When They Call You a Terrorist

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF PATRISSE KHAN-CULLORS AND ASHA BANDELE

Patrisse Khan-Cullors was born in Los Angeles County in 1984 and grew up at the height of the war on drugs. As a low-income Black child, she experienced racial profiling in school and watched both her disabled brother and nonviolent father go in and out of the prison system. In adulthood, she became a community organizer, focusing on addressing the effects of prison and over-policing on Black and Latinx neighborhoods in LA while also making art on the subject. After Trayvon Martin's death in 2012—and the subsequent acquittal of his killer, George Zimmerman, in 2013—Khan-Cullors started the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, along with Alicia Garza and Opal Tometi. Khan-Cullors self-identifies as queer and advocates for the centering of queer and trans voices in the BLM movement. As of 2021, Khan-Cullors continues to lead the Black Lives Matter Global Network while making art, writing books and television scripts, teaching at Prescott University, and raising her son, Shine.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

When They Call You a Terrorist spans from Khan-Cullors's birth in June 1984 to the final months of 2016. During that time, the war on drugs and the war on gangs in the U.S. were having devastating effects on Black and Latinx communities like her own. As Khan-Cullors notes in her book, between 1982 and 2000, the prison population in California grew by 500 percent, and many of those imprisoned were poor and Black. Trayvon Martin's murder in 2012—and his killer George Zimmerman's subsequent acquittal of all charges in 2013—was a turning point in both Khan-Cullors's memoir and U.S. society as a whole; as with the murder of Emmett Till in 1955, the public was suddenly focused on the violent consequences of being Black in the U.S. The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement that took off in response to Martin's death in Florida—as well as Michael Brown's death at the hands of a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri—led to massive protests in cities across the U.S. and around the globe. As Khan-Cullors notes at the end of her book, Donald Trump's election to the presidency in 2016 posed a threat to the BLM movement's momentum, but the movement has carried on since then.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Khan-Cullors is not the only Black Lives Matter founder to write a book about her experience with the movement—co-founder Alicia Garza published her own story in 2020 called *The Purpose of Power: How We Come Together to Fall Apart*. Both of these books build off the history of Black social movement leaders writing books that are both memoirs and calls to action, such as *Angela Davis: An Autobiography* or *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. In *When They Call You a Terrorist*, Khan-Cullors also references specific authors and works that have influenced her activism, such as Audre Lorde's collection of speeches and essays *Sister Outsider*, the sections of Emma Goldman's memoir *Living My Life* that touch on gender and sexuality, and Michelle Alexander's explosive nonfiction book about mass incarceration called *The New Jim Crow*. Khan-Cullors also starts her chapters with quotes pulled from books that touch on similar themes around organizing, racism, and sexism, such as Black activist Assata Shakur's 1987 autobiography *Assata* and Toni Morrison's 1987 novel *Beloved*.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** When They Call You a Terrorist: A Black Lives Matter Memoir
- **When Written:** 2016–2017
- **Where Written:** Los Angeles County, California
- **When Published:** 2018
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Memoir, Autobiography
- **Setting:** Los Angeles County, California
- **Climax:** Trayvon Martin's killer (George Zimmerman) is acquitted, and Patrisse helps start the Black Lives Matter movement in the wake of Zimmerman's trial.
- **Antagonist:** U.S. policymakers who invest in prisons and policing rather than in amenities and support for Black communities
- **Point of View:** First Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Co-authors. The writer asha bandele is officially listed as a co-author of *When They Call You a Terrorist* despite the fact that the book is a first-person account of Khan-Cullors's life. Khan-Cullors made the choice not to hire a ghostwriter but instead to credit bandele for her work in helping Khan-Cullors turn her story into a book.

Playing Herself on Screen. Between 2019 and 2021, Khan-Cullors appeared in eight episodes of the television show *Good Trouble*, playing a fictionalized version of herself in a storyline about Black Lives Matter-Los Angeles. She was also a writer on

the show and helped ensure that their representations of the organization were accurate.

PLOT SUMMARY

Growing up poor and Black in Los Angeles County in the 1990s, Patrisse Khan-Cullors witnessed the violence of the war on drugs and war on gangs firsthand. Throughout her life, she heard Black leaders lecture people about personal responsibility—but she didn't learn about wealth inequality or mass incarceration until she's an adult. Patrisse doesn't think it's fair that Black people are stereotyped as violent criminals, especially since she and her loved ones live in constant fear of being brutalized by the police. She also doesn't think it's fair that she and her fellow activists Alicia Garza and Opal Tometi were called terrorists when they started Black Lives Matter (BLM) following **Trayvon Martin**'s death.

Patrisse grows up with her mother Cherise, stepfather Alton (though as a child she believes that Alton is her biological father), older brothers Monte and Paul, and younger sister Jasmine in Van Nuys, California. Their neighborhood is poor, run-down, and predominately Mexican and Black. Cherise works 16-hour days while Alton is often absent and struggles to hold down a job. As the war on drugs ramps up, the police begin to target neighborhoods like Patrisse's; one day, police roughly accost 11-year-old Monte and his friends for no reason. Another time, the police raid Patrisse's house in search of her uncle (who sells drugs) and treat her and her siblings like criminals.

Patrisse attends a wealthy, predominately white middle school in Sherman Oaks, and she's shocked that her peers don't fear the police. At 12 years old, she's handcuffed in front of her classmates for smoking marijuana in the school bathroom—something her white peers do with impunity. Attending this school makes Patrisse ashamed of her poverty and unsure of herself for the first time. Black American children, Patrisse explains, are stereotyped as delinquent and disposable—they're taught that they don't matter.

The same year, Patrisse finds out that Alton isn't her real father—a man named Gabriel is. She meets Gabriel, who is gentle and kind, and grows close with him and his extended family. Gabriel is addicted to crack cocaine and has been in and out of prison throughout his life. One day, Gabriel suddenly disappears, and Patrisse is crushed to learn that he's been sent back to prison. Later in life, Patrisse learns how the war on drugs unfairly punished millions of nonviolent drug offenders—"the civil rights crisis of our time"—and how some prisons function like for-profit businesses.

Soon after this, 19-year-old Monte is imprisoned too. He's sentenced to six years for a robbery he committed because the voices in his head told him to. All of the boys in Patrisse's neighborhood have been arrested at least once—often seemingly for no reason. She compares 1990s Los Angeles to apartheid South Africa, as Black people living in LA lack access to the same good schools, well-paying jobs, and opportunities that white people have access to. Black and Mexican people are stereotyped as criminals and incarcerated at a disproportionately high rate, and inmates are often mistreated. Monte (who will later be diagnosed with schizoaffective disorder) is under-fed, physically abused, and over-medicated in prison.

Patrisse, meanwhile, attends a high school that has special programs focused on social justice and the arts. She spends her time dancing and learning about all of the "isms"—racism, sexism, classism, etc.—while developing skills for dealing with conflict in a restorative way. Around this time, she drifts away from the Jehovah's Witness religion she was raised with. She also comes out as queer and has a relationship with her friend Cheyenne before meeting Mark Anthony, a fellow student she connects with over art, healing, and justice and with whom she enters into a deep friendship that will later become romantic.

After high school, Patrisse begins working at the Strategy Center in LA, a nonprofit that teaches her how to become a community organizer in order to build the world she wants to see. She successfully recruits her parents and friends to be involved in the Center and gets closer to Gabriel, who has also been released from prison. Patrisse loves her father regardless of his struggles with addiction and incarceration. But one day, Gabriel unexpectedly passes away. Patrisse concludes that his fatal heart attack was, in part, the result of a life spent navigating racism, classism, and abuse in prison. Her community of activist friends organize a year-long healing process for Patrisse where they make art together every week.

Monte returns from prison again right around the time Gabriel passes away and he is in bad shape—after being fired from a job Patrisse found for him, he stops taking his medications and starts having manic episodes. At the same time, it becomes clear that he experienced severe abuse while in prison, including being forced to drink out of toilets. Patrisse and her friends put together a re-entry team, and she calls them to help get Monte to the hospital. Monte resists at first but eventually agrees to go with them, a moment that Patrisse celebrates for having no police involvement.

In between supporting Monte through his transition and marrying Mark Anthony, Patrisse puts together and then tours a performance art piece called *Stained*. The piece features blown-up pages from a 2011 ACLU about the torture inflicted on prisoners in the LA County Jail (where Monte was once held), along with recordings of Cherice's calls to the jail to try to locate Monte the first time he was arrested. The art performance eventually leads Patrisse to start her own organization that mobilizes incarcerated people's loved ones to push for civilian oversight of the LA County Sheriff's

Department.

The following year, a Black teenager named Trayvon Martin is shot and killed in Florida. His killer is acquitted of all charges, and Patrisse is furious—how can so many nonviolent Black people in her life be sent to prison while murderous white-presenting people get to go free? Her friend Alicia writes a Facebook post immediately after the trial that includes the sentence, "I continue to be surprised at how little Black lives matter," and Patrisse comments "#BlackLivesMatter." They, along with Alicia's friend Opal, start spreading the message and brainstorm how to expand its scope. This is the official start of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement.

While BLM is just getting off the ground, police twice raid Patrisse's home in a peaceful artist community in LA. First, Mark Anthony is pulled out of bed in the middle of the night and handcuffed outside because he "fits the description" of someone committing robberies in the area. Then, Patrisse, her friend JT, and his young daughter are forced out of the house at gunpoint by a dozen officers in full riot gear who claim that they have reason to believe a violent protestor is hiding out there. These moments lead Patrisse to wonder who the real terrorist is—nonviolent activists like herself or abusive police?

The BLM movement grows, and Patrisse helps to lead a massive protest Beverly Hills, where she asks the wealthy white people eating outside to remember Trayvon and all of the Black people killed by police in the U.S. She is surprised to see them lower their forks and bow their heads. The movement is gaining traction. Still, more and more Black people are being killed every day. When Patrisse learns about the ramping up of police violence in Ferguson, Missouri in the wake of Michael Brown's death, she works with Alicia and Opal to plan a national Freedom Ride to Ferguson. Thousands of BLM organizers drive from a dozen locales, joining local protestors in the streets and resting in a healing space Mark Anthony has set up in the basement of a church. Throughout, Patrisse works to ensure that the Black women at the center of the movement are publicly acknowledged for their work.

While working on the #SayHerName campaign in the wake of Sandra Bland's death, Patrisse and Mark Anthony end their romantic relationship. She starts a relationship with JT and is surprised to learn she is pregnant. When JT does not offer her support through the pregnancy, she leans on Future, a genderqueer leader of BLM Toronto whom she has recently started dating. Five months into the pregnancy, they get engaged and, after some challenges during Future's immigration process, Future officially moves in with Patrisse in LA.

Soon after Patrisse's son Shine is born, Donald Trump is elected president. Patrisse feels anger and despair yet knows that the BLM movement has already achieved so much and will not be stopped. BLM has pushed legislation decreasing the federal prison population, raised awareness about polish brutality, and offered thousands of people an outlet to heal from trauma and find their voices as activists. The organization still hopes to end police violence, reform the U.S. prison system, and build more a more robust support system for Black people's physical and mental health. After Trump's election, Patrisse tries to focus on her health and spend quality time with her family. She remains hopeful for the future and resolves to teach Shine (and Black children in general) that Black lives *do* matter.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Patrisse Khan-Cullors – Patrisse is—along with Alicia and Opal—one the founders of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. She is a self-identified queer Black woman who grew up in Van Nuys, California, during the 1990s, the height of the war on drugs. Along with her three siblings—Paul, Monte, and Jasmine—she was raised by her working-class single mother, Cherice, who was sometimes unable to earn enough money to pay for food. At 12 years old, Patrisse was handcuffed in front of the class for smoking marijuana in the bathroom, even though her wealthy white peers smoke with no consequences. The same year, she found out that her father, Alton, is not her biological father—Gabriel was. She became very close with both Gabriel and Monte and, as she grew up, watched them go in and out of prison for nonviolent, drug-related crimes. As an adult, she was heartbroken when Gabriel passed away from a heart attack and equally heartbroken when Monte was given a harsh prison sentence for a crime he committed while experiencing a severe manic episode (he suffered from schizoaffective disorder). These experiences—along with learning about racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination in a high school program focused on social justice and the arts—led Patrisse to become a community organizer. She also made a performance art piece about the abuses that prisoners faced in the LA County Jail, which then led to her found a nonprofit, Dignity and Power Now. After **Trayvon Martin** was killed and his killer was acquitted in 2013, Patrisse started the Black Lives Matter movement, putting the next four years of her life into building an international effort to hold people accountable for harming or killing Black people. Patrisse cares about both community organizing and community healing—when Monte was released from prison for the second time, she recruited family and friends to form a re-entry team to help with his transition. After marrying and then divorcing her long-time friend and fellow activist Mark Anthony, she married a genderqueer activist named Future. Just before Donald Trump's election in 2016, she gave birth to Shine.

Monte Cullors – Monte is Patrisse's older brother, the son of Cherice and Alton. He is a gentle and loving man who loves animals and started struggling with schizoaffective disorder as

a teenager, experiencing destructive manic episodes and deep bouts of depression. Police roughed Monte up and searched him for the first time when he was only 11 years old and hanging out with friends; police went on to target him many more times throughout his adolescence. He started using crack cocaine and was in and out of juvenile detention, but after breaking into someone's house while having a manic episode, was sent to prison for robbery at the age of 19. He was immediately stabbed by a fellow inmate and chose to spend the rest of his time in the mental health unit. Three years after he was released (during which his mental illness continued to destabilize him), Monte was arrested again and, this time, threatened with life in prison. Patrisse and Cherice worked hard to pay for a good lawyer, and his sentence was reduced to six years. Patrisse and Cherice were heartbroken throughout his trial, especially when they saw that he had been drugged to the point of incapacitation. When Monte was released again, Patrisse put together a re-entry support team and found him a job. Still, he struggled with his mental health and wound up unemployed and manic. Cherice convinced him to move to Las Vegas with her, but he ended up back in LA to live with his on-again, off-again girlfriend, Cynthia, and their son Chase. At one point, when Monte experienced a severe manic episode and started drinking out of the toilet, Patrisse realized that this is probably what he had to do to survive in prison. Whenever Patrisse hears stories about nonviolent Black men being killed by police, she thinks of Monte and fears for his safety. In this way, Monte represents the broad trend of police officers, prison workers, and policymakers treating Black people (especially disabled Black people) as though their lives don't matter.

Gabriel Brignac – Gabriel was Patrisse's father, a loving Black man who was in and out of prison for selling drugs before dying from a heart attack. Patrisse didn't learn that Gabriel was her biological father until she was 12 years old, since Gabriel disappeared before Cherice could tell him she was pregnant, and Alton agreed to raise her as his own. When Gabriel learned about Patrisse, he showered her with affection and invited her to his graduation from a sobriety ceremony. This was where Patrisse met his extended family and was warmly welcomed as a Brignac. Gabriel was the glue that held his family together, the compassionate listener who helped them work through conflict and enjoy their weekly barbecues. He took Patrisse to 12-step meetings with him and, though she didn't think that addicts should be solely held responsible for using drugs (she believed his addiction developed after he returned from the military with no job prospects), she appreciated the honesty she heard in the meetings and the way that Gabriel admitted his mistakes. After becoming a consistent presence in her life, Gabriel disappeared one day, and Patrisse found out that he was back in prison. Patrisse was 20 years old when Gabriel got out of prison, and they again became close, having lunch together every day when he was on break from his cement truck-driving job. When he disappeared again, Patrisse found him at a motel, drunk and high. He admitted that he had been arrested again for selling drugs, and that as a poor boy from small-town Louisiana, he just wanted a life with dignity where people respected him. Patrisse sat with him, telling him she wouldn't leave. He went to prison again after this, but for a reduced sentence, since he agreed to serve as a first responder to the California wildfires. Gabriel returned from prison again when Patrisse was 26 and died from a heart attack a few years later. Patrisse was devastated and viewed his heart attack as an effect of existing in a racist society that didn't support him.

Mark Anthony – Mark Anthony is Patrisse's friend whom she ended up marrying. They met when Patrisse is a senior at Cleveland High School and Mark Anthony was a junior. Though Patrisse had never before been attracted to a straight cisgender man, while working as a TA in one of his classes, she was immediately drawn to him. They developed a deep friendship over the next several years, connecting over healing, justice, and art. After graduation, they ran a restorative justice program at Cleveland together about trauma and resilience. They eventually started a romantic relationship, though they were non-monogamous and didn't kiss each other for years. After they did start a physical relationship, Mark Anthony disappeared again, and Patrisse cut him out of her life. Five years later, they both received divinatory readings in their Ifa spiritual tradition that said they were meant to be together. They decided to give their relationship another shot and eventually got married. Throughout this, Mark Anthony was studying Chinese Medicine and supporting Patrisse in taking care of Monte when he had manic episodes. He was also the victim of a police raid—Patrisse found him handcuffed in front of their house when she got home one night, and he was told that he fit the description of someone committing robberies in the area. After this, they started the prison abolition organization Dignity and Power Now together. But as Patrisse became focused on the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, she and Mark Anthony realized they were better as coworkers and friends. They ended their romantic relationship, though they stayed close friends.

Cherice – Cherice is Patrisse's mother. Cherice's middle-class Jehovah's Witness family disowned her when she revealed she was pregnant with Paul at 16 years old. Despite this, she didn't give up on the Jehovah's Witness tradition, attending church every week and working to be accepted back into the community (which she achieved when Patrisse was in high school). After Alton left the family, Cherice worked 16-hour days at low-paying jobs in order to provide for her four children. She was not an affectionate mother, which Patrisse sees as resulting from the fatigue of single motherhood; she was just trying to make sure her family survived. Still, there were moments when she let her emotions out, such as when Monte was brought strapped to a gurney to his hearing in the

midst of a full-on manic episode and shouted out for her before they rolled him out. Patrisse saw Cherice's tears and shame as evidence that she felt responsible for Monte's mental illness and current predicament, but Patrisse believed that oppressive social structures were really to blame. Cherice and Patrisse together raised the funds to pay for Monte's legal fees when the rest of the family stepped away. Cherice also attended some of the organizing events that Patrisse helped to plan when she was involved with Strategy Center, which led to Patrisse feeling closer to her. After Monte was released from prison the second time and struggling to stay mentally stable or find work, Cherice moved herself and Monte to Las Vegas, where the cost of living was lower.

Future – Future is a genderqueer Black Lives Matter Toronto leader. After Patrisse stopped seeing JT, Future became Patrisse's romantic partner. Given their geographic distance, Future and Patrisse developed a deep friendship virtually for a year and met in person for the first time during the summer of 2015, when Patrisse was leading the #SayHerName campaign in the wake of Sandra Bland's death. Their attraction to each other was immediately apparent, and when JT emotionally withdrew after Patrisse told him she was pregnant, Future stepped in to become her primary partner. They fell deeply in love, connecting over their shared commitment to the BLM movement. Future also experienced a tough childhood: they separated from their siblings and went into the foster care system due to their mother's mental illness. Patrisse and Future got engaged when Patrisse was five months pregnant and visiting Future in Toronto. After some challenges with Future's immigration status, they got married in LA when Patrisse was nine months pregnant and moved in together in West Hollywood. Future was present with Patrisse through health complications during her pregnancy and through Shine's birth, showing Patrisse that it was possible to trust again.

JT – JT is a Black Lives Matter-Los Angeles organizer and Patrisse's long-time friend. After Patrisse's divorce with Mark Anthony, he became her romantic partner and the father of their child, Shine. JT and his young daughter were with Patrisse when her home was raided in June 2013, after **Trayvon Martin** was killed and before his killer was acquitted. Fearing for JT's life—he is a large, dark-skinned Black man—Patrisse tried to handle the dozen police officers pointing guns at her house herself, but eventually JT and his daughter were also forced outside. They were all aware that JT could easily be killed for the slightest movement, but they all survived the encounter. A couple years later, while JT and Patrisse were in a non-monogamous relationship, Patrisse became pregnant with Shine. Despite expressing desire to raise a child with Patrisse, JT was not excited about the pregnancy and emotionally withdrew, leaving Patrisse to rely on Future and Carla to get through her pregnancy. Later, they went through a restorative mediation process in which JT shared that he was unable to be present for Patrisse because he was processing grief over both the deaths of family members and high-profile killings of Black people.

Alicia Garza – Alicia, along with Patrisse and Opal, is one of the founders of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. Patrisse met Alicia at a political gathering in Rhode Island, where they danced together all night. They had been friends for seven years when **Trayvon Martin**'s killer was acquitted of all charges in July 2013. In the wake of the trial, Alicia wrote a Facebook post about how she would "continue to be surprised at how little Black lives matter," and Patrisse responded with the hashtag "#BlackLivesMatter." Alicia and Patrisse immediately started brainstorming about how to turn this into a movement with global reach, and they brought Opal into their efforts. They worked closely together over the next few years, planning the Freedom Ride to Ferguson in the wake of Michael Brown's death and organizing massive marches in their respective locales—Patrisse in LA and Alicia in the San Francisco Bay Area. Like Patrisse, Alicia has been called a "terrorist" for her organizing work.

Carla – Carla is a friend Patrisse made during her sophomore year at Cleveland High School. She was loud, energetic, and queer, and Patrisse was immediately drawn to her. They ended up developing a deep friendship that has lasted into adulthood. Carla is one of the friends who started writing to Monte the first time he was in prison and went to pick him up with Patrisse when he was released. When Carla was kicked out of her home during their junior year, Patrisse also moved out of her family's one-bedroom apartment and, for over a year, they alternated between sleeping in Carla's car and staying with friends. When their teacher Donna Hill invited them to live with her after graduation, they lived with her together for years. Carla was part of Monte's re-entry team when he was released from prison the second time and also Patrisse's go-to for support when she was pregnant and JT didn't show up to take her to her doctor's appointments. Carla is a member of the chosen family that Patrisse has built around her.

Donna Hill – Donna Hill was Patrisse and Carla's art history teacher at Cleveland High School. She let Patrisse and Carla move in with her after graduation to give them more stable lives after over a year of homelessness. Patrisse stayed for two years, and Carla stayed for three. Patrisse considered Donna to be one of her spiritual guides—she taught Patrisse Transcendental Meditation and, rather than yelling at the girls when angry, taught them about what it means to act considerately while building a community. Donna also helped Patrisse find her first job out of high school, working at a social justice camp. Patrisse has remained close with Donna through adulthood.

Naomi – Naomi is Patrisse's cousin who attended Cleveland High School at the same time as Patrisse and came out as queer before Patrisse did. Naomi was a beautiful and charismatic

track star, well-loved by all of their peers. She was also masculine-presenting and identified as a "stud." Though Naomi was comfortable with her identity (and openly dated an older girl), her mother was homophobic and abused Naomi after she came out, including beating her in front of her team at track practice and forcing her to transfer schools. In this way, Naomi's experience was Patrisse's first exposure to violent homophobia.

Alton Cullors – Alton is the man Patrisse believed to be her father until Cherice told her at 12 years old that Gabriel was her biological father. Alton had not been a consistent presence in Patrisse's life since she was six years old and he was laid off from his job on the line at the GM auto plant. As an adult, Patrisse understands that his inconsistency is likely the result of never again being able to find a job that would allow him to provide for his family. Still, he and Patrisse care for each other, and when Alton learned that Cherice told Patrisse about Gabriel, he took Patrisse out for tacos and assured her that she was still his child.

Vina – Vina is Gabriel's mother and Patrisse's grandmother. The first time she and Patrisse met at Gabriel's graduation ceremony from a sobriety program, she hugged Patrisse and welcomed her into the family. Vina is from a small town in Louisiana—the daughter of a white father and a Creole mother—and had two daughters who were the product of being raped by a white man when she was young. Patrisse feels that trauma like this gets passed down generation to generation. Still, Vina is extremely warm and, despite having very little money, threw big holiday parties and planned weekly family barbeques in the park. While Gabriel was in prison, Patrisse lost touch with Vina and missed her.

Paul – Paul is Patrisse's oldest brother. After Alton left their family when Patrisse was six years old, Paul stepped in as the man of the house. When a friend asked Patrisse why Paul didn't end up in prison, she said it's because he was never allowed to be a kid. Still, the police roughed him up and searched him one day when he was 13 years old and simply hanging out in an alley with Monte and their friends. Paul was overwhelmed when Monte faced life in prison, so he didn't help Patrisse and Cherice raise the money to cover the legal funds. Still, he supported Monte after he was released six years later.

Jasmine – Jasmine is Patrisse's younger sister. After Patrisse moved out of their family's one-bedroom apartment when she was a junior in high school, she did not interact much with Jasmine. Jasmine became overwhelmed when Monte faced life in prison and didn't help Patrisse and Cherice raise funds for his legal fees. She ultimately moved to Las Vegas with Alton and convinced Cherice to join them, since there were good jobs and rent was cheap.

Cheyenne – Cheyenne was Patrisse's first girlfriend. She was a basketball player from an unstable home who ultimately dropped out of school because she didn't have money to pay for the bus to get there. They started dating during their sophomore year, exchanging poetry, reading about race and gender, and talking about spirituality. They felt safe among their friends (many of whom were also queer) at school, but they faced homophobia in the outside world. Their relationship ended when Cheyenne left Patrisse for one of their mutual friends.

Richie – Richie was one of Patrisse's students when she ran a restorative justice program at Cleveland (her former high school) for young Black men who had repeatedly gotten into trouble. The group met to discuss racism, sexism, and healing, and Richie stood out to Patrisse as the intellectual and the artist in the group. He even made news when, as editor of the school paper, he published a picture of a vulva on the front page along with an article by a young woman about ending sexual assault. After graduation, Richie found a good job working with youth like him in the LA County school system. But after his hours were cut and he wasn't able to make enough money for rent, he robbed someone. After he was arrested and sentenced to a decade in prison, Patrisse visited him on the day that **Trayvon Martin**'s killer went on trial. When Patrisse found out that the killer had been acquitted, she couldn't help but think of Richie sitting in prison for 10 years for committing one nonviolent crime in order to survive, while Trayvon's killer got to go free. In this way, Richie, like Trayvon, symbolizes Patrisse's belief that Black lives do not matter to U.S. policymakers or the criminal justice system.

Opal Tometi – In addition to Patrisse and Alicia, Opal is one of the founders of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. She runs the Black Alliance for Just Immigration in New York and is also skilled with communications work. After Alicia included Opal in the initial BLM-related conversations she had with Patrisse in the wake of **Trayvon Martin**'s death, Opal built the digital portion of their campaign, including their website and social media accounts. Patrisse met Opal in person for the first time over a year later, when they both arrived in Ferguson to protest the police killing of Michael Brown. Like Patrisse, Opal has been called a "terrorist" for her organizing work.

Trayvon Martin's Killer – **Trayvon Martin**'s killer is George Zimmerman, the white-presenting Latinx man who shot and killed17-year-old Trayvon while Trayvon was walking home to his gated community in Florida. Patrisse does not mention George Zimmerman by name in the book, only referring to him as Trayvon's killer. Zimmerman's acquittal of all charges in July 2013 was the impetus for Patrisse, Alicia, and Opal to start the Black Lives Matter movement. They believe that the ruling of not-guilty in this case proves that Black lives do not matter in the U.S.

Darnell Moore – Darnell is an activist and professor who helped Patrisse, Alicia, and Opal plan the Freedom Ride to Ferguson in the wake of Michael Brown's death. As part of a discussion on patriarchy in the movement, he acknowledged

that although he is a gay Black man, he still has more privilege than Black women. He is a skilled communicator and, after the Freedom Ride, helped to build out the Black Lives Matter network.

asha bandele – asha is the co-author of *When They Call You a Terrorist* and a writer for *Essence* magazine. After the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement gained momentum, she was one of the few journalists who wanted to know the whole story and published a front-page article in *Essence* that centered the narrative of the three Black women who founded it (Patrisse, Alicia, and Opal). After Donald Trump's election, asha sent Patrisse a talk by astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson that explains how humans are made out of stardust. This was her attempt at giving Patrisse hope in the face of Trump's conservative policies.

