasting effects. Worden and colleagues (2020) cast doubt on the potential salutary effects of training with a rare randomized controlled experiment that measured actual discrimination over time. They observed no impact of an implicit bias curriculum on NYPD officers' rates of disparities in stops, frisks, searches, physical force, summonses, arrests, or citizen complaints in the month after training, even though the majority of officers responded favorably to the training, learned about implicit bias, and reported trying to manage bias. Some (but not all) rigorous studies have suggested that training focused on de-escalation (Engel et al., 2020; Owens et al., 2018; but see Goh, 2021; McLean et al., 2020) or procedural justice (e.g., Wood et al., 2020; for review see Nagin & Telep, 2020) can reduce some forms of negative policing but analyses of effects on officers' racially discriminatory behavior in the field are almost nonexistent (but see Epp et al., 2014). Thus, it is still unclear whether training can address racially disparate policing.

Other efforts to address racially biased and discriminatory policing have concentrated on increasing monitoring and accountability, but these too have limited impacts. Evidence is mixed as to whether body-worn cameras reduce field contacts, citations, arrests, citizen complaints against officers, or officers' use of force (Lum et al., 2019), or whether observation reduces racial discrimination in weapon identification or shooting decisions (Bishara & Payne, 2009; Kramer et al., 2020), and no studies have investigated whether body-worn cameras have any palliative impact on racially disparate policing (Lum et al., 2019). Early intervention systems designed to identify officers in need of retraining, counseling, and monitoring focus on misconduct in general and may not discriminate effectively between problem officers and non-problem officers anyway (James et al., 2021). It remains unknown whether such systems could be used to address officers' disparate treatment of non-White people, but if so, they would require substantial resources to implement based on the number of officers engaging in that conduct. For instance, Goncalves and Mello (2020) determined that 42% of Florida highway patrol officers racially discriminated in harsh ticketing over a 10-year period; they estimated that removing officers in the top 5% of disparate ticketing would reduce statewide disparities by only 3%. Research might investigate whether early intervention systems are better used not for finding bad apples but for signaling institutional norms of intolerance for racism

(Research Recommendation #1). With regard to accountability, decades-old anecdotal and scientific evidence suggests officers with records of abuse or more anti-Black attitudes are not disciplined but instead enjoy positive evaluations and more success in their careers (Christopher et al., 1991; Leitner & Sedlacek, 1976). Whether bad behavior continues to be rewarded rather than disciplined at present is unknown, but the courts have given police broad power to profile, arrest, and use deadly force against Black people (“super powers” as described by Butler, 2016), and legal penalties are imposed in only a minority of cases (see, e.g., Lee & Park, 2018; Pryor et al., 2020).

It is worth pointing out, too, that ex-officer Derek Chauvin had received extensive training during his 19 years in the Minneapolis Police Department, and was, in fact, responsible for training new officers (Alfonseca, 2021). He also had been the subject of 18 misconduct complaints, 16 of which went undisciplined (Andone et al., 2020). Neither Chauvin’s training nor identification of his problem behavior prevented him from murdering George Floyd, and that Chauvin would eventually be charged, tried, convicted, and punished was far from certain in light of historical criminal legal responses to police violence.

Using an Abolition Democracy Lens to Bring the Rotten Trees into the Frame

As Sierra-Arévalo and Papachristos (2021, p. 377) pointed out, “The optimal, moral, and just number of ‘bad apples’ in policing is zero.” Any intervention that makes even a small reduction in the number of racist people in the policing profession or otherwise minimizes racist policing must be pursued to protect the rights of Black people and prevent the harm it causes (which we discuss in more detail later). However, the psychological literature addressing race and policing is dominated by research on individual officers’ anti-Black attitudes with relatively few studies documenting connections to actual discrimination and harm, and, despite the widespread adoption of many interventions informed by that work, racially disparate treatment and impacts persist. Perhaps interventions have focused too sharply on bad apples while leaving the infected branches and rotten trees cropped out of the picture. Having established that the bad apple approach is insufficient to uncover or remedy the whole of the problem (see also Goff, 2016), psychological scientists are well positioned to engage seriously with abolition as an intellectual approach to racism in public safety. What can we learn by

extending outward from the individual and accounting for the psychological conditions that result from the way policing has evolved in the U.S.?

Indeed, the psychological literature rarely reflects the historical fact that stereotypes and negative feelings toward Black people are manifestations of economic and sociopolitical systems of power that evolved to serve the interests of certain groups over others within the unique U.S. cultural context (Du Bois, 1935). This is the full-frame, social-ecological understanding of micro-level and macro-structural interactions that an abolitionist framework can raise up for psychologists' attention. In fact, anti-Black attitudes date back to the early 1600s, when early colonialists portrayed Africans as ape-like savages and the first laws of the land framed their behavior not as products of a human struggle to escape brutality and seek freedom but instead as acts of violence (Lott, 1999). Four hundred years later, social psychological research by Goff et al. (2008) showed that only 9% of their sample reported being aware of the historical depiction of Black people as apes, yet on average White men were still more likely to associate Black people with ape-related versus feline-related concepts and with concepts that they personally rated as bad rather than good. Further, 94% of participants reported knowing about the stereotype that Black people are violent. Although the Black-criminal stereotype has long historical legs, it continuously gains fresh footing because, as noted earlier, the criminalization of Black people that leads to racially disproportionate contact with criminal legal systems in turn generates an appearance of disproportionate criminality in the Black population (Sellin, 1928; Muhammad, 2019). As a result, many people continue to link Black people and criminality and this stereotype is broadly consciously accessible. Thus, these cognitive associations, whether implicit or explicit, whether consciously endorsed or not, owe much to slavery and its legacies.

