

The Legacies of Baltimore's Holy Week Uprising in 1968 On the Demonstrations in 2015 Against Police Brutality

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Baltimore City convulsed in 1968 and 2015 with uprisings against racial inequalities. In 1968, the Holy Week Uprising resulted after Martin Luther King Jr's assassination produced disillusionment with nonviolence as a means of achieving long-awaited progress on civil rights. The conservative backlash to the rioting, looting, and arson produced calls for law and order, which militarized law enforcement and contributed to a legacy of police brutality. In 2015, the death of Freddie Gray at the hands of the police, combined with the lack of socioeconomic progress, fueled the Black Lives Matter movement's calls for defunding the police and investing in underserved communities instead. 1968 and 2015 shared common themes. In both cases, the uprisings resulted from historical grievances with racial disparities, exacerbated the distrust between the Black community and the authorities, and highlighted the tension between dedicating resources to law and order instead of community development. However, Black activists had more agency in 2015 such that they could call for defunding the police. Yet, society at large still has not learned the lessons of 1968. As this paper will demonstrate, using law and order to respond to uprisings fueled by social problems would only lead to injustices going unaddressed.

The Holy Week Uprising in 1968 resulted from frustration about the inability to address longstanding inequalities. The Black freedom movement had historically gained traction in Baltimore throughout the 1900s.¹ In the 1930s, Baltimore had a prominent

¹ Peter Levy, *The Great Uprising: Race Riots in Urban American During the 1960s* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 120.

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) chapter that received support from churches, newspapers, and trade unionists.² The Freedom March in 1964 also protested against inadequate housing, employment, and education, and Baltimore was designated as the Congress for Racial Equality (CORE)'s first "Target City" to fight for Black Power.³ However, the progress on civil rights stalled because the liberal New Deal coalition was more intent on preserving White advantages such that the Black community won concessions but could not solve structural problems.⁴ As a result, Black individuals continued to face social, economic, and political oppression, which manifested in housing segregation, gerrymandering, and underrepresentation in City Hall.⁵ Urban renewal efforts, including the construction of federal highways, were intended to revitalize Baltimore but instead displaced Black people from their homes.⁶ This discontent fueled uprisings like Los Angeles' Watt Riots in 1965.⁷

After the race riots in 1967 across the nation, President Lyndon B. Johnson created the Kerner Commission to investigate its causes.⁸ The commission found that socioeconomic problems contributed to the events in 1967. It reports that "our nation is moving towards two societies, one black, one white — separate and unequal."⁹ Segregation, poverty, and the concentration of Black populations in cities with

² Ibid., 122.

³ Ibid., 120-122.

⁴ Ibid., 122.

⁵ Ibid., 120-135.

⁶ Ibid., 133.

⁷ Jill A. Edy, "Watts Riots of 1965," (Britannica, 2014), <https://www.britannica.com/event/Watts-Riots-of-1965>.

⁸ Clyde Haberman, "The 1968 Kerner Commission Report Still Echoes Across America," (*The New York Times*, June 23, 2020), <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/23/us/kerner-commission-report.html>.

⁹ National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, *The Kerner Report* (Princeton University Press, 2016), <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/jhu/reader.action?docID=4336795&ppg=523>, 1.

inadequate resources had produced racial “ghettos.”¹⁰ The commission concluded that the frustration over lack of progress in civil rights, the legitimization of violence from White terrorism, and the perception of a White power structure all incentivized Black individuals to participate in the 1967 riots.¹¹ The solutions address unemployment, education, flaws in the welfare system, and housing to reduce these racial disparities.¹² The socioeconomic reasons behind the 1967 protests also underlaid the Holy Week Uprising in 1968.