Cynthia – Cynthia was Patrisse's neighbor when she was growing up and also Monte's on-again, off-again partner. A low-income Black woman who was shot in a drive-by shooting while at a party and paralyzed from the waist down, Cynthia tried to care for Monte (and their son Chase). But given Monte's mental illness, she didn't have the capacity to do so. During one of Monte's manic episodes after returning from prison, he destroyed everything in Cynthia's house, and she made him move out.

Chase – Chase is Cynthia and Monte's son and Patrisse's nephew. He was primarily raised by Cherice when Monte was in prison. When Monte returned from prison after six years, Chase greeted him halfheartedly, and Patrisse thought that there was no way to make up for the time that was taken from them.

Michael (Mike) Brown – Michael Brown was the 18-year-old Black man killed by police officer Darren Wilson in Ferguson, Missouri in August 2014. Michael was shot several times for an unknown reason while standing in the street and then left there, bleeding, for four and a half hours. His death inspired a mass Black-led uprising in Ferguson that Patrisse joined as part of a national Freedom Ride to Ferguson she coordinated with Alicia, Opal, and Darnell. Patrisse considers Michael's death the start of the American Movement *Against* Black Lives.

Sandra Bland – Sandra was a 28-year-old Black woman who was found hanging in a jail cell in Texas in July 2015 after being pulled over and arrested for a routine traffic stop. While local officials ruled her death a suicide, Patrisse and other Black Lives Matter (BLM) leaders didn't believe that she killed herself; she was a healthy, socially engaged young woman who had just started a new job and was working with her sister to raise money for bail. Patrisse and BLM started a campaign called #SayHerName to raise awareness about Sandra's death. Part of the campaign was about centering the stories of Black women who die at the hands of police, as they are often left out of the narrative when it comes to police brutality (as opposed to Black men like **Trayvon Martin**, whose stories become national news).

Donald Trump – Donald Trump was elected president of the U.S. in 2016, when Patrisse was still in the early years of establishing the Black Lives Matter network. His election terrified and angered Patrisse because she believed that his policies would hurt women and people of color. She felt that the political Left should have considered Trump a more serious threat, especially as, in the wake of his election, hate crimes against Black people increased. After his election, Patrisse committed even more deeply to taking care of herself and her family while continuing to fight for justice.

Shine – Shine, Patrisse and JT's son, was born in March 2016. Patrisse and JT split up before Shine was born, so Patrisse and Future cared for him together during the first few months of his life. Patrisse loves Shine deeply, and being his mother inspires her to keep pushing for a world where Black lives matter.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Darren Wilson – Darren Wilson is the white Ferguson police officer who killed Michael Brown in August 2014, sparking the start of massive protests. Patrisse joined the uprising and called for Darren Wilson to be charged and indicted, though he never was.

Peter Corn – Peter Corn is the lawyer Patrisse and Cherice hired to take on Monte's case when he was threatened with life in prison. Though Peter initially made Patrisse uncomfortable, he was successful in decreasing Monte's sentence to only six years.

Bernard – Bernard is Cherice's husband whom she started to date when Patrisse was in high school. Patrisse is not particularly close to Bernard, but he was close with Monte when Monte returned from prison. When Cherice was evicted, she moved with Bernard, Patrisse, and Jasmine into Bernard's mother's one-bedroom apartment.

TERMS

Black Lives Matter (BLM) – The phrase Black Lives Matter is both a slogan (sometimes seen in the hashtag form #BlackLivesMatter) and an anti-racist movement that was built around the slogan. Introduced via a Facebook conversation between **Patrisse Khan-Cullors** and **Alicia Garza** after the acquittal of Trayvon Martin's **killer** in 2013, Black Lives Matter as a slogan is still used in antiracist protests across the globe today, especially those with a focus on ending police violence. The Black Lives Matter movement was started by Patrisse, Alicia, and **Opal Tometi** and, as of 2021, still exists as a network of local chapters around the U.S. BLM is one of many movements that falls under the umbrella of the Movement for

Black Lives.

War on Drugs – The war on drugs is an ongoing bipartisan effort by the U.S. government to reduce the use and sale of illegal drugs. Its initiatives included laws prohibiting drug possession and sale, harsh prison sentences for drug offenders, and military intervention to combat international drug trafficking. Though the term was coined in 1971 during Richard Nixon's presidency, as **Patrisse** argues in *When They Call you a Terrorist*, the height of the war on drugs was during Ronald Regan and Bill Clinton's presidencies in the 1980s and 90s.

War on Gangs – The war on gangs, though less of a popularized phrase than the "war on drugs," is an on-going effort by the U.S. government to reduce gang-related activity, such as violence and the illicit drug trade. Its initiatives to monitor and deter gang activity include legislation, federal programs, and local policing tactics.

Jim Crow – Jim Crow was a period in U.S. history from the 1870s through 1965 when "Jim Crow laws" upheld racial segregation in the South. These laws often physically limited where Black people were allowed to go, such as requiring them to sit in the back of buses or use segregated bathrooms and drinking fountains. Southern churches and public schools were also racially segregated at this time. The laws were formally overturned in the 1950s and 60s with major decisions like Brown v. Board of Education, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

BLACK LIVES MATTER

When They Call You a Terrorist is the memoir of Patrisse Khan-Cullors, one of the three founders of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. As a "Black Lives Matter memoir," the book focuses heavily on Patrisse's work with BLM, as well as the adverse early life experiences she went through as a Black girl growing up poor in Los Angeles during the war on drugs and the war on gangs. This was a period when federal and local policymakers tried to reduce drug use and gang violence by incarcerating low-income Black and Latinx people for minor infractions. Throughout the book, Patrisse weaves personal reflection with facts about police brutality, mass incarceration, and lack of access to resources to make the case that Black lives have historically not mattered to policymakers in the U.S., and that they *still* do not matter in the 21st century. She does, however, argue that the BLM movement is paving the way for its eponymous statement to finally be true.

Through sharing her own story, Patrisse makes it clear that Black lives do not matter to policymakers in the U.S. Throughout Patrisse's life, she watched her loved ones suffer racial discrimination. At one point, her mentally ill brother Monte was imprisoned after behaving erratically (but nonviolently) during a manic episode rather than being given adequate mental health support. This was due—at least in part—to the war on drugs' demonization of Black men and bipartisan support of bills that target "super-predators." In theory, super-predator legislation is meant to keep communities safe by giving particularly violent young people longer prison sentences. But in practice, it disproportionately targets young Black and Latinx men and leads to harsh sentences for minor infractions. Patrisse also describes how her father, Gabriel, faced the consequences of being Black "in a nation that treated [him] as expendable." Despite being a war veteran, because Gabriel was Black, he did not have access to the many benefits of the G.I. Bill (such as a free or low-cost college education and affordable housing) that white veterans did. By intentionally leaving loopholes in the G.I. Bill so that Black veterans like Gabriel could not access needed resources, policymakers made it clear that Black lives did not matter.

In addition to sharing personal anecdotes, Patrisse also analyzes statistics and high-profile cases pertaining to the police brutality, mass incarceration, and lack of access to resources that Black Americans experience. For example, California's prison population increased by 500 percent during war on drugs (between 1982 and 2000). Given that a disproportionate number of Black people were sentenced during this time, Patrisse implies that the harsh drug policies were more about targeting and controlling Black people than responding to crime. Moreover, at the time of the book's writing in 2017, someone was killed by police in California every 72 hours, and 63 percent of those victims were Black or Latinx. Additionally, Black people were only six percent of California's population, yet they were killed at five times the rate of white people and three times the rate of Latinx people. With these statistics, Patrisse suggests that policies equating Black people with violent criminals have led to police stereotyping and targeting Black people at a disproportionate rate.

Despite the dismal state of affairs for Black people in the U.S., Patrisse demonstrates that community organizers—particularly the Black Lives Matter movement—are working to hold policymakers accountable and ensure that Black lives finally *do* matter. Before starting the BLM movement, Patrisse was involved in community organizing in LA that effectively fought for a policy change regarding truancy, making it so that families no longer had to pay $250 if a student was late to school. While this was a win

for families across the board, it was particularly beneficial for low-income families in LA, many of whom were Black and Latinx. Patrisse's mobilization of families affected by the prison system in LA also led to the first civilian oversight board of the LA County Sheriff's Department, a critical policy shift that granted everyday people the ability to hold police accountable for their actions. Now, if a Black person is killed or abused by police, the civilian oversight board can conduct an official investigation, leading to possible legal charges. Making sure that Black people are not killed with impunity is a crucial way of showing that Black lives matter. The growing BLM movement has also helped shift racist policies nationwide. For example, at the urging of the movement, President Obama radically decreased the federal prison population (federal inmates being disproportionately Black). The movement also made it a priority to recruit and train Black people for political positions in order to create policies that center Black communities' needs.

In the end, while Patrisse makes a strong case that Black lives have historically not mattered to policymakers in the U.S., she leaves readers with a sense that at the time of the book's publishing in 2017, the BLM movement was gaining momentum. The organization had a solid vision and measurable goals to build a world where Black lives finally *do* matter.

PRISONS AND POLICING

Much of *When They Call You a Terrorist* focuses on author Patrisse Khan-Cullors's experience growing up poor and Black in Los Angeles in the 1990s, during the height of the U.S.'s war on drugs and war on gangs. During this time, policymakers tried to reduce drug use and gang violence by incarcerating low-income Black and Latinx people for minor infractions. As a child, Patrisse watched both her father and brother repeatedly be imprisoned for nonviolent crimes and, as an adult, experienced police violence herself when officers raided her home in the middle of the night without just cause. Beyond personal experience, Patrisse also heard reports of Black people (like **Trayvon Martin** and Michael Brown) being tortured or killed by police, prison guards, and vigilantes. All of this inspired Patrisse to get involved in community organizing in LA—and, eventually, to start the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. And as opponents started to call Patrisse and her fellow activists "terrorists," she couldn't help but feel that police officers and prison guards were the real terrorists. Throughout the memoir, Patrisse challenges the idea that prisons and police exist to protect people, suggesting instead that they are tools used to contain, control, and kill people—especially those who are poor and Black.

Patrisse makes the case that police officers unjustly target Black people for nonviolent crimes they commit out of necessity, for minor infractions, or for nothing at all. For example, Patrisse's brother Monte and his fellow young Black male friends were arrested or otherwise targeted by police for a slew of reasons that weren't crimes, such as carrying two-inch pocket knives, cutting class, talking back, and wearing the same T-shirts (police mistook this as a sign that they were in a gang). Additionally, when Monte was arrested during a nonviolent manic episode, the police tased him and shot him with rubber bullets. Monte and his friends were targeted and brutalized not because they actually did anything wrong, but because the police assumed that Black people (and particularly young Black men) were inherently dangerous in a way that other racial groups weren't. Patrisse also cites the infamous killings of Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown, two young Black men killed by a neighborhood watch coordinator and a police officer, respectively. Patrisse argues that neither of the young men were acting violently when they were killed—that Trayvon was simply walking to his home in Florida with his hood on, and that Michael was followed and targeted after a supposed scuffle at a convenience store. Patrisse believes that their killings were high-profile examples of authority figures targeting Black people based solely on their race, not because they posed a genuine threat.

Moreover, Patrisse argues that police violence is just one piece of a much larger system of violence—prison guards and other prison employees also target and abuse inmates (particularly those who are Black). Monte, for example, suffered abuse at the hands of guards and other employees both times he did long stints in prison. The first time, he was overmedicated to the point that he was unable to speak when Monte and Patrisse's mother, Cherice, visited him. The second time, he was undermedicated and only given Advil, despite the fact that the prison system had his mental illness in their records. When he came home, he had PTSD episodes that indicated he'd also experienced other types of abuse. For instance, he drank water from the toilet, which Patrisse interpreted to mean that this was the only way he could access water while in solitary confinement. While Monte's story is telling, it is just one among many. Patrisse shares stories of other prisoners, as laid out in a 2011 report published by the ACLU of Southern California. The report contains 70 pages of testimonies from survivors or witnesses of torture that LA County Jail employees inflicted on them. This includes inmates being raped, having eyes forced out of their sockets, being beaten while unconscious, and more. It became clear to Patrisse after reading the report that prisons are used to contain and control people—especially Black and Latinx people—rather than rehabilitate them.

Patrisse intentionally compares these acts of violence to instances when she and other Black people were called terrorists in order to highlight the absurdity of what qualifies as "terrorism" in the U.S. For example, Monte was formally charged with terrorism after getting into a fender bender with a white woman during a full-on manic episode. He didn't touch

the woman but was accused of saying something threatening to her that made her fear for her life. The implication is that Monte was scapegoated as a terrorist simply because he's a Black man—yet the officers who shot Monte with rubber bullets and locked him up without access to medication weren't called terrorists. As the title of the book suggests, Patrisse herself was called a terrorist simply for engaging in nonviolent community organizing. After starting Black Lives Matter, opponents of the movement publicly called Patrisse, Alicia, and Opal terrorists, and a right-wing person even sued them on the basis that they "instigated riots." Patrisse uses her personal experiences to highlight the absurdity of how the American justice system (and the American public) perceive Black people. Any form of Black resistance—even nonviolent resistance—tends to be labeled as terrorism or rioting, while actual terrorism committed under the guise of policing largely goes unnoticed and unpunished. All in all, then, Patrisse's exhaustive analysis of violence committed by police officers and prison workers subverts the idea that the criminal justice system exists to protect people. She makes the case, instead, that under the cover of helping, police and prison employees torture, abuse, and kill Black people (and people from other marginalized groups). She and her community are not the real terrorists, she argues—law enforcement is.

INTERSECTIONALITY OF IDENTITY

As a "Black Lives Matter memoir," much of *When They Call You a Terrorist* focuses on race. Still, Patrisse makes it clear throughout her memoir that she is not just Black—she also self-identifies as a queer (non-heterosexual) woman, and she experiences homophobia and sexism both within and outside of her own community. This idea that various aspects of one's identity—race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and so on—are interconnected and affect how one is treated is called "intersectionality." Patrisse's brother Monte, for instance, is not just a Black man who's repeatedly incarcerated, but a Black man with schizoaffective disorder who experiences racism *and* ableism (prejudice against physically or mentally disabled people). Patrisse was especially conscious of intersectionality when she started the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, as she did her best to make sure that the most marginalized people (like women who are both Black and transgender) were heard. By using an intersectional lens to understand identity, Patrisse subverts the idea that there is only one "Black experience" and raises awareness about other types of oppression that Black people face in conjunction with racism.

Throughout the memoir, Patrisse emphasizes the importance of recognizing that Black women have a unique experience of being marginalized on the basis of both gender and race. For example, Black women's work is ignored in a way that Black men's work isn't. After Patrisse, Alicia, and Opal started the BLM movement, mainstream media outlets often ignored them and interviewed Black men instead. Also, despite the fact that Black women made up 80 percent of the protestors on the ground in Ferguson in the wake of Michael Brown's death, they did not receive public recognition. Black female murder victims also don't receive as much media coverage as Black male victims do. While the killings of **Trayvon Martin** and Michael Brown easily made national news, Sandra Bland's death inside her jail cell after she was arrested for a minor traffic violation did not. Further, Patrisse argues, many Black women were lynched throughout U.S. history, and those stories still go untold. Additionally, Patrisse suggests that Black women who are being abused don't feel safe calling the police because they fear becoming victims of racially motivated police brutality. The majority of domestic violence victims are women, meaning that it's a gendered crime. Patrisse thus implies that Black women are uniquely threatened by both domestic violence (on the basis of gender) and police violence (on the basis of race).

Patrisse also describes the particular challenges that Black queer and trans people face. After coming out as queer in high school, Patrisse witnessed homophobia within the Black community and outside of it: her cousin Naomi was also queer, and because of this, Naomi's mother abused her and took her out of the school where she felt safe. Patrisse also dealt with homophobia while walking around in public with her high school girlfriend, Cheyenne—strangers yelled out homophobic slurs and looked at the girls with disgust. These experiences make it clear that racism isn't the only type of prejudice Black people experience—they may face discrimination for being non-heterosexual or gender-nonconforming as well. Though Patrisse is not trans, she describes Black trans women as "the most criminalized people on the planet" because they face racism, sexism, and transphobia. She acknowledges the unique risk that Black trans women faced when traveling through the Midwest to come to the BLM protests in Ferguson (the implication being that they were safer from harassment or physical violence in their more progressive coastal cities). So, she promised to do more to acknowledge their presence in the movement. In this way, Patrisse recognizes that there isn't one generic Black experience, because other identity markers (like sexual orientation or gender identity) intersect with race to affect how people are treated in society.

Through sharing Monte's story, Patrisse also delves into the particularly challenging experience of being both disabled and Black in the U.S. Both inside and outside of prison, Monte didn't have access to adequate mental healthcare to manage his schizoaffective disorder. He was twice arrested during manic episodes (once after breaking into someone's home because voices told him to, and once after getting into a fender bender). The police officers wrongly assumed that he was violent or on drugs, and they shot him with rubber bullets and arrested him. Patrisse suggests that Monte was targeted both for his race

(because Black men are stereotyped as criminals) and for his mental illness (because mentally ill people are stereotyped as dangerous). Monte was also unable to find stable work or housing, highlighting the specific struggle that low-income Black people with disabilities face. After Patrisse helped him secure a job as a janitor at a social justice organization she worked with, the executive director—a friend of hers—decided to fire him. When Patrisse explained that he might have needed his medication adjusted and that "this is what working with people who have a mental illness is like," Patrisse's friend didn't change her mind. Even when Monte was not discriminated against for his race or his status as a former prisoner, he still had to confront prejudice against people with disabilities.

By telling the stories of Black people with intersecting marginalized identities, Patrisse challenges the notion that there is a singular "Black experience" (usually assumed to be that of an able-bodied, straight Black man). She also raises awareness about various types of discrimination that need to be addressed by social movements, suggesting that BLM has never been a single-issue campaign.

FAMILY, COMMUNITY, AND HEALING

When They Call You a Terrorist makes the case that Black people are treated as disposable in the U.S.—by policymakers, police officers, and their fellow citizens. Patrisse has witnessed this in how police officers and the prison system have treated her brother Monte and father, Gabriel, as well as in high-profile killings of Black people. But despite broader society teaching Black people that their lives do not matter, Patrisse, her family (both blood family and chosen family), and her extended activist community are committed to supporting one another and recognizing one another's worth as human beings. She and her community supported Monte when he was released from prison and experiencing manic episodes, and, as a part of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, she and her friends hosted a healing space with massage and acupuncture for activists in Ferguson. Patrisse's reflections throughout the memoir show that being treated as disposable has a lasting, traumatic impact on Black people's lives, but that healing from this trauma is possible through support from a loving family or community.

Policymakers and police treated Patrisse's father, Gabriel, as disposable—but, with Patrisse's support, Gabriel learned what it was like to be loved and accepted for who he was. Gabriel—whom Patrisse learned was her biological father when she's in middle school—was a war veteran who was unable to access the benefits of the G.I. Bill (such as low-cost education and housing) because he was Black. Rather than being granted access to needed resources after serving their country in war, policymakers left Black veterans like Gabriel to fend for themselves. Unable to make ends meet, Gabriel turned to selling drugs, becoming an addict in the process. Gabriel was eventually incarcerated for his drug use rather than being offered rehabilitation or treatment, yet another example of being treated as if his life didn't matter. Despite all this, Patrisse "refused to turn away" when she found Gabriel drunk and high while out on bail from a recent arrest, writing, "If he matters to me at all then he has to matter to me at every moment." She sat with him the whole night, holding him and crying with him, showing him what it was like to be loved rather than disposed of.

Patrisse was also a healing force for her mentally ill brother Monte after a traumatizing prison sentence. While Monte was incarcerated for the second time, the prison doctors and guards treated him as a violent criminal rather than a gentle person suffering from schizoaffective disorder. They withheld his medication and locked him in solitary confinement, where he had to drink water out of a toilet. Whenever Patrisse interacted with guards, she noticed that they spoke about him as if he wasn't human, and she recognized that the criminal justice system would not give him the type of post-release support he needed (the first time he was released, they didn't even give him pants or shoes). So, Patrisse developed an informal "re-entry team" for Monte made up of members of her chosen family, such as her friend Carla and partner, Mark Anthony. Together, the re-entry team secured a job for Monte and helped make sure he got to work on time. When he had a severe manic episode, they rushed to calm him down and got him to the hospital without any police intervention, inspiring Patrisse to note, "My team, my community, my tribe: they stay with us." Though Monte was treated as disposable while in prison, he ended up with a community of people who were committed to helping him heal, however long it took.

Patrisse also built a community of Black activists via the BLM movement who were committed to healing one another, even as the world treated them as disposable. While in Ferguson to protest the killing of Michael Brown, Patrisse and Mark Anthony set up a space in the basement of a church where protestors could come to rest and restore. Police had pepper-sprayed and beaten the protestors for several weeks in a row, and as a result, the media had demonized the protestors—as if *they* were the source of violence, not the police. As Patrisse notes, "They—we all—need a space to speak, to be heard, to breathe." To help them heal, Patrisse and Mark Anthony offered massage, acupuncture, talk therapy, and group discussions about the pain the protestors were collectively experiencing. Patrisse also notes that as the BLM movement continues to grow, she and the other leaders will develop restorative processes for addressing conflict within their organizations. This is their way of challenging the underlying belief of the criminal justice system—that if a person causes harm, they deserve to be demonized and rejected. Patrisse and her community are committed to seeing one another as fully human and healing together in the process. So, although

Patrisse believes that policymakers, police, and broader society treat Black people as though their lives do not matter, she makes it clear that Black people can make a conscious effort to treat one another differently. Through her healing relationships, she is building the very world that she—and the BLM movement—want to see.

EXTERNAL FORCES VS. PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

Throughout *When They Call You a Terrorist*, Patrisse notices that many Black people in her life have gotten blamed for the hard choices they've made—the external factors that led them to that choice are rarely taken into account. For example, her stepfather, Alton, was an inconsistent presence in her life, but only after he was laid off from the stable job he had for 20 years and was unable to find another one. And her father, Gabriel, struggled with drug addiction, but only after coming home traumatized from war and having no social services available to him. By illuminating the external forces—such as racism and lack of access to resources—that lead people to certain choices in life, Patrisse challenges the "politics of personal responsibility" that suggest individuals are solely responsible for the decisions they make.

When examining her mother and stepfather's choices, Patrisse sees how, given the external forces at play, they could not have acted any other way. When Patrisse's brother Monte was in the throes of a manic episode after being arrested, their mother, Cherice, broke down. She told Patrisse that she felt guilty, as if Monte becoming mentally ill and going to prison were results of her poor parenting choices. Patrisse tried to tell her it wasn't her fault, that she was "collateral damage in the battle to elevate personal responsibility over everything," and that the real culprits were the people in power who made the decisions "about state budget priorities, about wages, about the presence of police, and even about damn grocery stores and access to quality food." The implication here is that if Cherice had been paid more or been able to work fewer hours (and thereby been able to be more present in Monte's life), or if Monte had not suffered abuse at the hands of police for being Black, he could have had a different fate. It was not Cherice's choices that led to his suffering, but external factors like racism, the war on drugs, and the war on gangs.

Moreover, Patrisse's stepfather, Alton, didn't openly express regret or guilt about his decision to leave their family when Patrisse was six, but she nonetheless views his decision as similarly bound by oppressive social forces. Alton only left the family after losing a well-paying job he held for 20 years at a nearby GM auto plant; the plant closed, and Alton was unable to find a job that would allow him to provide for his family. Noting that Black unemployment in LA at the time was worse than it was during the 2008 Great Recession, Patrisse implies that it wasn't Alton's fault that he couldn't find employment, but the fault of economic downturn and discriminatory employers. Between GM choosing to close the plant and employers choosing not to hire Alton (or to pay him a living wage), Alton's choices were bound by external forces outside of his control.

Patrisse is also critical of her biological father, Gabriel, blaming himself for life choices that were outside of his control. Gabriel started selling drugs after a couple of tours in the military—a choice he felt forced to make in order to supplement his mother's income—and found himself unable to access the benefits of the G.I. Bill (such as low-cost education and housing) because he was Black. Though he blamed himself for this choice, Patrisse tried to explain to him that personal responsibility is "mostly a lie meant to keep us from challenging real-world legislative decisions that chart people's paths, that undo people's lives." Gabriel also blamed himself for becoming addicted to drugs in the process of selling them, a point of view that was encouraged at his 12-step program meetings. Patrisse went to the meetings with him and couldn't help but feel that "they d[id] not account for all the external factors that exacerbate chaotic drug use" such as lack of access to good jobs, affordable housing, or treatment centers. In other words, she saw forces like racial and economic oppression as the root cause of Gabriel's addiction and didn't begrudge him for turning to drugs in the face of his suffering.

There are several other moments in her memoir where Patrisse notes that the choices people in her community made were wrongly attributed to personal responsibility. Richie—one of Patrisse's students when she ran a restorative mediation program at her former high school—ended up going to prison at the age of 18, after his hours working for the school system suddenly got cut and he resorted to robbery in order to pay rent. While many labeled Richie a "criminal" for his actions, Patrisse saw that he was only trying to survive in the face of external forces. Had lawmakers granted the public school system a larger budget (showing that they were invested in providing quality education and good jobs in low-income communities), Richie's hours likely wouldn't have been cut. Similarly, Patrisse's high school girlfriend, Cheyenne, dropped out of school because she didn't have money to take the bus or pay for lunch. In Patrisse's mind, this had nothing to do with Cheyenne's commitment to her studies but much more to do with poverty—something Cheyenne couldn't control or escape from. The politics of personal responsibility touch so many areas of Patrisse's life—her family members and community feel guilty and responsible for actions that they were forced into due to a variety of external forces acting on them at all times. Patrisse uses these examples to show that the choices people make are often more complex than they might appear on the surface, and to argue that in order for people to make better choices, they need to have better choices presented to them to begin with.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

TRAYVON MARTIN

Trayvon Martin symbolizes Patrisse's belief that Black lives don't matter (to policymakers, the criminal justice system, or fellow citizens) in the U.S. Trayvon was a 17-year-old young Black man from Florida whom a neighborhood watchman fatally shot in 2012 while Trayvon was walking home at night. For Patrisse, Trayvon's death represents the unjust killing of Black people more generally, and she uses it to support her argument that Black lives historically haven't mattered and still don't matter in the U.S.

Patrisse suggests that Trayvon Martin's case was not the first or the last time a Black American was unjustly killed, but that his story nevertheless represents this disturbing trend. The case gained traction because many people believed that Trayvon's killer was clearly at fault based on the available evidence. Patrisse maintains that Trayvon is one of many examples of young Black men being wrongfully stereotyped as violent and dangerous, and that he was simply walking home with a hood on, carrying snacks he'd just bought, when he was killed. Furthermore, when Trayvon's killer called the police to report Trayvon, he disobeyed the police dispatcher's request to leave Trayvon alone.

Patrisse describes how Black community organizers across the U.S. raised awareness about Trayvon's story via rallies and the media before the killer's trial began. Still, it wasn't until after Trayvon's killer was found not guilty of all charges in July 2013 that Trayvon became a symbol for Black victims of violence whose lives did not matter to other people. In this way, his story became the impetus for Patrisse launching the Black Lives Matter movement.

HELICOPTERS

Helicopters symbolize law enforcement's presence and power in the U.S. Patrisse first mentions helicopters when describing the many ways that police surveilled Van Nuys when she was a child, noting that they were like vultures hovering above them all night and day, looking for their next prey. When Patrisse was older and in the process of starting the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement while living in a village for artists of color in Central LA, helicopters hovering above her house foretold the violent police raid to come. Helicopters appeared yet again when Patrisse was leading a massive protest in Beverly Hills, signifying that police could attack her and the other protestors at any time. Together, then, helicopters represent Patrisse's argument that Black Americans live in constant fear of being racially profiled and unjustly targeted by police.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the St. Martin's Griffin edition of *When They Call You a Terrorist* published in 2020.

Chapter 1 Quotes

❝❝ Alton got a series of low-wage jobs that had no insurance, no job security and no way to take care of us, his family, which is why I think, looking back now, he left, and while he visited and was always there, it was never the same again. In the 1980s, when all this was going down, unemployment among Black people, nearly triple that of white people's, was worse in multiple regions of the United States, including where I lived, than it was during the Great Recession of 2008-2009.