Recommendations for change that ignore the origins of these associations or the systems that sustain them should not be expected to be sufficient for eliminating disparate treatment of non-White people. We cannot override what police officers learn over their entire lives in a few hours of training, and we must expect that these macro-level forces will influence officers' feeling, thinking, and behavior within the immediate settings in which they work. In other words, officers are at chronic risk for racist decision-making and behavior when they encounter Black people, and the risk is exacerbated by the

high levels of discretion and situational ambiguity that are inherent to policing.

Applying the abolition democracy framework to this problem calls for solutions that prevent anti-Black attitudes and cognitions—those relics of slavery—from affecting treatment of Black people, ideally through the creation of new systems that render the ones created under conditions of slavery obsolete. Interventions at the individual level are, therefore, not capable of achieving an abolitionist goal. However, there are harm-reducing steps that are short of wholesale abolition yet consistent with the approach. For instance, to alleviate the pressure that the prevailing individual-level approach to racially disparate policing puts on officers to navigate this risk themselves, microsystem level changes can reduce or eliminate risk (see Goff, 2016; Goff & Rau, 2020). In particular, psychologists should attend to the ways in which proactive policing strategies encourage discretion and generate uncertainty in interactions, thereby inviting anti-Black attitudes and cognitions to shape what happens next (Research Recommendation #2). When guidelines and expectations are clearer, outcomes are less likely to be influenced by the race of the people they affect (e.g., Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000). It follows then that racially disparate public safety outcomes can be reduced, for example, by establishing criteria that do and do not merit initiation of an investigatory encounter (e.g., in 2015 the NYPD prohibited stops or frisks on the basis of “mere suspicion,” “a hunch,” “furtive movements,” “presence in a ‘high crime area,’” or “standing alone”; NYPD, 2015, p. 2), delineating the situations in which pursuit is necessary, implementing guidelines that dictate procedures and expected (versus inappropriate) behavior in interactions, and/or requiring officers to obtain supervisor approval prior to engaging in certain actions under especially ambiguous conditions. In addition, encounters and decision-making can be evaluated after the fact to identify potential influences of anti-Black bias. Future studies are needed to determine whether adding front-end restrictions and back-end accountability can counter the microsystem-level risk factors for racist policing and facilitate equitable treatment of Black people (Research Recommendation #3). This highlights but one area in the microsystem in which psychological theorizing and research has plenty of room to flourish and inform policy (see Goff & Rau, 2020, for a starting point).

The Mesosystem: Who are the People in Your Neighborhood?

As we conceptualize situations more broadly, we next consider an example of how mesosystem-level influences on racially biased and discriminatory policing—which commonly fall within the purview of sociology, criminology, or political science—can be understood more completely using psychological analyses, and how that work may be improved further still by connecting it to structural macrosystem factors. Specifically, we contemplate the neighborhood context of policing and public safety. The meso-level of political organization, too, often falls short of abolitionist goals, yet provides opportunities for reducing the harms of present systems as new systems are reimagined.

This is particularly important at the meso-level because policing is not experienced evenly across places in the U.S. It is concentrated in neighborhoods that have high levels of social disorganization and crime, where poverty and Black people tend to be overrepresented (Kubrin et al., 2021; Massey & Denton, 1993; Sampson & Wilson, 2007). Compared to other neighborhoods, those characterized by high crime, more disadvantage, and larger Black populations experience not only more policing but different policing, with officers in such contexts taking a more surveillance-oriented and aggressive approach, engaging in more misconduct, and using more force and more deadly force (Fagan & Davies, 2000; Gaston & Brunson, 2020; Klinger et al., 2016; Terrill & Reisig, 2003). However, even after controlling for neighborhood factors and within high-crime neighborhoods, studies still show racially disparate policing (Gaston & Brunson, 2020; Phillips, 2020).

Psychologists have taken initial steps toward filling in our understanding about the ways race and place interact to influence police officers' decision-making (e.g., Bonam et al., 2016; Correll et al., 2011; Eberhardt et al., 2004). One possibility is that neighborhoods with many Black residents facilitate thoughts of crime, and, vice versa, high-crime neighborhoods make thoughts of Black race chronically accessible. In an elegant series of studies, Eberhardt et al. (2004) first exposed participants to images of Black men's faces so briefly that they could not be consciously perceived. Those participants subsequently recognized crime-related objects more quickly than did non-primed participants, who in turn identified crime-related objects faster than participants who were subliminally exposed to White men's faces. The researchers next showed that priming police officers with crime-

relevant words accelerated visual tuning toward Black faces and inhibited attention to White faces. Thus, because thoughts of race and crime are so intertwined, seeing Black men makes it easier to see crime and when crime is salient, police officers are psychologically biased to monitor and react to Black people, even if their behavior does not differ from that of White people in the same setting.

