

man president of the United States. The truth, however, is this: far from undermining the current system of control, the new caste system depends, in no small part, on black exceptionalism. The colorblind public consensus that supports the new caste system insists that race no longer matters. Now that America has officially embraced Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream (by reducing it to the platitude "that we should be judged by the content of our character, not the color of our skin"), the mass incarceration of people of color can be justified only to the extent that the plight of those locked up and locked out is understood to be their choice, not their birthright.

In short, mass incarceration is predicated on the notion that an extraordinary number of African Americans (but not all) have freely chosen a life of crime and thus belong behind bars. A belief that all blacks belong in jail would be incompatible with the social consensus that we have "moved beyond" race and that race is no longer relevant. But a widespread belief that a majority of black and brown men unfortunately belong in jail is compatible with the new American creed, provided that their imprisonment can be interpreted as their own fault. If the prison label imposed on them can be blamed on their culture, poor work ethic, or even their families, then society is absolved of responsibility to do anything about their condition.

This is where black exceptionalism comes in. Highly visible examples of black success are critical to the maintenance of a racial caste system in the era of colorblindness. Black success stories lend credence to the notion that anyone, no matter how poor or how black you may be, can make it to the top, if only you try hard enough. These stories "prove" that race is no longer relevant. Whereas black success stories undermined the logic of Jim Crow, they actually reinforce the system of mass incarceration. Mass incarceration depends for its legitimacy on the widespread belief that all those who appear trapped at the bottom actually chose their fate.

Viewed from this perspective, affirmative action no longer appears entirely progressive. So long as some readily identifiable African Americans are doing well, the system is largely immunized from racial critique. People like Barack Obama who are truly exceptional by any standards, along with others who have been granted exceptional opportunities, legitimate a system that remains fraught with racial bias—especially when they fail to challenge, or even acknowledge, the prevailing racial order. In the current era, while Americans are often eager to embrace token or exceptional African Ameri-

cans, particularly when they go out of their way not to talk about race or racial inequality.

Affirmative action may be counterproductive in yet another sense: it lends credence to a trickle-down theory of racial justice. The notion that giving a relatively small number of people of color access to key positions or institutions will inevitably redound to the benefit of the larger group is belied by the evidence. It also seems to disregard Martin Luther King Jr.'s stern warnings that racial justice requires the complete transformation of social institutions and a dramatic restructuring of our economy, not superficial changes that can be purchased on the cheap. King argued in 1968, "The changes [that have occurred to date] are basically in the social and political areas; the problems we now face—providing jobs, better housing and better education for the poor throughout the country—will require money for their solution, a fact that makes those solutions all the more difficult."⁴⁵ He emphasized that "most of the gains of the past decade were obtained at bargain prices," for the desegregation of public facilities and the election and appointment of a few black officials cost close to nothing. "White America must recognize that justice for black people cannot be achieved without radical changes in the structure of our society. The comfortable, the entrenched, the privileged cannot continue to tremble at the prospect of change in the status quo."⁴⁶

Against this backdrop, diversity-driven affirmative action programs seem to be the epitome of racial justice purchased on the cheap. They create the appearance of racial equity without the reality and do so at no great cost, without fundamentally altering any of the structures that create racial inequality in the first place. Perhaps the best illustration of this fact is that, thanks in part to affirmative action, police departments and law enforcement agencies nationwide have come to look more like America than ever, at precisely the moment that they have waged a war on the ghetto poor and played a leading role in the systematic mass incarceration of people of color. The color of police chiefs across the country has changed, but the role of the police in our society has not.

Gerald Torres and Lani Guinier offer a similar critique of affirmative action in *The Miner's Canary*. They point out that "conventional strategies for social change proceed as though a change in who administers power fundamentally affects the structure of power itself."⁴⁷ This narrow approach to social change is reflected in the justifications offered for affirmative action, most notably the claim that "previous outsiders, once given a chance, will

exercise power *differently*.⁴⁸ The reality, however, is that the existing hierarchy disciplines newcomers, requiring them to exercise power in the same old ways and play by the same old rules in order to survive. The newcomers, Torres and Guinier explain, are easily co-opted, as they have much to lose but little to gain by challenging the rules of the game.

