

The Code Switch Guide To Race And Policing

NPR Code Switch

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Highlight: We've been reporting on race, policing and protest since we first launched in 2013. Here's some of our best coverage from the past seven years.

Body

Over the past two weeks, we've watched the country grapple with questions about race and policing. And while those questions might be new to some, they're ones we've been thinking about since the very beginning of Code Switch.

As we said in a recent episode, it can be hard to find something new to say about the cycle of police brutality, black death and the resulting protests. To describe what's happening right now as a "moment" in the country's racial history doesn't feel right; the stories of black people killed by police have dominated news cycles before, as did calls for changes to policing.

But it's also clear that what's happening right now-protests in all 50 states and around the world, and widespread calls for defunding police departments-feels different. As my colleague Karen Grigsby Bates wrote, the unique circumstances of a pandemic and historic recession have fomented tensions beyond anything she's seen before.

To help explain how the United States got to this point, we looked back at some of our coverage of race and policing, both from the podcast and the blog. (We also compiled all those episodes in a handy Spotify playlist, if that's your podcast streaming method of choice!)

The Precarity of Black Life In the U.S.

The Dangers Of Life As An American 'Nobody'

In this 2016 episode, we interviewed Marc Lamont Hill about his book *Nobody: Casualties Of America's War On The Vulnerable, From Ferguson to Flint and Beyond*. The book chronicles decades of mistreatment of black Americans that lead to their untimely deaths at the hands of police. In their conversation, Hill makes the case for prison abolition and restorative justice, arguing that the current American criminal justice system wrongly treats people as disposable.

46 Stops: On 'The Driving Life And Death Of Philando Castile'

In the weeks after police officers shot and killed Philando Castile during a traffic stop in 2016, NPR reporters Cheryl Corley and Eyder Peralta found out that Castile had been pulled over 46 times in the 14 years he'd had a drivers license. We talked to Corley and Peralta about what they learned about Castile's interactions with the police, and

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how black people in Minnesota are more likely than people of other races to face low-level misdemeanor offenses and license suspensions because of traffic stops.

What To Make Of Philando Castile's Death, One Year Later

We released this episode in 2017, shortly after a Minnesota jury acquitted the police officer who shot and killed Philando Castile. Riham Feshir, a reporter with Minnesota Public Radio, told us about the legal case against the officer, Jeronimo Yanez, and why the jury didn't feel they could convict him under state law. We also spoke with Castile's former coworker, John Thompson, about how his friend's death made him "ready to put [his] feet to the ground to make sure that there is never another Philando Castile."

Claude Neal: A Strange And Bitter Crop

The history of the United States is filled with black death being made a spectacle for white people-whether it's videos of black people being killed by police, or lynchings becoming community events that entire towns attended. The lynching of Claude Neal, a 23-year-old farmhand, drew several thousand white people to Jackson County, Florida, in 1934. In this episode, we hear from poet L. Lamar Wilson about Neal's life and gruesome death, and why Neal's story is so important to learn and remember.

How Black Reporters Report On Black Death

As the nation grappled with police brutality in the wake of Michael Brown's death, questions about race and policing became one of the biggest stories in the country. And for black reporters, covering those "distressing and unrelenting" stories had become taxing to their well-being, Gene wrote back in 2015, saying: "We don't stop being black people when we're working as black reporters ... we quite literally have skin in the game." He talked to reporters Yamiche Alcindor, Wesley Lowery and Trymaine Lee about how their work has become simultaneously essential and traumatic, and how they cope with the stresses of reporting on black death.

Protesting For Black Lives

Respect Yourself

When discussing the tactics of protests against injustice, talking heads often invoke the importance of "civility" in persuading the powers that be. The politics of civility and its close cousin, "respectability," have long been a consideration of black people trying to make Americans pay attention to racial justice. In this 2019 episode, we talked to professors Brittany Cooper and Randall Kennedy about the optics of black rage, and the fraughtness of using respectability politics to bring about real change.

A Thousand Ways To Kneel And Kiss The Ground

When Colin Kaepernick first refused to stand for the U.S. national anthem back in 2016, protesting racism and police brutality, he joined a long line of black athletes who have used their platforms to denounce racism, including Jesse Owens and Muhammad Ali. And like many of those black athletes, he has suffered long-lasting career consequences. We talked about how Kap fits into the history of black athlete activism, and why his decision to take a knee sent the sports world into a frenzy.