Bonam and colleagues (2016) tackled the question of race-by-place interactions more directly by demonstrating that the physical spaces that Black people inhabit evoke stereotypes about Black people and are also themselves negatively stereotyped. When asked to describe how most Americans would think of areas where Black people live, participants explicitly spontaneously characterized these places as crime-ridden and dangerous—in line with the implicit associations demonstrated by Eberhardt et al. (2004)—as well as impoverished, rundown, and dirty. Further, when imagining a majority Black versus White neighborhood, participants evaluated the neighborhood less positively, perceived it as less desirable to be in, and judged it less worthy of protection from health risks. Bonam et al. (2017) connected the individual-level race-based stereotyping of places to structural-level policies that arrange groups across different, bounded physical spaces to construct race and reinforce racial hierarchy. They also posited that because Black physical spaces themselves are subjected to stereotypes, they also are vulnerable to discrimination, which in turn sustains and perpetuates space-focused racial bias. Bonam et al.'s theorizing aligns with the social-ecological framework that depicts psychology and culture as interconnected and interacting elements of the developing person's world (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998), and their integrative approach leads to a plethora of new questions about just how precariously positioned Black people are as they go about their lives within their own neighborhoods (Research Recommendation #4). For example, if police officers stereotype Black neighborhoods as crime-ridden and dangerous, does that exacerbate cognitive and attitudinal tendencies toward racist policing in these settings? Are effects of neighborhood racial composition on police officers' perceptions and judgments compatible with criminological thinking on "ecological contamination," whereby police view all people in high-crime neighborhoods as likely criminals deserving of punishment (Terrill & Reisig, 2003; Werthman & Piliavin, 1967), or are contamination effects limited to Black people in those spaces? Does space-

focused racial bias contribute to greater tolerance of negative and burdensome policing of majority Black spaces among police officers and the public?

By blending theories across system levels as well as disciplines, Bonam et al. (2016, 2017) made it possible to understand how Black physical space itself can be a target of racial stereotyping and discrimination. Their work also provides insights into how space-based racial bias can both reinforce race and foster the racialization of physical space from a policing standpoint. More creative efforts like this are needed to consider how policing adds risk instead of safety in neighborhoods as well as other mesosystem-level settings (e.g., schools, parks and recreation spaces, hospitals, etc.) (Research Recommendation #5). By growing their thinking about context, psychologists will be better positioned to innovate more comprehensive solutions to the over-policing and under-protecting of Black people in the U.S.

Implications for Policy

The neighborhood issues addressed in this section point to a number of directions for policy. It is entirely rational for police departments to deploy officers to the areas where crime occurs. One study of gun violence in Boston showed that, over 29 years, only 5% of street segments and intersections accounted for 74% of shootings (Braga et al., 2010), and it would be logical to focus police attention on those micro places to address the problem. However, the same study showed that there were no shooting incidents in 89% of the micro places (see also Klinger et al., 2016). This corresponds to a point made by Brunson and Wade (2019, p. 6): “the overwhelming majority of neighborhood residents are law-abiding, potential witnesses.” Deployment policies and officers’ approach to their work must account for both of these truths.

Given evidence that high-crime areas are especially vulnerable to racially disparate policing (e.g., Sampson & Wilson, 2007), officers should be deployed in ways that minimize the potential for on-the-job experience to reinforce attitudes and stereotypes directed at both the Black people who live in the spaces and the spaces themselves. The importance of this point is underscored by Eberhardt’s (2019) estimation that patrol officers in Oakland, California are likely to hear suspects described as “male Black” on their dispatch radios hundreds of times each day, many thousands of times a year.

Experimental research has demonstrated that exposure to stories about Black (versus White) criminals and images of armed Black men and unarmed White men (versus counterstereotypic men) exacerbates racial bias in shooting decisions (Correll et al., 2007). Also, training under conditions in which race is nondiagnostic of danger does not reduce racial bias on the first-person shooter task for officers in special gang and street-crimes units as it does for regular patrol officers (Sim et al., 2013). One practical remedy to reduce repeated exposure to environmental stimuli that associate Black race with crime may be to rotate officers around different areas, although this might carry risk of reducing officers' familiarity with the neighborhoods and people they police.

Otherwise, institutional practices must be evaluated to determine how race and place are linked in ways that produce bias and discrimination, and then those practices must be updated to counteract that tendency. One solution may be to educate officers about the history and sociopolitical context in generating the Black and White physical spaces they police, a tactic Bonam et al. (2019) found to be effective at increasing White adults' recognition of the role of systemic racism in generating Black ghettos. Such efforts may assist officers in appreciating that high levels of crime in majority Black neighborhoods manifest not because of Black pathology but because of structural racism that concentrates impoverishment of all kinds of resources (e.g., employment, food, health and mental health resources, etc.). Such efforts may counter place-based racial bias and help officers to understand that the people who live in high-crime areas are the most likely to need help while simultaneously most likely to be afraid to ask police for help because of past experiences of aggression and abuse (see, e.g., Brunson & Wade, 2019; Wilkinson et al., 2009).

The Macrosystem: Racism is Both Filtered Down from Structures and Reflected Back Up

To gain a complete understanding of why there are racial disparities in policing outcomes and the consequences of those disparities, we must incorporate macrosystem factors into psychological accounts. One line of inquiry in line with this broader approach investigated the ways in which the social hierarchy sets the stage for social identity threat and racist policing. Social identity threat occurs when a person is concerned about a challenge or threat to their valued social identity, not based on their own behavior, but rather because cultural stereotypes and beliefs about the social group could