Their point is particularly relevant to the predicament of minority police officers charged with waging the drug war. Profound racial injustice occurs when minority police officers *follow the rules*. It is a scandal when the public learns they have broken the rules, but no rules need be broken for the systematic mass incarceration of people of color to proceed unabated. This uncomfortable fact creates strong incentives for minority officers to deny, to rationalize, or to be willingly blind to the role of law enforcement in creating a racial undercaste. Reports that minority officers may engage in nearly as much racial profiling as white officers have been met with some amazement, but the real surprise is that some minority police officers have been willing to speak out against the practice, given the ferocity of the drug war. A war has been declared against poor communities of color, and the police are expected to wage it. Do we expect minority officers, whose livelihood depends on the very departments charged with waging the war, to play the role of peacenik? That expectation seems unreasonable, yet the dilemma for racial justice advocates is a real one. The quiet complicity of minority officers in the War on Drugs serves to legitimate the system and insulate it from critique. In a nation still stuck in an old Jim Crow mind-set—which equates racism with white bigotry and views racial diversity as proof the problem has been solved—a racially diverse police department invites questions like: “How can you say the Oakland Police Department’s drug raids are racist? There’s a black police chief, and most of the officers involved in the drug raids are black.” If the caste dimensions of mass incarceration were better understood and the limitations of cosmetic diversity were better appreciated, the existence of black police chiefs and black officers would be no more encouraging today than the presence of black slave drivers and black plantation owners hundreds of years ago.

When meaningful change fails to materialize following the achievement of superficial diversity, those who remain locked out can become extremely discouraged and demoralized, resulting in cynicism and resignation. Perhaps more concerning, though, is the fact that inclusion of people of color in power structures, particularly at the top, can paralyze reform efforts. People

of color are often reluctant to challenge institutions led by people who look like them, as they feel a personal stake in the individual’s success. After centuries of being denied access to leadership positions in key social institutions, people of color quite understandably are hesitant to create circumstances that could trigger the downfall of “one of their own.” An incident of police brutality that would be understood as undeniably racist if the officers involved were white may be given a more charitable spin if the officers are black. Similarly, black community residents who might have been inspired to challenge aggressive stop-and-frisk policies of a largely white police department may worry about “hurting” a black police chief. People of color, because of the history of racial subjugation and exclusion, often experience success and failure vicariously through the few who achieve positions of power, fame, and fortune. As a result, cosmetic diversity, which focuses on providing opportunities to individual members of under-represented groups, both diminishes the possibility that unfair rules will be challenged and legitimates the entire system.

Obama—the Promise and the Peril

This dynamic poses particular risks for racial justice advocacy during an Obama presidency. On the one hand, the election of Barack Obama to the presidency creates an extraordinary opportunity for those seeking to end the system of mass incarceration in America. Obama’s stated positions on criminal justice reform suggest that he is opposed to the War on Drugs and the systematic targeting of African Americans for mass incarceration.⁴⁹ Shouldn’t we trust him, now that he is holding the reins of power, to do the right thing?

Trust is tempting, especially because Obama himself violated our nation’s drug laws and almost certainly knows that his life would not have unfolded as it did if he had been arrested on drug charges and treated like a common criminal. As he wrote in his memoir about his wayward youth, “Pot had helped, and booze; maybe a little blow when you could afford it.” Unlike Bill Clinton, who famously admitted he experimented with marijuana on occasion “but didn’t inhale,” Obama has never minimized his illegal drug use. As he said in a 2006 speech to the American Society of Magazine Editors, “I look, you know, when I was a kid, I inhaled. Frequently. That was the

point."⁵⁰ Those "bad decisions," Obama has acknowledged, could have led him to a personal dead end. "Junkie. Pothead. That's where I'd have been headed: the final, fatal role of the young would-be black man." No doubt if Obama had been arrested and treated like a common criminal, he could have served years in prison and been labeled a drug felon for life. What are the chances he would have gone to Harvard Law School, much less become president of the United States, if that had happened? It seems reasonable to assume that Obama, who knows a little something about poverty and the temptations of drugs, would have a "there but for the grace of God go I" attitude about the millions of African and Latino men imprisoned for drug offenses comparable to his own or saddled for life with felony records.