Related Characters: Patrisse Khan-Cullors (speaker), Alton Cullors

Related Themes:

Page Number: 12

Explanation and Analysis

After introducing readers to her step-father, Alton, Patrisse explains why he was an inconsistent presence in her early life. In her mind, Alton's decision to leave their family (showing up unexpectedly now and then) was the result of external circumstances rather than personal responsibility—it was not his fault that unemployment for Black people in LA was so high when General Motors decided to close their plant, which lost him the well-paying job he'd had for 20 years. The real issue, Patrisse implies, was racist employers who wouldn't hire Black men like him. She sees how the shame of not being able to provide for his family, not a lack of love or care, led Alton to leave them.

Patrisse intentionally compares unemployment rates to the 2008 Great Recession, a global period of marked economic decline that deeply impacted the U.S. and led to extremely high rates of unemployment across race. This is her way of communicating how dire the situation was for Black people seeking employment in the 1980s.

Whatever goes through their minds after being half stripped in public and having their childhoods flung to the ground and ground into the concrete, we will never speak of this incident or the ones that will follow as Van Nuys becomes ground zero in the war on drugs and the war on gangs, designations that add even more license to police already empowered to do whatever they want to us.

Related Characters: Patrisse Khan-Cullors (speaker), Monte Cullors, Paul

Related Themes:

Page Number: 15

Explanation and Analysis

This passage comes after police roughed up Patrisse's brothers Paul and Monte for the first time, when Paul was 13 and Monte was 11. Patrisse makes it clear that while this was only one incident of police violence, it is indicative of wider trends related to the war on drugs and war on gangs. This was a period when policymakers tried to reduce drug use and gang violence by incarcerating low-income Black and Latinx people for minor infractions, reaching its peak in the 1980s and 1990s.

Patrisse highlights how the officers weren't targeting her brothers for any criminal behavior, but because they were "empowered to do whatever they want to us," suggesting that Black people are targeted simply because of their race. This, Patrisse believes, is a direct result of the war on drugs' racist depiction of Black people as being predatory and violent when, in this case, they were just teenagers hanging out in an alley with their friends. That Paul and Monte did not speak of the violence they endured shows the level of trauma and shame that they experienced in that moment, and would continue to experience through their young adulthoods.

Chapter 2 Quotes

For my brothers, and especially for Monte, learning that they did not matter, that they were expendable, began in the streets, began while they were hanging out with friends, began while they were literally breathing while Black [...] For us, law enforcement had nothing to do with protecting and serving, but controlling and containing the movement of children who had been labeled super-predators simply by virtue of who they were born to and where they were born, not because they were actually doing anything predatory.

Related Characters: Patrisse Khan-Cullors (speaker), Monte Cullors

Related Themes:

Page Number: 25

Explanation and Analysis

Patrisse builds on previous claims she has made about the violent intentions of prison and police to state directly that they are not seeking to protect or serve communities, but to contain and control young Black people. This is a direct outcome of the war on drugs and war on gangs leading policymakers to start using rhetoric about "super-predators," claiming that there existed particularly violent young gang members who deserved to be prosecuted as adults (and therefore serve longer prison sentences). This sort of "super-predator" legislation was support by both Democrats and Republicans and led to a sharp uptick in racial profiling, as Black and Latinx young men (like Patrisse's brothers) were harassed for minor infractions, or no infractions at all. Patrisse intentionally describes her brothers' experience as "learning that they did not matter," using language that mirrors that of the Black Lives Matter movement, which she will go on to describe in later chapters.

Chapter 3 Quotes

I know about crack. Everybody uses it, it seems like. At least in my neighborhood where there are no playgrounds, no parks, no afterschool programs, no hangout spots, no movie theaters, no jobs, no treatment centers or health care for the mentally ill, like my brother Monte, who had begun smoking crack and selling my mom's things and is already showing signs of what we would much later come to know as schizoaffective disorder.

Related Characters: Patrisse Khan-Cullors (speaker), Gabriel Brignac , Monte Cullors

Related Themes:

Page Number: 34

Explanation and Analysis

Just before this passage, Patrisse's father Gabriel told her that he struggled with crack addiction. Here, she is contextualizing his drug use, making the claim that poor Black people turn to drugs in order to survive a world that has treated them like their lives aren't worth investing in.

What else are young people supposed to do when they don't have access to parks, entertainment, or jobs? What are mentally ill people (like her brother Monte) supposed to do when they don't have access to healthcare that would provide them with the appropriate treatments for their illness?

Patrisse also names Monte's illness as schizoaffective disorder, which has similarities with bipolar disorder and schizophrenia. This is her way of naming that there is no one "Black experience," but that everyone exists at the intersections of various identities. Monte is both Black and mentally ill, and this makes him even more of a target for police given his erratic behavior.

> As I grow older I will come to question 12-step programs, see their failures, all the ways they do not reduce the harms of addiction by making their harms accrue to the individual, alone. They do not account for all the external factors that exacerbate chaotic drug use, send people into hell. The person who only has alcohol or crack at their fingertips almost never does as well as the person who has those things but also a range of other supports, including the general sense that their life matters.

Related Characters: Patrisse Khan-Cullors (speaker), Gabriel Brignac

Related Themes:

Page Number: 37

Explanation and Analysis

This passage comes after 12-year-old Patrisse attended her father, Gabriel's, graduation from a drug and alcohol treatment program and witnessed the rhetoric of 12-step programs for the first time. While the program encouraged Gabriel to take responsibility for his drug use, adult Patrisse questions the narrative of personal responsibility when it comes to addiction—how could a poor Black man like Gabriel be held responsible for using drugs when he was just trying to survive in a racist world that treated him like his life didn't matter?

When Patrisse notes that there are "external factors" that lead to drug addiction, she is referring to the lack of access to good jobs, affordable housing, and adequate healthcare. It is not drug use that "send[s] people into hell," she argues, but being treated as disposable and like Black communities are not worth investing in. In this sense, she implies that people aren't entirely responsible for the choices they make, since factors beyond their control influence which choices are available to them in the first place.

> In 1986 when I am three years old, Ronald Reagan reenergizes the drug war that was started in 1971 by Richard Nixon by further militarizing the police in our communities, which swells the number of Black and Latinx men who are incarcerated. Between 1982 and 2000, the number of people locked up in the state of California grows by 500 percent. And it will be nearly a quarter of a century before my home state is forced, under consent decree, to reduce the number of people it's locked up, signaling, we hope, the end of what will eventually be called the civil rights crisis of our time.

Related Characters: Patrisse Khan-Cullors (speaker), Gabriel Brignac

Related Themes:

Page Number: 44

Explanation and Analysis

This passage comes after a teenage Patrisse learned that her father Gabriel (whom she had only recently met and started to build a relationship with) was going back to prison. In offering some sociopolitical context, Patrisse makes the case that Gabriel was not solely responsible for his reincarceration. Rather, through racist war on drugs policies, politicians like Reagan and Nixon created the conditions for Black and Latinx men to be targeted by the police and imprisoned at disproportionately high rates.

That the California prison population grew by 500 percent—and that Black (and Latinx) men were incarcerated at disproportionately high rates—shows that policymakers were actively using prisons to punish and control Black people. Patrisse sees how her family members are forced to become criminals to survive and are then punished for it. By noting that California will, years later, be forced to reduce its prison population, Patrisse suggests that her father was imprisoned during a very real crisis of over-incarceration.

Chapter 4 Quotes

❝❞ The groups of kids they first called gangs were really young people who were friends, they were my friends, and they took a defensive posture against what looked and felt like an actual advancing army that came in on foot and came in police cars for which the county had appropriated ever more dollars to patrol us with. And worse than the cars, most frightening of all, were the helicopters overhead. At all hours of day and night they hovered above us, shone lights into the midnight, circling and surveilling, vultures looking for the best next prey.

Related Characters: Patrisse Khan-Cullors (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 56

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Patrisse describes the effect the war on gangs had on her neighborhood. The war on gangs went hand in hand with the war on drugs, empowering police to stereotype and harass young people of color who they suspected of being involved in gangs—even if they were, as Patrisse describes, just young people spending time with their friends. The reason they distrusted the police wasn't because of their criminal activity, but because they saw how police were primed to target them.

Helicopters show up throughout *When They Call You a Terrorist* to symbolize the presence and power of the police, and that's the function they served here. They were not merely advancing by foot and by car but, like a real army, approached by air as well, surveilling Patrisse's neighborhood day and night. With this description, Patrisse wants readers to understand the level of terror that she and her community experienced day to day during the war on gangs.

❝❞ There are drugs to take when a person is having a psychotic break. Those drugs can bring the person back into a good or total semblance of themselves. This was not what they did to my brother. They drugged Monte to incapacitate him, to incapacitate his humanity. To leave him with no dignity.

Related Characters: Patrisse Khan-Cullors (speaker), Monte Cullors

Related Themes:

Page Number: 60

Explanation and Analysis

Before this passage, police arrest Patrisse's brother Monte and take him to the LA County Jail, charging him with attempted robbery (when, in reality, he was experiencing a manic episode, and the voices in his head told him to enter someone's home). Here, Patrisse is highlighting how mentally ill Black people have to navigate both racism and ableism, or discrimination and mistreatment based on having a disability.

While the prison doctors and other employees could have treated Monte like the mentally ill person that he was, giving him the appropriate medication for a psychotic episode, they drugged him in order to sedate and demean him. The implication in Patrisse's description is that he was treated differently because he was Black as, throughout the book, she describes how Black people are treated as disposable and less than human. This is just another example of Patrisse's argument that prisons exist to control and contain people (especially Black people), not to make people safe.

Chapter 6 Quotes

❝❞ Naomi is enrolled in another school, in another town. She is separated from her friends, loses her coach, and is exiled from the community that had loved and supported her since she was ten years old. And we who love Naomi, we who love her and are Queer, whether we are out or not, will learn in the harshest of ways that this is what it means to be young and Queer: You can do nothing wrong whatsoever, you can just be alive and yourself, and that is enough to have the whole of your life smashed to the ground and swept away.

Related Characters: Patrisse Khan-Cullors (speaker), Naomi

Related Themes:

Page Number: 77

Explanation and Analysis

Before this passage, Patrisse's homophobic aunt found out that her daughter, Naomi, was queer, and came to her track practice to beat Naomi and yell at her track coach. Ultimately, she decided to take Naomi out of Cleveland, the

social justice-oriented high school that Naomi and Patrisse attended together. Here, Patrisse makes the case that queer Black people like herself and Naomi exist at the intersections of oppression, navigating both racism from outside their community and homophobia from inside (as well as outside) their community.

Just as Patrisse's brother Monte faced discrimination simply due to his mental illness and lost many years of his life in prison, Naomi faced mistreatment due to her queerness and had her life "smashed to the ground and swept away." Racism is not the only form of discrimination that has material consequences, Patrisse argues, and, for Black lives to matter, *all* Black lives have to matter.

❝ She is the first adult who doesn't think who we are, how we live and love, needs anything but support, some architecture. She understands our, Carla's and mine, emerging idea of building intentional family, a concept that I suppose will later become the basis of our theory of change.

To outsiders—in many cases outsiders being our families—our relationships may have seemed complex or odd or even dangerous. But to us they made sense. To us they were oxygen and still are.

Related Characters: Patrisse Khan-Cullors (speaker), Donna Hill, Carla

Related Themes:

Page Number: 83

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Patrisse describes the important role that Donna Hill played in her life. Donna was Patrisse's art history teacher at Cleveland High School who, after graduation, invited Patrisse and her friend Carla to temporarily live with her (since, at that point, they had been living out of Carla's car for a year). Unlike other adults in Patrisse's life, Donna fully accepted Patrisse for who she was, showing her that it was possible to build a loving and healing community even in the face of racism and police violence.

That Patrisse cites her time living with Donna as informing the basis of her "theory of change" is significant. In activist language, a theory of change is the way that a certain person or organization believes that social change will come about, whether that's through civil disobedience, lobbying, or voting. Here, Patrisse implies that her theory of change is based on the creation of loving community that will help people to heal so that they can do the long-term work of fighting systems that try to harm them.

Chapter 7 Quotes

❝ He says his real addiction is to the fast-paced energy of it all. How else was a man like him ever going to have some money in his pocket, decent clothes, be viewed as someone who mattered? He was invisible before immersing himself in the life, he said. But drugs not only made him feel seen and relevant, the lifestyle itself gave him that sense.

Related Characters: Patrisse Khan-Cullors (speaker), Gabriel Brignac

Related Themes:

Page Number: 90

Explanation and Analysis

After Patrisse's father, Gabriel, was released from prison, he explained to her why he started selling drugs again before he was arrested. This conversation highlights how Gabriel—like many people who sell drugs—was not committing a crime for the fun of it, but because he wanted both financial security and a job that made him feel like he had some dignity. The implication here is that, while working low-wage jobs and being unable to afford things like decent clothes, Gabriel did not feel like his employers treated him—a poor Black man—like his life mattered.

This conversation is also an example of the type of healing presence that Patrisse is committed to being for her family and community throughout the book. Rather than abandoning her father after he went to prison, she stayed in touch and, after he was released, wanted to hear his story and understand better why he did what he did. While policymakers, police, and prison employees treat Black drug dealers like they are disposable, Patrisse is committed to listening to and accepting the people in her life.

❝ I try continually to talk to my father about structural realities, policies and decisions as being even more decisive in the outcomes of his life than any choice he personally made. I talk about the politics of personal responsibility, how it's mostly a lie meant to keep us from challenging real-world legislative decisions that chart people's paths, that undo people's lives.

It was easy to understand that when race was a blatant factor, a friend says to me in a political discussion one afternoon. Jim Crow left no questions or confusion. But now that race isn't written into the law, she says, look for the codes. Look for the coded language everywhere, she says. They rewrote the laws, but they didn't rewrite white supremacy. They kept that shit intact, she says.

Related Characters: Patrisse Khan-Cullors (speaker), Gabriel Brignac

Related Themes:

Page Number: 93

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Patrisse talked with her father, Gabriel, after he was released from prison. While Gabriel was trained by 12-step programs to believe that he should take responsibility for the personal choices he made to use and sell drugs, Patrisse makes the case that external forces—such as legislative decisions—were really to blame. If poor Black people blame themselves for being put in prison, she implies, then no one is holding policymakers and the prison system accountable for the ways that they cause harm.

Patrisse goes on to explain that this is hard for some people to understand because it's been 50 years since the Jim Crow laws that legalized racial segregation were in effect. Still, just because the laws no longer contain blatantly racist language, that does not mean there isn't coded language (such as the language of "super-predators" that policymakers and police used to target young Black and Latinx men). This type of coded language, Patrisse argues, shows that policymakers still treat Black people like their lives do not matter.

❝ I have never seen him high before but I refuse to turn away. If he matters to me at all then he has to matter to me at every moment. He has to matter to me at this moment. Seeing him like this feels like my soul is being pulled over shards of glass but I do not turn away. His life is not expendable. Our love is not disposable. I will not be to him what the world has been to him. I will not throw him away.

Related Characters: Patrisse Khan-Cullors (speaker), Gabriel Brignac , Monte Cullors, Mark Anthony

Related Themes:

Page Number: 97

Explanation and Analysis

Before this passage, Patrisse tracked Gabriel down at a motel after he disappeared out of the blue for several days. She found him high on crack and learned that he'd been arrested again and is out on bail. Patrisse was determined not to abandon Gabriel, even though his actions hurt her and it was difficult for her to see him inebriated. This was her way of showing him that she believed it was possible for Black families and communities to heal together in the face of racism and the war on drugs.

Rather than treating Gabriel like he is a disposable Black man whose life did not matter—the way that policymakers and police did—she was committed to a radically different approach: accepting him for who he was. She refused to throw him away—just as she refused to throw away her brother Monte, who was also in and out of prison, or her partner Mark Anthony, who disappeared from her life from time to time.

❝ It would be easy to speculate about the impact of years of cocaine use on my father's heart, but I suspect that it will tell us less than if we could measure the cumulative effects of hatred, racism and indignity. What is the impact of years of strip searches, of being bent over, the years before that when you were a child and knew that no dream you had for yourself was taken seriously by anyone, that you were not someone who would be fully invested in by a nation that treated you as expendable?

Related Characters: Patrisse Khan-Cullors (speaker), Gabriel Brignac

Related Themes:

Page Number: 107

Explanation and Analysis

This passage comes after Patrisse's father, Gabriel, died from a heart attack out of the blue. As Patrisse tried to make sense of his unexpected passing at a relatively young age, she tied his heart attack to the experience of living in a racist society. While some may argue that cocaine was the cause of weakening his heart, she believed that his experience

suffering abuse in prison for many years, along with spending his whole life existing in a racist society that taught him from a young age his hopes and dreams didn't matter, was the root cause.

The implication here is that Gabriel was not responsible for his heart attack, and that Black people generally should not be blamed for their suffering when external factors—such as a violent prison system and racist war on drugs policies—clearly have an effect on their mental and physical well-being.

Chapter 8 Quotes

> We learned quickly that intervention was either us alone and without medical professional support, or it was the police. The brutal memory of Monte's first break, during which we learned that there were no social services or safety nets for my brother, hung over all of our heads like a sword.

Related Characters: Patrisse Khan-Cullors (speaker), Monte Cullors

Related Themes:

Page Number: 112

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Patrisse is grappling with how to support her mentally ill brother Monte after he is released from prison. She recalls how, the last time he experienced a psychotic episode, he was brutalized by both police and prison guards—an example of how Black people with disabilities face even more violence than able-bodied Black people.

Racist police officers and guards were not the only problem—the major underlying issue was that, when Monte was eventually released, he didn't have access to social services (like affordable therapy, support groups, or appropriate forms of medical intervention). The implication here is that policymakers have intentionally deprioritized public services for poor Black people, forcing families—already stretched thin themselves—to step in instead. Still, because Patrisse was committed to being a healing presence in her loved ones' lives, she wouldn't abandon Monte to figure this out on his own.

> I will learn later that my brother had been driving and had gotten into a fender bender with another driver, a white woman, who promptly called the police. My brother was in an episode and although he never touched the woman or did anything more than yell, although his mental illness was as clear as the fact that he was Black, he was shot with rubber bullets and tased.
>
> And then he was charged with terrorism.
>
> Literally.

Related Characters: Patrisse Khan-Cullors (speaker), Monte Cullors

Related Themes:

Page Number: 116

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Patrisse learned the reason that her mentally ill brother Monte has been arrested again. Here, Patrisse shares another example of how Black people with disabilities face more discrimination than able-bodied Black people, as Monte's erratic behavior was read as threatening rather than as part of his mental illness.

Patrisse is also drawing attention to the inherent contradiction in what is considered "terrorism" in the U.S. Despite the fact that Monte was the one who was shot with rubber bullets and tased for doing nothing but getting into a fender bender and behaving strangely (as Patrisse notes, he never touched the woman whose car he hit), he is the one who was called a terrorist. This connects to a larger thread in the book, as Patrisse was also called a terrorist for nonviolent protests she organized after starting the Black Lives Matter movement. Neither Monte nor Patrisse were causing harm, yet they were demonized, which Patrisse argues was a result of anti-Black racism.

> I am thinking of all the people, like my brother, like my father—who have been the targets of harm, not the harm itself. And yet they are the ones whom society views as disposable [...] I am filled with a sense of rage and a call to action at the idea that my brother, my Monte, is considered someone disposable to these people. But to me and my mother and to my sister and my brother, to Chase and to Cynthia, Monte was never disposable.

Related Characters: Patrisse Khan-Cullors (speaker), Monte Cullors, Chase, Cynthia

Related Themes:

Page Number: 120

Explanation and Analysis

Just before this passage, a court bailiff told Patrisse in a flat tone that her mentally ill brother Monte would be strapped onto a gurney when he entered the courtroom for his trial. This led Patrisse to reflect on how police and prison employees so often treated her brother and her father as if they were disposable criminals (despite the fact that they never hurt anyone), implying that these institutions do not exist to keep people safe but to contain and control people, especially Black people.

But Patrisse didn't think they were disposable. She was deeply committed to being a healing presence for her family and community, to treating them like their lives mattered. And she wasn't the only one—her blood and chosen families were also committed to doing things differently, to fighting back against a racist society who treated them like they were expendable by accepting and supporting one another.

❝ Is this my mother who is gripped, albeit wrongly, with guilt? Is she in this moment wondering what she did or did not do to ensure her baby, her Monte, be kept safe from the nightmare he's been cast into? Is my mother the fallout, the collateral damage in the battle to elevate personal responsibility over everything, over all those decisions that were made about state budget priorities, about wages, about the presence of police, and even about damn grocery stores and access to quality food?

Related Characters: Patrisse Khan-Cullors (speaker), Cherice, Monte Cullors

Related Themes:

Page Number: 124

Explanation and Analysis

This passage comes after Patrisse's normally put-together mother, Cherice, started sobbing in the courtroom over her son Monte going back to prison. Her mother's tears surprised Patrisse and caused her to reflect on how Cherice internalized the belief that she was personally responsible for Monte's struggles, when Patrisse argues that that wasn't the case—external factors like racist policies, a low minimum wage, and the war on drugs all contributed to his return to prison.

Patrisse has argued that policymakers intentionally treat Black people as if their lives don't matter, so it's no wonder that Monte—a mentally ill Black man who had no access to adequate healthcare and whose erratic behavior was read as violent—ended up back in prison. That Patrisse took the time to understand and contextualize her mother's feelings even after Cherice was not emotionally available for her throughout her childhood shows that Patrisse was committed to not treating Cherice as disposable either.

Chapter 9 Quotes

❝ Consider: In the wake of Katrina, there were two Getty images that Yahoo News ran two days after the storm hit. In the first photo, two white residents waded through the water with food. Beneath their picture, the caption read: "Two residents wade through chest-deep water after finding bread and soda from a local grocery store after Hurricane Katrina came through the area in New Orleans, Louisiana." Right after it, they ran an image of a Black boy also wading through the water with food. The caption read, "A young man walks through chest-deep flood water after looting a grocery store in New Orleans on Tuesday, Aug. 30, 2005."

Related Characters: Patrisse Khan-Cullors (speaker), Gabriel Brignac

Related Themes:

Page Number: 144

Explanation and Analysis

Hurricane Katrina was a Category 5 hurricane that hit New Orleans (and the Gulf Coast) in 2005, causing unprecedented flooding and at least 1,800 deaths. Patrisse brings this up as she is discussing the ways that anti-Black racism is baked into all layers of society, including the media. This passage is juxtaposing how the media portrayed white Hurricane victims who took food out of a store in a sympathetic light, while they portrayed Black hurricane victims as looters.

This example furthers Patrisse's argument throughout the book that policymakers and the public see Black people as perpetrators of harm rather than as victims. Her father, Gabriel, was imprisoned for selling drugs when he was only doing so in order to have money and a life with dignity. Her brother Monte was put away for threatening a white woman, when in reality, he was in the midst of a psychotic episode brought on by mental illness. Black people, Patrisse argues, deserve as much compassion as anyone else.

Chapter 10 Quotes

❝❞ The sheer number of individuals who were kicked in the testicles, set upon and beaten by several deputies at once, individuals who were tased for no apparent reason other than the entertainment of guards, who had bones broken by guards wielding flashlights and other everyday tools that became instruments of extreme violence in America's largest jail, is breathtaking enough. But other elements of the torture almost break me as I read the words of a civilian who testified about a wheelchair-bound prisoner whom deputies pulled off his bed, kicked and kneed in his ribs, back and neck and then shot with pepper spray in his face. I begin to hyperventilate and remember my brother on his knees drinking out of the toilet. My God.

I can't breathe.

We can't breathe.

Related Characters: Patrisse Khan-Cullors (speaker), Monte Cullors

Related Themes:

Page Number: 158

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Patrisse is responding to the stories she read about in the ACLU of Southern California's 2011 report on torture and abuse in the LA County Jail. The breadth and depth of violence shocked her and supported her belief that prisons exist not only to control and contain people, but also to actively abuse them. She remembered how Monte drank out of her toilet during a PTSD flashback to his time in the LA County Jail, now realizing that this was likely something the guards forced him to do as part of their widespread abuse.

Patrisse intentionally uses the phrase "I can't breathe" to connect this moment to the 2014 police killing of Eric Garner in New York. Garner was arrested for being suspected of selling cigarettes and then put into a chokehold, repeating the words "I can't breathe" 11 times before dying on the sidewalk. This was captured in video footage that circulated widely over the internet, leading to "I can't breathe" becoming an unofficial slogan of the Black Lives Matter movement.

Chapter 11 Quotes

❝❞ And then my friend Alicia writes a Facebook post. Alicia, who I'd known for seven years at this point, who I'd met at a political gathering in Rhode Island where at the end of the day our goal was to dance until we couldn't dance anymore [...] she writes these words in the wake of the acquittal:

btw stop saying that we are not surprised. that's a damn shame in itself. I continue to be surprised at how little Black lives matter. And I will continue that. stop giving up on black life. black people, I will NEVER give up on us. NEVER.

And then I respond. I wrote back with a hashtag:

#BlackLivesMatter

Related Characters: Patrisse Khan-Cullors (speaker), Alicia Garza, Trayvon Martin's Killer , Opal Tometi

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 179

Explanation and Analysis

This passage comes just after Patrisse was devastated to learn that Trayvon Martin's killer was acquitted of all charges. Turning to social media to see how her activist community was responding, Patrisse read Alicia's Facebook post and, responding with "#BlackLivesMatter," officially started the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. BLM would go on to mobilize thousands of people across the country to protest against police brutality and anti-Black racism.

Alicia noted in her post that people were saying they weren't surprised that Trayvon's killer was found not guilty, the implication being that this sort of violence was pervasive, as Patrisse has suggested throughout the book. Patrisse's response shows that, though the world treats Black people like their lives are disposable, she was committed to doing the opposite.

By including this moment in the book, Patrisse intentionally counters the narrative that the BLM movement was started and led by Black men. It was started by these two women, who then looped in Opal Tometi.

Chapter 12 Quotes

❝❞ Police, the literal progeny of slave catchers, meant harm to our community, and the race or class of any one officer, nor the good heart of an officer, could change that. No isolated acts of decency could wholly change an organization that became an institution that was created not to Protect but to catch, control and kill us.

Related Characters: Patrisse Khan-Cullors (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 186

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Patrisse was reflecting on the role of the police in U.S. history while helicopters flew low over her home. Historically speaking, police forces in the U.S. emerged from the "slave patrols" in the South in the early 1700s that were organized to stop slave revolts and catch runaway slaves. Patrisse shares this history to contextualize her claim that prisons and the police are institutions that exist to control and contain people rather than to keep them safe.

Patrisse also responds to a common critique that opponents of the Black Lives Matter movement would level against them: what about good police officers who aren't racist? Patrisse makes it clear that this is not a matter of individual morality but about the legacy and intention of an institution—no single police officer can reform a system that is intent on harming Black people. This is related to her belief that individual choice is less important than the external circumstances that force someone to act a certain way.

❝❞ Immediately, the police surround the three of us, who are not armed and who are dressed like three people who were sitting in their house and planning out their day, which is what we had been doing when we first heard the helicopters.

Ten, maybe a dozen, cops force us at gunpoint [...] into the courtyard in front of our cottage while the others swarm past us and enter my home like angry hornets or a sudden airborne plague.

Related Characters: Patrisse Khan-Cullors (speaker), JT

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 192

Explanation and Analysis

This passage comes after police told Patrisse, her friend JT, and his six-year-old daughter to immediately exit Patrisse's house because the police suspected someone to be hiding inside. Apart from when Patrisse was handcuffed in front of her class in middle school for smoking marijuana, this was her first personal experience of being targeted and intimidated by police, and it solidified her belief that police do not believe that Black people are worthy of basic respect or decency.

There was no one hiding in Patrisse's home, and she had done nothing wrong, yet she was treated like a criminal. More than that, JT's six-year-old daughter was also treated as a criminal, even though she was a child. The implication here is that a non-Black child would not have been treated this way. The fact that there were a dozen police officers pointing guns at them supports Patrisse's point that police are primed to use violence against Black people, even when they aren't doing anything wrong.