The Holy Week Uprising occurred because of the persistence of racial injustices combined with the shock of Martin Luther King Jr.’s assassination.¹³ For some, Martin Luther King Jr.’s death symbolized the ineffectiveness of nonviolence. Reflecting this view, Stokely Carmichael argues that “The oppressed must begin to legitimize that type of violence in the minds of our people, even though it is illegal at this time.”¹⁴ Some believed that civil disobedience, although peaceful, would not translate into tangible change in the lives of Black people. This galvanized individuals to resort to protests, looting, vandalism, or arson in the Holy Week Uprising to make their voices heard.¹⁵ In response, the government called in the police, Maryland National Guard, and federal troops.¹⁶ Due to restraint from law enforcement,¹⁷ Baltimore actually experienced fewer

¹⁰ Ibid., 207-208.

¹¹ Ibid., 208-210.

¹² Ibid., Ch. 17.

¹³ Peter Levy, *The Great Uprising: Race Riots in Urban American During the 1960s* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 156.

¹⁴ Stokely Carmichael, “The Pitfalls of Liberalism,” in Jeremy Suri, *The Global Revolutions of 1968* (W.W. Norton & Company, 2007), 242.

¹⁵ Peter Levy, *The Great Uprising: Race Riots in Urban American During the 1960s* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 153.

¹⁶ Ibid., 153.

¹⁷ Ibid., 179.

fatalities — only six¹⁸ — compared to other cities although around 5,500 were arrested, and the overloaded criminal justice system failed to protect constitutional rights.¹⁹

The Holy Week Uprising polarized Baltimore as conservatives called for law and order and Black activists demanded more solutions to socioeconomic issues. Although White individuals could have sympathized with the Black community following the Kerner Commission's findings, the Holy Week Uprising changed their perceptions. In eyewitness testimony from *The Baltimore Sun*, White people considered the uprising the work of "hooligans," "teenagers who were out for what they can get," "those who were too lazy to go out and work."²⁰ These racial stereotypes of Black people as criminal and dependent on welfare amplified calls for a stronger police response while lowering support for government funding for the impoverished. The restraint from the police in handling the Holy Week Uprising further contributed to this shift in White public opinion. The Kerner Commission had urged for a policy of containment of law enforcement. This resulted in fewer casualties in Baltimore, but a White eyewitness representative for a general perception condemned "the police for 'just sitting' inactively in their cars."²¹

Conservatives capitalized on these feelings to blame the Kerner Commission for the disorder. Spiro Agnew, in particular, criticized the Kerner Commission for forcing White individuals to feel a "masochistic group guilt" about inequality, which created a "permissive climate" that allowed "lawbreaking" to "become a socially acceptable and

¹⁸ Ibid., 166.

¹⁹ Ibid., 185.

²⁰ Linda Dunn, "Rioting Evokes Varying Emotions: Residents of Stricken Areas Disapprove Or Condone Disorders as Inevitable" (*The Baltimore Sun*, April 8, 1968), <https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/rioting-evokes-varying-emotions/docview/541478562/se-2?accountid=11752>.

²¹ Ibid.

occasionally stylish form of dissent.”²² He further blames the Black radicals, whom he characterized as “caterwauling,” “riot-inciting,” and “burn-American-down type[s],” and the moderates, who supposedly accepted their violence, for causing the Holy Week Uprising.²³ Civil disobedience would lead to riots, which would inevitably cause revolution when condoned.²⁴ By finding fault with the Kerner Commission, Agnew strove to end progress on its recommendations to address racial disparities, delegitimize the civil rights movement, and use law and order to gain political support. This scapegoating shifted responsibility away from the White community for contributing to racial inequalities.

The conservative rhetoric exacerbated distrust between authorities and the Black community. Black leaders accentuated that Agnew’s rhetoric on “law and order” produced “police brutality and an estrangement of the races.”²⁵ They also criticized how “health, welfare, and education services deteriorated markedly” because of Agnew’s inadequate focus on social reforms and disregard for the Kerner Commission.²⁶ From the viewpoint of the Black people in Baltimore, the authorities did not understand their suffering, nor did they dedicate sufficient resources to address their concerns. Instead, the governing conservatives merely used fiery rhetoric to achieve their own political

²² “Gov. Agnew on ‘Group Guilt’” (*The Afro-American*, August 3, 1968), <https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/gov-agnew-on-group-guilt/docview/532225890/se-2?accountid=11752>.

