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**BLACK LIVES MATTER**

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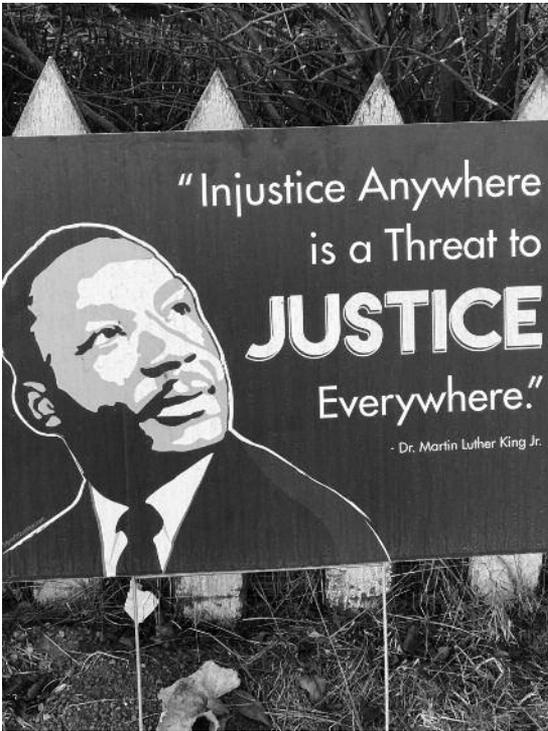
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*Photo by Karen Cane*

*Cover: Original artwork done by Santa Cruz  
County Artist Carol Bowie. Title: Africa*

## ALL BLACK LIVES MATTER

The recent protests for “Black Lives Matter” occur against a background in which Black lives have not mattered.



*Photo by Karen Cane*

From the very beginning of our country, white supremacy has been the rule. Forty of the fifty-six founders who signed the Declaration of Independence were slave owners. Ten of the first twelve US presidents were slave owners.

It took a war to end slavery, but the killing and persecution of Black people continued after the Civil War, and US History courses were largely silent about it.

### TERROR LYNCHING

Terror lynching continued in the South after the Civil War and forced thousands of Black Americans to flee to the North.

In 1868, just after the Emancipation Proclamation, white Democrats in St. Landry Parish, Louisiana, attacked the Black community for two weeks, and left more than a hundred Black people dead. In 1873, a militia of white Democrats killed dozens of Black Republicans in what came to be known as the Colfax Massacre.

After a lynching in Forsyth County, Georgia, in 1912, white vigilantes distributed leaflets demanding that all Black people leave

the county or suffer deadly consequences; so many Black families fled that, by 1920, the county's Black population had plunged from 1100 to just thirty.

The Tulsa race massacre on May 31, 1921 lasted twelve days and left somewhere around 25 African Americans dead. It destroyed Tulsa's prosperous black neighborhood of Greenwood, known as the "Black Wall Street." More than 1,400 homes and businesses were burned, and nearly 10,000 people were left homeless. Despite its severity and destructiveness, the Tulsa race massacre was barely mentioned in history books until the late 1990s, when a state commission was formed to document the incident.

These killings were not the actions of a few marginalized vigilantes or extremists; they were bold, public acts that implicated the entire community and sent a clear message that African Americans were less than human.

Whites who carried out the lynchings faced no legal punishment.

Against this background, it is heartening to hear the recent experience of a young woman from Portland who was part of the daily protests there.

## **NOTES ON THE PORTLAND PROTESTS FOR BLACK LIVES**

*by Bryn Morgan*

I'm Bryn, a 28 year old white woman. I live in Portland, Oregon and participated in months of protests following the murder of George Floyd. The protests aren't over here in Portland, but they are evolving. Throughout this piece I shift between past and present tense because I am referring both to specific moments and to the ongoing struggle. Instead of trying to explain anything or convince anyone, I am sharing the aspects of my experience that struck me and have stuck with me, deeply. Again, I speak only for myself as a white woman living in America.

### **HOLDING PARADOX**

If I learned anything, it was how to be a little comfier with paradox. From the beginning, my mind desperately wanted to know: what was the right way to protest? The wrong way? Which march was the right one to attend? Which organization the best to support? Which Black community organizers to attune to?

It is not the time for me, as a white person, to center on myself or my ideas. It is the time for me to throw my energy, weight and skills behind Black leaders and Black-led organizations. This much was clear. But Black leaders are not a monolith and the path forward for an (aspiring) ally is not cut and dry. Someone would be

rising as a young community leader and 48 hours later would be condemned across the internet for their revealed past. Many marches were announced on social media just a few hours in advance. Storylines rose and fell and things moved quickly.

I learned that my near inability to sit in unknowing while still moving forward is rooted in white supremacy. Doing just that became a (very uncomfortable, stumbling) practice. I listen hard, I center Black voices, and I use my discernment and intuition. I mess up, I get called out and I try again. To be clear, this is not about personal development, though I certainly am learning and changing. This is about defending, protecting and uplifting Black lives.

## **ABOLISH THE POLICE**

I learned so much on the go—things I’m ashamed I didn’t know before and I’m damn glad I know now, like Oregon’s racist past as a “whites-only” state with Black exclusionary laws. Oregon is not this white by accident. I learned more about the inherently racist underpinnings of America’s system of policing, and more clearly understood why it’s not just one or many “bad apples”. I learned to vehemently shout “A-C-A-B! All cops are bastards!”, understanding that the protest cry is not a commentary on any one cop’s personality, but on the system and practices they submit to when they don their uniforms. The system is and was designed to oppress Black bodies, full stop.