But before we kick back, relax, and wait for racial justice to trickle down, consider this: Obama chose Joe Biden, one of the Senate's most strident drug warriors, as his vice president. The man he picked to serve as his chief of staff in the White House, Rahm Emanuel, was a major proponent of the expansion of the drug war and the slashing of welfare rolls during President Clinton's administration. And the man he tapped to lead the U.S. Department of Justice—the agency that launched and continues to oversee the federal war on drugs—is an African American former U.S. attorney for the District of Columbia who sought to ratchet up the drug war in Washington, D.C., and fought the majority black D.C. City Council in an effort to impose harsh mandatory minimums for marijuana possession. Moreover, on the campaign trail, Obama took a dramatic step back from an earlier position opposing the death penalty, announcing that he now supports the death penalty for child rapists—even if the victim is not killed—even though the U.S. Supreme Court ruled the death penalty for nonhomicides unconstitutional and international law strongly disfavors the practice. The only countries that share Obama's view are countries like Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and China, which allow the death penalty for things like adultery and tax evasion. So why did Obama, on the campaign trail, go out of his way to announce disagreement with a Supreme Court decision ruling the death penalty for child rapists unconstitutional? Clearly he was attempting to immunize himself from any attempt to portray him as "soft" on crime—a tactic reminiscent of Bill Clinton's decision to fly back to Arkansas during the 1992 presidential campaign to oversee the execution of a mentally disabled black man.

Seasoned activists may respond that all of this is "just politics," but, as we have seen in earlier chapters, they are the same politics that gave rise to the

New Jim Crow. Obama has revived President Clinton's Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) program and increased funding for the Byrne grant program—two of the worst federal drug programs of the Clinton era.⁵¹ These programs, despite their benign names, are responsible for the militarization of policing, SWAT teams, Pipeline drug task forces, and the laundry list of drug-war horrors described in chapter 2.

Remarkably, the Obama administration chose to increase funding for Byrne programs twelvefold not in response to any sudden spike in crime rates or any new studies indicating the effectiveness of these programs, but instead because handing law enforcement billions of dollars in cash is an easy, efficient jobs program in the midst of an economic crisis.⁵² The dramatically increased funding for Byrne grants was included as part of the Economic Reinvestment Act of 2009. While the channeling of stimulus dollars to law enforcement may help some police officers keep their jobs at a time when state and local budgets are being slashed, there is a cost. As *New York Times* columnist Charles Blow observed, "[it's] a callous political calculus. . . . The fact that they are ruining the lives of hundreds of thousands of black and Hispanic men and, by extension, the communities they belong to barely seems to register."⁵³

Clinton once boasted that the COPS program, which put tens of thousands of officers on the streets, was responsible for the dramatic fifteen-year drop in violent crime that began in the 1990s. Recent studies, however, have shown that is not the case. A 2005 report by the Government Accountability Office concluded the program may have contributed to a 1 percent reduction in crime—at a cost of \$8 billion.⁵⁴ A peer-reviewed study in the journal *Criminology* found that the COPS program, despite the hype, "had little or no effect on crime."⁵⁵ And while Obama's drug czar, former Seattle police chief Gil Kerlikowske, has said the War on Drugs should no longer be called a war, Obama's budget for law enforcement is actually worse than the Bush administration's in terms of the ratio of dollars devoted to prevention and drug treatment as opposed to law enforcement.⁵⁶ Obama, who is celebrated as evidence of America's triumph over race, is proposing nothing less than reviving up the drug war through the same failed policies and programs that have systematically locked young men of color into a permanent racial undercaste.