Red Summer In Chicago: 100 Years After The Race Riots

Last year marked the 100-year anniversary of one of the country's bloodiest uprisings: Chicago's Red Summer. Sparked by the death of a black teenager drowned by white beachgoers, the upheaval claimed 38 lives and burned down around 1,000 black homes. Chicago wasn't alone in its turmoil; more than two dozen cities throughout the country experienced race riots of their own. It's worth revisiting this 2019 piece, as the U.S. once again enters what could be a Red Summer of protests.

Rethinking The Police

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Black And Blue

In 2016, we talked to the people caught in the crossfire of conversations about black people dying at the hands of police: black police officers. Gregory Thomas, the head of the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives, told us how his group wants to reform policing, and Michael Rallings, the Memphis police director, detailed his plans for repairing relationships with his community. And then we talked with writer Jelani Cobb, who embedded with the Newark police for an entire year, about how the existence of black police leadership can't necessarily fix problems with policing.

Flitting Between Solutions For Police Violence

Over the years, there have been a lot of proposed policies to curb police violence—more representative police forces, for example, or use of body cameras. In 2014, we delved into each of these proposals, and how they're ultimately insufficient to address policing's problems.

Some Key Facts We've Learned About Police Shootings Over The Past Year

In 2015, we took stock of all the cases of deadly police shootings of black people that we'd covered in the past year, and reflected on what we'd learned along the way. Among those lessons, we found that videos of black death tell an incomplete story about police violence, and that the guidelines for using deadly force are often hotly contested.

'It's Not Your Grandfather's LAPD' - And That's A Good Thing

After a mostly white jury acquitted four police officers for the beating death of Rodney King in 1992, Los Angeles erupted. The miscarriage of justice, compounded by decades of police mistreatment of black and brown Angelenos, led to the eventual overhaul of the city's police department. In 2017, 25 years after the uprising, Karen Grigsby Bates reported on the lasting changes to LAPD, and how a police force tried to repair its relationship with its city.

The After-Effects of Police Violence

The Pain Of Police Killings Can Last Decades

When Roman Duckworth Jr. was shot by a police officer in 1962, the case made national news and led to investigations by the FBI and the NAACP. But after headlines about his death died down, Duckworth's widow and six children had to figure out how to move on without a father. Over 50 years after the shooting, reporter Ben Greenberg talked to the family about growing up in the absence of a father figure, and how the siblings only found out the truth about his death when they received letters from the Southern Poverty Law Center as adults.

After The Cameras Leave

Five years after Michael Brown's death and the resulting uprising in Ferguson, we took a look at what changed—if anything—in the city. The upshot? The police department had been revamped to comply with a federal consent decree, but black people were still getting pulled over at disproportionate rates. And Brown's family was still working through a lot of emotional turmoil; as Michael Brown Sr. told us, "I just tell him I miss him all the time."

Interracial Solidarity

A Letter From Young Asian-Americans To Their Families About Black Lives Matter

When the police officer who shot Philando Castile was first (mis-)identified as Chinese, Christina Xu and other young Asian Americans drafted an open letter, addressed to their families, about anti-blackness in their communities. As Xu told us in this 2016 episode, she'd seen how Asian Americans had rallied to protest the prosecution and conviction of a Chinese American cop, Peter Liang, who had killed a black man named Akai Gurley in 2014. Afterward, she felt compelled to write and send the letter to her family.

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And after you listen to that episode, be sure to read Kat Chow's 2017 essay on the myth of Asian Americans being a "model minority," and how it's been used to drive a wedge between Asian and black folks.

Safety-Pin Solidarity: With Allies, Who Benefits?

In the Code Switch inbox, we get a lot of iterations of the same question: How can I be a better ally? And as we explain in this 2017 episode, that's a complicated question. We talked about the conundrums that arise when people want to be allies, but don't go far past the performative motions-like sharing an Instagram story, or its 2017 counterpart, the donning of a safety pin. [Copyright 2020 NPR]

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