Chapter 13 Quotes

❝❞ And then I ask the people there on Rodeo Drive in Beverly Hills to please just stop for a moment, to hold space for Trayvon Martin, to hold space for his parents left in grief and an unspeakable pain. And when I do that it seems like the police are going to pounce; they move in closer and closer and I am scared. But I ask again for a moment of remembrance for Trayvon, and as far as I can tell, every single person within reach of my voice, and all of them white as far as I can see, puts down their champagne glass and their silver fork and stops checking their phone or having their conversation and then every last one of them bows their head.

Related Characters: Patrisse Khan-Cullors (speaker), Trayvon Martin's Killer

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 201

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Patrisse was leading a large Black Lives Matter march in Beverly Hills in the wake of Trayvon

Martin's killer's acquittal, with the goal of raising awareness about this tragedy in a white and wealthy neighborhood. While she wasn't sure what to expect when she appealed to the emotions of the white people eating brunch outside along the route of the march, she was amazed to notice that they all paused what they are doing and bowed their heads in honor of Trayvon—a clear sign that the Black Lives Matter movement was gaining momentum and that change was possible.

The police were present at this march and, though they scared Patrisse, she felt buoyed by the presence of her fellow protestors and the support of the spectators bowing their heads. This underlines the shrinking power of the police in the face of the BLM movement's growing power.

Chapter 14 Quotes

At some point, sisters begin to talk about how unseen they have felt, how the media has focused on men but it has been them, the sisters, who were there. They were there in overwhelming numbers—just as they were during the Civil Rights Movement. Women, all women, Transwomen, are roughly 80 percent of the people who are standing down the face of terror in Ferguson, saying We are the caretakers of this community.

Related Characters: Patrisse Khan-Cullors (speaker), Michael (Mike) Brown

Related Themes:

Page Number: 218

Explanation and Analysis

This passage comes after Patrisse traveled to Ferguson, Missouri to join the protests in the wake of the police killing of Michael Brown. In addition to joining the protests, Patrisse turned the basement of a church into a space for healing and rest for the protestors—just because police treated them like they were disposable didn't mean they couldn't heal and support one another.

Patrisse describes how, in this healing space, women started criticizing the media for erasing their role in leading the protests, highlighting how Black women exist at the intersections of at least two different types of oppression—racism and sexism. (Patrisse also names trans women specifically as a nod to how they face transphobia as well.) She also notes that historically speaking, Black women played a major role in the civil rights movement, yet most people only think about the men who co-led the movement (like Martin Luther King, Jr. or Malcolm X), demonstrating that this type of sexism has always been something Black women have had to navigate.

Chapter 16 Quotes

Since Black Lives Matter was born in 2013 we have done some incredible work. We have built a decentralized movement that encourages and supports local leaders to name and claim the work that is needed in order to make their communities more just [...] But we have more than 20 chapters across the United States, in Canada and the UK, all autonomous but all connected and coordinated. We have centered and amplified the voices of those not only made most vulnerable but most unheard, even as they are on the front lines at every hour and in every space: Black women—*all* Black women.

Related Characters: Patrisse Khan-Cullors (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 249

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage near the end of her memoir, Patrisse reflects on all that the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement was able to accomplish between 2013 and early 2017 (when the book was published). The achievements that she shares—such as building a network of more than 20 chapters across three countries—indicate that the BLM movement, just over three years old, was only gaining momentum. Building a world where Black lives finally do matter, Patrisse suggests, is not only possible but well underway.

Patrisse also states that BLM had amplified the voices of the most marginalized members of their community, or those who exist at the intersections of multiple types of oppression, such as Black women. This is her attempt to address the fact that oftentimes, the narrative of Black freedom movements centers Black men, when Black women like herself are also participating on the frontlines of the movement.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

INTRODUCTION: WE ARE STARDUST

Patrisse Khan-Cullors remembers how, to offer hope after the elections of 2016, her co-author asha bandele sent her a talk by astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson in which he explains that humans are made out of stardust. Patrisse believes deGrasse Tyson because she has seen this magic in her mother, Cherice, who was disowned by her family for having children too young and worked 16 hours a day without ever making a living wage, yet never gave up. She also sees it in her father, Gabriel, who, despite struggling with racism and addiction, never stopped trying to be a better version of himself. She also sees it in her ancestors who survived slave ships, "who refused to accept the idea that their lives did not matter."

asha reaches out to Patrisse to offer her hope because, in the wake of Donald Trump's presidential election in 2016, many progressive activists feared the conservative policies that could be coming their way. Hearing that people are made out of stardust moves Patrisse to reflect on the resilience of people in her life—how her parents and ancestors persevered despite hardships, such as racism, poverty, and other types of structural oppression. Patrisse also introduces the language of lives that do not "matter," a nod to the Black Lives Matter movement that she will focus on in the memoir.

Patrisse feels her ancestors are the reason she is alive today, that their resilience gave her the ability to live as a queer Black artist and community organizer in a world where she wasn't meant to survive. Growing up in poverty and listening to Black pastors (and Obama) preaching the politics of personal responsibility, she wasn't taught the truth about the U.S.—that, while it's the wealthiest nation, there is also extreme wealth inequality. And despite having only five percent of the world's population, it has 25 percent of its prison population (including Patrisse's disabled brother, Monte, and nonviolent father, Gabriel).

Patrisse was not meant to survive because she exists at the intersections of many marginalized identities: Black, female, queer, and poor. She does not believe that she and her Black community are personally responsible for the struggles that they face, but that structural oppression—like wealth inequality and racism—is to blame. Though the U.S. claims to be the land of the free, its extreme wealth inequality and large prison population suggest otherwise.

Trayvon Martin's killer, on the other hand, was not imprisoned. And when Patrisse and others started the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement in the wake of his acquittal, they were called terrorists. This was in July 2016, after the police killings of Alton Sterling and Philando Castile and before Black sniper Micah Johnson killed five police officers at a BLM protest in Dallas. Johnson was killed by a military-grade bomb rather than taken alive, whereas white shooters in Charleston and Aurora were taken alive. (Most police officers killed in the U.S. are murdered by white men who are taken alive.) Johnson was then used against BLM, an excuse for opponents to call them terrorists. Despite knowing this is a strategy that has been used against activists before, being called a terrorist devastates Patrisse.

Trayvon Martin was a young Black man who was killed by neighborhood watchman George Zimmerman in 2012, while Martin was walking home while wearing a hood. After Zimmerman was acquitted of all charges in 2013, Martin became a national symbol for all of the innocent Black men who are killed by police and vigilantes in the U.S. Alton Sterling (who was killed by Baton Rouge police while selling illegal CDs) and Philando Castile (who was killed by Minneapolis police during a routine traffic stop) similarly became symbols after their deaths in 2016. Micah Johnson was a Black former sniper who opened fire at police officers during a protest against the killings of Sterling and Castile. Patrisse takes issue with the way Johnson was immediately killed rather than taken alive like white shooters, an example of Black lives mattering less to police officers than white lives.

Patrisse has lived a life plagued by both poverty and the police, like many others in the BLM movement. Growing up during the war on drugs, neighborhoods like hers were war zones. White people have always used and sold more drugs than people of color in the U.S., yet both the public and the police have long associated people of color with drugs. Patrisse is terrified that she or a family member could be killed by the police at any moment, and it's not right that she and her BLM co-founders Alicia Garza and Opal Tometi are the ones called terrorists.

The war on drugs was a period when policymakers at the federal and local levels tried to reduce drug use and gang violence by incarcerating low-income Black and Latinx people for minor infractions. Though technically ongoing, the height of the war on drugs was in the 1980s and 1990s while Patrisse was growing up. As Patrisse notes, white people have historically used and sold more drugs than people of color. That Black and Latinx people are targeted despite this suggests that prisons and police may be less focused on keeping people safe and more focused on containing and controlling people of color. Patrisse implies that the police, not her and her fellow BLM activists, are the real terrorists.

CHAPTER 1: COMMUNITY, INTERRUPTED

Patrisse is raised by her mother, Cherice, in a broken-down Section 8 apartment in Van Nuys, California, just outside Los Angeles. Patrisse and Cherice are both short, but Patrisse's older brothers (Paul and Monte) and younger sister (Jasmine) are all tall, a trait they get from their father, Alton. Alton works at the General Motors plant nearby. Although he stops living with the family when Patrisse is six, he continues to visit, and she feels his love. Van Nuys is multiracial; Patrisse's family is Black, but the neighborhood is majority Mexican. Yet Van Nuys is also not somewhere people can grow roots. There isn't even a grocery store.

Patrisse and her family live in Section 8 housing, meaning they qualify for a federal program that decreases how much rent they have to pay because they are low-income. The lack of grocery stores in Van Nuys is an example of how companies often choose not to invest in low-income communities of color, implying that those communities matter less to them than white or wealthy ones. When Patrisse says that she loves Alton despite the fact that he left their family, she shows that she believes in understanding and empathizing with people who have caused harm rather than shunning or punishing them.

Less than a mile from Van Nuys is Sherman Oaks, a wealthy white neighborhood where there are no apartment buildings, just large houses with lawns. Parents in Sherman Oaks drive their kids to school, whereas the parents in Van Nuys leave early for work. So, kids like Patrisse take the bus or walk, "our fresh brown faces trying to figure out a world we did not make and did not know we had the power to unmake."

In describing Sherman Oaks, Patrisse demonstrates the extremes of the racial wealth divide in the U.S.—it is not an accident, but a direct effect of racism, that white kids tend to have larger houses and parents with reasonable work schedules. When Patrisse writes that she and her friends did not know they had the power to unmake the world, she foreshadows the activism she will later in engage in to challenge the racist status quo.

Cherice works 16 hours a day between two or three working-class jobs. After the GM plant closes, Alton also works a series of low-wage jobs and is unable to provide for their family, which may be why he eventually leaves them entirely. This is the 1980s, and Black unemployment in the LA region is worse than it will be during the 2008 Great Recession. Patrisse's family often does not have enough food. Free breakfast and lunch at school (a program started by the Black Panthers) is how Patrisse survives childhood.

Patrisse understands Alton's decision to leave their family as the result of external circumstances rather than personal responsibility—she believes that his inability to find a job to provide for his family and then leaving them in shame is not his fault, but their racist society's fault. Unemployment for Black people in LA was higher at this time than it was during the 2008 Great Recession, a global period of marked economic decline that deeply impacted the U.S. Patrisse also references the Black Panthers, a militant Black Power organization that was active in the U.S. from the 1960s through the 1980s.

Patrisse and her siblings look out for one another. Jasmine is the baby and Paul is the oldest, taking charge after Alton leaves. Monte is special to Patrisse because he plays with her and is very loving. One day, though, police round up and roughly accost Monte (who's 11) and Paul (who's 13) while they are doing nothing more than hanging out with friends in the alley next to their building. (There are no parks or community centers, so this is the only place where they can see each other.) The police violently throw Patrisse's brothers against the wall, aggressively searching them. From behind a nearby fence, Patrisse (who's nine) watches, frozen.

Watching her brothers be arrested for doing nothing more than play with friends outside, Patrisse witnesses police violence for the first time. She sees firsthand that they are doing nothing wrong but are treated as criminals anyway—the implication being that they are being targeted because of their race. That there are no parks or community centers in Van Nuys suggests that policymakers are choosing not invest in their Black and Latinx community.

Monte and Paul never talk about what happened, likely because they expect this behavior from the police and/or are worried that no one will believe they were doing nothing wrong. Over the following months and years, police continue to brutalize them; the war on drugs is ramping up, and the police find more and more "ways to make us the enemy." As an adult, Patrisse thinks about this particular incident of police brutality against her brothers after hearing about the murders of Michael Brown and Freddie Grey, two unarmed young Black men killed by police in Ferguson, Missouri and Baltimore, Maryland, respectively.

Again, Patrisse highlights that police target her brothers not because they are committing crimes, but because the police see Black people as "the enemy." This is a direct result of the war on drugs' racist depiction of Black people as being predatory and violent. She compares her brothers' experience to those of Mike Brown and Freddie Grey, who were both unarmed when they were killed by police officers in 2014 and 2015, respectively.

Monte and Paul get arrested so often that Cherice moves the family to a different part of Van Nuys, but there is no place they can go where they know "that their lives matter." Patrisse, meanwhile, is sent to Millikan, a wealthy white middle school in Sherman Oaks, where she makes friends with a white girl whose brother is a drug dealer. Patrisse is surprised to learn that not only has he never been arrested, but that he's never *feared* being arrested. Patrisse comments that, in that moment, she couldn't comprehend the idea that some people live without the fear of police, and that she still can't.

Patrisse's brothers are unable to escape being racially profiled by the police no matter where their family moves, showing how pervasive this form of discrimination is. But until Patrisse starts attending a majority wealthy and white middle school, she doesn't realize how tied this police brutality is to her family's race. That there are white drug dealers who do not fear the police suggests that police are less interested in cracking down on drug-related crime and more interested in abusing and controlling Black people.

CHAPTER 2: TWELVE

Patrisse is 12 years old the first time she is arrested. It is the summer after seventh grade and, despite attending Millikan (the school for gifted children) during the year, she is back in Van Nuys for remedial math and science courses. Unlike Millikan, this school has metal detectors and police. Patrisse smokes marijuana in the bathroom during school one day to cope with the stress, something her peers at Millikan do regularly with no consequences.

The presence of metal detectors and police at a school that is mostly made up of low-income students of color, compared to the lack of security at Patrisse's majority-white and wealthy school, again suggests that police are being used as a tool to control people of color rather than to keep them safe.

Someone must have told on Patrisse, because two days later, a police officer handcuffs her in front of her class before taking her to the dean's office and searching her bag and her clothes. Despite having no marijuana on her, she is forced to call her mother and tell her what happened. Patrisse lies, and her mother takes her side. Later, at home, Cherice does not ask her about it, tell her she loves her, or get angry. Patrisse does not judge her for this; her kids are safe, which is enough for her.

Unlike her white peers, Patrisse is handcuffed and taken out of class for smoking marijuana—another example of police disproportionately targeting Black people. Reflecting on her mother's lack of concern afterward, Patrisse sees how Cherice is doing her best to keep her kids safe. Though she perhaps wishes her mother would be more emotionally involved in her life, she empathizes with the fact that Cherice is a single parent trying to keep her head above water.

Middle school is a culture shock because of race and class differences, but also because, before then, Patrisse had been seen as gifted. Her fourth-grade teacher gave a book about a Black girl traveling through the Jim Crow South and allowed Patrisse to teach the class about the book. Patrisse related to the terror the main character felt—police in full riot gear had recently raided her home, tearing through the house in search of her favorite uncle, who sold drugs. Unlike on television, the police were not kind to her and her young siblings, instead treating them like suspects. Patrisse presented on this book (and others) to her class, wanting her peers to see how their terror was connected to history.

The Jim Crow period in U.S. history (the 1870s through 1965) was marked by laws that mandated racial segregation in the South. Though Patrisse was born after Jim Crow had ended, she sees how Black people are still mistreated today. Like the little girl in the story, she fears being violently attacked because she is Black, not by racist Southerners but by police in LA.

Patrisse can't take the bus to Millikan, so her mother borrows a car from Cynthia, their 19-year-old neighbor who has a child and is paralyzed from the waist down after being shot in a drive-by shooting. (Cynthia has been involved with Monte and will eventually give birth to Patrisse's nephew Chase.) Her car is a beaten-up station wagon with no back windows. Being dropped off in that car, surrounded by her peers' fancy cars, Patrisse is ashamed of her family's class position for the first time. She asks Cherice to drop her off before the entrance but feels conflicted about it.

Patrisse's shame about her mother dropping her off in a rundown car shows that, at this age, she believes that being poor means something is wrong with her or her family, rather than indicating that something is wrong with their society (a position that will shift as she heads to high school). By introducing Cynthia, Patrisse starts to tell the stories of Black people with disabilities who experience multiple, intersecting types of oppression.

Patrisse doesn't fit in with the white kids who smoke marijuana at Millikan or the Black girls who want to be famous. People think she is weird, but she just feels like herself: a Black girl from a Mexican community who loves poetry, reading, and dancing. She befriends a white boy named Mikie and wants to show him her home. Though her mother is ashamed of their home (she grew up middle-class before being disowned by her parents), Patrisse isn't. When not at Millikan, she feels no shame at all—she loves her community because it's what she knows. When Mikie visits, he notices the ambulances and peeling paint and says, without malice, "I didn't think you lived like this." Patrisse doesn't respond, and things are different after that.

That it takes a white outsider to draw attention to the ways that Patrisse's home and community are less than ideal shows how accustomed Patrisse has become to living in subpar conditions—this is how all of the Black and Latinx people she knows live. Again, race is shown to be the differentiating factor in people's quality of life. Still, Patrisse loves her community despite its flaws; though the world treats her family and neighbors as disposable, she refuses to.

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At Millikan, Patrisse feels unsure of herself for the first time. Her grades drop, and she feels like she is on her own, like she has "become a thing to be discarded." Her brothers learn about their own expendability while being overly policed in the streets, labeled "super-predators" based on their race. Patrisse learns this at school and will not enjoy school again until, as an adult, she pursues a degree in religion in order to become a minister.

Patrisse feeling that she has "become a thing to be discarded" is directly related to being one of the only Black girls at a majority-white school. While police make her brothers feel like their lives do not matter, teachers, administrators, and peers make her feel this way, showing that racism is not just something police perpetuate but something that schools and other institutions do too. The phrase "super-predator" was introduced in legislation in the 1990s to describe particularly violent young people who deserved longer prison sentences; Patrisse believes that the popularization of this term led to an increase in racial profiling.

Research has shown that 12 percent of Black girls in the U.S. receive at least one suspension during their time in school, while white girls are suspended at a rate of 2 percent. This fits with Patrisse's experience: white people at Millikan use drugs far more than her friends at her neighborhood schools, yet those schools were full of officers in Kevlar and drug-sniffing dogs. News stories about Black girls being thrown from their seats by School Safety Officers and being threatened with expulsion for wearing their hair natural prove that they're seen as disposable. Like some of these girls, Patrisse learns at 12 years old that "being Black and poor defined me more than being bright and hopeful and ready." Tamir Rice was also 12 when a police officer only hesitated for two seconds before killing him.

Black female students are disproportionately punished for behavior that white female students also engage in, which Patrisse uses as evidence of the pervasiveness of institutional racism. Patrisse intentionally shares statistics about Black girls to raise awareness of the fact that it's not just Black boys and men who are unjustly punished. In stating that being Black and poor defined her more than being hopeful and ready, Patrisse challenges the idea of personal responsibility—her experience of struggling in school was less about her work ethic or preparedness and more about her marginalized identities. Patrisse learns this at the young age of 12, the same age Tamir Rice was in 2014, when he was killed while playing with a toy gun in a Cleveland park.

CHAPTER 3: BLOODLINES

The incident that defines Patrisse's middle school experience is not about school, though it does relate to poverty, policing, and Blackness. At the end of sixth grade, Cherice tells her that Alton is not her biological father. He is her siblings' father, but while they were temporarily broken up, Cherice fell in love with a man named Gabriel and got pregnant with Patrisse. Cherice ran into Gabriel recently and told him about Patrisse, which is why he has been calling the house. She asks if Patrisse wants to meet him and, though Patrisse wants everything to stay the same, she also wants to meet her father. So, she says yes.

Gabriel's absence in Patrisse's life is related to poverty and policing because, as Patrisse goes on to explain, Gabriel responded to being poor by starting to sell drugs and eventually went to prison for it. What may look like a man choosing to abandon his pregnant girlfriend, Patrisse suggests, is really a Black man trying to survive in the face of structural oppression.

Between this conversation and when Patrisse meets Gabriel a month later, she and Cherice do not talk about him. In that time, Alton comes to visit—as he has for six years since leaving—and adult Patrisse reflects that she didn't yet understand how his disappearance was tied to larger social issues, such as losing his well-paying job at the GM plant and never again finding financial stability. Twelve-year-old Patrisse feels, instead, like she and her siblings must have done something to push him away. She loves and misses Alton, so when he comes to pick her up to get some food, she says yes.

Again, Patrisse analyzes Alton's decision to leave their family as the result of structural oppression rather than personal responsibility. Patrisse's believes that his inability to find a job and then disappearing due to the shame of not being able to provide for his family is not his fault—it's the result of circumstances like economic downturn and poverty that are beyond his control. But 12-year-old Patrisse doesn't yet understand this, so she blames herself.

They get tacos at a hole-in-the-wall Mexican restaurant nearby and, as they eat, Alton starts crying. He asks Patrisse if he is still her father, and she says yes, of course. He explains that he didn't want Cherice to tell her about Gabriel because he didn't want her to feel like she wasn't fully *his*. Patrisse wishes she could say "I love you" a million times, but this is not how they talk to each other. So, she says nothing, and they eat in silence. She starts to feel guilty, like she is responsible for his tears, but she still wants to meet Gabriel.

Despite the fact that Alton has been an inconsistent presence in her life, Patrisse deeply cares for him. This sentiment will become part of Patrisse's commitments as she becomes an activist: to accept and love people for who they are rather than turning away.

When Gabriel comes to pick Patrisse up, she notices how similar they look. He doesn't have a car, so they take the bus to the movies. Though Patrisse feels awkward, Gabriel hugs and kisses her comfortably throughout the day. Gabriel explains that he's in recovery from crack addiction and lives in a sober-living home. Patrisse knows about crack because everyone in her neighborhood seems to use it—there are no playgrounds, parks, theaters, or treatment centers, so what else is there to do? Patrisse's brother Monte has even started selling Cherice's things to buy crack and has started showing signs of schizoaffective disorder. This is the post-Regan generation, and "crack filled the empty spaces for a lot of people whose lives had been emptied out."

When Patrisse writes that many peoples' "lives had been emptied out," she is referring to the way that policymakers and corporations chose not to invest in Black communities, leaving them without playgrounds, parks, theaters, or treatments centers. Ronald Regan—president of the U.S. in the 1908s—was known for reducing government spending, which led to fewer public amenities. Patrisse makes the case that, for poor Black people, using crack was a way to survive being treated like their lives weren't worth investing in. People struggling with mental illness without access to healthcare (like Monte) had even more reason to turn to drugs.

A week after Patrisse meets Gabriel, Cherice takes her to Gabriel's graduation from his Salvation Army treatment program. Gabriel's extended family is there, and they greet Patrisse as one of their own, kissing and hugging her. Five of Gabriel's nine siblings are there, and so is his mother, Vina, who is short like Patrisse. Vina is from Louisiana and had a white mother and Creole father. Patrisse later learns that when Vina was young, a white man raped her, and she gave birth to two daughters. No one speaks of it, an example of family trauma that is passed on and cannot heal. Patrisse loves Vina immediately. Patrisse also meets Gabriel's 20-year-old son, and they hug.

Meeting her new extended family is a healing experience for Patrisse—though they don't know her, they embrace her straight away. At the same time, Patrisse acknowledges that full healing cannot take place unless people share openly about their trauma and pain, which Vina does not. Vina's experience of being raped twice by a white man is an example of the harm that can come from living at the intersection of Blackness and womanhood.

Gabriel's family is poor, unlike Cherice's family, who is middle class. (Cherice was kicked out of her community for getting pregnant before marriage and will never access middle-class safety again.) Gabriel's extended family's world is nothing like Cherice's world, and Patrisse feels out of place, especially without her siblings. She starts to feel like she is two Patrisses—her mother's daughter and her father's daughter—and she doesn't feel whole.

Here, Patrisse acknowledges that although both sides of her family are Black, they're of different social classes—another way of showing that there is no one Black experience. Cherice's experience of being disowned by her family also shows the unique experience of being a woman and a Jehovah's Witness—she is punished for promiscuity in a way that a man likely would not be.

Patrisse listens to Gabriel's graduation speech, about his healing and gratitude for his family. She will later question the way 12-step programs hold individuals responsible for their addictions rather than addressing external factors, like not having access to support or "the general sense that their life matters." Still, she sees the power in public accountability. This is possibly the first time she's heard an adult apologize. Alton never apologized for leaving, and GM never apologized for closing the plant with no support for him. Even Cherice is secretive. But Gabriel is being in honest in public, thanking his family for standing by him when he went to prison for his drug use. When Patrisse gets home, no one asks her about her time with Gabriel. She just goes to sleep, gets up, and heads to school.

Patrisse again questions the narrative of personal responsibility when it comes to addiction—she wonders how a poor Black man like Gabriel could be held responsible for using drugs when he was just trying to survive in a classist, racist world. But although she doesn't believe people should be held individually responsible for their addictions, she does believe they should be publicly accountable for the harm they've caused to others. In this way, Patrisse's relationship with Gabriel (unlike her relationships with Alton and Cherice) teaches her how to share honestly and heal in community.

Gabriel becomes very present in Patrisse's life, picking her up every Friday to see their sports-loving extended family at Vina's house. Patrisse sometimes worries what Alton and her siblings think of her being with her new family, but she also starts to feel like one of them. Growing up a Jehovah's Witness, Patrisse never celebrated Christmas, Thanksgiving, or birthdays, and didn't feel she was missing anything. But with her new Catholic family, she has fun celebrating and eating food, even though no one has money for gifts.

Patrisse continues to navigate being a member of two separate families without favoring one side over another or abandoning her loved ones. Spending time with Gabriel's extended family is healing for Patrisse, who was raised as a Jehovah's Witness and was not allowed to celebrate holidays. Again, Patrisse shows that there is no singular Black experience.

Gabriel eventually buys a car and drives Patrisse and her friends around, something Cherice can't do because of her work schedule. He drives them wherever they want to go—pizza, movies, and more. One day, he takes Patrisse to a small 12-step meeting and, though Patrisse is young and slightly overwhelmed by the attendees' stories of harm they'd caused, she also loves everyone's honesty. Still, she wonders why only individuals are held accountable when unemployment and police brutality are at play. The meetings—and going out to eat afterwards—help Patrisse feel closer to Gabriel. His honesty and openness start to change her, encourage her to want to be the same way.

Again, Patrisse questions the way that 12-step programs encourage addicts to see their choices as solely within their control rather than informed by context like the war on drugs and high unemployment. Still, she appreciates the honesty that she witnesses at the meetings and starts to develop her own commitment to being honest as a way to heal.

Patrisse also joins Gabriel at weekend barbecues where he plays baseball with their extended family. When there is conflict in the family, everyone goes to Gabriel, who listens and encourages them to forgive. His gentleness and big heart help Patrisse feel more at home in her own skin. But then, Gabriel suddenly disappears for weeks. After making some calls, Cherice tells Patrisse that Gabriel is going back to prison. Patrisse collapses, unable to picture her father in chains. She doesn't ask what he has been reincarcerated for and wishes she had access to support groups. This was before any talk of criminal justice reform and "all we have is the shame of it, we who are the families."

Patrisse juxtaposes descriptions of Gabriel's gentleness and big heart with the image of him in chains to suggest that prison is not about protecting communities from violence or harm, but about punishing and controlling people—especially poor Black people. That Patrisse doesn't have access to support groups and has to sit alone with her shame also points to how Black people and communities are treated as disposable.

As an adult, Patrisse will understand the contradiction in the U.S. being founded on addiction (alcohol, tobacco, sugar) and people now being imprisoned for it. But, as a teenager heading into 11th grade, Patrisse doesn't have this context and asks herself, "If prisons are supposed to make society more safe, why do I feel so much fear and hurt?" This is the war on drugs era—between 1982 and 2000, the California prison population grows by 500 percent, jails swelling with Black and Latinx men. This will eventually be understood as a civil rights crisis, but not for many years. This is the generation of Black people being viewed as prisoners (including Gabriel and, eventually, Patrisse's brother Monte).

Here Patrisse directly names the contradiction between prisons claiming to be about making society safe while leaving so many people feeling less safe. *Patrisse uses the fact the California prison population grows by 500 percent—and the fact that Black and Latinx men are incarcerated at disproportionately high rates—to suggest that policymakers are actively using prisons to punish and control racial minorities. She sees how her family members are forced to become criminals to survive and then punished for it.*

Patrisse reflects on how prisons are valuable: poor white people in rural communities can find jobs as guards, food vendors, and more, while prisoners—legally considered slaves—work for almost no pay making license plates and American flags. In the 1980s through early 2000s, prisoners mostly made products for companies like Victoria's Secret, Whole Foods, and Starbucks. The private prison industry will become the largest growth industry in the U.S. by the time Gabriel goes back to prison.