The unique and concerning situation racial justice advocates now face is that the very people who are most oppressed by the current caste system—African Americans—may be the least likely to want to challenge it, now that a

black family is living in the White House. If Obama were white, there would be no hesitation to remind him of his youthful drug use when arguing that he should end the drug war and make good on his promises to end unjust mandatory minimums. But do African Americans want the media to talk about Obama's drug use? Do African Americans want to pressure Obama on any issue, let alone issues of race? To go one step further, could it be that many African Americans would actually prefer to ignore racial issues during Obama's presidency, to help ensure him smooth sailing and a triumphant presidency, no matter how bad things are for African Americans in the meantime?

The fact that the last question could plausibly be answered yes raises serious questions for the civil rights community. Have we unwittingly exaggerated the importance of individuals succeeding within pre-existing structures of power, and thereby undermined King's call for a "complete restructuring of our society"? Have we contributed to the disempowerment and passivity of the black community, not only by letting the lawyers take over, but also by communicating the message that the best path—perhaps the only path—to the promised land is infiltrating elite institutions and seizing power at the top, so racial justice can trickle down?

Torres and Guinier suggest the answer to these questions may be yes. They observe that, "surprisingly, strategists on both the left and right, despite their differences, converge on the individual as the unit of power."³⁷ Conservatives challenge the legitimacy of group rights or race consciousness and argue that the best empowerment strategy is entrepreneurship and individual initiative. Civil rights advocates argue that individual group members "represent" the race and that hierarchies of power that lack diversity are illegitimate. The theory is, when black individuals achieve power for themselves, black people as a group benefit, as does society as a whole. "Here we see both liberals and conservatives endorsing the same meta-narrative of American individualism: When individuals get ahead, the group triumphs. When individuals succeed, American democracy prevails."³⁸

The absence of a thoroughgoing structural critique of the prevailing social order explains why so many civil rights advocates responded to Barack Obama's election with glee, combined with hasty reminders that "we still have a long way to go." The predictable response from the casual observer is well, how much further? A black man was just elected president. How much

further do black people want to go? If a black person can be elected president, can't a black person do just about anything now?

All of Us or None

At the same time that many civil rights advocates have been pursuing lawyer-driven, trickle-down strategies for racial justice, a growing number of formerly incarcerated men and women have been organizing in major cities across the United States, providing assistance to those newly released from prison and engaging in grassroots political activism in pursuit of basic civil rights. One such organization, based in Oakland, California, is named All of Us or None. The name explicitly challenges a politics that affords inclusion and acceptance for a few but guarantees exclusion for many. In spirit, it asserts solidarity with the "least of these among us."

Diversity-driven affirmative action, as described and implemented today, sends a different message. The message is that "some of us" will gain inclusion. As a policy, it is blind to those who are beyond its reach, the colored faces at the bottom of the well. One policy alone can't save the world, the skeptic might respond. True enough. But what if affirmative action, as it has been framed and debated, does more harm than good, viewed from the perspective of "all of us"?

This brings us to a critical question: who is the *us* that civil rights advocates are fighting for? Judging from the plethora of groups that have embarked on their own civil rights campaigns since Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination—women, gays, immigrants, Latinos, Asian Americans—the answer seems to be that *us* includes everyone except white men.

This result is not illogical. When Malcolm X condemned "the white man" and declared him the enemy, he was not, of course, speaking about any particular white man, but rather the white, patriarchal order that characterized both slavery and Jim Crow. Malcolm X understood that the United States was created by and for privileged white men. It was white men who dominated politics, controlled the nation's wealth, and wrote the rules by which everyone else was forced to live. No group in the United States can be said to have experienced more privilege, and gone to greater lengths to protect it, than "the white man."

