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## Prison Nation : African Americans and the Violence of Modern Neoliberal State = Przemysł więzienny : przemoc strukturalna wobec mniejszości etnicznych Stanach Zjednoczonych

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## **PRISON NATION: AFRICAN AMERICANS AND THE VIOLENCE OF MODERN NEOLIBERAL STATE**

PRZEMYSŁ WIĘZIENNY: PRZEMOC STRUKTURALNA WOBEC  
MNIejszości ETNICZNYCH W STANACH ZJEDNOCZONYCH

### **Abstract**

This essay focuses on widespread structural violence against American ethnic minorities. It argues that what is missing from media coverage of America's interracial violence and public debates surrounding this issue is an account of how violence that inheres in social, economic and power relations contributes to inter-racial conflicts in the US. The economic deprivation and political marginalisation of African Americans and other US minorities is a well-known fact, but its connection to racially motivated violence, especially that unleashed by the oppressed groups on the oppressive majority, is, more often than not, pushed to the backburner in mainstream public debates.

### **Abstrakt**

Tematem tego eseju jest strukturalna przemoc, jakiej amerykańskie mniejszości etniczne doświadczają ze strony państwa. Esej utrzymuje, że w rasizm oraz między-etniczne konflikty są efektem ekonomicznej, politycznej i kulturowej dyskryminacji kolorowej populacji Stanów Zjednoczonych. Debaty publiczne oraz relacje medialne dotyczące kwestii konfliktów etnicznych przemocy na tle rasowej są w dużej mierze zdominowane przez analizy dotyczące poszczególnych incydentów, takich jak morderstwa dokonane przez Dylanna Roofa. Mniej uwagi natomiast poświęca się usankcjonowanej przez państwo przemocy wobec marginalizowanym i kryminalizowanym mniejszościom, o której mówią prawie wyłącznie tylko środowiska

**Keywords:** structural violence, zero tolerance, racial profiling, US penitentiary, racism, discrimination

akademickie, aktywiści społeczni i agencje pozarządowe..

**Słowa kluczowe:** przemoc strukturalna, polityka zero tolerancji, system więzienny w USA, rasizm, dyskryminacja

## 1. Introduction

Most discussions of violence in the academia and mass media focus on the authored violence, that is acts of violence which have identifiable actors [Arendt, 1969], Horowitz [1985]. This is also true about inter-racial violence in the United States which is often shown as black-and-white wars taking the form of racially motivated homicide or inner-city rampages, usually staged by ethnic minorities. Quite recently, in June 2015, TV viewers worldwide watched reports from Charleston killing spree of twenty-one-year old white man Dylann Roof who shot down nine African Americans died in a church. A year earlier, the world was stunned by media coverage of African American race riots that erupted in Ferguson and other American towns in response to the endemic brutality of the American police forces. Roof's cold-blooded murder of nine black churchgoers and the murders committed by the police on the people from ethnic minorities are easy to recognise and condemn because they have identifiable perpetrators. Similarly, rioters are swiftly denounced by the public opinion as criminals, vandals and thieves. What is missing from this general coverage of America's interracial violence and public debates surrounding this issue is an account of how violence that inheres in social, economic and power relations contributes to inter-racial conflicts in the US. This violence, which is indirect and state-sanctioned, affects mostly lower class ethnic minorities, and it is harder to see and identify. The economic deprivation and political marginalisation of African Americans and other US minorities is a well-known fact, but its connection to racially motivated violence, especially that unleashed by the oppressed groups on the oppressive majority, is, more often than not, pushed to the backburner in mainstream public debates. Therefore, the aim of this essay is to shed light on the underside of racial warfare – policies and programs by means of which the American state criminalises African Americans and hampers their social and economic progress.