result in negative judgment and treatment (Steele, 2011). Psychological studies have identified the social construction of masculinity in particular as a macro-level risk factor for racially disparate policing. Masculinity is based on social judgments regarding men's ability to embody characteristics and behaviors that are culturally determined to be appropriate for their gender identity, and it becomes hegemonic when it promotes hierarchical social ordering of men above other social identity groups (Connell, 2020). In the policing subculture, aggressive hegemonic masculinity is portrayed as core to the job (Herbert, 2001; Prokos & Padavic, 2002). Of concern is that threats to the masculine social identity cause men to feel anxious and aggressive (Vandello et al., 2008) and motivate them to take physical and aggressive actions to prove their masculinity (Goff et al., 2012; Bosson et al., 2009). The fact that Black men are socially subordinate and stereotypically depicted as aggressive, tough, sexual, ape-like beasts (Devine, 1989; Goff et al., 2008) poses two challenges in this context: First, even when masculinity threat comes from other sources, exhibiting dominance over Black people may be especially effective at restoring masculinity and positionality, and second, police officers may be more likely to feel masculinity threat when they interact with Black people rather than White people (see Richardson & Goff, 2014). In support, Goff et al. (2012) found that the more masculinity threat police officers reported experiencing in simulated use of force encounters, the more likely they were to use force against Black men. Further work could be done to connect macro-level masculinity threat to other micro-level features that generate disparate policing. For instance, because people experiencing social identity threat seek to manage their behavior to avoid being judged unfairly while also monitoring social cues for evidence they are at risk, the threat is anxiety-provoking, physiologically arousing, and cognitively exhausting (Richeson & Shelton, 2007; Schmader et al., 2008), all of which is known to increase racial bias (e.g., Correll et al., 2002; Singh et al., 2020). Research could inquire whether social identity threats interact with anti-Black attitudes and associations in ways that aggravate bias and discrimination, and whether or not the context of policing is an aggravating factor for one, both, and/or their interaction (Research Recommendation #6).

Although work on masculinity threat began with a critique of the macro-level context, other research we reviewed previously emphasizes the importance of appreciating both that (a) the

macrosystem influences what happens within the mesosystem and microsystem and (b) the structural influences on more proximal settings reflect and also sustain the macro-level structures. In brief review of these interconnections, individual officers have anti-Black attitudes or cognitions because of the broader cultural and sociopolitical context in which race has been and continues to be used to organize social, political, and economic power (e.g., Goff et al., 2008). Neighborhoods that are high in reported crime tend to be occupied by poorer Black residents in part because federal housing policy has often been structured explicitly to maintain racial stratification (Massey & Denton, 1993), leading both Black people and the neighborhoods they live in to be targeted for discrimination. Black communities that disproportionately experience police violence usually lack political and economic power, limiting the consequences officers are likely to face under the current system (but see Christiani et al., 2021). Racial disparities in contacts and arrests are then used to pathologize Black people and reinforce the false narrative that they need to be controlled to protect society (Muhammad, 2019). This understanding demands that psychologists ask questions that address the full social-ecological context of public safety and policing.

Implications for Policy

The simplest form of abolitionist critique of policing is that the police cause more harm than can be justified and that other systems would do better at responding to crisis. While this is often made as a normative claim, there is emerging evidence that replacing police with unarmed community responders reduces state violence, at least in some domains. For instance, there has been a recent surge in public policy attention towards replacing law enforcement with trained mental health responders (Goff & Porter, 2021). This has resulted in marked reductions in police use of force, according to public data, in cities as disparate as Eugene, Oregon and Denver, Colorado (Dholakia & Gilbert, 2021). The Support Team Assisted Response (STAR) program in Denver began sending non-law enforcement resources to non-violent crises involving mental health, unhoused persons, substance use, and poverty, resulting in now thousands of contacts without a single violent incident. Given that roughly 25% of police killings are of those with mental health considerations, this seems an important policy consideration for further research (Research Recommendation #7).

This simple form of critique is layered by critiques of the harm that asking micro-level questions absent macro-level questions does to the public imagination for what is possible—both to reduce anti-Black violence and produce actual public safety. As noted by Ture and Hamilton (1967, p. xvi), “to get the right answers, one must pose the right questions.” It is right to ask the question of how to make policing better. As long as the institution exists, we should improve it. However, psychological scientists must grapple with the possibility that the narrow focus on “fixing racism in policing” has created a blind spot to more fundamental questions (see Goff, 2021). Should police officers be expected to respond to every community need? When does this do more harm than good from a public safety standpoint? What if policing is not the best way to react to every social problem? To any?

As an example, consider Ba et al.’s (2021) study of Chicago Police Department records, which showed that Black officers stop, arrest, and use force against civilians less often than White officers do, particularly when encounters involve Black rather than White civilians. Officer demographics were unrelated to responses to community violence, but, as Goff (2021) pointed out, substantial variance in the differences between Black and White officers’ stop rates in Ba et al.’s study was explained by White officers’ greater number of discretionary stops and resulting higher level of enforcement for low-level offenses. In addition, differences between Black and White officers’ rates of force use were attributed to White officers’ higher likelihood of using force against Black civilians in particular. These statistics led Goff to question whether any of the excessive numbers of discretionary stops or use of force incidents among White officers were necessary to public safety. In addition, an analysis of data from three police departments revealed that only 4% of officers’ time in the first half of 2020 was spent on violent crime (Asher & Horwitz, 2020; see also Brodeur, 2010). This leads us to wonder how much of the other 96% of police officers’ time involves concerns that might be more appropriately handled by unarmed responders.

The abolitionist critique brings questions like these to the forefront and reveals a gap in psychological analysis. The field has poorly conceptualized “the situation” beyond the laboratory, has only rarely articulated the structural problems that contribute to racial bias and discrimination (in policing specifically, and the wider world in general), and often neglects to examine the relations

between systems within the full social-ecological context. It has, however, generated a wealth of unique psychological evidence that criminal legal systems are not set up to succeed at their putative goal. This means psychologists are well positioned to participate in finding answers, and to consider how using a broader lens might improve theorizing and science on race and public safety.