Patrisse adds nuance to her claim that prisons are about controlling and containing (poor Black) people by noting that prisons also actively exploit people by forcing prisoners to work for almost no pay.

There are no rulebooks for guiding Patrisse through losing a parent to incarceration, despite the 10 million children going through it in 1996. Michelle Alexander also hasn't yet written *The New Jim Crow*, nor has Barack Obama reduced the federal prison population. No one has yet challenged the racist sentencing imbalance between crack and powder cocaine, and Angela Davis hasn't written *Are Prisons Obsolete?* Young Patrisse hasn't heard of any of this. She only knows her dad will miss her performances, birthdays, graduation. And she will miss holidays with his family and his embrace. She acts like she is fine but also feels she cannot breathe.

A lot has changed since Patrisse was growing up and losing her father to incarceration—between 1996 and 2016 (when she wrote the book), scholars like Michelle Alexander and Angela Davis published books that are very critical of the prison system, even comparing it to modern-day slavery. President Obama also actively reduced the prison population, showing that some policymakers have come to understand that mass incarceration was a problem.

CHAPTER 4: MAGNITUDE AND BOND

With Gabriel in prison, Patrisse loses touch with his extended family. They only knew each other for four years, after all, and Gabriel was the glue holding the family together. Patrisse's cousin Naomi tells her that the family no longer spends time together without Gabriel. Still, Patrisse stays in touch with him through letters. In Gabriel's letters, he apologizes and promises better times in the future. Patrisse tells him she misses him. Neither shares intimate details about their lives, including why he was sent to prison.

That Patrisse loses touch with her extended family—as well as the close emotional bond she'd formed with Gabriel—shows the traumatic effects that the prison system has not only on prisoners, but also their families.

Monte goes to prison soon after Gabriel. He doesn't pick Patrisse up from dance class from one day, which doesn't worry her because he's generally been acting strangely—some days he's full of love and energy and giving her money, other days he's crying in the bathroom for hours and she can't get him to come out. He also sometimes doesn't sleep for days, talking non-stop. Patrisse assumes that his drug use causes the mood swings, and she also feels he has a right to inconsistency because "He never knows how the world will greet him, after all." Monte had been arrested throughout her childhood, including a few years before when a cop came up to him while they were walking down the street, handcuffed him, and took him away. She doesn't know a single boy in her community who hasn't been arrested at least once.

As a Black man with schizoaffective disorder, Monte experiences ableism (discrimination against people with disabilities) in conjunction with racism. Rather than blaming Monte for his drug use, erratic behavior, and countless arrests, Patrisse sees how he is doing his best to survive with his multiple marginalized identities. Patrisse also notes that all the boys in her predominately Black and Latinx community have been arrested, suggesting that race and class are reason enough for young men to be targeted by police.

All of this is happening while Americans of all races are part of the fight to end apartheid in South Africa. In his "I Am Prepared to Die" speech, Nelson Mandela describes the effects of white supremacy on South Africa: Black people are seen as less than human and do not have access to schools, well-paying jobs, or the ability to own their own homes. Patrisse sees the struggles in South Africa in 1964 as similar to Los Angeles in 1992—unequal spending on schools, no social services or programs, meager job opportunities, families being torn apart as parents are thrown in jail.

Apartheid, similar to Jim Crow, was a period in South African history (1948–1991) when racial segregation policies were written into law. Patrisse juxtaposes South Africa in 1964 with LA in 1992 to make the point that even though segregation is no longer formally in effect in the U.S. at this point, the state of the country hasn't changed much. Black Americans have less school funding and fewer social programs or job opportunities, and they're criminalized more often.

Patrisse realizes these similarities between South Africa and LA only after she attends Millikan and sees how white people live. One day, she goes over to her white friend Tiffany's house in Sherman Oaks and has dinner, marveling at how their house has a separate dining room and that Tiffany's parents are home to join them (whereas her mother works from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. every day). Tiffany's father asks her about her day and what she wants to be when she grows up, and Patrisse feels she is in a TV show like *90210*. With her own family, she talks and laughs, but not like this—pain is always there just below the surface.

Patrisse's bewilderment at the differences between her home life and Tiffany's shows the gap between being wealthy and white versus poor and Black (which is what makes her think of South African apartheid). Patrisse wishes her family could have deep conversations over dinner like Tiffany's family does, but due to her mother having to work 16 hours a day to make ends meet, this is not possible.

Patrisse and Tiffany's father will both realize over the course of her visits there that he is her family's landlord—a "slum lord" who owns many buildings in Van Nuys and allowed Patrisse's family to go a year without a working fridge. Unsure what to do with this shocking information, Patrisse says nothing, thinking people will assume she made it up. But it's true—he is part of the white wealthy community that wants to keep Black people like her family separate.

Finding out that Tiffany's father is Patrisse's family's neglectful landlord is shocking, because he is a kind man. The problem is not this one man's behavior, but the fact that oppression is structural—Patrisse has implied that policymakers, landlords, and police have all normalized treating Black people like they're unworthy of basic necessities.

This is the 1990s, the middle of the war on drugs and the war on gangs. Being Black or Mexican makes you a drug dealer or dangerous criminal, and a group of boys becomes a gang. There is also no money going into schools (or school lunches). If young people of color don't die, they—like Monte—cycle in and out of juvenile detention centers, being trained for prison as adults. They are beaten and abused, forced to use the bathroom in public, then sent back into the world hardened, teaching other boys that they need to man up.

Here, Patrisse expounds on how Black and Latinx young men are targeted for being drug dealers or gang members just because of their race—an example of how war on drugs policies may seem neutral but, in practice, perpetuate racist stereotypes. She also connects tough-on-crime policies with policies that lead to less money going into schools, suggesting that politicians treat Black people like their lives don't matter on several different fronts.

Though it's possible that removing one thief or bully might make a community safer, removing parents from Black children's lives makes them much less safe. With no adults around, there is no one to love or protect them, no one to tell them that they matter, so they have to raise themselves. "Gangs" are really just groups of young people taking care of one another against the army of police officers on foot, in cars, and in **helicopters** that surveil them all day and night.

Here, Patrisse suggests that the reason young Black men distrust the police isn't because of their criminal activity, but because they see how police are primed to target them. Helicopters symbolize constant presence and power of the police—they are not merely advancing by foot and by car but, like a real army, approach by air as well, surveilling Patrisse's neighborhood day and night.

Monte and his friends try to stay safe from these police officers who "s[ee] the enemy as anyone Black or Brown who move[s]." They are imprisoned for minor crimes like tagging and cutting class, and also just for being kids or talking back. As the ACLU later describes, "Gang injunctions make otherwise legal, everyday activities […] illegal for people they target." They note that racial profiling is inevitable with these overly broad laws, and that no white gang in California has ever been targeted (despite evidence that they exist). Republicans and Democrats, both Black and white, supported these "super-predator" laws.

Patrisse again highlights how police harass young Black men simply for existing, not for anything that they have done. That police have never targeted a single white gang—despite the fact that these groups also exist in LA—suggests that their behavior is racially motivated. Patrisse notes that Democrats and Republicans both support these racist laws to suggest that anti-Black violence in the U.S is pervasive and accepted.

Young people are easy targets because they do not have the right to vote. By labeling them criminals, adults can absolve themselves of any responsibility for the youth not having access to resources. And moving money from youth services (schools, arts, sports, etc.) doesn't work—between 1990 and 2010, 10,000 young people will have died in Los Angeles. This is why young people of color looked out for one another. Patrisse's brother Paul didn't get caught in the criminal justice system only because he wasn't allowed to be a kid; after Alton left, he took over all of the house responsibilities and couldn't participate in normal teenage behavior.

Patrisse notes here that the war on drugs policies affected young people the most. In this sense, young men of color face both racism and ageism, or being discriminated against because of their age. The statistics she share backs up the fatal consequences that racism and ageism together can have.

This time, when Monte is arrested, he is 19 and accused of robbery and goes to prison (rather than juvie) for the first time. It takes two months to even locate where he has been imprisoned and, when Cherice is finally allowed to visit him at Twin Towers Detention Center, she finds him emaciated, bruised, and drugged. Patrisse only learns years later, after he is in prison, that Monte was having a schizoaffective episode and hearing voices when he was arrested. No one explains this to his family or tells them that the sheriffs at the jail were the ones who beat him, tied him down, and gave him the wrong drugs for his condition. When Cherice sees him, he can't speak but touches the glass to meet her hand. She tells him she loves him.

Here, Patrisse is highlighting how mentally ill Black people have to navigate both racism and ableism, or discrimination and mistreatment based on having a disability. While the prison doctors and other employees could have treated Monte like the mentally ill person that he was—giving him the appropriate medication for a psychotic episode—they drug him in order to sedate and demean him. This is just another example of Patrisse's stance that prisons exist to control and contain people (especially Black people), not to make people safe.

Monte is facing six years in prison for attempted burglary, a crime he committed because the voices in his head told him to. In prison, he doesn't understand the prisoner-enforced racial segregation, and a Mexican gang member stabs him. After moving to a mental health unit, he isn't stabbed again. (By 2015, there will be 10 times the number of mentally ill patients in prison than there are in psychiatric hospitals.) Monte writes Patrisse incoherent letters every week about crying, Jehovah, and more.

Again, Patrisse is highlighting the way that Black people with disabilities navigate both racism (the Mexican gang member presumably targets him because of his race) and ableism (Monte is imprisoned rather than medically treated for the mental illness that led him to break into someone's house). The prison did take steps to place him in a mental health unit, but the fact that there are far more mentally ill patients in prison than in psychiatric hospitals shows how the criminal justice system criminalizes people with disabilities.

There are no counselors for Patrisse to talk to, but she has friends. Rosa, a dark-skinned Mexican girl, is her first friend when she starts attending a magnet program centered on social justice and the arts at Cleveland High School. In 10th grade, they befriend Cheyenne—whom Patrisse will become very close to—and Carla, who is bold, loud, and queer. Patrisse tells them about Monte and they start writing to him in prison, too, such that he comes to feel like their brother. In his responses to them, Monte is more coherent, indicating that he's been properly medicated. Patrisse is grateful for the family she's creating with her friends.

Patrisse's developing friendships with Rosa, Cheyenne, and Carla are the start of her creating a chosen family in addition to her blood family. That they start writing to Monte shows how important healing with the help of a community is—and will be—for Patrisse. Monte finally receiving the proper medication dosage is comforting to Patrisse, but doesn't change the fact that he is still locked up away from his family.

Monte is released from prison in 2003, two years after Patrisse graduates from high school. Carla drives Patrisse to pick him up from the bus station. Monte is unwell—swollen from all the medication he's on and having a full-blown episode. The prison failed to stabilize him before he left and also failed to give him pants, so he is wearing boxers, a muscle shirt, and shower slippers. Patrisse goes to hug him but he rejects her by simply getting into the car and saying "okay" when she tells him she loves him. The family has planned a Welcome Home Monte party with Monte's siblings and son, but Monte sits in the corner like a zombie while Cherice watches him with pain on her face.

Seeing how unwell Monte looks—and how little clothing he has on—underlines for Patrisse how prisons treat people (especially Black people) as if they are disposable. While prison employees may have treated Monte's mental illness properly at some point, clearly they stopped caring. Despite Monte rejecting her, Patrisse is determined to help him feel seen and appreciated. This is part of her commitment to taking care of her community in the face of deep trauma.

For the next few days, Monte doesn't sleep or eat and acts erratically, rubbing toothpaste on the walls and shouting nonsense. Cherice eventually breaks down crying one day, which is not like her. Monte's episode worsens to the point that nothing he says is coherent. He won't talk to Patrisse but will talk to Bernard, Cherice's new partner (whom she will later marry). Together, they try to convince him to go to the hospital. Patrisse calls for an ambulance but, upon learning he is a felon, the dispatcher tells her she has to call the police.

Here, Patrisse shares the reality of what it is like to live as a Black ex-felon with severe mental illness. Monte struggles with schizoaffective disorder, but also with not being able to receive proper medical care because he is a felon. Despite the challenges this poses for Patrisse and her family, they are committed to helping him heal.

Patrisse and Cherice decide there is no other choice and call the police, explaining Monte's history to law enforcement. When two rookie officers arrive, Patrisse makes them agree not to be violent (after they casually say they will tase him if needed). When Monte sees the officers, he drops to his knees and cries, "Please don't take me back." Patrisse tells the police to leave and holds Monte on the floor as he cries, telling him she's sorry. Bernard then takes Monte for a walk, but he destroys items in the supermarket and movie theater, finally agreeing to go to the hospital, where he stabilizes over the course of three weeks. Patrisse now sees Cherice as the reason they got through that time—her family disavowed her, but Cherice refused to disavow anyone in hers. She held the family together.

Monte's reaction to seeing police officers indicates that he was traumatized at the hands of police and prison employees, highlighting how those institutions do not protect him as a disabled Black man but harass and control him. (That Patrisse and Cherice also only call the police when they have no other option shows how frightened they are that the police will only make things worse.) Patrisse's reflections on how Cherice refused to disavow anyone show how important healing as a family is to both of them—they refuse to abandon their loved ones, no matter how hard things get.

CHAPTER 5: WITNESS

Cleveland High School is located in Reseda, a working-class Latinx neighborhood that's a bit more developed than Van Nuys. The magnet school's humanities program is centered on social justice; Patrisse studies apartheid, communism, Audre Lorde, and more. She learns to challenge racism, sexism, classism, and heteronormativity. She also starts to question the Jehovah's Witness world she grew up in, asking probing questions of the all-male Elders who guide Kingdom Hall, like how they can believe Earth is only 2,000 years old and why a religion would encourage family members to shun one another.

Patrisse's new school is centered on social justice, and she learns new language that describes various forms of oppression. Heteronormativity is the socially accepted attitude that monogamous, heterosexual relationships are normal and natural, and that any other sexual orientation or type of relationship is abnormal. Classism is discrimination against poor and low-income people. All that Patrisse learns reinforces the idea that oppression is intersectional, meaning that people who have multiple marginalized identities (someone who is both non-heterosexual and poor, for instance) are oppressed in unique ways.

The Elders start to say that Satan has gotten Patrisse, which doesn't bother her since she has lived her whole life as a partial exile within the religion. Cherice was, after all, dissociated from the religion (and thrown out of the house) when her parents found out she was pregnant at 16. Cherice stayed in the community, though, and she and her children are allowed to pray at services but not allowed to speak to anyone except the Elders—not even her own family.

Cherice's experience of being thrown out of the house as a pregnant teenager is another example of intersectionality, as she was punished based on both her age and her gender (since a young man likely would not have been punished in the same way). Patrisse has alluded to being called a terrorist as the result of her activism as an adult, and the fact that she's not bothered by the Elders saying Satan has gotten her is a testament to her resilience in the face of insults.

Twenty years after disavowal, Cherice argues for her reinstatement, and the Elders say yes. She is excited, but Patrisse feels anger and disgust after all the years of being treated as dirty. Gabriel showed her a different way to relate to religion, centered on community and love rather than shame. It seems to Patrisse that her mother was never granted this kind of freedom from judgment. Patrisse wants a place of worship that feels honest, that doesn't take the Bible so literally, and that doesn't shame women for their sexuality.

Patrisse is angered by how the Jehovah's Witness tradition treats women's sexuality as sinful or disgusting, an example of how sexism intersects with her experience as a Black woman. She reflects on Gabriel's teachings about what it means to center community and love, and this lesson that will be at the center of her activism in future years.

Patrisse wants a liberatory and purposeful spiritual path—she wants to feel connected like she does when she reads Audre Lorde (whose books she now carries everywhere). She is going through big changes and feels scared but also excited about finding her truest self. Patrisse learns of Cherice's reinstatement mere moments before it happens and feels sick, deciding to hide in the bathroom rather than watch it happen. She can't stand the hypocrisy of men judging her hardworking mother after all they've done. Being a Jehovah's Witness suddenly becomes part of her past, and she sets out to find her own spirituality.

This moment is significant in that Patrisse is taking her first steps toward charting her own direction in life—she wants to prioritize love and acceptance, and Jehovah's Witness does not offer her that. She wants to be free from the sexism she's experienced and witnessed in the community, and to move toward a more liberatory form of spirituality instead.

CHAPTER 6: OUT IN THE WORLD

Patrisse always knew she wasn't straight; though she acted boy-crazy as a kid, she never felt it in her soul. She grew up in the repressive sexual environment of Jehovah's Witness and was taught not to engage in "sinful" behavior such as masturbating. Cleveland High saves her life by creating space for queer students to come out. There is no Gay Straight Alliance, but there is a student group for people with depression called Impact that a lot of queer kids flock to, given the way that homophobia and shame often lead to depression.

Here, Patrisse shifts her focus from race to sexuality. In addition to being Black, she is also queer, which means that she must navigate racism and homophobia simultaneously. Though homophobia is clearly impacting her queer community at school—that they flock to a group for people with depression is telling—they are also coming together to heal and take care of one another, something Patrisse is committed to in all aspects of her life.

Many of Patrisse's cousins attend Cleveland because they live in the neighborhood, including Naomi. Naomi's father, James, is Gabriel's cousin and best friend—they both moved to LA from Louisiana as kids—and Patrisse's relationship with Naomi is just as close. Naomi is outgoing, beautiful, and beloved by her peers, across race and status. She is also a "stud" and comes out as queer (something Patrisse wishes she had the courage to do) and starts dating an older girl. Though their family generally accepts queer people (including a couple of gay aunts), Naomi's mother, Marsha, is deeply homophobic and starts to abuse Naomi after she comes out.

Patrisse refers to Naomi as a "stud," a term usually used to refer to non-heterosexual women whose gender presentation is masculine of center. In sharing Naomi's story, Patrisse highlights that homophobia is another form of prejudice that Black people experience alongside racism.

One day, when Naomi is at track practice, Marsha shows up and beats her in front of her team. She accuses the coach of making Naomi gay by abusing her and threatens to make Naomi transfer schools. When Patrisse hears about it, she looks for Naomi and finds her crying—she doesn't want to leave her peers at Cleveland, whom she considers family. Patrisse says they won't let her go, and they vow to stay together—but when fall rolls around, Marsha has enrolled her elsewhere. Watching Naomi lose the community she had since she was 10 years old, Patrisse realizes that to be young and queer means you can have your whole life taken from you just for being who you are. Twenty girls of color come out while Patrisse is at Cleveland, including herself.

Here, Patrisse is again making the case that queer Black people like herself and Naomi exist at the intersections of homophobia and racism, and that homophobia can be just as much of a threat to their well-being as racism is. Just as Monte faces discrimination simply due to his mental illness and loses many years of his life in prison, Naomi faces mistreatment due to her sexual orientation and has her life ripped away from her. Racism is not the only form of discrimination that has material consequences, Patrisse argues, and for the slogan "Black lives to matter" to be true, all *Black lives have to matter.*

Cleveland feels welcoming partially because it doesn't have metal detectors or police presence—the Columbine shooting hasn't happened yet, and kids of color haven't yet been unjustly punished in its wake. When Patrisse works for the Strategy Center (a nonprofit) as an adult, she will work to end the school-to-prison pipeline that criminalizes children (usually poor people of color) in the effort to create "safe" schools. This will involve metal detectors, surveillance cameras, drug-sniffing dogs, and school suspensions leading to incarceration. The LA school district will have its own $52 million police budget.

The Columbine shooting took place at a high school in Colorado in 1999, when two teenagers killed 13 of their peers and themselves. A lot of schools in the U.S. increased security measures after that, which Patrisse believes led to the targeting of students of color. Patrisse doesn't believe that police presence in schools leads to students being safer—instead, it leads to criminalizing young people of color.

One day in 10th grade, Patrisse tells Naomi that she is bisexual. Naomi is shocked, telling Patrisse they can't *both* be queer. Patrisse can tell this is about Naomi's fear for her—society already harms Black people every day, and she doesn't want Patrisse to be abandoned by her family, too. They are awkward and quiet, and then Patrisse starts telling Naomi about Cheyenne (the basketball player she is dating) and how they talk about spirituality, read books about race and gender, and share poetry—they are each other's world. Naomi starts to understand, and Patrisse leaves feeling strong.

Here, Patrisse is again pointing to how queer Black people face discrimination from multiple angles. Naomi doesn't want Patrisse to come out as queer because she knows firsthand how hard it is to face harassment for both her race and her sexuality.

Patrisse starts to bring Cheyenne back to her home, which is challenging because Patrisse and her family have moved into Bernard's mother's one-bedroom apartment after being evicted with little notice. Bernard's mother sleeps in the bedroom, and Patrisse, Jasmine, Cherice, and Bernard sleep in sleeping bags on the living room floor (Paul has moved out, and Monte is in prison). Patrisse wants a normal life, so she invites Cheyenne over and they act oblivious to the awkwardness—they love each other so much.

That Patrisse's family is forced—by nature of being evicted with little notice—to fit five people into a one-bedroom apartment is yet another example of how Black people are affected by multiple forms of oppression (in this case systemic poverty), not just racism. Patrisse leans on Cheyenne at this time—yet another way that she tries to heal in a world that makes it difficult for Black people (and particularly queer Black people) to do so.

Patrisse and Cheyenne feel protected in the classroom where queer kids hang out at Cleveland, but in the outside world, they face homophobia. Still, they stay together, even when Cheyenne drops out of school. She is poor and doesn't have support getting to school, eating meals, or doing her homework. As for Naomi, she eventually moves in with her father, which helps with her depression. (Queer people whose families reject them are at a high risk of committing suicide.)

Again, Patrisse is highlighting how she and Cheyenne struggle to navigate various types of oppression as two queer Black women growing up in poverty. Patrisse shares the fact that queer people whose families reject them are much more likely to commit suicide to show that, like racism and poverty, homophobia can have fatal consequences.

Carla is kicked out of her home during their junior year, and Patrisse is sick of sharing a one-bedroom apartment with four people. So, they start staying at the homes of their different friends or else sleeping in Carla's car. When they graduate, their teacher Donna Hill invites them to live with her temporarily, but they stay for years. Though they both work (Patrisse at Rite Aid and as a dance teacher), Donna doesn't ask them to pay for rent or food. She teaches them meditation and what it means to live in intentional community, and she becomes Patrisse's first spirit guide. She doesn't want to change them or their queerness, just offer support. (Though Patrisse and Donna lost touch with Cheyenne, they remain close to this day.)

Unlike other adults in Patrisse's life, Donna fully accepts Patrisse for the queer young woman that she is, showing her that it's possible to build loving and healing community even in the face of racism and police violence. In addition to building a queer community at Cleveland, Patrisse is now building chosen family with Donna as a guide, showing her what it can look like to heal in community.

One other important person joins Patrisse's community in high school: Mark Anthony, the man who will become her first husband. Patrisse has never been attracted to a cisgender heterosexual man before. Yet, when she meets him as the 12th-grade TA for his 11th-grade class, she can't help but notice his beauty: he's tall and light-skinned, and he has green eyes. They take the bus after school one day and talk about literature and music, and how they both enjoy journaling. Everyone in their presence can feel the energy between them, but for many years, they channel it into friendship. One day in high school, Patrisse helps him with a photography project about masculinity, and Carla takes a photo of them together, fists raised and hands held, looking out toward their shared destiny.

Patrisse will go on to describe the ups and downs of her relationship with Mark Anthony in later chapters, but here she establishes that he will play an important role in her life. That they connect while Mark Anthony works on a piece about masculinity shows that he is also interested in looking at the intersections of identities—in his case, what it means to be both male and Black.

CHAPTER 7: ALL THE BONES WE COULD FIND

Gabriel comes home from prison when Patrisse is 20 years old and fully immersed in community organizing. After graduation, Donna tells her about a social justice camp where she teaches kids about systems of oppression and how to have compassionate relationships with all people. The campers come from all backgrounds, and the goal is to help them confront all types of difference and discrimination, including stereotypes they hold of one another. In a group discussion with the queer campers, they talk about depression and homelessness, and one young Black man reveals he is HIV positive. They all grieve for how homophobia means sentencing people to death.

Here, Patrisse again engages with intersectionality as she encourages the young campers she works with to understand different forms of discrimination—racism is important to address, but homophobia is, too. Patrisse says that homophobia sentences queer people to death, likely alluding to how inadequate sex education for queer people (such as not teaching the importance of using of condoms) can lead to HIV infection and, eventually, death.

The Strategy Center is one of the organizations that presents to the campers, and Patrisse is immediately drawn to them—especially Kikanza Ramsey, their lead organizer. She is a Black woman with natural hair, and Patrisse wants to be just like her: to challenge inequity and build power. After camp ends, Patrisse joins the Center and, for a year, is trained in how to be an organizer. She reads Mao, Marx, and Lenin; runs spoken-word events; and canvasses for the Bus Riders' Union for fair public transit in LA. Eric Mann—the white antiracist founder of the Center—mentors Patrisse. Eventually, Patrisse gets her friends and also her parents involved, too—the first time she will be in public with both her parents, something her white friends had always experienced.

This moment is important in Patrisse's development as a community organizer—she learned about oppression in high school, but here she is taking steps toward becoming the seasoned activist who will go on to start the Black Lives Matter movement. The Strategy Center is what brings her family together to demonstrate how community organizing and community healing go hand in hand.

At the Center's annual gala, Patrisse and Gabriel dance the night away while Cherice stays seated, smiling. She is happy just to watch. Patrisse moves back in with her family (in a new larger apartment) to help take care of Monte when he returns from prison. He resists taking his meds because they make him sleepy and dull—it will be years before they realize he is being overmedicated. Gabriel also returns from prison, and Patrisse feels closer to him than ever. She rejoins family gatherings and brings her friends along, "demonstrating proudly just what love and community look like in action."

Again, Patrisse shows readers the reality of what it means to be both Black and disabled—though Monte is no longer in prison, he is still being mistreated by healthcare providers. With Gabriel's return, Patrisse starts to merge her blood family and chosen family, explicitly naming how important "love and community" are to her.

Gabriel tells Patrisse how he was less addicted to drugs and more addicted to the lifestyle; he was a poor Southern boy who, as a drug dealer, finally had money and clout. He is trying to hold himself accountable for his actions, and Patrisse wonders who has been accountable to Black people like him, people who were trained to serve others rather than to have their own dreams. When he was young, he wanted to financially support his family and felt the military was his only choice. When he got back from his tours, though, he returned to "a city under siege" and wasn't able to access the benefits of the GI Bill because he was Black.

This moment highlights that Gabriel was not selling drugs for the fun of it, but because he wanted both financial security and a job that made him feel like he had some dignity. It wasn't a poor choice he made, but one he felt forced into by external factors (like the fact that the benefits of the G.I. Bill, like low-cost education and housing for veterans, did not apply to Black people). This is an example of the type of healing presence that Patrisse is committed to being for her family and community—rather than abandoning her father after he went to prison, she wanted to hear his story and understand better why he did what he did.

When Gabriel was discharged in 1984, the rates of unemployment for Black people in the LA region rivaled the rates in apartheid South Africa. Silicon Valley emerged but was almost entirely white. What Black people had access to were underground drug markets. Patrisse believes that Gabriel started using drugs while in the army, and that he began selling and using drugs to survive once he was left to fend for himself at home. Patrisse tries to explain to Gabriel that policies and structures, rather than personal decisions, determined his life's outcome, but she doesn't convince him. Now that racism is no longer written into law (like during Jim Crow), it's hard to point to. Still, "they rewrote the laws, but they didn't rewrite white supremacy."

While 12-step programs have trained Gabriel to believe that he should take responsibility for the personal choices he made to use and sell drugs, Patrisse makes the case that external forces—such as legislative decisions—are really to blame. Patrisse goes on to explain that this is hard for some people to understand because it's been 50 years since the Jim Crow laws that legalized racial segregation were in effect. Still, the coded language that policymakers use (such as "super-predators," referring mostly to young Black and Latinx men) supports Patrisse's point that policymakers still treat Black people like their lives do not matter.

Gabriel wants to have a grounded life and gets a job as a cement truck driver. Patrisse has lunch with him every day and spends each weekend with him and his extended family, sometimes bringing her friends to family baseball games and barbecues. She is thrilled to be connected to that family again and feels so much love. Patrisse attends 12-step meetings with Gabriel again and questions the binary thinking of people being either good or bad. Gabriel could have loved Cherice *and*, due to self-doubt, not showed up the day she wanted to tell him she was pregnant.

