

WIN WITHOUT WAR



Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief

Intel for Advocacy

DATE: February 11, 2022

SL: **Community Over Militarism**

The Takeaway:

- Black History Month is a time to celebrate and reflect on community — how we define it and what it means to care for and protect the people we are in community with.
- The denial of Black people's equal rights in the United States has shaped how Black activists build up their community's security, pushing them to invest in meeting people's basic needs rather than investing in state-sponsored violence, and to build relationships with other communities within and beyond the U.S. that share these interests.
- As the U.S. faces security challenges like fascism and COVID-19, the communal care structures that Black activists built can help us address these issues and build a more progressive, community-oriented U.S. foreign policy.

Building Community to Challenge Militarism: The Impact of Black Communal Care on U.S. Security

In honor of Black History Month, Win Without War's Government Relations Associate, Faith Gay, shares some of her family's stories and some reflections on how they speak to the security challenges the U.S. faces today.

Civil Disturbance

The year is 1965. A twelve-year old kid named Bobby is tossing around a football in the alley behind his home in South Los Angeles when he sees several white armed soldiers walking towards him.

A few days before, Black people across L.A. had begun protesting in the streets against rampant police violence, housing segregation, employment discrimination, and other forms of racial injustice they encountered every day. Many of them had migrated west from the South, like his mother, seeking an escape from Jim Crow segregation, only to find that California had its own ways of enforcing racial inequity among its residents. These protests would become known as the Watts Uprising, and as they grew larger, the state's National Guard was called in to end the "civil disturbance" and handle any further 'threats' to the city of L.A.

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With some Guardsmen training their guns on him, and others standing idly by, Bobby is singled out for a strip-search, without reasonable cause, by the soldiers. Seeing this through the kitchen window, his mother, horrified, comes running out of the house screaming, but she's immediately commanded by soldiers to go back inside, or, they say, her son will be shot. She complies. They finish the search. And finding nothing, they walk off. Bobby goes inside his house.

Undignified Response

I've got a confession — I've heard my dad tell this story several times. But each time he narrates it, I'm struck by a different aspect of it. The image of soldiers walking throughout the streets. The insecurity and arrogance you must have to feel threatened by a twelve year old. The way the National Guard members worked to make Black people feel the opposite of safe, the supposed purpose of their job — and how predictable that is.

My father wasn't the only one in the family who was put through terrifying military experiences. My mom's father, Grandpa Lloyd, was drafted to the U.S. Army to fight in the Korean War, but for religious reasons, he identified as a conscientious objector and refused to use a weapon in combat. He endured racial discrimination throughout his service, including, as the family story goes, an instance where, right before being sent into battle, his white commander took away the rifle Lloyd refused to use and gave him a broom to carry instead.

What these types of stories, from my family and many other Black families, indicate is that, aside from making Black people feel physically unsafe (and that's a big aside!), U.S. militarism has been used to strip Black people of their agency and dignity as well.

Serving and Expanding the Community

Such negative experiences with U.S. militarism and security forces have incentivized Black people to redefine what community care is — ensuring that people have food, education, medical care, to name a few — and inspire the rest of the country to follow suit. The [Black Panthers](#) ran programs like free health clinics, senior escort assistance, and pre-school breakfasts because they recognized that their communities were most in need of those services — not wars — to feel safe. Six years after they started their free breakfast program, the U.S. government started providing free breakfasts in public schools.

Back in the 1960s, when police were often responsible for medical transports, but had negative relationships with Black communities, the nearly all-Black [Freedom House Ambulance Service](#) was created to service a predominantly Black neighborhood. With its development, it became the nation's first mobile, emergency medical service staffed by paramedics, and became a model for the emergency medical services we receive today.

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Something about my dad and grandfather's stories that I've thought more about recently is that after all that harassment, endangerment, and unnecessary violence, who do you call? Who do you rage at, or complain to? The police who called the National Guard in? The city officials who have largely ignored your concerns for years? The platoon commander who ignored some of your deepest religious convictions? It's the feeling of isolation that sort of experience can create that gets me, the feeling that all we've got is each other.

And to some extent, plenty of Black people in the United States have felt that way, and responded accordingly by engaging in the forms of self-sufficiency I described above. But in a different vein, we've also built relationships with others out of shared struggle. From building out the [Rainbow Coalition](#) in class and race solidarity in Chicago to successfully advocating against apartheid in South Africa, Black activists have been able to internationalize their definitions of shared community, and build the types of broad support needed to achieve transformative change.

No Time Like the Present

Black activists have pioneered creating alternative community care structures and building solidarity with other impacted communities in order to successfully build security for people, Black or otherwise. There's so much we can and should learn from their examples, especially in light of the challenges of rising facism and Covid-19 that as a country we're facing today.

BURIED LEDES

Win Without War [joined](#) a coalition [letter](#) to the Secretary of State and the National Security Advisor urging a diplomatic path forward with Iran. As negotiations reach the final stretch, it's time to remember that diplomacy is our only viable option.

It turns out, tantrums aren't just for toddlers. [Sen. Lindsey Graham had a meltdown on Wednesday after hearing testimony on the harm of U.S. drone strikes.](#) He has major campaign donors in the drone industry...so we know what's really behind these theatrics.

Speaking of the folly of top Republicans: while Sen. Marco Rubio claims that "there is no embargo on Cuba," to those on the ground, the impacts of the U.S. blockade are all too clear. **Last week marked [60 years of the embargo](#), and it's long past time for it to end.**

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Drone warfare is real warfare: with all its terror, death, and destruction. Read [our statement](#) with Afghans for a Better Tomorrow on the brutal reality of U.S. drone strikes in Afghanistan and elsewhere across the globe.

The United States is “strangling” the Afghan economy, but Members of Congress [voted against](#) assessing whether this policy is causing harm. Spoiler: it is. And there’s a [solution right at our fingertips](#) — if only we’d use it.

The Pentagon [lied about how “well”](#) the war in Afghanistan was going; it [lied about killing an “ISIS operative”](#) who was really an aid worker; and it [repeatedly lies](#) about the number of civilians it kills. **Luckily, there’s now [a helpful disclaimer](#): the Pentagon lies.**

The perfect storm of anti-vaxxers, right-wing bigots, and trolls has [descended on Ottawa](#), some assaulting local residents and flying hate symbols. A siege on the capitol in the name of “freedom”...[déjà vu?](#)

We know that the greatest threats to our security are global challenges like pandemics, authoritarianism, and climate change. Yet our national security apparatus tries to solve every problem through military means. **It’s time to [look beyond the war paradigm](#).**

And finally, a [record-holding bolt](#) (hint: it’s not Usain Bolt).