## 2. Structural and Symbolic Violence

One of the theoretical texts that could shed light on the vicious circle of inter-racial oppression and aggression in America is Jean-Paul Sartre's preface to Frantz Fanon's seminal postcolonial study *The Wretched of the Earth* [1961]. In the preface, Sartre introduced the concept of structural violence and counter-violence; structural violence is an institutionalised state violence levelled by the bourgeoisie at the working classes (or the colonisers at the colonised). Counter-violence, on the other hand, is a revolutionary counter-force that seeks to abolish the economic and political hegemony of the oppressor. According to Sartre and Fanon, counter-violence is the only means of struggle of the oppressed peoples. At the same time, both thinkers emphasise that structural violence

is always the initial violence, whereas counter-violence only turns this initial violence onto the oppressor. Another text that could illuminate the hidden structural dimension of violence is Slavoj Žižek's 2008 study entitled simply – *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*. In the book, Žižek's proposes a classification of violence that is similar to Sartre's. There is "objective" violence, which is reminiscent of Sartre's structural violence "that is no longer attributable to concrete individuals and their 'evil' intentions but is purely 'objective,' systemic, anonymous" [2008, p. 10–11]. He compares this type of violence with "subjective" violence perpetrated by individuals and "symbolic" violence of discourses and representations that intentionally misrecognize and misinterpret people and processes. The symbolic violence is the means by which Western societies naturalise objective/structural violence directed at their lower classes and minorities. Symbolic and systemic violence inhere in the society, whereas individual eruptions of subjective violence stem from the other two types of violence hidden from our view. In other words, objective/structural or systemic violence together with symbolic/cultural violence frames subjective acts of violence committed by underprivileged individuals or groups.

A good example of how structural and symbolic violence frames the lives of African Americans is Richard Wright's dramatization of the life of Bigger Thomas, who is one of the most memorable black characters in American fiction. The protagonist of Wright's 1940 classic novel, *Native Son*, comes close to the white racist stereotype of the "bad nigger." Bigger Thomas lives with his family in a one room kitchenette, in a black ghetto in one of the American cities. He has no education, no job, and no prospect for the future. He dreams of becoming a pilot; instead, he gets employment as a chauffeur by Mr Dalton, an owner of dilapidated tenement houses and, at the same time, a philanthropic contributor to charitable causes in the black ghetto. On the one hand, Mr Dalton's opens clubs for black youths to draw young people, like Bigger, away from crime; on the other, he has no scruples in extracting from his black tenants extortionate sums of money as rents. As his very name suggests, Mr Dalton is blind to this contradiction. The price of his blindness is the life of his daughter Mary, accidentally killed by Bigger Thomas. Although Bigger is not a "natural born" killer, evil by nature, the act of murder, at least in his eyes, changes his life for better. While he is on the run, trying to save his life and outwit white people who hunt him down, his attitude to the crime he committed begins to change. He feels more alive now than ever in his entire life. Finally, he has taken his life into his own hands. Before he is caught, he kills his black girlfriend Bessie, by pounding her head with a brick to experience once more the sense of power and freedom that was excluded from his previous life. To cut a long story short, one may say that Bigger Thomas resorts to horrifying acts of violence in response to systemic and symbolic violence that has been deployed against him, and Wright is very effective at conveying this terrifying message to his readers.

I do not wish to negate the culpability of Bigger Thomas or mobs that take part in race riots that end in the damage of property and, occasionally, a loss of life. But I want to suggest that such manifestations of violence can be fully comprehended only in the larger context of continuing social and symbolic violence – "the twin evils of racism

and economic deprivation,” to quote the manual distributed during the famous March on Washington in 1963. The symbolic violence against African Americans presents them as people who are culturally deficient, less intelligent, less accomplished and less ambitious than whites. In one of the most notorious books of the previous century titled *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life* [1994], its authors, the psychologist Richard J. Herrnstein and political scientist Charles Murray, argued that human intelligence is substantially influenced by both inherited and environmental factors. For example, they claimed that the fact that African Americans had worse test scores (in comparison to whites and Asians) could be put down to their lower IQs as well as social factors, such as poverty or lack of access to good-quality education. Since the book provided manipulated statistical data supporting the assertion that blacks were, on average, less intelligent than whites, some people feared that *The Bell Curve* could be used by extremists to justify hate crimes. Many people questioned the methodology of this study and saw its publication as a return of scientific racism and biological determinism in their original form. How detrimental can spreading of such arguments be was proven by Dylann Roof’s racist “manifesto” that trotted out the same “ideas” in a more simplistic fashion:

*Negroes have lower IQs, lower impulse control, and higher testosterone levels in general. These three things alone are a recipe for violent behaviour. If a scientist publishes a paper on the differences between the races in Western Europe or Americans, he can expect to lose his job. There are personality traits within human families, and within different breeds of cats or dogs, so why not within the races?* [O’Connor, 2015]

The book was grist to the mill of those white Americans who see black women as “welfare queens,” having too many neglected children and continually living on the “dole,” and black men as dangerous rapists, burglars, drug dealers, muggers and murderers. This latter stereotype that Wright so cleverly used in his social protest novel, *Native Son*, has been so widespread in America that it was even commented on by President Obama who admitted:

*There are very few African-American men in this country who haven’t had the experience of being followed when they were shopping in a department store. That includes me. And there are very few African American men who haven’t had the experience of walking across the street and hearing the locks click on the doors of the cars. That happened to me . . . before I was a Senator. There are very few African Americans who haven’t had the experience of getting on an elevator and a woman clutching her purse nervously and holding her breath until she had a chance to get off.* [Obama, 2013]

### 3. Structural Violence in Numbers

Still, the outcomes of symbolic violence pale into insignificance in comparison with the ramifications of structural violence which is an enduring legacy of slavery and segregation. In 2013, the National Urban League, a civil rights organisation based in

New York, prepared a report on the progress that African Americans made since desegregation in the 1970s. The report was published on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the “March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom” that took place one year before the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was signed into law. Regarding education, the report revealed, the high school completion gap has closed by 57 points, and the number of African Americans in colleges tripled. There were five college graduates for every one in 1963 [“40 Years”]. However, despite this remarkable educational progress for Black America, there was, according to the authors of the report, much less progress towards economic equality with whites. There was some significant improvement. For example, the percentage of Africans Americans living in poverty fell by 23 points, and homeownership among black increased by 14%. Also, the Black poverty rate was 2.4 percentage points lower in 2013 than in 1976 (down to 27% from 29.4%). On the other hand, however, in those years (1963–2013) the black-white income gap closed only by 7 points, and unemployment rate closed only by 6 points. The racial unemployment ratio remained unchanged since 1963. It was at the level of 2-to-1, and it was still on the same level in 2016 at the time when this essay was written. For every one white person unemployed, there were two black persons out of job, regardless of their education, gender, region of the country or income level. Since the mid – 1970s, the unemployment rate for blacks has remained roughly double of the rate of unemployment of whites. Currently, the unemployment rate is 13 % for blacks and 6 % for whites [“40 Years”].

The big wealth gap is seen in the median wealth of black and white families. The head of a black family with a university degree still earns less than the white head of the family, who is a college drop-out. Eighty-five percent of black and Latino households have income that falls below the median wealth for white families. Closing the gap would require the black and Latino households to save 100% of their incomes for three consecutive years. Forty-five percent of Blacks and 70% of Whites own their house [“40 Years”]. Moreover, Obama’s election coincided with an economic slump, in which black communities were the hardest hit. From 2007 to 2010 according to the Urban Institute, a Washington DC-based think tank, the wealth of a black family fell by 31% (by comparison the wealth of a white family fell by 11%). Average annual household income is 33K for black and 55K for white households. In the recent recession, according to Eddie Glaude Jr. (Chair of the Center for African American Studies at Princeton University), African Americans experienced what he called a “black Great Depression” [Sherer and Dias, 2013, p. 35]. These opportunity and income gaps have had a direct impact on the health of the black population. Whites outlive blacks by nearly four years. Life expectancy for white women is 81 years, for black women 78. Life expectancy for white males is 77 years, for black males 72. Yet, suicide rates prove that Black people, in general, are better equipped to deal with harsh economic realities of life and anxiety that they engender. Only 5% of Blacks per 100,000 members of the population commit suicide as compared to 13 % Whites! [Sherer and Dias, 2013, p. 35].