Patrisse again makes sense of Gabriel's actions by looking at the external factors that led him to cause harm. He might have not shown up for Cherice when she was pregnant because of his own self-doubt as a Black man who learned from the world that his life did not matter. Patrisse believes in healing in community, which means accepting people—like Gabriel—for all their complexities and trauma.

Patrisse and Gabriel talk about forgiveness and healing, and about Patrisse's dream of building a new world. She tells him about her journey to find God but doesn't talk about her queerness. She senses that he knows but doesn't care—he is so easy-going and nonjudgmental. She feels that his presence in her life is as necessary as air, but, three years later, he disappears again. She is an adult now who has survived homelessness, homophobia, and Gabriel's first incarceration, and she is determined to find him. After calling him 35 times, Patrisse reaches Gabriel and meets him at a rundown motel.

Patrisse again explores her intersectional identities here: she is a poor, queer, Black woman who has had to navigate homelessness, homophobia, and racism. She also again proves her commitment to healing in community—instead of giving up on finding Gabriel, she calls him repeatedly and goes to see him.

Gabriel lets Patrisse in, and he's not well—he looks inebriated and sunken. As Patrisse cries, he tells her he's sorry. She begs him not to leave and he begins to cry. He has been avoiding her because he is ashamed—he was in jail, is out on bail, and is facing seven years in prison. Patrisse says she wants to know everything, and he tells her about how he hated driving the cement truck and how, after years of being bullied for being a weird country kid in LA, he hates himself. They talk about the drug war, how prison is the only intervention he's allowed, and "how it feels to not seem to matter as a person in the world." Since they've known each other, Gabriel has been behind bars for more time than not.

This moment captures the depth of Gabriel's trauma as a poor, Black ex-convict who simply wants to matter as a full person, rather than being treated by the public, police, and policymakers like his life is disposable. By sharing the depth of Gabriel's despair, Patrisse again suggests that he did not start using and selling drugs due to ill intent, but simply as a way to survive. That Patrisse stays, asks questions, and listens shows how committed she is to helping her loved ones heal.

This is the first time Patrisse has seen Gabriel high, and it hurts her, but she refuses to leave. "If he matters to me at all then he has to matter to me at every moment." Gabriel's addiction and its stigma have made him profoundly lonely. Patrisse tells him that relapse is part of recovery, and that she won't leave him. They stay there together all night, crying and holding each other. Gabriel is ultimately sentenced to three years, cutting down his time by volunteering to serve as a first responder to the California wildfires, risking death for freedom.

Patrisse is determined not to abandon Gabriel, even though his actions have hurt her and it's difficult for her to see him inebriated—she demonstrates that loving people means supporting and accepting them even in their darkest moments. This is her way of showing him that she believes it's possible for Black families and communities to heal together in the face of racism and the war on drugs. That LA allows prisoners to have shorter prison sentences if they risk their lives putting out wildfires supports Patrisse's belief that prisons are not mechanisms to keep people safe from criminals. Instead, their purpose is to control and exploit people (especially poor Black people).

Patrisse is 26 when Gabriel comes home from prison. (He will never go back.) Patrisse has built a small family around her with Carla and Mark Anthony (who is now her partner), and they pay for Gabriel's flight home. Her chosen family's love shows her that another world is possible. When they pick Gabriel up from the airport, Patrisse runs to him, full of joy. He lives with her for a week then moves into a shelter, going to 12-step meetings and getting a substance abuse counselor certificate to help other people heal. Patrisse is going to UCLA at the time, the first person on her mother's side to attend college. She and Gabriel spend March through June of 2009 feeling hopeful.

Again, Patrisse demonstrates what it means to heal as a community—she and her chosen family (who are not related to Gabriel) pay for Gabriel's flight and pick him up rather than letting him get home on his own. Gabriel also proves that he is committed to helping fellow addicts heal as he gets his substance abuse counselor certificate.

Then Gabriel's father dies, and he and Patrisse travel to Eunice, Louisiana for the funeral. Eunice is a small town known for Cajun music that Patrisse has visited once before when volunteering in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. That was when she met her grandfather, who welcomed her and made he feel like she came from somewhere. This trip is healing for Patrisse; she sees Gabriel completely at ease for the first time among his loving family. They mourn at the funeral but know they will survive; Eunice teaches them that they matter. Patrisse suggests that Gabriel move back, but he says the pace is too slow.

Patrisse's experience in Eunice is significant in that she sees what it's like to be in a place that shows her that her life matters—as opposed to LA, where police and policymakers show her otherwise. In connecting with her loving extended family, she also learns more about what it means to heal as a family and an extended community.

They leave Eunice—saying goodbye to the "Black people who just love you and openly"—and Patrisse spends the summer watching Gabriel enjoy playing baseball with his family. By now, Patrisse is in love with Mark Anthony. He is kind and accepting of her sexuality, and she feels fully loved. Mark Anthony is dedicated to healing and gets his master's in Chinese medicine. They move into a tiny cottage in Topanga Canyon, surrounded by beauty. Patrisse spends the holiday season making up for the celebrations she and Gabriel missed out on, including a raucous and loving Christmas with their extended family at Vina's.

Here, Patrisse shares more examples of what it can look like for Black people to love one another and heal communally in the face of widespread police violence and racist policies: visiting extended family, forming loving romantic relationships, and celebrating holidays together.

Two days later, Gabriel leaves Patrisse a voicemail saying he doesn't feel well, but she doesn't get it immediately since she's at her mom's house and then drives the long stretch without service on her way back to the Canyon. When she gets home, her landline rings, and it's Cherice—she tells Patrisse that people are saying Gabriel is dead. Patrisse refuses to accept this is true and calls Gabriel's cell repeatedly as Mark Anthony drives them to the shelter where Gabriel had been living. She is in shock. The shelter is surrounded by police cars, and an officer tells her matter-of-factly that her father is dead.

Gabriel's death is devastating for Patrisse because she has only just started to become close to him again after he got released from prison. That the officer emotionlessly tells Patrisse her father is dead supports her belief that policing as an institution treats Black people like their lives are disposable.

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Patrisse sits outside, unable to move, as the medical examiner determines if there was foul play. There wasn't. She goes upstairs to find Gabriel on a stretcher outside his room in boxers and a T-shirt. She keeps his glasses and watch, along with other small items inside the room that proved he had existed. Mournfully, she tells him she loves him and kisses him one final time. Planning the funeral helps dull the pain and, on January 3, 300 people gather to honor Gabriel's life. His sponsor speaks, sharing about how Gabriel was committed to being a better version of himself and was working on making amends. Patrisse also speaks and struggles to be as authentic as Gabriel was, but she shares about his brilliance and how he was flawless and flawed, like everyone.

This is an incredibly painful moment for Patrisse, and yet she proves how committed she is to healing, even in the face of immense trauma and grief. Honoring Gabriel as someone who was both flawless and flawed is evidence of Patrisse's approach to family and community healing—loving and accepting people fully for who they are.

They bury Gabriel a week later with complete military honors, led by his sister Jackie, who works at the Pentagon. By this time, they know that Gabriel died of a heart attack, which Patrisse feels is related to having his heart broken by a country that didn't love him. When a soldier hands her the folded American flag, she thinks about how the U.S. offered him cages instead of compassion—in addition to his cocaine use, his years in prison likely had a direct impact on his heart. Gabriel was part of a generation of Black men who weren't allowed hopes or dreams, yet he kept trying, coming back to her from prison, loving her fiercely. If his life is not possible in the U.S., then the U.S. as a concept is not possible.

As Patrisse tries to make sense of Gabriel's unexpected passing, she ties his heart attack to the experience of living in a racist society. While his drug used probably harmed his health, she believes that the root cause of his heart attack is his experience suffering abuse in prison for many years, along with spending his whole life existing in a racist society that taught him he didn't matter. The implication here is that Gabriel is not responsible for his heart attack, and that Black people generally should not be blamed for their suffering when external factors—such as a violent prison system and racist policies—clearly affect their mental and physical well-being.

CHAPTER 8: ZERO DARK THIRTY

Back in 2006, soon after Gabriel is taken to the fire camp prison, Patrisse wakes up to Cherice telling her that Monte has been arrested again. Patrisse is in college at the time, studying philosophy with a focus on Abrahamic religions. She's also working at Cleveland, running a program with Mark Anthony on trauma and resilience. Monte has been out of prison for three years but unable to find stability, and Patrisse has turned to spirituality and chosen family for support. As an ex-felon, Monte is unable to find even low-wage work and is ineligible for government housing. There are over 4,800 barriers to re-entry in California. "You can have a two-year sentence," explains Patrisse, "but it doesn't mean you're not doing life."

Here, Patrisse shows the day-to-day challenges of being both Black and mentally ill—not only has Monte not been able to find stable work, but he has been arrested again. Patrisse shares that there are over 4,800 barriers to re-enter society as a former prison in California (such as ex-felons being ineligible for certain jobs) in order to stress that even if Monte didn't struggle with mental illness, he would likely end up back in prison. She believes that he is not entirely responsible for his re-arrest, since external factors pushed him toward it. Patrisse is able to handle the challenges of supporting Monte by leaning on her chosen family—a healing force in her life.

Monte moved back in with Cynthia, but, as a poor paraplegic in a wheelchair, she was unable to make sure he was managing his illness. Like many people with schizoaffective disorder, Monte stopped taking his medication and started to behave erratically again. Patrisse and her family tried to convince him to get help, but all of his experiences with doctors had been in prison or in hospitals. He was stabilized and hastily kicked out of these places because he was a poor Black man to be "contained, controlled" instead of healed.

Patrisse again shares the stories of disabled Black people (Monte is disabled by his mental illness and Cynthia is physically disabled) in order to show that Black people with multiple marginalized identities have to navigate more challenges than their able-bodied counterparts. Monte's experience being hastily kicked out of the hospital shows that prisons are not the only institutions that try to contain and control Black people rather than offering them support.

Cherice tells Patrisse on the phone that Monte is in the hospital, though she doesn't know the details. Patrisse feels very afraid. Paul joins them when they visit Monte at the hospital, and Patrisse recites a prayer in Yoruba for Monte that translates to "Warrior for justice, protect my brother." The police guarding his room nonchalantly describe how Monte had gotten into a fender bender with a white woman and, after she called the police due to his yelling, they tased him and shot him with rubber bullets. Patrisse explains that he is mentally ill, confused about why police officers always assume Black people are high.

Here, Patrisse shares another example of how Black people with disabilities face more discrimination than able-bodied Black people, as the white woman Monte hit (and the police officers who arrived at the scene) read his erratic behavior as threatening rather than part of his mental illness. Not only that, but they also tase him and shoot him with rubber bullets despite the fact that he isn't acting violently. With this, Patrisse implies that police are more interested in controlling (and abusing) Black people than protecting them.

Patrisse is angry to learn Monte has been charged with terrorism—a charge that can be used when someone says something threatening that makes you fear for your life. When she talks to Monte, his words are slurred, and he cries uncontrollably—begging for medication—the start of the depression that comes after mania (a typical cycle with this disease). Monte is then imprisoned and classified as a threat to officers, which infuriates Patrisse, since Monte has never hurt a living being. Meanwhile, police have beaten and harassed him for years. Monte is locked in solitary confinement for 23 hours a day, a condition that is known to trigger mental illness. And, with no advocates, this is exactly what happens to Monte.

Monte being charged with terrorism illuminates a central contradiction of the criminal justice system: police and prison employees torture innocent people, and yet those innocent people are the ones accused of causing harm. Again, Monte is punished for having a mental illness rather than supported in treating it, an example of how ableism threatens his well-being in similar ways to racism.

When Patrisse visits Monte for the first time, he again asks for his meds, saying that they have only been giving him Advil. (There is evidence that prisons have used medicine as a weapon, withholding treatments for AIDS, Hep C, and more.) Patrisse doesn't understand why the jailers would do this when they are the ones who diagnosed him, have his records, and would benefit from a more stable Monte. After she approaches the sheriff about it and he blows her off, she realizes that it is probably cheaper for them to just strap Monte down than to offer him proper care.

Here, Patrisse explains how prisons aren't just in the business of controlling and containing people, but are also actively trying to save money in the process—Monte's well-being as a disabled Black man is less of a priority than the prison keeping its budget small. Patrisse uses this personal example to suggest that prisoners (especially poor Black prisoners) are treated as if their lives are disposable.

Patrisse and Cherice go to visit Monte several times over the next three weeks but are turned away because he is "not fit to be seen." Patrisse's friends and family turn out for Monte's hearing, but before it begins, the bailiff tells them flatly that Monte is in very bad condition, strapped to a gurney, face covered in a spit net. Patrisse is shocked and enraged—why are mentally ill poor people who have never hurt anyone treated this way in the U.S.? Even those who *have* caused harm should have had appropriate interventions. Healthcare should center the patient, not the money. Patrisse is furious that people see Monte, with his big heart and broken brain, as disposable.

Patrisse reflects on how police and prison employees have so often treated Monte as if he's a violent criminal (despite the fact that he's never hurt anyone), implying that these institutions do not exist to keep people safe but to contain and control people. That the bailiff tells Patrisse with little affect that her brother is strapped down supports her belief that the criminal justice system is disinterested in treating disabled Black people with respect. But Patrisse knows that Monte is not disposable and is committed to advocating for him.

Patrisse demands to know why Monte isn't getting treatment, but the bailiff doesn't answer. There is a sudden disturbance—Monte is wheeled in in a full psychotic episode, talking to himself. Patrisse is shocked by the "stunning betrayal of human dignity." When white men in the court laugh and look at Monte like he is a freak, Patrisse feels shame, but tries to stay centered. When the judge walks in, she is confused and asks why Monte is in the courtroom. No one answers, not even Monte's public defender. The judge admonishes the police officers, the DA, and Monte's public defender, and postpones the trial date. As the police nonchalantly roll Monte out of the courtroom, he lets out a final scream of "Mom!" As they leave, Patrisse is angry, asking the DA how he could have let that happen, but he just shrugs.

That the judge admonishes the police officers and both lawyers for bringing Monte into the courtroom while in a full-on manic episode affirms Patrisse's sense that the criminal justice system has been treating her disabled brother as less than human. It is hard for her to watch, yet she does not turn away and does everything she can to be a healing presence for Monte throughout the proceedings, even as she cannot touch him.

Cherice starts sobbing and says she feels guilty, which confuses Patrisse, since Cherice has done everything to take care of her kids. But she realizes this is part of being a Black mother—existing between rage, grief, and guilt as the world tries to kill your children. She can't remember Cherice ever being relaxed with her kids, laughing with him, going to the movies, or telling them to do their homework. Patrisse worries that Cherice is "collateral damage in the battle to elevate personal responsibility over everything," feeling she is at fault for Monte's struggles rather than state budget priorities, low wages, police, and lack of access to food. In the face of her mother's misplaced guilt for having a baby young, being poor, and not keeping mental illness out of Monte's brain, Patrisse hugs her and tells her it's not her fault—but she isn't sure it sticks.

Cherice's tears surprise Patrisse and cause her to reflect on how Cherice has internalized the belief that she is personally responsible for Monte's struggles when that is not the case—external factors like racist policies, a low minimum wage, and the war on drugs all contributed to his return to prison. Policymakers intentionally treat Black people as if their lives don't matter, so it's no wonder that Monte—a mentally ill Black man who doesn't have access to adequate healthcare and whose erratic behavior is read as violent—has ended up back in prison. That Patrisse takes the time to understand and contextualize her mother's feelings even after Cherice was not emotionally available for her throughout her childhood shows that Patrisse is committed to not treating Cherice as disposable either.

A new hearing date is set. Patrisse and Cherice meet with the public defender and fire him after he says, with no concern, that Monte could be sentenced to life in prison and that he has no plan to fight it, that this is what Monte wants. (This is Monte's third strike after breaking and entering while manic and supposedly hiding a weapon in his cell while in prison, though he claimed it wasn't his.) Patrisse makes the public defender tell Monte that they will hire a different lawyer. Then, using the organizing skills she learned at the Strategy Center, Patrisse starts a campaign to raise funds.

Public defenders are lawyers that the government provides to people who cannot afford their own lawyers. Patrisse is not shocked to find that the PD they have been assigned is not interested in advocating for Monte—he is just another part of a criminal justice system that treats Black people like their lives are disposable. Patrisse's commitment to raising funds for a new lawyer shows how dedicated she is to fighting for her family.

Patrisse has faith they will find a way, the very same faith that led slaves to run away and Black civil rights protestors to sit down at a whites-only lunch counter. They have two weeks to hire and finance a lawyer, but it's difficult because this is before social media and digital fundraising infrastructure. Monte hears about a lawyer named Peter Corn, and Patrisse meets with him. He makes her uncomfortable and charges $10,000, but they don't have another choice. Alton has money but doesn't share it, and Paul and Jasmine keep distance from the case due to overwhelm, so it's up to Patrisse and Cherice to raise the funds. Patrisse refuses to be intimidated, though that's what the system wants.

Patrisse wants to channel the faith and bravery of runaway slaves and civil rights protestors, implying that raising funds for her disabled Black brother to be fairly represented in court is a similar pursuit for freedom and justice. The price that Peter Corn charges is meant to highlight inequality in the criminal justice system—those with access to money are able to have better representation (and therefore shorter sentences). This is yet another example of how prison is less about punishing criminals and more about punishing poor people (many of whom are Black). While other members of Patrisse's family turn away from Monte in this moment of need, she once again proves her commitment to healing together in community.

The Strategy Center taught Patrisse how to plan and win campaigns. (Just last year, she helped them win a fight against the school district for fining parents $250 each time their kid was late.) Donna taught her how to live a life centered on faith. And her chosen family taught her that nothing could break a community centered on love. Patrisse tells Peter they will get the money and then coordinates community phone banks and letter-writing. In 10 days, they raise $6,000. After Patrisse pushes her to, Cherice asks her parents for the final $4,000, which they eventually provide.

Here, Patrisse proves her dedication to helping Monte avoid a life in prison and also demonstrates her community organizing skills, hinting at the power she will help build with the Black Lives Matter movement later in the book. By enlisting the help of her entire extended Black community, Patrisse proves that she will do whatever it takes to take care of her loved ones in times of need.

When Patrisse meets with Peter, his law partner tells her that he once prosecuted Patrisse's uncle, which reminds her that "for these folks, this is all a chess game." But Peter is a good lawyer and is able to get Monte's second strike struck from the record, preventing life in prison. Monte will have to serve six years, though, and there is no mention of medical treatment. Patrisse feels something like gratitude and visits Monte in prison every month of his sentence, glad that they mostly keep him on the right balance of meds.

Patrisse reflects here on how the legal system is just "a chess game" to lawyers, implying that they have no ethical commitments but merely do whatever they are paid to do. That Patrisse visits Monte every single month of his sentence shows her commitment to collective healing even in the face of immense trauma. She is glad to see that Monte is on the right medication—something that should have been true during his first prison stint as well.

Before Monte comes home, Patrisse and Mark Anthony organize a re-entry team for Monte made up of their chosen family. When he is released in October of 2011, Alton, Paul, and Patrisse drive three hours to pick him up. Patrisse notices all of the prisoners working at the prison, how they are an enslaved workforce, laboring for both corporate America (by making products for companies) and the state of California (by maintaining the prison they're kept in). Monte emerges from a van, greeting his family and then asking if an older Black man with no one to pick him up can ride with them. As they drive home, Monte comments on the beauty of the scenery he has missed.

Patrisse's commitment to building a community of Black people centered on healing pays off—her chosen family shows up to support Monte in a big way. Their "re-entry team" is dedicated to supporting Monte in re-entering society. Patrisse notes that she sees prisoners laboring away in order to underline her point that prisons not only exist to control and contain people, but to exploit them for their labor.

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They stop for food and then drop the older man off in Hollywood—he doesn't know where to go, like so many prisoners with lengthy sentences. Then they drive to Cherice's new Section 8 apartment for a barbecue. Chase greets his father half-heartedly—there's no way to make up the time they lost. They have a calm night and, before Patrisse leaves, Monte asks if she can help him find a job. Little does he know she has been working on this with the re-entry team and has a janitorial job lined up with a social justice non-profit she has been working with. The re-entry team members will make sure Monte gets to work on time.

Patrisse shares the story of the older Black prisoner to show that while Monte is lucky to have a community dedicated to helping him heal from the trauma of his prison experience and get back on his feet, many other Black people are left with very little re-entry support. She notes that Monte's son Chase only greets his father half-heartedly to point out how the prison system deeply affects prisoners' loved ones as well.

Several weeks later, Monte tells Patrisse he's going to be fired. She calls the ED of the organization, who says Monte isn't cut out for the job and won't budge even after Patrisse tries to tell her that they will adjust his dose, and that this is what it means to work with mentally ill people. Monte becomes very depressed, and Cherice can't support him since she's also supporting Chase and Bernard. Jasmine and Alton now live in Las Vegas and convince Cherice to bring Monte and join them—housing is much cheaper, and there are good jobs. Patrisse accepts that her mother is leaving but also feels that the war on gangs is a "forced migration project" and "ethnic cleansing"—people of color out and young white people in.

That Monte is fired because his mental illness makes it hard for him to be a reliable employee shows the particular challenge of navigating the world as a disabled ex-felon. Patrisse writes that the war on gangs is a "forced migration project" or "ethnic cleansing" because, by criminalizing Black people and making it impossible for them to get jobs after prison, these policies force them to leave their homes (where their families have sometimes lived for several generations) for places with more affordable rent or jobs. When Black and Latinx people leave these places, young white people move in, effectively replacing one group with another.

Monte moves to Las Vegas but hates it and returns to LA against Patrisse's advice, moving in with Cynthia. Less than a year later, Cherice calls Patrisse to tell her Monte is off his meds and is destroying Cynthia's home. Mark Anthony and Patrisse drive over there (they now live 45 minutes away in Central LA in an artist's village) and find Paul holding a crying Monte in his arms, broken furniture and plates everywhere. Monte is calm now, but Cynthia rightfully won't let him stay there. Patrisse can tell that Monte hasn't slept in days and takes him home with her and Mark Anthony to rest.

Patrisse continues to share stories that highlight how difficult it is for Monte to navigate mental illness in a society that doesn't offer adequate support for people (especially poor Black people) with disabilities. Still, Patrisse proves that she is as committed as ever to being there for Monte even in his most manic moments, as are Mark Anthony and Paul. They are a community dedicated to helping each other heal.

Cherice and the re-entry team meet the others at Cynthia's, and they all try to convince Monte to go to the hospital. He associates hospitals with prison and has a flashback to his time in LA County Jail (when the only water he had access to was a toilet), and he starts drinking out of Patrisse's. Watching him like this steels Patrisse's resolve to get him to the hospital. Since Monte responds better to men, they call in more male support. Mark Anthony and the other men calmly convince Monte to go to the hospital, telling him they love him and want him well. Mark Anthony goes into the hospital with Monte to get him settled. They have navigated this with no police—"this is what community control looks like."

That Monte starts drinking out of a toilet during a flashback to his time in prison indicates how traumatic his time there was—clearly, the prison system is less interested in supporting inmates with mental illness and more interested in controlling and abusing them. At least six people come to help Monte get to the hospital even when he's lashing out, which shows how committed their community is to supporting one another even in the darkest times. This experiences proves to Patrisse that when communities work together, police aren't needed.

CHAPTER 9: NO ORDINARY LOVE

Back in high school, Mark Anthony and Patrisse first connect over Spike Lee's film *Bamboozled*. The film is about a Black man whose racist white boss at a television network abuses him and claims to be Blacker than he is because he's married to a Black woman. In an attempt to be fired, the man pitches a racist minstrel show to the network as a joke—but they end up loving it, and he comes to embrace it, too. Many of the film's characters die in the end, bolstering the message that the media has taught Black people to hate themselves and that this internalized hatred can lead to death. Patrisse and her senior friends all love the film, and she decides to share it with the juniors (including Mark Anthony), who are studying the "isms."

Patrisse shares the plot of Bamboozled *because it relates to her overarching belief that anti-Black racism can have fatal consequences (beyond police killings)—the main character in the movie dies in the end, after years of internalizing the racism he faced at work and in the wider world. In this sense, Patrisse implies that having the public and employers treat you every day like your life doesn't matter is a subtle yet very real form of violence.*

All of the Black juniors in the humanities program come to the screening, including Mark Anthony. The room is silent afterward; the students absorb the pain rather than the satire. People start to leave, but Mark Anthony stays, his head in his hands. He and Patrisse have never spoken before, but Patrisse asks if he's okay. She holds him as he cries, and students leave the room so they can have privacy. As they sit in silence, the intimacy feels natural, though Patrisse is also confused by her attraction to him. These days, she is only interested in "studs," or masculine women of color. But more than that, she loves imperfect and beautiful people like herself.

The way Patrisse sits with Mark Anthony—someone she doesn't know—as he cries about the brutality of racism is one example of how she supports other Black people in her community. Rather than turning away from Black people in her life who are hurt or struggling, she moves toward them, showing them that they can heal from their trauma together.

After this day, Patrisse and Mark Anthony form a deep friendship not based on sex. Patrisse is still dating Cheyenne, though they are starting to grow apart. Mark Anthony is also reserved, which helps. Their chemistry is undeniable, but they channel it into reading about race together and writing in a shared journal. After graduation, they see each other every day and connect over their shared sense that they can change the world. Mark Anthony's consistency helps Patrisse heal her relationship with Black men—after all, both of her fathers and Monte disappeared. She doesn't yet understand how social forces (job loss and the war on drugs) rather than personal failings led to both Alton and Gabriel's struggles.

While Patrisse initially emotionally supported Mark Anthony, he is also offering her healing and support by showing her that she can trust Black men (like Monte, Alton, and Gabriel) who have disappeared from her life at various points. Patrisse notes again that she knows they did not disappear due to personal failings or malicious intent, but because of external social forces, like high unemployment and racist policies.

No one talks about how trauma drives addiction, or how 75 percent of people who use drugs don't become addicted. The unacknowledged truth is that drug policy is race policy, laws put into effect to demonize Black people who, after the civil rights movement, had won the moral upper hand. After cutting jobs, school budgets, and welfare laws for Black people, policymakers criminalized them for the choices they made out of desperation. Black people started being framed only as criminals; after Hurricane Katrina, for example, news outlets were sympathetic to white people "finding" food while calling Black people "looters." Harm to Black people is framed as their own doing.

Here, Patrisse lays out an argument that policymakers intentionally wrote and implemented war on drugs policies to control and repress Black people who had gained too much after the civil rights movement. This is part of her larger claim that policymakers have historically treated Black people like their lives do not matter. They painted Black people into a corner—taking away social services and then criminalizing them for trying to survive in a country that did not offer them any form of support. Patrisse also talks about Hurricane Katrina, a Category 5 hurricane that hit New Orleans and the Gulf Coast in 2005. The disaster caused unprecedented flooding and at least 1,800 deaths; many of the victims were poor Black people. Patrisse brings this up as an example of how anti-Black racism is baked into all layers of society, including the media.

Despite all of Patrisse's structural analysis, she is just a teenager with a broken heart. This feeling is compounded when, out of the blue that summer after graduation, she doesn't hear from Mark Anthony for two weeks. She writes him a long letter and gives it to his brother. Two days later, Mark Anthony calls and asks to talk. Patrisse is still angry but agrees to it because their "little tribe" is "committed to courageous conversations." Cheyenne had recently left her for one of Patrisse's friends, and Patrisse doesn't want any relationship to end painfully like that again.

Patrisse's use of the phrase "little tribe" shows that, as she grows up, she has started to build a community of people who, in the face of police violence and racist policies, are determined to accept and love one another. Their commitment to one another is apparent in how Patrisse and Mark Anthony engage in "courageous conversations" to process his disappearance. Even though he has caused her harm, she wants to understand rather than drop him from her life.

When Patrisse and Mark Anthony, meet up, Patrisse looks different—she has a shaved head and a new tattoo, physically demonstrating her feminism—and Mark Anthony looks at her approvingly. Mark Anthony has grown out his hair. They are playful at first, and then Mark Anthony apologizes, stating seriously that he will never disappear again. He was feeling too vulnerable with her; she could see parts of him others couldn't. They talk about Black men and how they are never allowed to be afraid—this is the first relationship in which Mark Anthony has cried.