Yet the white man, it turns out, has suffered too. The fact that his suffering has been far less extreme, and has not been linked to a belief in his inherent inferiority, has not made his suffering less real. Civil rights advocates, however, have treated the white man's suffering as largely irrelevant to the pursuit of the promised land. As civil rights lawyers unveiled plans to desegregate public schools, it was poor and working-class whites who were expected to bear the burden of this profound social adjustment, even though many of them were as desperate for upward social mobility and quality education as African Americans. According to the 1950 census, among Southerners in their late twenties, the state-by-state percentages of functional illiterates (people with less than five years of schooling) for whites on farms overlapped with those for blacks in the cities. The majority of Southern whites were better off than Southern blacks, but they were not affluent or well educated by any means; they were semiliterate (with less than twelve years of schooling). Only a tiny minority of whites were affluent and well educated. They stood far apart from the rest of the whites and virtually all blacks.⁵⁹

What lower-class whites *did* have was what W.E.B. Du Bois described as the public and psychological wage⁶⁰ paid to white workers, who depended on their status and privileges as whites to compensate for low pay and harsh working conditions. As described in chapter 1, time and time again, poor and working-class whites were persuaded to choose their racial status interests over their common economic interests with blacks, resulting in the emergence of new caste systems that only marginally benefited whites but were devastating for African Americans.

In retrospect, it seems clear that nothing could have been more important in the 1970s and 1980s than finding a way to create a durable, interracial, bottom-up coalition for social and economic justice to ensure that another caste system did not emerge from the ashes of Jim Crow. Priority should have been given to figuring out some way for poor and working-class whites to feel as though they had a stake—some tangible interest—in the nascent integrated racial order. As Lani Guinier points out, however, the racial liberalism expressed in the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision and endorsed by civil rights litigators “did not offer poor whites even an elementary framework for understanding what they might gain as a result of integration.”⁶¹ Nothing in the opinion or in the subsequent legal strategy made clear that segregation had afforded elites a crucial means of exercising social control

over poor and working-class whites as well as blacks. The Southern white elite, whether planters or industrialists, had successfully endeavored to make all whites think in racial rather than class terms, predictably leading whites to experience desegregation, as Derrick Bell put it, as a net “loss.”⁶²

Given that poor and working-class whites (not white elites) were the ones who had their world rocked by desegregation, it does not take a great leap of empathy to see why affirmative action could be experienced as salt in a wound. Du Bois once observed that the psychological wage of whiteness put “an indelible black face to failure.”⁶³ Yet with the advent of affirmative action, suddenly African Americans were leapfrogging over poor and working-class whites on their way to Harvard and Yale and taking jobs in police departments and fire departments that had once been reserved for whites. Civil rights advocates offered no balm for the wound, publicly resisting calls for class-based affirmative action and dismissing claims of unfairness on the grounds that whites had been enjoying racial preferences for hundreds of years. Resentment, frustration, and anger expressed by poor and working-class whites was chalked up to racism, leading to a subterranean discourse about race and to implicitly racial political appeals, but little honest dialogue.

Perhaps the time has come to give up the racial bribes and begin an honest conversation about race in America. The topic of the conversation should be how *us* can come to include *all of us*. Accomplishing this degree of unity may mean giving up fierce defense of policies and strategies that exacerbate racial tensions and produce for racially defined groups primarily psychological or cosmetic racial benefits.

Of course, if meaningful progress is to be made, whites must give up their racial bribes too, and be willing to sacrifice their racial privilege. Some might argue that in this game of chicken, whites should make the first move. Whites should demonstrate that their silence in the drug war cannot be bought by tacit assurances that their sons and daughters will not be rounded up en masse and locked away. Whites should prove their commitment to dismantling not only mass incarceration, but all of the structures of racial inequality that guarantee for whites the resilience of white privilege. After all, why should “we” give up our racial bribes if whites have been unwilling to give up theirs? In light of our nation’s racial history, that seems profoundly unfair. But if your strategy for racial justice involves waiting for whites to be fair, history suggests it will be a long wait. It’s not that white people are more unjust than others. Rather it seems that an aspect of human nature is the

tendency to cling tightly to one's advantages and privileges and to rationalize the suffering and exclusion of others. This tendency is what led Frederick Douglass to declare that "power concedes nothing without a demand; it never has and it never will."