#### 4. Prison Nation: The Warehousing of American Poor

Inequalities in the criminal justice system are even more striking. Blacks make up 13% of the American population, but more than half of America's homicide victims and culprits are black [Scherer and Dias, p. 35]. Of the 2.3 million people incarcerated in the US, 1 million are black. Blacks are 13% of regular drug users but 38% or maybe even 45% of drug offenders. Blacks make up 37% of prison population, 42 % of death-row inmates, and 32% of all juvenile delinquents. A black teenager is 30% more likely to go to prison for "doing drugs" than his white friend. After prison, the likelihood of getting *any* job drops by 50%. For former black inmates, wages grow 21% slower than for white inmates [Scherer and Dias, 2013, p. 35].

The inequalities and imbalances in the American penitentiary system were scrutinised as early as 2003 in the collection of essays *Prison Nation: The Warehousing of America's Poor* written by prisoners as well as investigative journalists and leading intellectuals (such as, for example, Noam Chomsky). The study describes the so-called prison-industrial complex and details how prisons have been incorporated into the system of capital accumulation, and how they contribute to the development of U.S. capitalism by generating large profits for some corporations. Essays and case studies in *Prison Nation* explain that changes in the criminal code and business law as well as the manipulation of public perceptions and fears made it possible to incarcerate and economically exploit large numbers of poor, often black, people. The study reveals that mechanism of exploitation of inmates is in fact quite simple. Prisoners have to work; they produce goods for such companies as Starbucks, McDonald's, Boeing, or Walmart. They earn 23 cents per hour. The two companies that organise the forced labour, CCA and GEO, earn around 3 billion \$ each year. Their contracts with the US government stipulate that the number of inmates in 5,000 American penitentiaries cannot drop below 90%. It is no wonder that on the average prisoners serve a term of 5.3 years, and half of them serve time for offences not felonies (with the use of violence) [p. 112–137]. According to Kozłowska and Karaian:

*Following the election of Donald Trump to US president, shares in the country's two major private-prison companies soared, presumably banking on a hike in immigration detentions under a Trump administration, and a better climate for privatizing criminal justice. CoreCivic, formerly known as Corrections Corporation of America (CCA), jumped 34%, while GEO Group rose 18%, as of 10:30 am ET Wednesday morning. [2016]*

The United States now has the highest rate of incarceration in the world, even surpassing that of highly repressive regimes like Russia, China, and Iran. In Germany, 93 people are in prison for every 100,000 adults and children. In the United States, the rate is roughly eightfold bigger – 750 per 100,000. The racial makeup of the US penitentiary system is its most disconcerting feature. No other country in the world imprisons so many of its racial or ethnic minorities. The United States imprisons a larger percentage of its black population than South African regime did at the height of apartheid. In Washington, D.C., it is estimated that three out of four young black men mostly the poorest

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communities can expect to serve time in prison. In some cities, more than half of all young adult black men are currently under correctional control, in prison, on probation or parole [Alexander, 2010, p. 4].

The racial and ethnic disproportions in American prisons, whose population does not numerically reflect the racial and ethnic makeup of the American society, can be attributed to the so-called “war on drugs” announced by President Ronald Reagan in 1982. The war soon captured public imagination by becoming a major issue in the media with the spotlight almost exclusively in black communities. In fact, the War on Drugs began at a time when illegal drug use was on the decline [Alexander, 2010, p. 4]. In spite of that, arrests and convictions for drug offenses especially among people of color skyrocketed, with the effect that in less than thirty years, the U.S penal population exploded from around 300,000 to more than 2 million, with drug convictions accounting for the majority of the increase [Alexander, 2010, p. 4]. This increase was at variance with the founding of current surveys, which suggested that whites, particularly white youth, are more likely to engage in drug crime than people of colour.<sup>11</sup> No statistics related to drug crime were able to explain stark racial disparities in numbers of coloured people imprisoned as a result of the war on drugs. Contemporary studies show that statistically white and black Americans use and sell illegal drugs at remarkably similar rates [Alexander, 2010, p. 4].