Here, Patrisse and Mark Anthony again show their commitment to working through tensions rather than abandoning each other. They also address how Mark Anthony navigates the pressures of masculinity alongside racism, intersecting identities that make it hard for him to be vulnerable.

After this, Patrisse and Mark Anthony start dating, though it is non-sexual and non-monogamous. The other people they date have to accept that they have a special connection. One of the writers Patrisse and Mark Anthony study together is Emma Goldman—a Russian-born American who wrote in the late 1800s about feminism, homosexuality, and how gender exists on a spectrum. She also believed that "relationships do not come before community liberation," and that people who want freedom must challenge their jealous instincts. The goal is freedom and challenging the American culture that teaches Black people they don't matter.

Patrisse and Mark Anthony continue to exemplify what healing communally can look like for two Black people who have been wounded by their racist society. Their decision to be non-monogamous (meaning that they date other people) is another way that they center community in their lives. To Patrisse, this is related to challenging all of the other oppressive parts of American culture—Black people deserve to be free, which means having the types of relationships they want.

The U.S. shows that Black people don't matter in many ways: no updated history books in Black schools, no safe places for Black kids to play, no grocery stores or decent hospitals in Black neighborhoods, racist media, and bogus arrests. In the face of this, Patrisse and Mark Anthony are committed to a different way of life, including being platonic and radically honest. They don't kiss until 2003, four years after they met. They go to a powerful Talib Kweli concert and, the next day, kiss for hours in his bed. It feels perfect, and Patrisse realizes they are in love. They date for six months, and then Mark Anthony disconnects again, breaking his promise to never disappear. They stay in touch, but their romantic relationship ends.

Patrisse continues to describe how her honest and loving relationship with Mark Anthony challenges American culture teaching Black people (through policy, the media, over-policing, and more) that they do not deserve to have good lives. When Mark Anthony disappears again after promising not to, Patrisse ends their romantic relationship but stays in touch with him—showing that even after being hurt, she does not believe their relationship should be thrown away.

Mark Anthony's abandonment is not as painful as the first time, and Patrisse soon starts dating Starr. They are a stud and a musician, and Patrisse feels at home with them, though they yell together more than they laugh. They are together for five years, but their relationship is volatile. Patrisse misses Mark Anthony's healing energy, and she starts to see him as a friend again. Both Patrisse and Mark Anthony are part of the Ifa tradition, an African spiritual practice that believes in a benevolent supreme being, all elements of nature possessing interconnected souls, and Ancestors who act as guides. Both of them receive divinatory readings around the same time that they are meant to be together.

After experiencing a volatile relationship, Patrisse craves the healing relationship that she had built with Mark Anthony. Their commitment to the Ifa tradition that stresses benevolence and love also points to how healing and care are at the center of Patrisse and Mark Anthony's lives.

As a queer woman, Patrisse feels like a fraud—how could she be destined to be with a man? Ifa also has some heteronormative aspects. Still, Mark Anthony tells her that they always knew it would come to this. Patrisse breaks up with Starr, and Starr's reaction turns abusive: they sends angry texts and leave notes on Patrisse's car. Patrisse reflects that there aren't enough resources for queer people of color when it comes to non-police-involved interventions for partner violence. So many Black women (queer and straight) suffer abuse because calling the police is worse. Patrisse finally blocks Starr fully from her life and restarts her relationship with Mark Anthony, who has agreed to be emotionally available.

Here, Patrisse looks again at how queer Black women exist at the intersections of multiple oppressed identities—fearing violence (and potential homophobia) from the police, queer Black women often stay in abusive relationships. Still, with the support of Mark Anthony (and likely her extended community), Patrisse ends her relationship with Starr.

Patrisse and Mark Anthony move into a cabin in Topanga Canyon, the place where she learns that Gabriel has died. Mark Anthony carries her through that loss, facilitating a year-long healing group with their friends where they meet every week and make art together in honor of Gabriel. In September 2010, they have a commitment ceremony, surrounded by family and friends. They jump the broom, and 15 of their friends jump it, too. After a night of dancing, they go to their favorite diner with all of their friends and then peel off to spend the night alone at a hotel. They each have to go back to school the next day, but they spend the night giving into their unordinary love.

That Patrisse's community participates in a year-long healing process with her in order to collectively process Gabriel's death shows how committed Patrisse's chosen family is to healing together. The joy of Patrisse and Mark Anthony's wedding also highlights the healing power of community. They jump the broom at their wedding, a traditional act performed at Black weddings in which couples jump over a broom after taking their vows to symbolize their union.

CHAPTER 10: DIGNITY AND POWER. NOW.

Monte has always been Patrisse's closest sibling and was her first best friend. It will take her over a decade to unpack the wound of losing him to the system when she was only a teenager. He was tortured by the police so young. ("Torture" is different from "abuse" in that it is premeditated and intentionally used to destroy people and communities.) A 2011 ACLU report proves that terrorism and torture started in the U.S. prison system long before September 11th (and Abu Ghraib). Patrisse reads the report weeks after Monte is released from prison. It is 86 pages and full of testimonies from survivors who prove that torture was pervasive in the LA County Jail for at least two decades.

Abu Ghraib is a prison in Iraq that the U.S. government used to house suspected terrorists during the War on Iraq (following the September 11th attacks). The torture and abuse that guards inflicted on suspects there (many of whom were not formally charged) received criticism from the media as well as opponents of the war. Patrisse argues here that the sort of torture inmates experiments in the LA County Jail prior to September 11, 2001 is a comparable level of violence.

The report tells stories of prisoners being kicked in the testicles, beaten by several deputies at once, and tased for no reason. One wheelchair-bound prisoner was thrown to the floor, beaten, and shot with pepper spray. Patrisse remembers Monte drinking out of the toilet and feels like she can't breathe. Another inmate describes an officer forcing a flashlight into a prisoner's rectum, making him bleed profusely, and how the man didn't say anything because the last person who did was tortured even worse. Many had bones broken or eyes popped out, or were assaulted after losing consciousness. Officers encouraged inmates to rape men they wanted to punish. The staff all knew what was happening, including the sheriff.

The extreme torture and violence that inmates in the LA County Jail faced contributes to Patrisse's belief that prisons exist not only to control and contain people, but also to actively abuse them. That Patrisse can't breathe while thinking of Monte drinking out of the toilet suggests that she now believes this is something that the guards forced him to do as part of their widespread abuse.

Reading this report helps Patrisse understand more fully what happened to Monte. His story is not included, but he is a survivor, and so is their family. She remembers when Cherice desperately called the jails the first time Monte was arrested and how no one would tell her where he was being held. Patrisse starts to cry and calls Cherice and Monte, explaining that the ACLU is suing the LA County Jail for torturing people. After a pause, Cherice says, "Thank God," and Monte whispers, "Finally."

That no one would tell Cherice where Monte was being held is an example of how the prison system treats inmates (many of whom are poor and Black, like Patrisse's family) as if their lives do not matter. Patrisse writing that their family are survivors is a nod to how prisoners' families and loved ones also face the consequences of this sort of abuse (such as supporting Monte through his PTSD flashbacks).

Patrisse knows immediately that she wants to make an art piece about the report. She gathers four performer friends and blows the pages of the report up to 8 x 11 feet. She records audio of Cherice's written notes on her phone calls to the jail and asks a local art space if they will host her piece, *Stained*. When people enter, they see testimonies on the walls, stories of brutal torture. The performers are separated by caution tape and stand alone, as if in solitary confinement. One exercises until he collapses, one alternates between crying and laughing, one paces in circles, one jumps continuously. The recorded audio of Cherice's notes plays, along with recordings of the sheriff being questioned about how he let this happen.

With this art piece, Patrisse is highlighting multiple forms of violence that prisons enact on inmates (many of whom are poor and Black): violently torturing them, isolating them in solitary confinement, caging them so they can't exercise or move, and negatively affecting their mental health. Including audio recordings of Cherice's notes from trying to locate Monte shows, again, how inmates being treated as disposable deeply affects families as well.

After the show tours for two years, Patrisse's friend from the Strategy Center encourages her to do more to make sure this violence stops. In September 2012, they launch a campaign: The Coalition to End Sheriff Violence. To achieve their goal of establishing civilian oversight of the sheriff's department, Patrisse realizes, they need to start their own organization. Though she loves the Strategy Center and has learned so much there—including their successful campaign to stop truancy fines—she starts her own non-profit, Dignity and Power Now. And in 2016, they win their campaign.

Though Patrisse has been a community organizer for several years, this is the start of her leaning into her leadership and starting her own campaign, followed by her own organization. That she is part of a successful campaign to end truancy fines for students and then successfully leads the campaign to establish civilian oversight of the sheriff's department shows that the type of organizing she's doing has the power to bring about real change.

CHAPTER 11: BLACK LIVES MATTER

Patrisse hears about **Trayvon Martin** in 2012 while going through Facebook. The story is that a white man (how he at first self-identified) killed a 17-year-old Black boy and is not going to be charged. Patrisse is furious and organizes a multiracial group of friends to come over and process the news together. The story spreads, and Al Sharpton holds a huge rally in New York, demanding the killer's arrest. The Dream Defenders in Florida amplify the call using social media and direct action, and weeks later, the killer is arrested. His history of violence comes to light, too (attacking police and girlfriends, molesting his cousin, making endless calls to report "suspicious Black males"), though he was never called a terrorist.

Patrisse notes that Trayvon Martin's killer initially self-identified as white to suggest that he only began to identify at Latinx to appear more like a victim in court. She also does not mention his name (George Zimmerman) throughout the book, likely as an attempt to decenter him from the story and center Trayvon instead. That he is not being charged after killing an innocent young Black man emphasizes to Patrisse how the criminal justice system is more interested in protecting perpetrators than keeping Black people safe. Patrisse also shares Zimmerman's history of domestic violence to show that sexism and racism can go hand in hand.

On July 13, 2013—the day of **Trayvon**'s killer's trial—Patrisse drives 11 hours with Mark Anthony and a few of their friends to visit Richie, an 18-year-old who is serving a decade in prison for a nonviolent robbery (Patrisse wonders how long Trayvon's killer will serve). Richie stood out in the restorative justice programming they led at Cleveland a few years ago for Black boys who often got in trouble. Data shows that suspending students from school doesn't inspire them to change their behavior (and, in fact, alienates them from their community), and that Black kids are suspended at four times the rate of white kids for the same behavior. Seven million kids in the U.S. were suspended in the U.S. from 2011–2012 alone, punishments that did not address external factors like housing or food insecurity that lead to misbehavior.

Patrisse juxtaposes Richie's sentence (18 years for a nonviolent robbery) with what Trayvon's killer might get, suggesting that she senses the bad news to come. She also analyzes data related to school suspensions to argue that school punishments are one part of a racist criminal justice system that seeks to control Black people rather than protect them. This type of punishment does not address the root causes—polices that exacerbate housing and food insecurities and treat poor Black people like they are disposable.

The programming Patrisse and Mark Anthony ran at Cleveland was about elevating students' humanity. They sat in circle with the boys, talking about racism and sexism, addiction, their dreams. Richie was the intellectual and the artist in the group and, after becoming both a feminist and the editor of the school newspaper, published a story about honoring vaginas and stopping sexual assault as front-page news (along with a picture of a vulva). He was threatened with suspension but stood his ground, and the story ended up getting national attention. When he was 18, he wanted space from the toxic masculinity in his home and found his own apartment and a good job in the school system working with kids like him.

Patrisse and Mark Anthony's restorative justice program is one example of how Patrisse puts into practice her commitment to Black people healing together in community—just because these students have misbehaved does not mean that they should be treated as if they are lost causes. Richie's growth after participating in the program supports Patrisse's belief that he was not intentionally acting out but was pushed to act out due to external factors. He also began to embrace the intersectionality of identity, amplifying the voices of women survivors of sexual assault.

Then the district cut Richie's hours, leaving him without a living wage. He couldn't find another job given his erratic hours, and his rent was due—so, in desperation, he robbed someone. Afterward, he told Patrisse he had his father's voice in his head: "Men don't ask for help." Though he likely scared someone, he didn't hurt them—but, like Monte, he became another nonviolent Black man in prison. Meanwhile, killer police officers don't get charged, and the white rapist Brock Turner only got sentenced to six months because "prison wasn't for him"—proof that it was made for Black people like Richie. Patrisse sees this as clear evidence that prisons should be shut down.

Richie's story—like Gabriel's—is an example of external factors forcing a person to make tough choices. While the criminal justice system holds Richie accountable for robbing someone, he only did so because the school system cut his hours, and he felt he had no other way to make rent. That he felt he couldn't ask for help because he was a man shows the intersectionality of identity—he struggles with both racism and the pressure to appear tough and masculine. Patrisse makes the point that a white rapist was sentenced to six months when Richie was sentenced to 18 years to suggest that prisons are not about keeping people safe, but controlling and punishing people (specifically those who are poor and Black).

Patrisse, Mark Anthony, and Richie's friends sit with Richie in the prison visiting room and talk about what will happen to **Trayvon**'s killer. They talk optimistically about it—surely he will be punished. He willfully ignored a 911 operator's orders, chasing down and killing a Black boy who was just walking home wearing a hood and carrying iced tea and Skittles. He shot Trayvon, claiming he had a right to stand his ground—and, based on how much time and pressure it took to get him arrested, a jury might agree. After all, the story didn't make front-page news; Patrisse saw it in a blog post.

Patrisse shares more details about Trayvon Martin's death to show how cut-and-dry she believes the case against Zimmerman is. Yet she also acknowledges that the media and the public at first didn't seem to care—which could suggest that the jury will let him get away with treating a Black person as disposable.

The story reminds Patrisse of Emmett Till's murder in 1955. She also thinks of Monte's son Chase, who is 14 when **Trayvon** is killed—will he be killed with no accountability? When anyone in Van Nuys committed a crime, they were held accountable with searchlights, metal detectors, and sweeps of schoolchildren. Where were the policymakers when white men harmed them? The only reason people know about Trayvon is because of the Dream Defenders and Al Sharpton. Against all odds, Patrisse, Mark Anthony, Richie's friends, and Richie hold onto hope. The visit with Richie ends, and they go to their motel.

Emmett Till was a 14-year-old Black boy who was lynched in Mississippi in 1955. After his killers were acquitted, he became an icon for the civil rights movement (similar to Trayvon Martin's role in the Black Lives Matter movement). Patrisse reflects on the racist nature of police responses to crimes—police officers do not hold white men accountable yet terrorize Black and Latinx communities with searchlights and school sweeps. The broader public isn't much better—no one seemed to care about Trayvon until Black activists intentionally raised awareness.

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The prison is in Susanville, a town north of the Bay Area where half the residents are in prison. It is a small working-class town whose reported diversity is entirely due to its Black prisoner population. Susanville's growth industry is prisons—half of the adults work at the two facilities (not including the labor performed by the prisoners themselves, shipped from LA County and the Bay). There are American flags everywhere and random soldiers who are stationed nearby—the town is committed to war and crime because, without these things, their town's economy would collapse.

Patrisse shares context about Susanville in order to highlight how prisons exist to control and contain Black people, but also to actively exploit them—prisons are part of an industry that mostly benefits white people.

Patrisse and Richie's friends pick up microwavable dinners. Back at the motel, Patrisse checks Facebook and sees updates come in—**Trayvon**'s killer is acquitted of all charges. She goes into shock and then denial before realizing it's true—and then she feels ashamed that they couldn't stop this from happening. She cries but feels like she shouldn't. Instead, she should be strong, especially since the people she's with (Richie's friends) were her mentees at Cleveland, young people she taught to be strong and to fight for their community. She wants to protect them, to make sure they have long, healthy lives.

Patrisse realizes in the wake of Zimmerman's acquittal that, despite her hope to the contrary, the criminal justice system indeed exists to protect white (and white-presenting) people and police officers at the expense of Black people. While she feels shocked and angry at this blatant example of racism, she also immediately turns her attention to the young Black people she is with, wishing that she could protect them. This is an example of Patrisse's deep commitment to healing with her Black community.

Patrisse and Richie's friends all weep together—and then Patrisse gets angry. It makes no sense that Richie could be locked up for 10 years without hurting anyone, but **Trayvon**'s killer gets to go home. Just then, she sees that her friend Alicia (whom she met seven years ago at a political gathering) has written a Facebook post telling people to stop saying they're not surprised—"I will continue to be surprised at how little Black lives matter." She will never give up on Black life. Patrisse writes a comment that simply says "#BlackLivesMatter." They start to strategize on a campaign together, looping in Opal Tometi, a Black immigration organizer in New York. They create a website and social media accounts, hoping the world will finally understand that Black lives matter. They begin to organize.

This is the climax of the book, when the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement officially begins. Alicia notes in her post that people are saying they are not surprised that Trayvon's killer was found not guilty, the implication being that this sort of police violence is pervasive, as Patrisse has been suggesting throughout the book. Patrisse's response shows that although the world treats Black people like their lives are disposable, she is committed to doing the opposite.

CHAPTER 12: RAID

Patrisse and Mark Anthony lived for a time in St. Elmo's, a community started by a Black artist and his nephew in 1969. The artist and his nephew worked with their Black councilman to create a place during the Vietnam War where life could be lived in peace, planting redwoods and gardens that are still there. Over the years, the residents painted murals and told the world that everything that was beautiful was possible. This was the one place Patrisse felt she could live safely and fully as herself, a feeling that was taken from her during the raids that came after she demanded that police stop killing Black people.

Patrisse describes the history of St. Elmo's in order to highlight the type of community she has chosen to live in—one that prioritizes making artists of color feel safe in a racist country that makes them feel so unsafe most of the time. She also notes that the police took this sense of safety was taken from her, as they're part of an institution that only claims to care about safety while targeting people of color.

It is summer 2013, and police **helicopters** are flying above Patrisse's cottage in St. Elmo's. Patrisse and Mark Anthony have two cottages there and have used them to help Monte heal. Lately, Dignity and Power Now has been demanding that the sheriff's department be held accountable but also supporting the BLM movement, which makes them a police target. St. Elmo's was raided earlier in the year (the first time police had entered the village), before BLM began but after protests had started across the U.S.

As in other sections of the book, helicopters symbolize the power and pervasiveness of the police presence in Black and Latinx communities in LA—in addition to police cars, helicopters ensure that Patrisse's community is surveilled from every angle. Patrisse shares about the activism work she's been engaging in to show that none of it is criminal or violent, yet helicopters are still flying low over her house, implying that any sort of demand for police accountability will be met with more surveillance and possibly violence.

Patrisse, her friend and fellow BLM activist JT, and his daughter hide in a corner of the cottage as the **helicopters** get louder. They aren't sure if they are actively being monitored or just being reminded that, as people of color, they can be taken or killed at any time. This reality has been proven over the years: Oscar Grant, Amadou Diallo, Sean Bell, and Clifford Glover were all killed by police while simply living their lives. Other people who understood this reality include Ida B. Wells when she exposed the names of white lynch mobs, the Deacons of Defense when they protected Black people from white vigilantes and police in the 1960s, and the Black Panthers when they challenged the Oakland Police Department in 1966.

Patrisse reflects more on how the helicopters are part of the police force's attempt to intimidate her and remind her that they do not care about her safety. She shares examples of Black people who have been killed by police without doing anything wrong to suggest that police are uninterested in protecting people, only in controlling them. She names other historical figures and organizations who tried to hold police accountable in order to show that this is not a new issue—she believes that Black people have been treated like their lives don't matter for all of U.S. history.

Patrisse and her community are the progeny of these freedom fighters, while police are the progeny of slave catchers—no isolated act of decency can change that. Their goal is to control and kill, not to protect, as evidenced by gang policy doing nothing to end violence and 50 percent of all homicides in the U.S. going unsolved. Someone is killed by police in California every 72 hours, and 63 percent of victims are Black or Latinx. Black people are only six percent of California's population, yet they are killed at five times the rate of white people and three times the rate of Latinx people.

Historically speaking, police forces in the U.S. emerged from the "slave patrols" in the South in the early 1700s that were organized to stop slave revolts and catch runaway slaves. Patrisse shares this history to contextualize her claim that prisons and policing are institutions that exist to control and kill, not to keep people safe. She also shares data that proves gang policy did nothing to actually address violence, especially violence against Black and Latinx people—which suggests that policymakers, like police, also cared less about public safety and more about controlling people of color.

Patrisse shares these statistics whenever she is asked to speak somewhere, noting that there aren't stats for all of the Black people who indirectly lose their lives due to racism, such as grief leading to addiction, which leads to cirrhosis, which leads to death. These undocumented and slow deaths come from being told daily that your life doesn't matter. When police kill, the assumption is that they did so in the name of public safety rather than due to poor training and racism. JT and Patrisse discuss this as the **helicopters** hover, and they know that even if the police aren't there for Patrisse, they're there for another Black or brown person.

Like usual, Patrisse critiques the overt violence of the police alongside the more subtle violence of everyday racism stemming from policymakers and the public—for Black people, addiction and health issues are inherently tied to trying to survive in a racist society. Patrisse does not believe that police kill in order to keep people safe, but because they don't care about Black people's lives.

Patrisse will not be shocked when police use tear gas and tanks against people protesting the death of Michael Brown in Ferguson. The federal government has provided these weapons to local police departments for decades. (LA was the first place where a SWAT raid was undertaken.) Sitting in her cottage, Patrisse tries to stay alive and prepares herself for the news of another child being killed or arrested and tortured the way Monte was. Have any Black kids been given a slap on the wrist or pointed toward therapy? Why aren't people like **Trayvon**, Clifford Glover, or Rekia Boyd given a first chance or a second? Rekia was simply talking with friends in a Chicago park when shot and killed by a cop.

Michael Brown was killed by a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri in 2014, leading to massive protests. (Patrisse will describe Michael Brown's death in more detail in later chapters.) Patrisse juxtaposes how the criminal justice system treats Black children like they are inherently criminal with how non-Black children are often given a slap on the wrist or empathetically encouraged to seek therapy—again suggesting that prisons do not exist to protect Black people but to control them.

Someone bangs on the door, and Patrisse answers to protect JT since he is dark-skinned and large. If **Trayvon**, Oscar Grant, and Ramarley Graham could be killed for no real reason, JT could be, too. Patrisse hugs JT's daughter and then slips outside. She knows that police can't come in without a warrant, and that they've done nothing criminal—just protesting, organizing meetings, painting murals, crying, and demanding justice. Still, she's terrified to find 12 police officers in riot gear pointing guns at her home. A Latinx officer explains that someone tried to shoot up the police station and may be hiding in the village. Patrisse says no one is here, and the cop asks why she's shaking. She says that she is scared because of the guns, but that there is no one here, and goes back inside.

Patrisse is worried that the police will target JT because she believes that large, dark-skinned Black men have historically been treated as inherently violent just for existing. The fact that there are 12 police officers in full riot gear pointing guns directly at Patrisse based on the incorrect belief that someone might be hiding inside shows how police are primed to treat innocent Black people as violent and dangerous.

Inside, Patrisse and JT hug and try to breathe. They hear the police talking loudly outside about how Patrisse must be afraid because someone inside is manipulating her. Patrisse knows they are inventing a reason to gain entry without a warrant. The police bang on the door, telling them to come outside, and Patrisse wonders if they will be killed. They decide that JT and his daughter should leave together, hoping that they won't kill him if he's with her. They are all immediately surrounded at gunpoint and forced into the courtyard outside while other officers raid Patrisse's house and search it for four hours. Patrisse doesn't know what they take or destroy—she is treated like a prisoner in a cell who can be removed at will. After this, she moves out.

Apart from when Patrisse was handcuffed in front of her class in middle school for smoking marijuana, this is her first personal experience of being targeted and intimidated by police, and it solidifies her belief that police do not think Black people are worthy of basic respect or decency. There is no one hiding in Patrisse's home, and she has done nothing wrong, yet she is treated like a criminal. More than that, JT's six-year-old daughter is also treated as a criminal, even though she is a child. The implication here is that a non-Black child would not have been treated this way. That the police invent a reason to come inside and raid Patrisse's home for hours shows how disinterested they are in treating her with respect.

The first time police entered St. Elmo's was in February 2013. Patrisse got home from a late-night comedy show and found Mark Anthony handcuffed outside and in pajamas. Before this, no one locked their doors in St. Elmo's, so a couple police officers had easily gained entry and dragged him out of bed. They said he matched the description of someone committing robberies in the area. Patrisse was furious, wondering how many white people were dragged out of bed after Dylann Roof massacred people in prayer, when Ted Bundy was killing women, or after Columbine. (Most mass shootings in the U.S. are committed by white men.) Patrisse explained that Mark Anthony was her husband, and the police let him go before spending two hours asking questions to find a reason to take him away. Their tactics remind Patrisse of the SS and the KGB, of real terrorists.

The SS was a Nazi paramilitary organization, and the KGB was the Soviet Union's main security agency. Both organizations were known for enacting extreme amounts of violence on innocent people. Patrisse compares the police who raided her house to these "terrorist" organizations because she believes they were more interested in harassing Mark Anthony than actually keeping the community safe.

CHAPTER 13: A CALL, A RESPONSE

Back in summer 2013, Patrisse and Alicia are talking regularly and decide to turn #BlackLivesMatter into a movement that raises awareness of the deadliest parts of anti-Black racism. The seeds are already there—the Dream Defenders walked 40 miles to the Florida statehouse and occupied it, organizers in New York started the Million Hoodies Movement, and the Black Youth Project 100 in Chicago started developing leaders. Some Black people worry that "Black Lives Matter" is too radical a phrase, but they persist. Opal organizes a huge sit-in in New York, and Alicia leads a march through Oakland where the police attack everyone after a couple protestors aren't peaceful.

Patrisse describes all of the direct actions taking place across the country as a way to show the momentum of the Black Lives Matter movement—Black lives may not matter now, but all of these seeds of resistance suggest that there is hope that conditions could change. While, in the past, they may have watered down their demands or rhetoric, Patrisse and the other organizers feel that it's time to state unequivocally that Black Lives Matter.

In LA, Patrisse prepares for what will be the largest march she's planned. She brings together a march committee of mostly Black women, a crew that will become the core of BLM-Los Angeles. Their list of demands includes federal charges against **Trayvon**'s killer, the release of a Black woman who was imprisoned for defending herself against an abusive husband, no new jail or prison construction, and community control over law enforcement. They decide to march in Beverly Hills, where wealthy white people will hear their message.

BLM-Los Angeles's demands show that, to Patrisse and her fellow organizers, Black lives will only matter when prisons and policing lose their power and actually become tools for keeping communities safe rather than making them less safe. Patrisse names that the group is mostly Black women as an attempt to challenge the sexist narrative that the Black Lives Matter movement was started and led by Black men.

Patrisse reaches out to all of the local progressive groups. The team discusses how to get across their goals of healing and building power. They want to aim for a world without punishment or prisons, a world where they know they will live long, fulfilling lives. They want lives filled with healthy food and rest rather than heart attacks, strokes, and diabetes. They deserve quality housing without asbestos, lead-contaminated water, or the sense that they are living in a cage. They deserve love.

Patrisse reaching out to all of the local progressive groups shows that anti-Black racism intersects with so many other struggles—yes, they want a world without prisons (since inmates are disproportionately Black), but they also want healthy food, adequate healthcare, and safe housing. Policymakers choosing to disinvest in Black communities—and public services at large—is another way of showing that Black lives don't matter to them.

The group takes their message to the march. Bullhorn in hand, Patrisse tells the people having brunch on Rodeo Drive that it's time for them to confront police violence. As **helicopters** hover, she asks them to remember **Trayvon** and all of the dead, to know that their lives "mattered then and they matter now," to understand that Black people were not born to bury their children. She asks that they stop what they're doing for a moment to hold space for Trayvon and his grieving parents. The police move closer and, for a minute, Patrisse is scared—but then she sees all of the white people eating outside bow their heads.

While Patrisse is not sure what to expect when she appeals to the emotions of the white people eating brunch outside along the route of the march, she is amazed to notice that they all pause what they are doing and bow their heads in honor of Trayvon—a clear sign that the Black Lives Matter movement is gaining momentum, and that change is possible. The police are present at this march and, though they scare Patrisse, she feels buoyed by the presence of her fellow protestors and the support of the spectators bowing their heads. This underlines the shrinking power of the police in the face of the movement's growing power.