So what is to be demanded in this moment in our nation's racial history? If the answer is more power, more top jobs, more slots in fancy schools for "us"—a narrow, racially defined *us* that excludes many—we will continue the same power struggles and can expect to achieve many of the same results. Yes, we may still manage to persuade mainstream voters in the midst of an economic crisis that we have relied too heavily on incarceration, that prisons are too expensive, and that drug use is a public health problem, not a crime. But if the movement that emerges to end mass incarceration does not meaningfully address the racial divisions and resentments that gave rise to mass incarceration, and if it fails to cultivate an ethic of genuine care, compassion, and concern for every human being—of every class, race, and nationality—within our nation's borders, including poor whites, who are often pitted against poor people of color, the collapse of mass incarceration will not mean the death of racial caste in America. Inevitably a new system of racialized social control will emerge—one that we cannot foresee, just as the current system of mass incarceration was not predicted by anyone thirty years ago. No task is more urgent for racial justice advocates today than ensuring that America's current racial caste system is its last.

Given what is at stake at this moment in history, bolder, more inspired action is required than we have seen to date. Piecemeal, top-down policy reform on criminal justice issues, combined with a racial justice discourse that revolves largely around the meaning of Barack Obama's election and "post-racialism," will not get us out of our nation's racial quagmire. We must flip the script. Taking our cue from the courageous civil rights advocates who brazenly refused to defend themselves, marching unarmed past white mobs that threatened to kill them, we, too, must be the change we hope to create. If we want to do more than just end mass incarceration—if we want to put an end to the history of racial caste in America—we must lay down our racial bribes, join hands with people of all colors who are not content to wait for change to trickle down, and say to those who would stand in our way: Accept all of us or none.

That is the basic message that Martin Luther King Jr. aimed to deliver through the Poor People's Movement back in 1968. He argued then that the

time had come for racial justice advocates to shift from a civil rights to a human rights paradigm, and that the real work of movement building had only just begun.⁶⁴ A human rights approach, he believed, would offer far greater hope for those of us determined to create a thriving, multiracial, multiethnic democracy free from racial hierarchy than the civil rights model had provided to date. It would offer a positive vision of what we can strive for—a society in which all human beings of all races are treated with dignity, and have the right to food, shelter, health care, education, and security.⁶⁵ This expansive vision could open the door to meaningful alliances between poor and working-class people of all colors, who could begin to see their interests as aligned, rather than in conflict—no longer in competition for scarce resources in a zero-sum game.

A human rights movement, King believed, held revolutionary potential. Speaking at a Southern Christian Leadership Conference staff retreat in May 1967, he told SCLC staff, who were concerned that the Civil Rights Movement had lost its steam and its direction, "It is necessary for us to realize that we have moved from the era of civil rights to the era of human rights." Political reform efforts were no longer adequate to the task at hand, he said. "For the last 12 years, we have been in a reform movement. . . . [But] after Selma and the voting rights bill, we moved into a new era, which must be an era of revolution. We must see the great distinction between a reform movement and a revolutionary movement. We are called upon to raise certain basic questions about the whole society."⁶⁶

More than forty years later, civil rights advocacy is stuck in a model of advocacy King was determined to leave behind. Rather than challenging the basic structure of society and doing the hard work of movement building, the work to which King was still committed at the end of his life—we have been tempted too often by the opportunity for people of color to be included within the political and economic structure as-is, even if it means alienating those who are necessary allies. We have allowed ourselves to be willfully blind to the emergence of a new caste system—a system of social exclusion and communication that has denied millions of African Americans basic human dignity. The significance of this cannot be overstated, for the failure to acknowledge the humanity and dignity of all persons has lurked at the root of every racial caste system. This common thread explains why, in the 1780s, the British Society for the Abolition of Slavery adopted as its official seal a woodcut of a kneeling slave above a banner that read, "AM I NOT A MAN?"