## 5. Racial Profiling and Zero Tolerance Policy

The enduring legacy of the war on drugs is the so-called “zero tolerance policy.” It is the “policy of applying laws or penalties to even minor infringements of a code in order to reinforce its overall importance and enhance deterrence” (“zero tolerance”). According to scholars, zero tolerance means giving *carte blanche* to the police for the repression of minor offences associated both with drugs and street violence. A well-known criticism of this approach is that it targets poor people treating them as potential criminals. The policy became famous under the Mayor of New York, Rudolph Giuliani, who asserted that it helped him to reduce crime in New York City dramatically. In fact, the decline of crime rates had started well before he came to power in 1993, and the decrease was not related to zero tolerance policy. In the same period, a similar decrease in crime was observed in other major US cities, including those that had not resorted to zero tolerance policy. Still, the popularity of the policy was so great that in 1994 President Bill Clinton felt compelled to sign the so-called “three strikes bill” that meant anyone convicted of a serious violent crime who had two or more prior convictions, including drug crimes, was given a life sentence. The law clogged the courts and prisons, and further exacerbated the situation of African American felons. Because these laws included drug offences as prior “strikes” against the law, more black offenders were subject to life sentences under the “three strikes” law.

What currently causes the greatest concerns and controversy is “racial profiling.” It is a practice of drawing suspicion from the skin colour. Black people are far more likely to be stopped and searched by the Police than white people, even if they did not do

anything wrong. In New York, for example, there is a program called “stop and frisk,” (it is called Terry-stop in other parts of the US). It allows the police to stop and search anybody if policemen deem the person “suspicious.” Many African Americans are detained under this law. Many die in the process of being frisked or in detention. Readers of this essay may remember the case of Michael Brown killed by the Police in Ferguson, a working-class suburb north of St Louis (Missouri) in 2014. Brown was shot several times at close range while apparently walking, unarmed, from a convenience store to his grandmother’s apartment. His “crime” was walking in the road and refusing the Police-man order to “get the fuck on to the sidewalk” [Swaine, 2014]. Since then, many more teenagers have been killed by the US Police force.<sup>1</sup> In the first seven months of 2016, the Police in the US killed more than 544 people on patrols.<sup>2</sup> Jeannie Ambeer, the editor of *Essence*, wrote in the *Time* article titled “The Talk. How Parents Raising Black Boys Try to Keep Their Sons Safe,” says:

*At kitchen tables, during drives to school and in parting words as we (black parents) sent them (sons) off to college we share a version of the same lesson given to young black men for generations: “if you are stopped by a cop. Do what he says, even if he’s harassing you, even if you didn’t do anything wrong. Let him arrest you, memorize his badge number, and call me as soon as you get to the precinct. Keep your hands where you can see them. Do not reach for your wallet. Do not grab your phone. Do not raise your voice. Do not talk back. Do you understand me?” [Sherer and Dias, 2013, p. 35]*

A relatively new legal trend in targeting people of colour has been created by the so-called “stand your ground laws.” The laws say that people can fight back with deadly force if they feel threatened. They can shoot and kill a presumed attacker, even it is possible to retreat to safety and let the assassin go. Citizens who kill strangers when threatened are protected by the US law. The most notorious case of such gratuitous violence was the murder committed by George Zimmerman, a neighbourhood watch volunteer, on the 17-year old black boy, Trayvon Martin, in Florida in 2012. Trayvon was unarmed, and the only thing suspicious about him was the fact that he was wearing a hood. Zimmerman stood a trial but was acquitted. The black lawyer Michelle Alexander succinctly commented that Americans suffer from “the Zimmerman mind-set” that “views black boys and men in particular as a problem to be dealt with, managed and controlled” [Alexander, 2013, p. 37]. In fact, this comment aptly describes the ruling principle on which the entire US criminal justice system is based.

## 6. Structural Violence, Political Representation and Legislature

The long-term effect of such practices as racial profiling, stand your ground laws and zero tolerance policy left black communities in the US feeling distrustful and victimised. These policies have not kerbed crime or contained the rampant violence in

<sup>1</sup> For the full list of the victims of the Police see his link: <http://killedbypolice.net/>

<sup>2</sup> “Killed by Police 2016.” <<http://killedbypolice.net/>> Accessed 22 June 2016.