The problem of police violence against Black people is rooted in history and culture, but that larger system of race-based oppression and violence is echoed in the way police officers process information and perceive Black people and Black neighborhoods, and situational constraints put pressures on officers' cognitive processes and decision-making that set them up to discriminate against Black people. And yet police aggression and violence are disproportionately targeted at not only Black people but also other non-White people (e.g., Latinx people, Seguíno & Brooks, 2021) and other socially marginalized people (e.g., people with serious mental illnesses, Laníyonu & Goff, in press). Because those disparities cannot be explained by anti-Black racism, there must be something more fundamentally wrong with policing and the purposes for which it is employed.

This brings us to the next question: What is the mission of policing? Historically in the U.S., the mission has been to enforce laws and secure public order in ways that aligned with the prevailing economic, social, and political hierarchies. If this mission continues to guide policing, then we can expect the institution to remain at odds with the interests of and exert control over socially marginalized groups, thereby preserving and reproducing power structures (see Loader, 2020; Swencionis & Goff, 2021). To the extent that the mission can be shifted to focus on supporting public safety in ways that prioritize the rights, dignity, and wellbeing of people and communities, psychologists should develop theories and predictions and then test whether state agencies and officers are acting in service to those humane goals and how fidelity (or infidelity) relates to public safety (Research Recommendation #8). Next we highlight some specific examples of how public safety is being reimagined in ways that create space for abolition democracy, followed by a discussion of public support for those changes.

Ithaca, New York as a Case Study. Making changes to the fundamental mission of policing as an institution takes serious commitment, evaluation, and investment (e.g., Loader, 2020), but, as

Skolnick and Fyfe (1993, p. 187) observed, “history teaches that if reform is to last, it must change the systems and values to which officers adhere rather than just the officers themselves.” Local communities across the U.S. already recognize this. Take Ithaca, New York as a case in point. In 2020, a task force was charged with consulting the public and collaborating with the Center for Policing Equity (author Goff is the Co-Founder and CEO) to reimagine the Ithaca Police Department and the city’s public safety programs. To develop ideas for promoting community engagement and addressing racial disparities in policing outcomes, the collective held public forums and presentations; solicited community input through surveys; convened with leaders from Camden, New Jersey to learn from their experience of police reform; hosted town halls with city and county officials; shared draft reports and solicited community feedback; and conferred with the local police union. The City of Ithaca and surrounding Tompkins County approved resolutions and submitted them with an attending report to the Governor of New York in April, 2021.

Ithaca’s plans are bold. The city will restructure the Ithaca Police Department into a Department of Community Solutions and Public Safety. Crucially, while the department will retain a smaller unit of police officers to respond to violence, it will rely on a larger unit of “unarmed first responders” to manage nonviolent calls. The new department may be led by a civilian director and the Community Police Board has been granted more authority to oversee its activities. In addition, the final resolutions include, among other things, reforms to make recruitment and testing more inclusive, development of culturally sensitive training that includes de-escalation and mental health education, alternative response models for crisis intervention, analyses of data including on traffic stops, promotion of officer wellness, outreach to community members, and development of a community healing plan to address law enforcement-related trauma. (For details, see Tompkins County, n.d.)

The restructuring is only just beginning in Ithaca, and it is not abolition in any strict sense. However, the commitment to standing up a new system does create the conditions for abolition democracy. The plans were democratically negotiated across affected communities and represent an emerging consensus among residents about the best path forward to achieve equitable public safety. Civilian leadership and oversight will further contribute to collective governance, all with the aim of

reducing negative contacts between public safety officers and community residents. To the extent these efforts succeed in achieving meaningful improvements in the practice of public safety, they may provide a blueprint for other cities, counties, and states to follow.

Public Support for Reform and Abolition. The work happening in Ithaca and Tompkins County in New York is both consistent with existing research and broadly supported by the public. For example, recent nationally representative surveys indicate that only 6% of adults think no changes need to be made to policing, whereas 58% of adults call for major changes (Lloyd, 2021). With regard to the specific initiatives taking place in Ithaca, 50% of adults support eliminating officer enforcement of nonviolent crimes, 75% favor giving more power to civilian oversight boards, 92% support requiring police to be trained in nonviolent alternatives to deadly force, 70% support funding programs to replace armed police officers with trained first responders for situations involving mental or behavioral health crises (e.g., related to substance use, lack of housing, etc.), and 97% believe that officers should be required to have good relations with the community (Lloyd, 2021; Milam & McElwee, 2021; Pew Research Center, 2020). Support for these changes was typically higher among Black than White adults, but in no instance did fewer than 50% of White adults support change.

Other jurisdictions across the U.S. are heeding the abolitionist call to reduce the footprint of policing, too. For instance, many have questioned the wisdom of tasking armed police officers with routine traffic enforcement (e.g., Woods, 2021). Indeed, Kim Potter, a former Brooklyn Center, Minnesota officer with 26 years of experience, would not have shot and killed Duante Wright in 2021 if police did not perform traffic stops for expired car registration tags (Lavoie, 2021). Based on data that revealed the seemingly unnecessary dangers of these types of contacts, the Berkeley, California police department moved in February of 2021 to eliminate low-level traffic enforcement (Raguso, 2021). Subsequently, the Philadelphia City Council (2021) adopted a bill that also will prohibit officers from pulling people over for minor traffic violations. This is the kind of change that can save lives. At a higher level of governance, at least 17 states have passed laws banning officers from unjustified use of deadly chokeholds (Amiri et al., 2021), a policy that 74% of U.S. adults favor. In March 2021, the Democrat-led U.S. House of Representatives sought to ban chokeholds at the national level by

passing the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act, but the reform bill was blocked by Senate Republicans and negotiations came to a halt after six months (Sonmez & DeBonis, 2021). The bill included several other provisions that would have reined in police power and held officers accountable for abusing their authority, including ending “qualified immunity” so civilians may sue officers for excessive use of force or misconduct and establishing a national database to track officers who have engaged in misconduct. These latter two policy changes are also backed by the majority of U.S. adults (66% and 90%, respectively; Pew Research Center, 2020).