A BROTHER?" That symbol was followed more than a hundred years later by signs worn around the necks of black sanitation workers during the Poor People's Campaign answering the slave's question with the simple statement, I AM A MAN.

The fact that black men could wear the same sign today in protest of the new caste system suggests that the model of civil rights advocacy that has been employed for the past several decades is, as King predicted, inadequate to the task at hand. If we can agree that what is needed now, at this critical juncture, is not more tinkering or tokenism, but as King insisted forty years ago, a "radical restructuring of our society," then perhaps we can also agree that a radical restructuring of our approach to racial justice advocacy is in order as well.

All of this is easier said than done, of course. Change in civil rights organizations, like change in society as a whole, will not come easy. Fully committing to a vision of racial justice that includes grassroots, bottom-up advocacy on behalf of "all of us" will require a major reconsideration of priorities, staffing, strategies, and messages. Egos, competing agendas, career goals, and inertia may get in the way. It may be that traditional civil rights organizations simply cannot, or will not, change. To this it can only be said, without a hint of disrespect: adapt or die.

If Martin Luther King Jr. is right that the arc of history is long, but it bends toward justice, a new movement will arise; and if civil rights organizations fail to keep up with the times, they will be pushed to the side as another generation of advocates comes to the fore. Hopefully the new generation will be led by those who know best the brutality of the new caste system—a group with greater vision, courage, and determination than the old guard can muster, trapped as they may be in an outdated paradigm. This new generation of activists should not disrespect their elders or disparage their contributions or achievements; to the contrary, they should bow their heads in respect, for their forerunners have expended untold hours and made great sacrifices in an elusive quest for justice. But once respects have been paid, they should march right past them, emboldened, as King once said, by the fierce urgency of now.

Those of us who hope to be their allies should not be surprised, if and when this day comes, that when those who have been locked up and locked out finally have the chance to speak and truly be heard, what we hear is rage. The rage may frighten us; it may remind us of riots, uprisings, and buildings

afire. We may be tempted to control it, or douse it with buckets of doubt, dismay, and disbelief. But we should do no such thing. Instead, when a young man who was born in the ghetto and who knows little of life beyond the walls of his prison cell and the invisible cage that has become his life, turns to us in bewilderment and rage, we should do nothing more than look him in the eye and tell him the truth. We should tell him the same truth the great African American writer James Baldwin told his nephew in a letter published in 1962, in one of the most extraordinary books ever written, *The Fire Next Time*. With great passion and searing conviction, Baldwin had this to say to his young nephew:

This is the crime of which I accuse my country and my countrymen, and for which neither I nor time nor history will ever forgive them, that they have destroyed and are destroying hundreds of thousands of lives and do not know it and do not want to know it. . . . It is their innocence which constitutes the crime. . . . This innocent country set you down in a ghetto in which, in fact, it intended that you should perish. The limits of your ambition were, thus, expected to be set forever. You were born into a society which spelled out with brutal clarity, and in as many ways as possible, that you were a worthless human being. You were not expected to aspire to excellence: you were expected to make peace with mediocrity. . . . You have, and many of us have, defeated this intention; and, by a terrible law, a terrible paradox, those innocents who believed that your imprisonment made them safe are losing their grasp on reality. But these men are your brothers—your lost, younger brothers. And if the word integration means anything, this is what it means: that we, with love, shall force our brothers to see themselves as they are, to cease fleeing from reality and begin to change it. For this is your home, my friend, do not be driven from it; great men have done great things here, and will again, and we can make America what it must become. It will be hard, but you come from sturdy, peasant stock, men who picked cotton and dammed rivers and built railroads, and, in the teeth of the most terrifying odds, achieved an unassailable and monumental dignity. You come from a long line of great poets since Homer. One of them said, *The very time I thought I was lost, My dungeon shook and my chains fell off*. . . . We cannot be free until they are free. God bless you, and Godspeed to