The conversation between Patrisse, Alicia, and Opal continues, mostly with women, many of whom are queer and trans. They have 11 guiding principles that include ending all violence against Black people, celebrating differences in the Black community (gender, sexuality, disability, age, etc.), and practicing empathy. They talk about how to infuse art into their work and build out local and national demands that center on slashing police budgets and investing in jobs, schools, and parks. They are clear that Black lives matter both by virtue of their birth and the work Black people have put into people, systems and structures that did not respect them.

Black Lives Matter's commitment to centering the experiences of queer and trans Black women is an attempt to counter the way that, in daily life, these women exist at the intersections of many forms of oppression. They also name age and disability as important markers of difference to keep in mind as older, disabled people also face particular forms of discrimination. That they also include practicing empathy as a core principle shows how healing is at the center of the movement, much as it is as the center of Patrisse's life.

The first year of BLM comes in fits and starts. More and more Black people are killed: in Michigan, a man kills Renisha McBride (age 19) after she gets into a car accident and seeks help. A cop kills John Crawford (age 22) after he bought a toy gun from Walmart. And police suffocate Eric Garner to death while he calls out "*I can't breathe. I can't breathe*." The public still views each event as separate rather than as part of a movement that says Black Lives Do Not Matter. The organizers want Americans to understand that Black people are the only people in the U.S. to have ever been legally designated as not human, which is why it's imperative that people say Black Lives Matter.

Patrisse shares more real-life examples of innocent Black people being killed by police and vigilantes to show how pervasive this type of anti-Black violence is. When Patrisse writes that Black people are the only Americans to have ever been legally designated as not human, she is likely referring to how, during slavery, Black people were legally designated property and were each considered three-fifths of a person for voting purposes in the 1700s.

On August 9, 2014, the American Movement *Against* Black Lives begins with the police killing of 18-year-old Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. Darren Wilson chases this unarmed Black man for an unknown reason and shoots him four times, including in the top of the head. His body was left on the street in the sun for four and a half hours. After, Wilson claims that he felt his life was in danger. Mike reminds Patrisse of Monte. This story shocks many, but not Patrisse; she is used to these kinds of public assaults.

The American Movement Against Black Lives is not a formal, organized movement, but the stylized way that Patrisse chooses to refer to the level of police violence that emerged in Ferguson in the wake of Michael Brown's death. Patrisse believes that Mike being shot and killed is example enough of racist police violence, but the fact that his body was left to lie on the street for four and a half hours underlines her point that Black people are treated as less than human.

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Ferguson had been plagued by anti-Black racism long before Mike Brown was killed. Ferguson has 21,000 residents, most of whom are poor and Black, and police treated them like they didn't matter. *The Atlantic* even compared their police force to mafia bosses. They had a game centered on seeing who could issue the most citations (mostly to Black people). Citations became fines, which then became jail time, even for people receiving their first parking infraction. And the city refused to offer payment plans. *The Atlantic* also described police arresting a Black man cooling off in his car after playing basketball at a park, charging him with random code violations like providing the short form of his first name and not wearing a seatbelt (while parked).

Here, Patrisse again makes the case that police violence is only one piece of how Black people in the U.S. are treated as if their lives do not matter—unjust policies are just as detrimental to Black people's lives. Simple parking citations leading to jail time (as they do in Ferguson) is a more subtle yet deeply impactful way of controlling and punishing poor Black people.

After Jim Crow ended, politicians found other ways to weave anti-Black racism into legislation. And Black people did not rise up, because even they started to call one another "thugs" and "welfare queens." Slavery and Jim Crow made public spectacle of Black torture, and the 1990s and 2000s brought the idea that if Black people did what they were told, they could become the next Oprah, LeBron, or Obama. The reality was, though, that most people were too busy fighting things like asset forfeiture, a law that allowed police to seize property (cash, cars, homes) if they suspected someone of selling drugs. They would then use the money from the seized assets to purchase military equipment, such as the weapons the Ferguson police use against protestors.

Furthering her argument about how policies can be just as racist as police officers, Patrisse notes that after Jim Crow ended, politicians used more coded language to continue to oppress Black people. This led to war on drugs policies (such as asset forfeiture) which targeted Black people simply for being suspected of selling drugs. The Black Lives Matter movement is committed to addressing policies alongside policing and prisons.

CHAPTER 14: #SAYHERNAME

Patrisse, Opal, Alicia, and Darnell Moore (a professor who will help build out the BLM network) decide they have to go to Ferguson. Some organizers on the ground tell them to come, but others say they should only come if they can offer medical, legal, policy, or reporting support. They decide to organize a Freedom Ride to Ferguson in two weeks, coordinating buses from Northern and Southern California, Texas, New York, and more. Hundreds join a national planning call, and they raise $50,000 for buses and food.

That Patrisse and the other organizers are able to coordinate buses from across the country, fundraise $50,000, and plan a call with hundreds of people all in just two weeks' time shows the power and momentum of the Black Lives Matter movement.

Patrisse, Darnell, and friends fly to St. Louis a week early and then drive to Ferguson, which feels like an occupied zone. Local police and the National Guard are there with tanks on street corners. They notice how much money is spent on community repression rather than support. They listen to the car radio and are surprised to hear local newscasters talking about Mike Brown with love. Patrisse wonders, "Could it be that we matter?" They talk about how **Trayvon** was killed in a gated community, a place meant to separate people from one another, whereas Mike was known and loved in Ferguson. Out the windows, they see people protesting and wearing Mike Brown T-shirts.

The extreme police response to the protests in Ferguson—National Guard tanks on every corner—shows how law enforcement is not about keeping Black people safe but about containing and controlling them. Patrisse is amazed to see how locals are referring to Mike Brown with love and is reminded of the power of Black community coming together to heal one another in the face of external threats.

Patrisse, Darnell, and others meet up with organizers at Harris Stowe University (the local HBCU), and the president of the school says they can use the campus as a meeting place for the Riders. They are thrilled and identify hotels where people can stay before meeting even more organizers from Dream Defenders and BYP 100. They head back to LA, feeling like they have the lay of the land. Two days before the ride, the Harris Stowe organizers back out of their promise, but a pastor in St. Louis calls and says they can use his church as the meeting place. Patrisse pauses and then notes that many of the Riders are queer and trans, but he says all are welcome.

The amount of coordination involved in the Freedom Ride to Ferguson planning suggests that BLM has become a serious and strategic movement. Still, that Harris Stowe backs out of supporting them shows that people are still wary of supporting a movement that seems radical or controversial. When a pastor offers up his church as their new meeting place, Patrisse pauses because she worries that this man will discriminate against the queer and trans members of their group.

The Riders send out a final press release and hold a call with 600 organizers across the U.S. The buses leave the Thursday of Labor Day weekend—it will take 38 hours for Californians to arrive. Many Black trans women risk their lives to travel through the Midwest and, after, tell Patrisse and the other leaders that their presence should have been made more visible. Black trans women are the most criminalized people on the planet. After this, the leaders make sure to always name that they are queer- and trans-led, and to work with Black trans organizations. BLM also decides to always have an evolving political framework.

Patrisse notes that the Black trans women are risking their lives to travel through the Midwest, implying that they are safer from harassment or physical violence in their more progressive coastal cities. Patrisse's attunement to the particular intersections of oppression that Black trans women face is another example of her commitment to healing together in community. She accepts that she and other cisgender leaders did not do enough to amplify their stories and commits to doing better.

Everyone arrives at the church on Friday night, and Patrisse meets Opal for the first time—they are happy but also somber because they know there's work to do. Darnell and Patrisse welcome everyone and review the safety guidelines. The next day, they are in the streets by 10 a.m., standing in front of tanks. Palestinian protestors have taught them to douse their eyes in milk after tear gas attacks. That evening, some of them join a peaceful occupation of the police station, calling for Darren Wilson to be charged (which he never will be). Others (mostly women) use the church to rest, including locals who have been protesting for four weeks.

Patrisse uses the fact that Darren Wilson is never charged for killing Mike Brown to suggest that law enforcement and public officials treat Black people as expendable. Despite all of the police violence at the protests, Patrisse and the other organizers show that healing is also an important part of their movement, opening up the church for people to simply rest.

In the church, they process what's happening: two Black women have recently been imprisoned for defending themselves against abuse. They talk about their own experiences, too—poverty, abuse, police violence, feeling unseen in the movement despite the fact that 80 percent of protestors in Ferguson are women. The media, of course, focus on the men. This will continue to be true as news outlets cover the growing BLM movement; Patrisse, Alicia, and Opal will not be invited to speak on news programs at first. Patrisse notes, "*it is always women who do the work, even as men get the praise.*"

Though Patrisse cares deeply about the police killings of Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown, she—and the other Black women in Ferguson—take the time to address the fact that Black women are also actively harmed by the police. In fact, they exist at the intersection of racism and sexism, sometimes navigating both domestic violence from male partners and police violence. Sexism also leads to the media ignoring Patrisse, Alicia, and Opal's role in starting the BLM movement, choosing to amplify the voices of Black male protestors instead.

This erasure of women's work is exacerbated by social media; the number of followers someone has supplants the work of people who don't have time to tweet. Like the many women who organized, marched, and cooked for the civil rights movement, Patrisse, Alicia, and Opal are being erased. They don't want to be the center of the movement but they don't want to be forgotten either. Infuriated, Patrisse tells Black women journalists about their erasure, including asha bandele, her co-author and a writer for *Essence*. asha asks for the whole story and publishes an essay about Patrisse in late 2014. Then, *Essence* turns BLM into a front-page story, the first article to center the three women's experience.

The Black women protestors at the church start criticizing the media for erasing their role in leading the protests, highlighting again how Black women exist at the intersection of at least two different types of oppression—racism and sexism. Patrisse also notes that historically speaking, Black women played a major role in the civil rights movement. Yet most people only think about the men who co-led the movement, demonstrating that this type of sexism has always been something Black women have had to navigate.

On Sunday, the church has a service dedicated to BLM, and many protestors attend. The pastor gives a sermon calling congregants to commit to the movement. After, Patrisse helps pass out flyers in the prosecutor's neighborhood, asking people to tell him to indict Darren Wilson. Their final day there, they host a discussion on patriarchy in the movement. Darnell describes how he knows, even as a gay man, that he is prioritized. Meanwhile, Mark Anthony and others have turned the church basement into a healing space, where protestors can access massage, therapy, acupuncture, and art supplies. They deserve a place to restore. Before leaving, Patrisse shouts out Assata Shakur's declaration that it is their duty to fight and support one another, and the crowd repeats it back.

By taking part in an action to get Darren Wilson indicted, hosting a discussion on sexism within the Black Lives Matter movement, and working with Mark Anthony to set up a healing space in the church all within the span of a day, Patrisse shows that in order to create a world where Black lives finally do matter, it will take policy changes, police accountability, an acknowledgement of the intersectionality of identity, and community healing.

In December, Alicia and Opal come to LA to discuss building out the BLM network. The movement is growing: people want to organize by region and also by expertise and hundreds of organizers across the globe join biweekly calls. Meanwhile, Patrisse's relationship with Mark Anthony is changing. She learned from Cherice that love is best expressed through labor rather than affection and, as she works around the clock, their relationship loses its romantic charge. Patrisse feels like Mark Anthony will fight alongside her but not *for* her. At dinner one night, they agree that they love each other but that they are not working. The break-up is painful for both of them, but they know they will always be family. They continue to work well together on Dignity and Power Now.

The fact that the Black Lives Matter movement is growing so quickly suggests that they are successfully building power and have a shot at winning their campaigns to make the world safer for Black people. Patrisse and Mark Anthony's decision to end their relationship in an amicable and loving way shows how much effort they have put into building a relationship where they genuinely value and respect each other.

Patrisse begins to date again—first a trans man who doesn't agree to nonmonogamy, and then JT, her longtime friend who is part of BLM. They are talking about having a child together when they hear about Sandra Bland, a young Black activist who was pulled over by a Texas state trooper for failing to signal a turn. Sandra refused to put out a cigarette she was smoking, so the state trooper pulled her out of the car and slammed her to the ground. Dash cam footage circulates in which he threatens to "light her up." He will be fired for perjury, but not until after Sandra is found dead in her jail cell. The police call her hanging a suicide, but Patrisse says that no one with sense believes this—she was on her way to a new job and had talked to her sister about putting together bail.

As Patrisse describes, Sandra Bland was found hanging in a Texas jail cell in July 2015 a few days after a routine traffic stop led to her arrest. The way that the state trooper targeted her for such a minor offense (not using a turn signal) combined with how he spoke to her (threatening to "light her up") are examples of Patrisse's argument that police officers are primed to treat Black people with aggression. Patrisse doesn't believe that Sandra killed herself, implying that it was a police officer or jail employee who took her life.

The African American Policy Forum begins using the hashtag #SayHerName to acknowledge how state violence affects Black women, too. The day after Sandra is found dead, Kindra Chapman (18) is found hanging in her cell after being there for 90 minutes on a stolen cell phone charge. There are so many other stories: Miriam Carey (age 34) killed by federal officers when she made a wrong turn near the White House, Rekia Boyd (age 22) killed by Chicago police while talking to friends in a park, Kathryn Johnston (age 92) killed by Atlanta police who had the wrong address, and many more.

The hashtag #SayHerName is intentionally used to highlight that Black women's names and stories go untold when they are the targets of police violence, an example of how Black women navigate both racism and sexism. Patrisse intentionally shares other Black women's stories to suggest that Sandra Bland was not the only Black woman unjustly targeted by the police.

Women have historically been left out of the story, even though many Black women were lynched, too. Some have been killed while pregnant or had their babies cut out of them. Sandra's death ignites something in Patrisse, maybe because she's an activist, or because death inside facilities is so rarely talked about, or because women have been leading BLM since the start. Patrisse knows she has to amplify this story and reaches out to friends at Dream Defenders, Mijente, and BLM-Los Angeles (there are 20 chapters at this point). They decide to meet at the Netroots conference in Phoenix, where it's unlikely people will be talking about Sandra's death.

Again, Patrisse notes that Black women's stories are so often erased from both history books and modern-day media—when people think of lynching victims, they almost never think of Black women. Patrisse also wants to tell the stories of people who die inside prisons and jails, which are often left out of the narrative and show that prisons can be just as violent as overly policed communities.

Patrisse has some regrets about the action—now, she would tell the full BLM network what they're planning. But in 2015, they move fast; less than a week after finding out about Sandra's death, they are meeting in the back of a restaurant in Phoenix, planning, singing, and crying. Someone says that they are doing a candidate's forum the next day, and that Bernie Sanders will be there. Patrisse suggests they shut it down. She lets the moderator know that they are coming, and the next day, 100 of them storm the forum.

This is another moment when Patrisse and her fellow activists intentionally combine public direct actions with private moments of grieving and healing together. For Black lives to fully matter, Patrisse suggests, policymakers must be held accountable, but the organizers will not wait for that day to come—they will heal one another now, too.

Patrisse and the other BLM members sing "Which side are you on?" and one activist gets on stage to talk about immigration. The crowd of Democrats boos, which motivates Patrisse to jump on stage and yell back at them "How dare you boo her, boo us?! Our people are dying!" The audience stops booing and they continue their action, sitting down and saying in unison that if they die in police custody, people should know that they were killed, protest their deaths, and tell the world they wanted to live. The protest makes headlines globally and Patrisse feels the impact of their work. Back in LA, as she is gearing up for the first Movement for Black Lives gathering (to take place in Cleveland where Tamir Rice was killed), she finds out she is six weeks pregnant.

The direct action that Patrisse engages in intends to highlight how Black people who die in police custody may have been killed rather than taken their own lives, suggesting that prisons are not a safe place for Black people. That the Black Lives Matter organizers are working with Mijente (an immigrant rights organization mostly led by Latinx people) points to their deep understanding that their struggles are connected—identity is intersectional, and just as the Black people Patrisse grew up with were targeted by police, Latinx immigrants are targeted by ICE.

CHAPTER 15: BLACK FUTURES

Patrisse takes the pregnancy test because her period is late, and she feels sick. When she tells JT she is pregnant, he does not acknowledge her and then looks at her with fear and sadness. She doesn't know how to respond—they had talked about having a baby—so she goes outside to call Future. Future is genderqueer and a leader of BLM Toronto (where unarmed Black people are also being killed by police), so their friendship for the past year has been mostly virtual. They bond over their commitment to building a different world and feel deep respect for each other. When they met just a month ago at a conference, Patrisse was intensely drawn to Future, but she ignored her attraction to them because she was preparing to have a baby with JT.

Patrisse uses the pronouns "they/them/theirs" for Future because Future is genderqueer and does not identify as a man or a woman. Future is organizing protests against police killings of Black people in Toronto, which suggests that police treating Black people as disposable extends beyond the U.S. That Patrisse turns to Future when JT is emotionally unavailable hints at their special bond.

When Patrisse told Future about her relationship with JT and the potential baby, they were respectful. They talked about their families together, and Patrisse learned that Future was split up from their siblings in foster care due to their mother's mental illness. They tell Patrisse they will support her in having a baby and stay true to their word when JT does not. Even though they've only known each other a short time, calling Future to tell them the news feels natural. They say they are happy and ask Patrisse how they can be supportive, which makes Patrisse feel like she and the baby are going to be okay.

Future's early childhood experience underlines how existing at the intersections of being poor, Black, and disabled (as their mother was) means facing specific challenges that other Black people do not. Despite Future and Patrisse both having traumatic experiences of being split up from family members at a young age (Future went into foster care, and Patrisse's brother and father went to prison), they are committed to being present with each other and healing together.

Days later, JT hides when he is supposed to drive Patrisse to her first doctor's appointment, so she calls Carla. After learning the baby is healthy, Patrisse feels that she can do this and that she already loves the baby. Later, she asks Future if they will be present at the birth, and they say of course. They talk about what it means to have a baby in the middle of a movement that is fighting for the lives of Black children and agree this is not the way they imagined becoming parents. But they love each other and the baby so much already. And Patrisse's relationship with JT will heal, too, after a restorative mediation process where he shares his unresolved grief at losing family members in the midst of so much public loss.

Patrisse and Future are afraid for their future baby because anti-Black racism and police brutality means that child growing up at risk of violence. Patrisse and JT going through a restorative mediation process to understand each other's feelings and pain shows how, as chosen family, they refuse to throw each other away even when things get hard. They don't believe in punishing people the way that the criminal justice system has tried to teach them they should.

Patrisse moves out of her home with JT and couch surfs for three months, spending some time in Toronto where Future cares for her through nausea and exhaustion. They are in love, and this is the first time Patrisse feels fully cared for. They find a two-bedroom apartment in West Hollywood and get to work on moving Future to LA. When Patrisse is five months pregnant, she goes to Toronto to help Future move, and Future surprises her with a party where they propose to her, saying they knew they were meant to be from the moment they met. Patrisse says yes. Days later, Patrisse goes to the hospital in pain and learns she has pelvic flooring disorder. She pays no fees and is amazed by Canada's healthcare system.

Future continues to show Patrisse what healing in a romantic relationship can look like after several relationships caused her harm. Patrisse's experience going to a hospital in Canada and not having to pay for the emergency services she received exemplifies how policies seemingly unrelated to race can still lead to a world where Black lives matter. While in the U.S. this experience might have put her into debt, in Canada she is treated as a person deserving of care, no matter how much money she has.

After leaving the hospital, Patrisse and Future decide to go back to LA early. Patrisse gets through security fine, but Future is detained for hours and not allowed through. Patrisse learns this while in an airport wheelchair, unable to walk, and feels completely defeated. Future has been the only consistent thing in her life lately. She stays in Canada with Future for a couple days and then heads back to LA alone. Her friends and Cherice carry her through the next three weeks as she helps Future with their immigration documents. Future is again detained on their way to LA but finally allowed through.

Future's experience with immigration highlights another form of intersecting identities—Future is a genderqueer Black person and also a non-U.S. citizen. That they are not allowed to enter the U.S. and interrogated for hours shows the types of obstacles that non-U.S. citizens (especially those of color) face when trying to legally enter the country. While Future is gone, Patrisse's family and community shows up for her, showing the sort of healing relationships she has intentionally cultivated over the years.

In Patrisse's ninth month of pregnancy, she and Future get married in Malibu. (After the immigration challenges, they decided to have their wedding sooner.) Mark Anthony is among the 20 loved ones present and tells Patrisse how happy he is for her. Three and a half weeks later, Patrisse goes into labor, but the baby is breech. After 36 hours of labor, she rushes to the hospital, where her baby, Shine, is born. After, she is in immense pain because the doctors refuse to give her enough pain medication. Patrisse, Future, and Shine leave the hospital five days later and marvel at the gentle baby. Patrisse wants to hold him forever and keep him safe from the world. Two weeks later, Future decides they have to be in Toronto as protests develop in the wake of Andrew Loku's murder, and they are gone for three weeks.

Mark Anthony attending Patrisse and Future's wedding, even though he is Patrisse's ex-husband, shows how much work they have both put into healing that relationship and not throwing each other away. Patrisse's experience of not being given enough pain medication in the hospital highlights the reality that healthcare providers often treat Black women—who exist at the intersections of racism and sexism—as if they have a higher pain tolerance or are somehow less fragile than women of other racial groups, though this is not the case. Future heading back to Canada to respond to another police killing shows the unrelenting nature of police violence.

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CHAPTER 16: WHEN THEY CALL YOU A TERRORIST

On November 8, 2016, Patrisse is in LA at an election night gathering with members of the California marijuana-legalization campaign that she's been working on. Being arrested for marijuana use is often the first step toward the prison system. Marijuana is also a leading cause of deportation in the state, and 500 people sit in jail each night for its possession. This new law will ensure no child will go to prison for marijuana, allow people with marijuana convictions to get jobs, move the tax revenue from legal marijuana sale to communities impacted by the war on drugs, and expunge records of marijuana convictions. Their months of canvassing have paid off—by 8 p.m., they know they are going to win.

This is another example of how prisons and policing exist to control and punish certain people rather than keep them safe; using marijuana is a nonviolent offense that many Black people are arrested for and, thereafter, have a mark on their record that could lead to more jailtime in the future. That their campaign wins shows the power of their community organizing and the fact that Black lives are starting to matter to the American public and policymakers, in part because of the Black Lives Matter movement.

The group also realizes that Donald Trump—a man Patrisse believes campaigned on white supremacy and misogyny—is going to win the election. They all feel defeated after their hard work on Proposition 64. Patrisse doesn't know how they will survive a Trump presidency—and how will she protect Shine? She and Future head home. It's hard for Patrisse to move on from the grief and the fear of what will happen to her community, what will happen to Monte if he can't access healthcare.

Donald Trump's presidential election in 2016 surprised many progressives who were convinced that Hilary Clinton would be victorious. Many believed that his views were sexist and racist, and he also openly campaigned on being tough on crime. Patrisse is scared that conditions will get work for Black people and, as usual, thinks of how she can care for her family and community through the next four years.

Patrisse moves from feeling helpless to angry—96 percent of Black women voted against Trump, who Patrisse believes publicly supported sexual assault. Patrisse thinks the Democratic Party should have run someone better, and that she should have realized that the average American is wedded to racism and sexism. She should have taken Trump more seriously. And his election has had real effects: in 2016, hate crimes in large cities in the U.S. rose by 6 percent, and 30 percent of them targeted Black people. Families were split up by border patrol, health care options like Planned Parenthood were put at risk, the Paris Climate Accord was tossed out, and mass incarceration and prison privatization ramped up.

Patrisse notes that 96 percent of Black women voted against Trump, showing that those who exist at the intersections of oppressed identities are more likely to feel threatened by someone they believe openly embraces sexism and racism. (Black men and white women supported Trump in larger numbers.) Patrisse shares statistics to suggest that Trump's campaign and election led to more violence against women and people of color, demonstrating that community organizing work is still needed to ensure that Black lives matter in the U.S.

Hillary Clinton's presidency wouldn't have been perfect, but Patrisse thinks that it wouldn't have set the progressive agenda so far behind. Instead of pushing for single-payer healthcare, organizers now have to fight for basic rights. In Canada, they've just elected Justin Trudeau—Trump's polar opposite—and Patrisse and Future almost consider moving to Toronto. Meanwhile, Trump immediately starts talking about how he will end the "dangerous anti-police atmosphere." Over the next year, three Ferguson organizers are found shot dead in their cars. Patrisse, Alicia, and Opal are also sued for instigating riots and, under Trump, they aren't sure what will happen.

Here, Patrisse underlines how impactful policy can be on the daily lives of marginalized people—a change to healthcare policy at the federal level, for example, can have consequences for poor Black people who will no longer be able to afford health coverage. Patrisse also connects Trump's pro-police rhetoric with several Black Lives Matter organizers who are found dead in their cars—whether they're killed by police or vigilantes who feel more emboldened under President Trump is unclear.

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Despite her fear, Patrisse doesn't want to leave the organizing work that needs to happen in the U.S, and Future agrees to stay. The BLM chapters are all doing critical work in their locales, including, in LA, stopping the construction of a $3.5 billion jail. When Patrisse is at her most afraid, "what makes me stay is us." She is part of a forgotten generation—people who are written off by the war on drugs and war on gangs, who have no access to good schools, and who are pushed out of their communities. They don't care about polished candidates—they care about justice, bold leaders, and human rights. It was organizers who pulled Black people out of slavery and Jim Crow, and it will be organizers who will pull them out of deadly policing practices.

That BLM's LA chapter is gaining ground in halting the construction of a massive new jail suggests that, although Black lives have historically not mattered in the U.S., things are starting to change thanks to their organizing efforts. When Patrisse says that "what makes me stay is us," she underlines how important her family and community are to her. What makes the struggle worth it is healing among people who show one another that their lives are not disposable.

Since BLM began in 2013, the organization has achieved so much: they've built a decentralized movement that empowers local leadership across 20 chapters, while centering the voices of Black women. The also successfully pushed Obama to decrease the federal prison population, demanded that police accountability be taken seriously, and brought healing and a commitment to communal care to the movement.

Despite the fact that the Black Lives Matter movement is up against a lot, they have achieved so much in just over three years. The achievements that Patrisse lists indicate that, even in the face of Trump's presidency, BLM is only gaining momentum. Building a world where Black lives finally do matter, Patrisse suggests, is not only possible but well underway. She also states that BLM has amplified the voices of the most marginalized members of their community, or those who exist at the intersections of multiple types of oppression, such as Black women. And, as always, Patrisse notes that communal healing is at the center of their work.

Yet there is still so much that BLM wants to achieve, like fighting Trump's presidency, developing rapid response networks for violence and ICE raids, building Black political power, and, most important to Patrisse, creating a new movement culture centered on healing. Because BLM is working with a lot of traumatized people, the network has wellness directors who encourage self-care and challenge toxic behavior. The network also cares about offering healthy food options at conferences, paying organizers well, building out restorative practices for conflict, honoring different skillsets (like those of ex-prisoners), and pushing for comprehensive mental healthcare.

Though BLM has achieved so much, they still have a ways to go to shift racist policies, address the violence of law enforcement like ICE, support Black people who struggle with their mental health, and create an atmosphere of healing within the movement. These are all responses to the ways that policymakers, police, and the public treat Black people as if their lives are disposable. BLM is committed to fighting for a world where this is no longer true.

Patrisse has neglected her own health for years and, in the wake of Trump's election, begins working out again, traveling less, and cooking and praying more. Inspired by Gabriel, she also has fun—roller-skating, hosting park days, and more. She spends time with Future and with Shine, a child who teaches her that so much is possible. If Shine—or any Black child—is called a terrorist, she will explain that terrorism is stalking, surveillance, and solitary confinement. Terrorism is making it impossible for Black people to feed their children or enroll them in good schools. Freedom, on the other hand, is the realization of justice, dignity and peace. She will tell them they have the power to change the world, that they are what "Black lives matter" looks like.

Patrisse again notes that healing in community is at the center of her organizing work. Taking care of herself as a queer Black woman who navigates multiple types of oppression daily is *political, and so is having fun and spending time with her family, because these actions affirm that her life matters. Tying the end of the book to the title, she underlines the idea that she and her Black community are not terrorists—in her opinion, racist policymakers and police officers are the real terrorists.*

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