Considering some of the misconceptions around police abolition reviewed earlier, it is perhaps not surprising to find that the specific reforms mapped out for Ithaca and outlined in state and federal policy enjoy much stronger levels of support than do the broader ideas of police abolition or defunding the police. Only 15% of U.S. adults recommend abolishing police departments (Lloyd, 2021). One recent analysis of four decades of data revealed that, over time, people have come to agree more with the idea that too much money is spent on law enforcement (Roscigno & Preito-Hodge, 2021), but, even so, in 2020 only 25% of U.S. adults supported cutting spending on policing and in 2021 only 47% favored shifting financial support from police departments to social programs (Lloyd, 2021; Pew Research Center, 2020). On each of these matters, higher percentages of Black adults support change relative to White adults. Where Black and White people are more aligned in their views is in their desire for police to maintain their current local presence—overall 81% of Black adults and 88% of White adults recommend that police continue spending the same amount or more time in their areas (Lloyd, 2021). This preference stands in direct contradiction to the idea of shrinking or eliminating the police.

It is important to contextualize these figures in light of public support for other movements on behalf of Black people. Regarding emancipation during the Civil War, Du Bois (1935, p. 121) noted, “Abolitionists never had a real majority of the people of the United States back of them.” Yet no serious person could argue now that freeing enslaved Black people was not the morally right and just thing to do. Also, civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr. was unpopular, with 72% of White respondents (versus 5% of Black respondents) reportedly disliking him on a Gallup Poll administered two years

before he was assassinated (Appleton, 1995). It would not do well to impose any means of securing public safety on a community. All community stakeholders must participate in discussions to make challenging and complicated decisions to eliminate racially biased and discriminatory policing. As these statistics prove, however, popularity is not always the bellwether of righteousness. The will of the people being governed cannot be ignored, but we need not wait for majority endorsement to improve our democracy. It is entirely reasonable that people want to both check police abuse of power and be protected. The question is how to enact public safety in a way that achieves both goals.

The Urgency of the Moment

Within the framing of the Du Boisian notion of abolition democracy, there is plenty of evidence that theoretical framings that ignore macro-structural concerns are insufficient to understand racially disparate policing and that psychologists have a role to play in developing structural changes to the practice of policing to reduce bias and discrimination. For example, empirical questions that psychologists can inform and investigate include whether any of the policy changes we have described can be effective in light of the “blue wall of silence”—the informal code among police officers that emphasizes loyalty and protection and contributes to officers concealing their fellow officers’ wrongdoing (Skolnick, 2002)—or whether peer intervention training that teaches officers to report misconduct can be effective in breaking down the blue wall or preventing misconduct in the first place (see Aronie & Lopez, 2017) (Research Recommendation #9). Because the kinds of changes that create space for abolition are already taking place, psychologists must take the abolitionist tradition seriously. The urgency of this need is underscored by studies that have documented the harm done when Black people are disproportionality targeted and victimized by police, both to Black people (e.g., Bryant-Davis et al., 2017) and the institution of policing (e.g., Trinkner & Goff, 2019; Sunshine & Tyler, 2003). As we review next, the data indicate that policing in its current form does less to engender public safety and more to endanger it.

Racially Biased and Discriminatory Policing Psychologically Harms Black People

The trauma of experiencing and witnessing racially biased and discriminatory policing can be devastating to the mental and physical health of Black people. This makes it imperative for

psychologists to focus more on the issue and use every available theoretical tool to understand and examine the mental health consequences of contact with the police (Research Recommendation #10). What we know so far is that Black people experience their neighborhoods as occupied territories (Balto, 2019; Fagan et al., 2010; Wallace, 2018), they perceive that police are racially biased (Weitzer & Tuch, 2005), and their mental representations of police are more negative—for example, biased, dominant, and aggressive—when compared to those of White people (Lloyd et al., 2020). Black people expect that police officers will stereotype them as criminals, and Black men react to this identity threat with anxiety (Najdowski et al., 2015). Threat-induced anxiety may lead Black men to be more likely than White men to appear nervous or engage in suspicious-looking behaviors (e.g., avoiding eye contact) (Najdowski et al., 2015). This is concerning because police have been found to commonly cite such “furtive movements” to justify their investigatory stops, and, notably, more often for stops involving Black rather than White people (Najdowski, 2014).

Actually experiencing police contact also creates anxiety, with more stops and more intrusive stops being more anxiety-provoking (Geller et al., 2014). When people believe they have been stopped without reasonable justification, they feel anger, fear, distress, and annoyance (Nadal et al., 2017). Of crucial importance, across all races, unfair police treatment appears to be associated with depressive symptoms, drug use, lowered self-efficacy, and suicidal ideation (Dennison & Finkeldey, 2021). This is especially concerning because Black people are more likely than White people to report having been unfairly stopped, searched, or questioned by the police—by a margin of 269% in one study (Dennison & Finkeldey, 2021). Less procedurally just police encounters also are associated with more negative mental health symptoms later on (Geller et al., 2014), and, compared to White people, Black people are more likely to report having been questioned intrusively, disrespectfully, and even abusively by police (Epp et al., 2014; Tyler, 2005; Tyler & Huo, 2002; Weitzer & Tuch, 2006).