²³ Spiro Agnew, “Statement at Conference with Civil Rights and Community Leaders, State Office Building, Baltimore (April 11, 1968)” in *Executive Records, Governor Spiro T. Agnew, 1967-1969* (Maryland State Archives, 2018), 758, <https://msa.maryland.gov/megafile/msa/speccol/sc2900/sc2908/000001/000083/html/am83--758.html>.

²⁴ “Gov. Agnew on ‘Group Guilt’” (*The Afro-American*, August 3, 1968), <https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/gov-agnew-on-group-guilt/docview/532225890/se-2?accountid=11752>.

²⁵ “Leaders Issue Bitter Manifesto on Agnew” (*The Afro-American*, Aug 17, 1968), <https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/leaders-issue-bitter-manifesto-on-agnew/docview/532182642/se-2?accountid=11752>.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

ends. As a result, the Black Power movement became more militant and empowered. A myriad of actors, including the Black Panther Party, Activists, Inc., the Baltimoreans United in Leadership Development, black women, and high-schoolers, worked to call for greater political representation, higher-quality education, anti-poverty programs, housing improvements, better working conditions, and union recognition.²⁷

This radicalization of the political discourse occurred as law and order — an outcome of the Holy Week Uprising — manifested itself in the militarization of the police, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)'s Counterintelligence Program (Cointelpro), and the wars on crime and drugs. The legacies of these policies contributed to police brutality, lack of community development, and tensions between law enforcement and the Black community that culminated in the 2015 protests.

Baltimore dedicated resources to bolstering the police. The Maryland Crime Report in June 1968 underscored that “where we find a killer, looter, or burner operating by himself or with co-criminals, great authoritative force is called for immediately.”²⁸ The report’s recommendations included dispatching seasoned officers to patrol the “ghettos,” creating plans to mobilize police rapidly, and generating rumors to counteract beliefs that would contribute to disorder.²⁹ In 1969, the *Baltimore Sun* finds that the city, state, and federal police had upgraded their riot-control equipment and communications. The police purchased “tear gas grenades,” “pepper foggers,” and “better chemical agents.” The officers would also use “a more forceful approach at the outset” of any

²⁷ Peter Levy, *The Great Uprising: Race Riots in Urban American During the 1960s* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 208-214.

²⁸ “Dedicated to Reducing Crime and Delinquency in Maryland” (Maryland Crime Report, July 1968). <https://archives.ubalt.edu/bsr/archival-resources/documents/maryland-crime-report.pdf>.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

signs of violence.³⁰ Law and order became more prominent in not just rhetoric but also policy.

Moreover, the FBI's Cointelpro program reinforced an antagonistic relationship between the civil rights movement and the Black community. The program intended to neutralize threats from what it designated as "Black Nationalist Hate Groups," especially the Black Panther Party (BPP).³¹ Nationally, the FBI weakened the BPP by inciting conflict with other armed organizations, fostering internal strife, planting criticism of the BPP in the media, and collaborating with police departments to crack down on its activities.³² The Baltimore Division of the BPP was subject to the FBI's surveillance and interference. Paul Coates, the founder of Baltimore's Black Classic Press, notes that the police would commit crimes while impersonating the BPP and harass members such that they would leave and disappear from Baltimore.³³

The FBI's Baltimore Division also used counterintelligence operations to thwart an alliance between the BPP and the Students for a New Democratic Society (SDS), which represented the New Left, in 1969 to weaken the reach of Black activism by preventing it from forming coalitions.³⁴ The FBI used their sources within the BPP to portray the SDS as "elite white chauvinistic students of upper middle class who would

³⁰ Paul D. Samuel, "Inner City Small Business Find Crime More a Concern" (*The Baltimore Sun*, March 31, 1969),

https://archives.ubalt.edu/cj/pdfs/R0028_CJ_S01_B08_F003.pdf.

