

Foreword

The magazine cover stopped me in my tracks.

I was in an Italian airport, bustling to another terminal for a connecting flight. And there she was. A thin, bespectacled Black woman was wearing a sundress. The white police officers who were arresting her wore war gear. They were clad in all-black, full body armor—from the top of their helmeted heads to the soles of their steel-toed, booted feet. The woman held one hand over her diaphragm, as if she was taking in her last few deep breaths before impact. My heart sank. I knew instinctively that the image I was looking at was not a scene from Italy. It looked like home. It looked like the United States.

I later learned that while I was abroad lecturing about Black Lives Matter, the movement was experiencing its second wave. On July 5, 2016, police in Baton Rouge shot and killed Alton Sterling at point blank range. One day later, an officer fatally wounded Philando Castile, as a routine traffic stop in suburban Minneapolis escalated to a deadly tragedy. Black citizen journalists filmed both incidents with their cellphones. The damning footage inspired Ieshia Evans to travel from New York to Louisiana, to support the anti-police brutality protests. Evans later told me, for a book I was writing about Black smartphone witnessing, that she had no idea that her encounter with Baton Rouge police was being photographed. She definitely knew, however, that she wanted the narrative of why she chose to demonstrate to be within her control. She wanted the world to know that the brutality against Black people, at the hands of police, must end, she said.

The now infamous photograph of Evans—entitled *Taking a Stand in Baton Rouge*—is but one of the many startling images of rebellion that the Black Lives Matter movement has birthed. Throughout each wave of the anti-police brutality uprisings, there is a photograph of stoic resistance so striking, that it calls into question the need for excessive police force. In the early days of the movement, for example, the Pulitzer Prize-winning photograph of the late Edward Crawford lobbing tear gas away from a crowd of children in Ferguson, Missouri, went viral. Crawford, who was protesting the killing of Michael Brown Jr., wore an American flag t-shirt against a navy-blue night sky. His black locks flew behind him as the camera caught him in

mid-hurl. That was 2014. By 2016, Ieshia Evans had taken her stand. And in 2020, when the world viewed George Floyd's protracted and ghastly murder caught on video, it was Khennedi Meeks who took a knee in front of a phalanx of police during a San Jose, California protest.

All of these images of increasingly militarized law enforcement officers make this new edition of *The Politics of Force* just as essential now as the first edition was in the early 2000s. This fresh volume continues to make us think about the relationship we have with the people who are sworn to protect us—and how news media shape whether we believe that their force fits the crime. When this book was first written in 2000, only one visual record of police force typically existed: that which came from the police. Twenty years later, in 2020, a 17-year-old girl's brave cellphone filming of George Floyd's murder garnered her a Pulitzer Prize Special Citation. And yet, it is chilling to acknowledge that Darnella Frazier's 2021 recognition coincided with the 30th anniversary of the infamous Rodney King video, which George Holliday filmed in 1991. Three decades separate the videos, yet the same brutality persists.

This new edition offers glimmers of hope, however, by explaining that some of the old ways news media cover police brutality have fallen away. Due to the intervention of Black citizen journalists' counternarratives, journalists have had to ask different questions, interview more people than just the usual official sources, and re-examine how systemic racism might impact how different communities encounter police. Journalists have had to wrestle with normative ideals of objectivity and problematic framing too, which often cast victims of fatal police force as deserving characters—instead of complex human beings.

It was Ieshia Evans's humanity, after all, that caused me to stop at that newsstand in Milan. As I searched the headlines for more context, I was aware that I was seeing the culmination of a profession that grew out of slave-catching. I thought about how police initially did not want to wear uniforms at all in the mid-1800s, for fear of being ridiculed (Archbold 2012). Yet I knew that over time police did indeed adopt a menacing identity. They patterned themselves after the military—initially by donning surplus Union Army uniforms and eventually by wearing the riot gear that intimidated Ms. Evans on that humid, July day in 2016. Through polycarbonate face shields, the police glared at her. This updated book tells the story of how the media were forever changed when she—and others like her—dared to glare back.

Allissa V. Richardson, Ph.D.