Young Black men indicate that they feel harassed and hopeless about unjustified stops and intrusive searches (Brunson, 2007). They also experience fear of police violence as a chronic source of trauma and stress (Brunson, 2007; Smith Lee & Robinson, 2019). Black people who experience or witness unjust incidents or brutality involving Black victims also suffer mental health consequences,

including fear, anger, and post-traumatic stress disorder (“PTSD”; Aymer, 2016; Bor et al., 2018; for review, see Bryant-Davis et al., 2017). Notably, exposure to police killings of unarmed Black Americans has not been shown to negatively impact the mental health of White people to the same extent (Bor et al., 2018). Further, more frequently witnessing or experiencing negative or burdensome policing or living in areas with higher rates of such incidents or more disparate rates of incidents all relate to worse physical health, including diabetes, high blood pressure, asthma, obesity (Sewell et al., 2021; Sewell & Jefferson, 2016), and even premature cellular aging, especially among Black men (McFarland et al., 2018). On the one hand, the more unarmed Black people police kill in an area, the more Black people are diagnosed with depression in emergency departments in the following months (Das et al., 2021). On the other hand, the more frequent police frisks are in an area, the less likely people with poor health are to visit an emergency department (Kerrison & Sewell, 2020). Add to this that deaths caused by police violence have been shown to take more years off the lives of Black people than White people (Bui et al., 2018).

The well-being of Black people, families, and communities is further negatively impacted as a result of disparities in incarceration rates, because incarceration increases risk of depression and other negative mental health outcomes, both during incarceration and after release to the community (Sugie & Turney, 2017; Turney et al., 2012). Notably, clinical anxiety, depression, PTSD, relationship problems, and adjustment difficulties are prevalent even among individuals who were wrongfully convicted and later exonerated (Brooks & Greenberg, 2020; Wildeman et al., 2011). Moreover, children and families who are affected by parental incarceration experience negative cognitive, mental health, and physical health outcomes (e.g., poor academic performance, depression, delinquency, poorer cardiac functioning) (DeHart et al., 2017; Glaze & Maruschak, 2008, Miller et al., 2013; Murray et al., 2012; Poehlmann, 2005; Turney, 2014). As this all makes clear, racism in policing needs to be recognized as the urgent public health problem that it is.

Racially Disparate Policing Undermines Policing and Threatens Public Safety

Racial bias and discrimination are detrimental from a policing perspective as well, as they delegitimize the institution as a whole, undermine individual officers as they engage in their work, and

threaten public safety. The perceived legitimacy of policing as a morally authoritative institution depends on people's trust and confidence in the police as well as beliefs that police behave in morally just and appropriate ways (Tyler, 2004). Of importance, as Jost and Major (2001, p. 14) noted,

If a system that distributes outcomes unequally among its members is to survive, then its members must view the inequalities as justified and legitimate. Thus, perceived legitimacy must come not only from those who benefit from it, but also from those who are disadvantaged by the system.

Yet, burdensome and disparate policing, whether experienced directly or vicariously, leads Black people to perceive the police as less legitimate than White people do, and to distrust the police, believe police mistreat them and expect mistreatment in the future, and be cynical about their responsiveness and effectiveness (Brunson & Wade, 2019; Camp et al., 2021; Davis et al., 2018; Kirk & Papachristos, 2011; Sampson & Bartusch, 1998; Sunshine & Tyler, 2003; Tyler, 2005; Tyler & Huo, 2002; Weitzer & Tuch, 2006).

Such findings are relevant for understanding why Black people are more reluctant than others to call the police when in need of assistance (in contexts of similar severity) and less likely to help identify perpetrators, provide information or witness statements, or testify in court (Davis et al., 2018; Jefferson & Walker, 1993; Tyler, 2005; Viki et al., 2006; see also Brunson & Wade, 2019). These elements of community cooperation are essential to effective policing (see, e.g., Baskin & Sommers, 2010; Regoeczi & Jarvis, 2013; Wellford et al., 2019). What this means is that racially disparate policing impairs officers' ability to protect and serve. In support, Desmond et al. (2016) provided empirical evidence that high-profile incidents involving police violence against unarmed Black men reduce the number of calls made to 911 to report crimes. They found that a local event produced a substantial and long-lasting decline in calls in Black neighborhoods, but smaller, shorter-term reductions occurred even after a national event and in White neighborhoods. More concerning still, Brunson and Wade (2019) found that lack of confidence in police officers' willingness or ability to apprehend suspected perpetrators of gun violence motivated young Black men not only to withhold cooperation from police investigators but also to arm themselves, to both protect against further

assault and seek justice on their own through retaliation. Del Toro et al. (2019) also showed that the more frequently non-White adolescent boys are stopped by police, the more psychological distress they experience, consistent with the findings reviewed previously (Geller et al., 2014). Del Toro et al. further observed that higher levels of stop-induced psychological distress translated into higher rates of delinquency 6, 12, and 18 months later. Thus, as Desmond et al. note, police abuses of Black people “not only threaten the legitimacy and reputation of law enforcement; they also . . . thwart the suppression of law breaking, obstruct the application of justice, and ultimately make cities as a whole, and the [B]lack community in particular, less safe” (p. 870; see also Bell, 2017; Kirk & Matsuda, 2011; Kirk & Papachristos, 2011).