Night after night we were brutalized—terrorized—by the police. For white protestors, these experiences served to wake us up bodily to the everyday experience of being Black in America. The Portland Police (and then the Feds, and then the State Police) were like storm troopers, bull-rushing crowds of young people in black sweatshirts.



*Portland Police in riot gear. Photo by Samuel Gehrke*

They were fully equipped with riot gear like they were going to war. We (as time passed and we learned how freely they would harm us) were fully equipped with gas masks, goggles and helmets to protect ourselves against what we knew was coming.

There has been a lot of conversation about whether the protests are peaceful. Anyone stuck on this is missing the point, in my opinion, and is ignoring the history of the civil rights movement in our country. Nevertheless, the reality is that in every encounter I



*During a march, a protestor shows his several days old injury sustained from Portland Police's "less lethal" munitionz. Photo by Bryn Morgan*

witnessed, the police escalated the situation. A firework on the part of the protestors—or sometimes just enough time passing—would give them reason enough to tear gas, kettle, beat and shoot “less-lethal” munitions directly at the heads and limbs of protestors. A nightly affair.

I think of the so-called “two sides” of

the Palestinian and Israeli conflict. One side throwing rocks, one side rich in high-tech weapons funded by the United States of America. It took me years to realize there is no “seeing both sides” evenly when one party is the oppressor, clinging to power at all costs, and the other is the oppressed. Occasionally the Portland Police Bureau would post photos of what the protestors has thrown that had provoked the declaration of an unlawful assembly and the subsequent escalation. A half-eaten apple, a crushed up Pepsi can, occasionally a crumbling chunk of brick.

As we passed through tax season (in July, COVID style), it was not lost on us that we were resolutely suiting up night after night to protect ourselves from humans that we were paying to tear gas and terrorize us. It was also not lost on us that for the price of just one cop’s riot gear, many many nurses caring for COVID patients could be equipped with proper PPE (somewhere between 31 and 55 nurses, according to the internet).

## **MUTUAL AID AND COMMUNITY**

For me, what’s grown in our community has been the most heartening part of the protests. The first few weeks, when the marches were huge, the streets were flooded with folks offering water bottles, hand sanitizer, masks, granola bars, homemade gluten-free baked goods and the list goes on. There was so much joy and generosity in the care people showed each other. As the protests evolved, so did the mutual aid. The green spaces in front of

the Justice Center and Federal building (which for months were the focal points of our efforts) grew full of food offerings, clothing offerings and even art offerings. A group called Riot Ribs kept on grilling meat for anyone hungry, even through rounds upon rounds of tear gas. They grilled, with masks on, and they were arrested for feeding people. The Witches pulled red wagons full of snacks, medical supplies and masks. One night I scored a Rice Krispie Treat from one of their wagons and my heart was bolstered—something wonderful and nostalgic amidst the intimidation! One morning I learned they'd been arrested—for passing out snacks and supplies—and my heart sank.

As crowds of protestors moved away from deployed tear gas (“Walk, don’t run!”), medics of all sorts would shout, “Eye wash! Water! Anyone need help?” and rush to anyone affected. When a disabled woman needed an inhaler, and stat, one was found in a matter of seconds. Depending on how hard the gas hits you, how close you are to the canisters, you might be unable to see and you might even vomit. We had to lean on each other.

We made each other laugh, too. One night someone passed out seemingly hundreds of squeaky pig toys, and in all the live streams after that you would hear the constant squeak of tiny pigs. In the beginning, after there was damage caused to the Justice Center, there was a fence erected around the building and the cops defended it like it was an actual, precious human life. Protestors trying to pull it down in defiance would lead to tear gas, beating

and arrests. Soon we found the fence itself had a Twitter account (@PortlandFence) where it voiced its distaste at being smothered by the Portland Police. It brightened spirits and reminded us that there are so many ways to resist—art, humor and creativity not least of all. As the protests continue to evolve, the energy and



*Protesters at the fence near the Justice Center in downtown Portland.  
Photo by Samuel Gehrke*

community care is diffusing into many forms. One example I discovered the other day that made me smile is Portland Bakers Against Racism—a collective of bakers committed to supporting change. Sign up for a pastry box (September's was eight slices of pie from eight different bakers) and 100% of proceeds go to

organizations working towards racial justice. An event called Art Therapy is organized by a Black photographer and organizer and is reoccurring on Fridays at the park.

To be clear, in the last week and a half Proud Boys rallied in Portland, multiple counter protests took place and the Portland Police deployed tear gas on protestors. Last Friday at the community art event I mentioned above, men in plain clothes with guns and tasers claiming to be Federal agents tried to snatch a prominent Black organizer. The fight continues.

## **ALL BLACK LIVES MATTER**

### **ART THERAPY FOR ACTIVISTS**

For a follow-up on Art Therapy mentioned in above story by Bryn Morgan, see the article in the *Williamette Week* by Shannon Gormley (September 2, 2020).

*[www.wweek.com/arts/2020/phoographer-linneas-boland-godbey-hosts-art-therapy-for-activists/](http://www.wweek.com/arts/2020/phoographer-linneas-boland-godbey-hosts-art-therapy-for-activists/)*

A Portland photographer, Linneas Boland-Godbey has been a regular at protests starting in June. He figured if he needed to channel his energy into a change of pace, other protesters may feel the same way. In August, Linneas hosted his first event which he called BLM Art Therapy.



*Linneas Boland-Godfrey, Portland photographer. Photo by Samuel Gehrke*



*Protesters taking a break from tear gas. Some painted on canvas, others decorated masks or made signs. Photo by Samuel Gehrke*



*An iconic image from a protest June 2, 2020. Thousands of us lay face-down with our hands behind our backs on the Burnside Bridge in Portland to remember George Floyd and demand justice. Photo by Andrew Wallner*

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