

PEACEFUL PROTEST

Well then, if direct action is the only way to address police murders, then certainly the most effective way to make change is through strict non-violence, as Martin Luther King Jr.'s granddaughter tells us.

Unfortunately, that's rhetoric, not history. In fact, the civil rights movement drew its successes from a combination of militant direct action, armed self-defense, rioting, and non-violent civil disobedience. King's appeal as a civil rights leader—and the interest politicians today have in promoting his legacy to the exclusion of all others—arose in no small part because he offered an alternative to the threat of ungovernable urban riots and Black Power militancy. Condemning all action that falls outside the paradigm of nonviolence divides movements, protecting the reigning order and concealing the history of how change really happens.

RIOTS

If not strictly nonviolent protests, can riots ensure that police stop killing and are held accountable?

Riots can accomplish many things that peaceful protesting rarely does. They raise the economic and political costs of police violence for the regimes that perpetrate it. They can enable marginalized people to meet their needs directly via empowering group action—their needs for collective grieving, for vengeance, even for material goods. They dispel the myth that the police are invulnerable and rupture the illusion of political consensus. They expand the horizons of our collective imagination about what we can do together and how the world could be different.

But riots alone may not suffice. While mass unrest has forced reluctant authorities to press charges against killer cops—in Oakland, in Ferguson, in Baltimore, and now in Minneapolis—they often don't

secure convictions, as the court cases in Ferguson and Baltimore make clear. And even if they could discourage further killings by some specific police forces, the consistent rate of police murders over the past five years shows that they have yet to make a dent in the overall problem. The flames of Ferguson were just dying down when St. Louis police fatally shot Isaac Holmes, despite the threat of further unrest.

If we have to burn down whole neighborhoods just to get a single officer indicted, that's not a viable program to make the US justice industry accountable. The courage and determination of the rebels in Minneapolis and around the country represents an inspiring step forward. But we should not understand them as a means of reform—we should approach them as a step towards revolution.

SO WHAT DO WE DO?

If none of the “solutions” that governments, police departments, and some community activists have proposed will suffice, what could put a stop to racist police murders once and for all? It is not easy to answer this question, but we have to ask it in earnest.