³¹ Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations, *Supplementary Detailed Staff Reports of Intelligence Activities and the Rights of Americans Book III* (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1976), 187, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015076851883&view=1up&seq=232>.

³² *Ibid.*, 185.

³³ Christina Royster-Hemby, "Fighting the Power" (*The Baltimore Sun*, February 1, 2006), <https://www.baltimoresun.com/citypaper/bcpnews-fighting-the-power-20060201-story.html>.

³⁴ *Freedom of Information and Privacy Acts Subject: Cointelpro New Left Baltimore Division* (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1969), 16, <https://vault.fbi.gov/cointel-pro/new-left/cointel-pro-new-left-baltimore-part-01-of-01/view>.

like to exploit the militant potential and strength of the BPP and other extremist groups.”³⁵ Under that characterization, the SDS would only pay “lip service” to the BPP’s needs, get them to do their “dirty work,” and push them into “needless danger.”³⁶ The program successfully caused the BPP to punish members for engaging with the SDS. For instance, the BPP expelled an officer for associating with a SDS member.³⁷ This revealed a conflict between law enforcements who want to preserve the status quo and social movements forming coalitions to challenge the existing power structures.

Another belated law-and-order legacy of the Holy Week Uprising in 1968 was President Ronald Reagan’s war on crime, which morphed into a war on drugs that disproportionately impacted Baltimore’s Black community. In 1986, the federal government implemented legislation that dedicated \$1.7 billion to enforcing laws prohibiting the possession and consumption of drugs.³⁸ The policy instituted mandatory minimum sentences for different drug violations.³⁹ However, the war on drugs disproportionately incarcerated minorities, especially during the crack epidemic. The *Baltimore Sun* reports that there were “nearly 40,000 drug arrests in 1994 alone, which we can infer were mostly people of color from Baltimore’s demographics.”⁴⁰ A vicious cycle occurred whereby incarcerated individuals could not find employment upon their release, returned to using drugs, and were apprehended by the police again.⁴¹

³⁵ Ibid., 16.

³⁶ Ibid., 16.

³⁷ Ibid., 9.

³⁸ “Congress Passes Anti-Drug Measure” (*The Afro-American*, October 25, 1986), <https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/congress-passes-anti-drug-measure/docview/532548423/se-2?accountid=11752>.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Dan Rodricks, “Crack Epidemic’s Legacy in Baltimore” (*The Baltimore Sun*, April 18, 2012), <https://www.baltimoresun.com/opinion/bs-xpm-2012-04-18-bs-ed-rodricks-crack-20120418-story.html>.

⁴¹ Ibid.

The *Afro-American* shows how the wars on crime and drugs harmed Black communities. In 1981, the newspaper condemned “preventive detention” because that would arbitrarily designate individuals as “dangerous” and exacerbate oppression.⁴² The war on crime also did not involve any programs for “rehabilitation,” which meant that the administration was not considering the welfare and futures of incarcerated people.⁴³ Vernon Jordan, a civil rights activist, similarly critiques the government for dedicating resources to building prisons “at luxury-hotel construction rates” rather than “invest[ing] in education and job opportunities.”⁴⁴ He argues that helping inmates gain skills is critical since they ultimately have to reintegrate into the community.⁴⁵ Furthermore, a writer in the *Afro-American* contends that the inmates “are primarily persons who have run afoul of America’s racial, class, and political biases.” More specifically, America sees lack people in two roles, as servants and as captives.⁴⁶ This reflects the viewpoint that the criminal justice system — controlled by the White community — discriminate against the Blacks individuals.