American streets. Despite common beliefs that the predators are almost always black and the victims are white, statistics seem to tell a different story. In fact, only 15% Whites are killed by blacks, whereas as many as 82% whites are killed by white perpetrators [Greenberg, 2016]. Michael Nutter, a mayor of Philadelphia (2008–16), who had many successes in fighting crime, without using the controversial zero tolerance policy, argues that the only way to clamp down on crime is to eradicate poverty. In the article tellingly titled “Stopping the Slaughter,” he claims that 32 Americans are killed by gun violence every day, and a disproportionate number of them are black. “That’s apparently no breaking news,” he wryly comments; “with each death, the networks aren’t interrupting game shows or soap operas. We get lulled back to complacency ....”. This is unacceptable, he upholds, because “our priorities are askew. Our leaders talk about international terrorism,” but day-to-day crime kills more people in America than terrorists. He also takes to task US federal government for spending more money on rebuilding such countries as Iraq or Afghanistan than on helping its own citizens [Nutter, 2013, p. 38].

In reality, there is very little political will to tackle the structural roots of violence and crime – racism and poverty. The abuse of the black population is allowed to continue because Blacks are underrepresented in the government. Only 45 representatives in Congress (out of 435) and 2 in Senate (out of 100) are African American. One can hardly say that the election of Barak Obama managed to offset that imbalance. Moreover, in 2013 the Supreme Court struck down Section Four of the Voting Rights Act, giving federal protection to minority voters in states with a track record of discrimination, which is another example of structural violence that is enacted through the state anti-black legislation [Reilly, Sacks, Siddiqui, 2013]. In many states with restrictive voting laws, African American felons are also often disenfranchised by their states. According to different estimates, from 8% to 10% of the black population has permanently lost the right to vote as a result of a felony conviction, compared with 2% of other racial groups. Thirteen percent of African American men – 1.4 million – are disenfranchised, representing just over one-third (36%) of the total disenfranchised population. Michelle Alexander explains that “felons are typically stripped of the very rights supposedly won in the civil rights movement, including the right to vote, the right to serve on juries, and the right to be free of legal discrimination in the employment, housing, access to education and public benefits” [Alexander, 2013, p. 37]. According to Human Rights Watch, “if current trends continue, the rate of disenfranchisement for black men could reach 40 percent in the states that disenfranchise ex-offenders. Given the current rates of incarceration, three in ten of the next generation of black men will be disenfranchised at some point in their lifetime.”<sup>3</sup> Alexander points to the fact that the disenfranchised African Americans are relegated as “permanent undercast ... Unable to find work or housing, most wind up back in prison within few years. Black men with criminal records are the most severely disadvantaged group in the labour market. In some places more than 50% of people are in this demographic” [Alexander, 2013, p. 37].

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/legacy/reports98/vote/usvot98o.htm>

## 7. Conclusions

For Fanon, Sartre and Žižek, violence is destructive, but it also can be regenerative if it takes the form of a revolution. It can put an end to “a certain state of enslavement that was making it impossible for people to become human beings” [Sartre, 1996, p. 92]. Violence, in their opinion, is dehumanising, but it can overthrow the regimes of structural violence and pave the way for new forms of social relations, though, of course, it may just as well only lead to a reconfiguration of power relations that will inhibit self-development and self-expression of another social group. In the US, however, no form of violence seems to be regenerative. The counter violence only fuels interracial hatred and cements the existing mutual prejudice, distrust and fear. Therefore, though the theory of structural violence and also counter-violence helps to understand the dynamics of interracial violence, it does not offer any hope for a better future. The only solution, as Nutter observes, is putting an end to state violence – launching programs for the education of the poor, community-development and grants to put people to work.

This may turn out to be very difficult, not least because of the slow economic growth or seemingly unending military engagement of the USA. The United States seems to be governed now by its own “project fear.”<sup>4</sup> By 2023, the majority of American children will not be white, and after centuries of domination, the white population will become a minority. The paranoid fear of living in a predominantly no-white society was what probably pushed Dylan Roof to take the lives of his black neighbours. Daniel Freeman, a Professor in the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Oxford and the author of bestselling 2008 study *Paranoia: The 21st Century Fear*, would probably see Dylan as a paranoid schizophrenic. But he might also think that Dylan is more than that, that is a typical product of the American culture of fear. In his study, Freeman argues that paranoia stopped being an individual affliction and has become a permanent state of society. Americans fear terrorist attacks, black teenagers, Mexican immigrants and Muslims, just to mention a few most apparent “scares.” Many of them are convinced that the Police are not able to protect them; they arm themselves to teeth and organise their own militia to patrol their neighbourhoods. For these people, Donald Trump’s promises to tighten control of the porous Mexican border and stop what they consider a “Mexican invasion” were a godsend. Some of these vigilantes, for example, Jason Todd Ready, the founder of the Minuteman Civil Defense Corps and the U.S. Border Guard (two armed groups that patrolled the Arizona–Mexico border searching for illegal immigrants) was suspected of domestic terrorism involving killing Mexican immigrants in the American desert. The charges against him were eventually dropped, when in May 2012 he committed suicide, after having shot five members of his own family.