Whereas any single instance of police violence against a Black person may delegitimize policing, it is important to acknowledge the cumulative effects of increased attention correspondent with technological advances facilitating video documentation of problematic incidents. With this in mind, it is unsurprising that Gallup polls indicate confidence in the police has been declining in recent years, with the percentage of U.S. adults indicating a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in this institution falling from a high of 64% in 2004 to a record low 48% in the summer of 2020 (Jones, 2020). The drop has occurred among both Black and White people, but it has been particularly pronounced among the former, only 19% of whom reported confidence in police in 2020.

Police officers are aware that high-profile incidents of race-based police violence reduce public confidence and trust (Turchan, 2021). This likely contributes to the fact that the vast majority—between 75% and 93%—of police officers believe high-profile incidents between police and Black people have made interactions with Black civilians more tense, made their job more difficult, and increased their concerns about safety (Morin et al., 2017). All of this can add stress to an already stressful job, as two out of three police officers report having been verbally abused by a community member recently, approximately one in three do not think most people respect them, over eight out of ten believe the public does not understand the risks and challenges that police face, and half find their work frustrating (Morin et al., 2017). Moreover, whereas only 9% of officers rate relations between the police in their department and White people in the community as poor or only fair, nearly half—44%—

rate the relationship between police and Black people negatively (Morin et al., 2017).

Ironically, however, when police officers are concerned about race relations, it may only make matters worse. Specifically, two studies, one in the U.S. (Trinkner et al., 2019) and the other in Australia (McCarthy et al., 2021), have shown that police officers experience social identity threat as concern that community members may judge them as a stereotypical racist police officer—regardless of their racial or ethnic identity. Moreover, in both studies, the more worry police officers reported experiencing related to being viewed as racist, the less confident they felt about the legitimacy of their authority in society. Of importance, these tempered feelings of self-legitimacy translated into less endorsement for fair, procedurally just policing and greater support for coercive policing (e.g., using excessive force). Logic dictates that police officers are more likely to feel threatened about being perceived as a stereotypical racist—and, thus, to police coercively—in interactions that involve Black (as opposed to White) community members. Thus, declines in both civilians' and police officers' perceptions of police legitimacy chip away at the foundation on which the institution's moral authority rests (see Richardson & Goff, 2014; Tyler, 2004).

In sum, when modern police officers, who are the professional descendants of slave-catchers, behave unjustly and coercively to the biological descendants of enslaved people, Black people and police officers view the institution of policing and criminal legal systems as less legitimate. Ironically, this increases the likelihood that police officers will engage in unjust and coercive policing, perpetuating a cycle of illegitimacy and violence that erodes the institution's moral authority. To be clear, our goals should not be constrained to making Black people trust the police or helping officers to feel more legitimate. In fact, that approach is contradictory to any notion of legitimacy in a society that truly values social equality. Instead psychologists should consider how engaging with the abolitionist intellectual tradition can lead to the development of better public safety efforts that will interrupt the cycle of racist policing.

Conclusion

George Floyd's murder resonated globally because it is "the most recent in the long series of crises faced by putatively democratic nations founded on and maintained by mass exclusion, forced

labor, colonialism, and genocide” (Dilts, 2019, pp. 230-231). In the U.S., there is nothing new about Black people’s struggle to be free. Writing several decades after the Civil War and the era of Reconstruction that followed, Du Bois (1935) lamented that abolition democracy had yet to be achieved in the comprehensive sense of the idea. Chattel slavery was made illegal but even aside from the mass criminalization and incarceration and lack of support that Black people received from police during that era, Black people remained politically, economically, and socially constrained in the U.S. Now, as in the past, police harassment limits Black people’s mobility and social activities, as Black people constrain their behavior to avoid encountering the police (Fader, 2021; Smith Lee & Robinson, 2019). As a result of aggressive over-policing, Black people continue to be disproportionately at risk of being incarcerated in jails and prisons (Alexander, 2010) where they may be exploited for their labor by states and private corporations (although this is done now under the guise of rehabilitation and job skills training; Whitehouse, 2017). Black people are still disenfranchised relative to White people, because felons, who are disproportionately Black, are stripped of their rights to vote or serve as jurors during their time in prison and permanently in some states (Binnall, 2021). Having even a misdemeanor criminal record can result in the loss of access to housing, employment, and education (Natapoff, 2018), which means that Black people continue to be more cut off than White people from opportunities to amass capital.

The psychological damage that racially biased and discriminatory policing exacts on Black people and the threat it poses to public safety is evidence that transformative change is needed. Psychologists have played an important role in illuminating the causes and consequences of racism in policing, but we have focused too much on micro-level interpersonal factors without appreciating the influences of the broader structural context. Considering that the ideas behind police abolition stem from a century-old intellectual tradition and also share wide public support when viewed apart from politically charged labels, psychologists should engage with them seriously. Reimagining public safety through the lens of abolition democracy provides a promising opportunity for psychologists to advance their theorizing and generate science that meaningfully contributes to equity and justice in the U.S.

Thus, we call on psychologists to engage seriously with abolition democracy by locating the

source of contemporary policing problems in slavery and historical racism, taking a critical and analytical approach, and synthesizing that understanding with psychological theory and science. The field has a responsibility to interrogate, develop, evaluate, and continually improve public safety practices to relieve Black people, Black families, and Black communities of the trauma of racial injustice, both past and present, while also fostering their resilience and well-being. These transformative changes would necessarily reduce racial disparities in criminalization and punishment. They also should move the United States closer to the democratic ideal of equal justice for all. As Moten and Harney (2004, p. 114) characterized it, abolition is “the founding of a new society.” We hope psychologists will play a useful role in the building of that society.

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