This historical legacy of law and order contributed to police brutality in recent times. Between 2011 and 2014, Baltimore had provided \$6 million in settlements to over 100 people who had suffered from police brutality.⁴⁷ The Justice Department, which investigated the Baltimore Police Department (BPD) after Freddie Gray’s death,

⁴² “War on Crime” (*The Afro-American*, October 17, 1981), <https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/war-on-crime/docview/532408355/se-2?accountid=11752>.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Vernon E. Jordan Jr., “Vernon Jordan: ‘Another War on Crime’” (*The Afro-American*, November 14, 1981), <https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/vernon-jordan/docview/532416543/se-2?accountid=11752>.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ R.B. Jones, “Bloodnotes: Prison Reform” (*The Afro-American*, April 19, 1986), <https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/bloodnotes/docview/532528923/se-2?accountid=11752>.

⁴⁷ David Von Drehle, “The Roots of a Riot” (*Time Magazine*, May 11, 2015), 36.

reported on its discriminatory practices leading up to 2015. The Justice Department found that the BPD had engaged in “unconstitutional stops, searches, and arrests,” used “excessive force,” and employed “enforcement strategies that produce[d] severe and unjustified [racial] disparities.”⁴⁸ As a result of the zero-tolerance policy on crime, there were more than 300,000 pedestrian stops between 2010 and 2015, many of which lacked probable cause.⁴⁹ Almost half of the stops occurred in two Black communities that only accounted for 11% of the population.⁵⁰ Furthermore, Black people used drugs at similar levels to other racial groups but had five times the number of arrests for drug possession. These issues were direct legacies of the war on drugs and crime in the 1980s and 1990s.

These problems culminated in the death of Freddie Gray in Baltimore. On April 12, 2015, the police arrested Freddie Gray based on allegations that he an illegal switch blade although the knife that Gray had was different and legal under state law.⁵¹ The police officers put Freddie Gray into a “leg lace,” ignored his screaming and requests for an inhaler for his asthma, and dragged him into the van.⁵² They placed handcuffs and leg shackles on him but did not buckle him into the seat.⁵³ During the ride, Freddie Gray sustained spinal injuries that ultimately contributed to his death one week later.⁵⁴ The

⁴⁸ “Investigation of the Baltimore City Police Department” (U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division, August 10, 2016), 3, <https://www.justice.gov/opa/file/883366/download>.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁵¹ Eyder Peralta, “Timeline: What We Know About The Freddie Gray Arrest” (NPR, May 1, 2015), <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2015/05/01/403629104/baltimore-protests-what-we-know-about-the-freddie-gray-arrest>.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

incident reflects the arrest of an individual without cause and the use of excessive force that the Justice Department reported on afterwards.

Freddie Gray's death sparked outrage over police brutality and massive protests in Baltimore. The first demonstration happened on April 18, 2015 with a few hundred individuals protesting outside of the Western District Police Station.⁵⁵ The mainly peaceful demonstrations turned violent after Freddie Gray's funeral service on April 27, 2015.⁵⁶ In response to flyers and social media posts calling for a "purge," which references a film whereby laws are suspended for a day every year, the police shut down the Mondawmin Mall and bus services.⁵⁷ Wes Moore reports that "the kids [from the nearby Frederick Douglass High School] could not leave."⁵⁸ The police's act sparked confrontations, looting, and arson.⁵⁹ The police used tear gas, and Governor Larry Hogan announced a state of emergency and the deployment of the National Guard.⁶⁰ The Mayor of Baltimore, Stephanie Rawlings-Brake, implemented a nighttime curfew that would last until May 3, 2015.⁶¹ The rioting subsided on April 28, 2015, and other cities marched in solidarity with Baltimore the next day.⁶²

Grievances with socioeconomic problems contributed to the 2015 protests. That year, Baltimore had around 16,000 empty homes with a significant portion concentrated

⁵⁵ Garth den Heyer, *Police Response to Riots* (Springer, 2020), 195.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 198.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 198.