The American fear and paranoia are whipped up by such political movements as the conservative and populist Tea Party movement or the newly-emerged extremist

<sup>4</sup> The term comes from British politics to denote campaigning deemed to be based on scaremongering. It was first used by the Scottish National Party (SNP) and supporters of Scottish independence during the “Better Together” campaign in 2014 during the Scottish independence referendum that year and later got currency under the Remain campaign of Brexit in 2016.

Alt-Right that helped to bring Donald Trump to power. They preach the ideology of nationalism, white supremacy, anti-Semitism and anti-feminism. According to Damien Walter from the *Independent*, Alt-Right:

*is a nebulous online community whose values are almost indistinguishable from the far-right racism and sexism of Europe's National Front or America's Klu Klux Klan. They openly call for ethnic purity, believe in the inferiority of women, and treat all alternative sexualities as aberrant and illegal.*

Mark Potok from Southern Poverty Law Center called 2015 “a year in hate and extremism” (having failed to anticipate Trump and his supporters’ surge to power). He says that during Obama’s presidency, which did not reduce racism, but conversely produced a backlash, and in the run-up to 2016 presidential elections “hate groups (have) continued to flourish.” In consequence. “(the) number of groups on the American radical right, according to the latest count by the Southern Poverty Law Center, expanded from 784 in 2014 to 892 in 2015 — a 14% increase.” That includes members of “old” organizations such as Ku Klux Klan, who mobilized in support of Dynann Roof, as well as black separatists incensed by police shootings of black men advocating violence against “all whites, gays, and, in particular, Jews.” Potok’s attempt to do reckoning with the *annus horribilis* – 2015 – is worth quoting at length:

*Last year brought more political violence, both from the American radical right and from American jihadists, than the nation has seen in many years. According to a year-end report from the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), “domestic extremist killers” slew more people in 2015 than in any year since 1995, when the Oklahoma City bombing left 168 men, women and children dead. Counting both political and other violence from extremists, the ADL said: “a minimum of 52 people in the United States were killed by adherents of domestic extremist movement(s) in the past 12 months.” Another tally, by the respected New America Foundation, found that by year’s end, 45 people in America had been killed in “violent jihadist attacks” since the Al Qaeda massacre of Sept. 11, 2001, just short of the 48 people killed in the same 14-year period in “far right wing attacks.” (Unlike the ADL, the foundation does not count non-political violence by extremists). The impact of terrorism goes far beyond the body count. Violence motivated by racial, ethnic or religious animus fractures society along its most fragile fault lines, and sends shock waves through entire targeted communities. More hatred and fear, particularly of diversity, are often the response. [2016]*

In conclusion, Potok claims that “the year 2015 was remarkable for its terrorist violence, the penetration of the radical right and its conspiracy theories into mainstream politics, and the boost far-right ideas and groups received from pandering politicians like Donald Trump.” His prediction that the situation is very likely to get worse has, unfortunately, come true, as, under the Trump administration, the country is more than ever unlikely to come to terms with its increasing diversity. In Trump’s America, the structural violence inherent in American social structures, histories, ideologies, and politics can only become more deeply ingrained thus validating Simon Springer’s remark

that “we must reject commonsense view of violence as somehow essential, universal, or psychological and that only civilization enables us to overcome our cruel impulses. In fact, the opposite is true, that our cruelty is largely a product of civilisation and its discontents.”<sup>5</sup> American culture with its propensity for racial violence seems to be a supreme example of a civilisation run amok.

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