Joshua Berlinger, "Baltimore Riots: A Timeline" (CNN, April 28, 2015), <https://www.cnn.com/2015/04/27/us/baltimore-riots-timeline/index.html>.

⁵⁸ Terry Gross and Wes Moore, "From Freddie Gray to George Floyd: Wes Moore Says It's Time to 'Change the Systems'" (NPR, June 3, 2020), <https://www.npr.org/transcripts/868565590>.

⁵⁹ Garth den Heyer, *Police Response to Riots* (Springer, 2020), 198.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 198.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 199.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 200.

in the city's poorest areas.⁶³ In Sandtown-Winchester, for instance, almost 25% of houses were vacant, the unemployment rate was double that of Baltimore as a whole, and every one juvenile in four was detained between 2005 and 2009.⁶⁴ Bill Henry, a member of the City Council, explicitly argued that Baltimore's overinvestment in the police and underinvestment in the community caused the 2015 protests. While the BPD's resources have "tripled since 1991," "funding for programs that improve the lives of young people — such as recreation centers, libraries, after-school programs and summer jobs — has stagnated or been slashed."⁶⁵ Henry contends that the government's focus on imprisoning youth rather than supporting their education and development laid the groundwork for the 2015 protests. This reflects striking similarities between 1968 and 2015. In 1968, Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination was not the only cause. The Kerner Commission had highlighted socioeconomic problems ranging from segregation to poverty. Similarly, in 2015, Freddie Gray's death was only the spark that lit the fire. Baltimore had been struggling from a history of police brutality and racial disparities that culminated in the protests. Responses to uprisings with law and order ignores the underlying inequalities that build up dissatisfaction over time.

Black individuals have gained higher positions in the government in recent times, but the difficult relations between authorities and the Black community have persisted. In 2015, Black people accounted for 48% of the police officers.⁶⁶ Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake reflects the struggles of representing the government but also being a

⁶³ David Von Drehle, "The Roots of a Riot" (*Time Magazine*, May 11, 2015), 36.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁶⁵ Mark Reutter, "Closing Rec Centers and Slashing Youth Programs Were Root Causes of Riot, Councilman Asserts," (*Baltimore Brew*, May 4, 2015), <https://www.baltimorebrew.com/2015/05/04/closing-rec-centers-and-slashing-youth-programs-were-root-causes-of-riot-councilman-asserts/>.

⁶⁶ David Von Drehle, "The Roots of a Riot" (*Time Magazine*, May 11, 2015), 38.

member of the Black community. The mayor described the management of the 2015 demonstrations as a “delicate balancing act” whereby the authorities would protect the community from the violence but also give “those who wished to destroy space to do that as well.”⁶⁷ That speech drew harsh criticism, especially from conservatives about the mayor encouraging the riots. Although she later clarified that she meant how “in giving peaceful demonstrators room to share their message, unfortunately, those who were seeking to incite violence also had space to operate,” conservatives believed that she had failed in her responsibility.⁶⁸ At the same time, however, the mayor characterized the demonstrators as “thugs,” which elicited condemnations from the Black community.⁶⁹ She had grown up in Baltimore, witnessed the suffering resulting from violence on the streets, and lost her brother to stabbing in a carjacking, but her support for law enforcement has estranged her from the community.⁷⁰ Travis Smiley states that “these riots aren’t a black or white thing — they’re a humanity thing, a dignity thing.”⁷¹ Just because the president, the mayor, and the police chief at the time of the protests were black, the tensions between maintaining law and order and addressing inequality have remained stronger than ever.

The lack of accountability for the six police officers involved in the death of Freddie Gray exacerbated that conflict. The officers faced charges of second-degree murder and manslaughter, but three “were acquitted during a bench trial,” one “walked

⁶⁷ Elizabeth Chuck, “Baltimore Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake Under Fire For ‘Space’ to Destroy Comment,” (NBC News, April 28, 2015), <https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/baltimore-unrest/mayor-stephanie-rawlings-blake-under-fire-giving-space-destroy-baltimore-n349656>.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ David Von Drehle, “The Roots of a Riot” (*Time Magazine*, May 11, 2015), 37.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁷¹ Tavis Smiley, “It’s a Dignity Thing — Democracy is Threatened By Racism and Poverty” (*Time Magazine*, May 11, 2015), 39.

free after a jury standstill resulted in a mistrial,” and the State Attorney dropped the remaining charges “after repeated unsuccessful legal outcomes.”⁷² This created perceptions among the Black community that the legal system was structured to protect the authorities who violated the rights of the people. One Black journalist, Issac Bailey, wrote that the lack of liability for the police officers involved in Freddie Gray’s death was a common occurrence, not an anomaly. In fact, “the presence of a badge on a man or woman’s chest absolves him or her of just any kind of wrongdoing.”⁷³ Although the “badge confers an outsized level of power — the legal right to detain and kill and seize property — it comes with a lower, not higher, level of responsibility.”⁷⁴ For Black communities, the police represented not protection but rather a threat arising from abuse of power.

With cases of police brutality against Black people gaining more national attention, the Black Lives Matter Movement began advocating for defunding the police. The death of George Floyd sparked protests in Baltimore in June 2020. George Floyd had died because a police officer placed a knee on his neck for almost nine minutes.⁷⁵ Demonstrations against police brutality in Charles Street, at the Clarence Mitchell Courthouse, and at City Hall championed the Black Lives Matter movement and calls for defunding the police.⁷⁶ One participant in the protests stated that “We need the

⁷² Safia Samee Ali, “Freddie Gray Death: Several Baltimore Officers Face Termination After Trial,” (NBC News, May 22, 2017), <https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/baltimore-unrest/freddie-gray-death-several-baltimore-officers-face-termination-after-internal-n763271>.

⁷³ Issac Bailey, “Freddie Gray Case and Reason for BLM Movement,” (CNN, July 29, 2016), <https://www.cnn.com/2016/07/29/opinions/freddie-gray-charges-dropped-bailey/index.html>.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Oxenden McKenna, Christina Tkacik, Justin Fenton, and Lillian Reed, “Public Defenders Join City Protests,” (*The Baltimore Sun*, June 9, 2020), <https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/public-defenders-join-city-protests/docview/2410641105/se-2?accountid=11752>.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

resources going to the Baltimore Police Department, year after year after year and failure after failure, to serve our communities' desperate needs.”⁷⁷ This parallels concerns from 1968 whereby resources dedicated to law and order would siphon away funds for solving socioeconomic issues. In June of 2020, the calls for change actually influenced Baltimore’s City Council to slash funding for the police by \$22 million in order to dedicate more resources to “opening recreation centers on Sundays, increasing trauma services and offering black-owned businesses forgivable loans.”⁷⁸

In sum, the Holy Week Uprising in 1968 contributed to legacies of law and order, which manifested in the militarization of the police, the FBI’s Cointelpro program, and the wars on crime and drugs. That laid the groundwork for police brutality, which caused Freddie Gray’s death and catalyzed Baltimore’s protests in 2015. While the demonstrations in both 1968 and 2015 arose from historical grievances over racial inequalities and exacerbated distrust between law enforcement and the Black community, in recent times, Black activism gained more agency as their calls for defunding the police have translated into policy. However, it is yet to be seen whether this attempted shift away from law and order would actually funnel more resources into community development and increase the focus on addressing socioeconomic disparities.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Talia Richman and Yvonne Wenger, “The Baltimore City Council Eliminated \$22 Million From the Police Budget. What Does That Look Like?,” (*The Baltimore Sun*, June 17, 2020), <https://www.baltimoresun.com/politics/bs-md-pol-police-budget-explainer-20200617-4yjweepbkreknjlef4f45jiblm-story.html>.

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