

Portals to Politics: Perspectives on Policing from the Grassroots

Amar Bakshi, Shared_Studios

Tracey Meares, Yale University, The Law School

Vesla Weaver, Yale University, African American Studies and Political Science

When people speak to one another without hope of gain or fear of judgment, but to convey their own truth, authentically, and to listen to someone else do the same, they create their own, unique meaning together, laying the groundwork for our shared societies.

– Amar Bakshi

It seems[s] like you're standing right in front of me. It's an amazing technology, but it also represents what this summit's all about, which is young people from all around the world coming up with new ideas and making those ideas a reality.

– Barack Obama in a Portal in 2016

In an era in which real-time media and the fake news cycle, aided by digital technology have facilitated the rise of propaganda, it is easy to conclude that digital technologies impede the functioning of political life. Emergent digital technologies intersect with existing and new political realities. United States citizens live in a time of runaway inequality when ordinary voices of citizens must contend with the rising influence of money in politics, challenges to our most basic democratic institutions (including an independent media), the fraying of our social bonds, and political leaders who are seemingly as polarized as they were when the country was torn by Civil War and its aftermath. And, critically, the neighborhoods we live in and the schools and churches we attend are segregated by race, income, and political ideology. These multiple dimensions of segregation interact with social media use to compound the separation of our social worlds and undermine political discourse across boundaries of class, race and neighborhood. Thus, the speed of development in digital technologies combined with continued erosion of our civic fabric have led some to believe we are headed for a deleterious breakdown in political deliberation in the United States and in other countries across the globe. (Consider the momentous “Brexit” vote in the U.K.)

Despite these pressing challenges, we believe that digital technologies may also be an antidote. While they have the potential to warp facts, silo segments of the citizenry from one another, and compound inequalities of status, digital technologies also have the potential to bridge communities who are far from one another in physical and cultural space, bringing people out of sheltered spaces – people who may never own a passport. Digital technologies have the potential to make ordinary residents the lifeblood of political life. Technology, then, has the potential to make politics more equal, more engaged, and more conducive to the society we envision for the next generation. Technology *should* achieve these goals, and it *can*.

We have created a technology, PORTALS, that enhances politics by transforming the capacity of disparate people and communities to define their narratives, engage one another politically, and, therefore, to be more efficacious citizens. By creating a “wormhole” through space, a bridge to

places unseen and unheard, and, crucially, by making access to these wormholes easy and free, PORTALS facilitate the politics of ordinary people.

PORTALS are gold shipping containers with immersive audio and video technology inside. Upon entering the dark container, which is covered in gray carpet, a participant is connected by life-size video and audio with a complete stranger in an identical gold shipping container in real time in a different city, different time zone, even a different country. This creates the illusion of being in the same room with someone who is, in fact, on the other side of the world, ready to bridge the gap through meaningful conversations and collaborations. Unlike other forms of video communication, a PORTAL is intended to remove the walls that traditional technology creates. It provides a safe and secure space in which participants can be fully present without cropped images or staccato conversations. We are thus provided with an opportunity to read one another's full body language, to make eye contact, to bond over our shared or divergent lived experiences, or to confront difficult political issues in collaboration with each other.

The gold shipping containers can be placed anywhere – in a neighborhood, in a community gathering spot, in a public square. Since December 2014, PORTALS has enabled 25,000 conversations among nearly 9,000 conversationalists in more than 15 countries. PORTAL locations range from cultural centers, museums, universities, and art galleries to public parks, NGOs, tech hubs, and refugee camps. These sites have included Erbil, Iraq; Berlin, Germany; Mumbai, India; Tehran, Iran; Mexico City, Mexico; Herat, Afghanistan; Za'atari, Jordan; Havana, Cuba; New York City, U.S.; San Francisco, U.S.; Washington, DC, U.S.; Seoul, South Korea, and many more. A PORTAL may be eliciting conversations between Washington, DC and Herat in the morning, Tehran in the afternoon, and Havana in the evening.

When people leave a PORTAL, they come out giddy, weeping, and everything in between. They can put their immediate thoughts down in “The Gold Book” that sits outside each PORTAL. The reflections reveal that these experiences touch their hearts and prick their consciousness in some way. Most feel more than a fleeting sense of connection. Take a few entries from The Gold Book:

Often in school we learn about other cultures, countries and lifestyles and what make them different from our own. However, today I learned how we are alike.

*

I had a long conversation with Nikoo. The most wonderful moment was when we sang the song "Edelweiss" from the Sound of Music together. She asked me to sing a song with her... Both of us had grown up watching the Sound of Music. She also asked me what my biggest dream is. It was so special having such a deep conversation with someone who is a complete stranger.

*

Dear Olivier, Thank you so much for your bright spirit and dancing ways. It was very healing for me to meet you because you were 5 years old in 1994, orphaned just like the little kids I worked with in Benaco Camp in Tanzania. I've been afraid to return; it was a difficult time for me there and you were so welcoming. I hope we can meet someday. It's still strange for me to think that

English is the main language there now when we spoke in French. You seem so happy, and that makes me so happy. I hope you have a nice dinner with your uncle & brothers and sisters when you get home tonight. I will remember the quote you shared with me: "better to fail trying than to fail not trying." I hope you can visit my café someday. With love, MaryJane

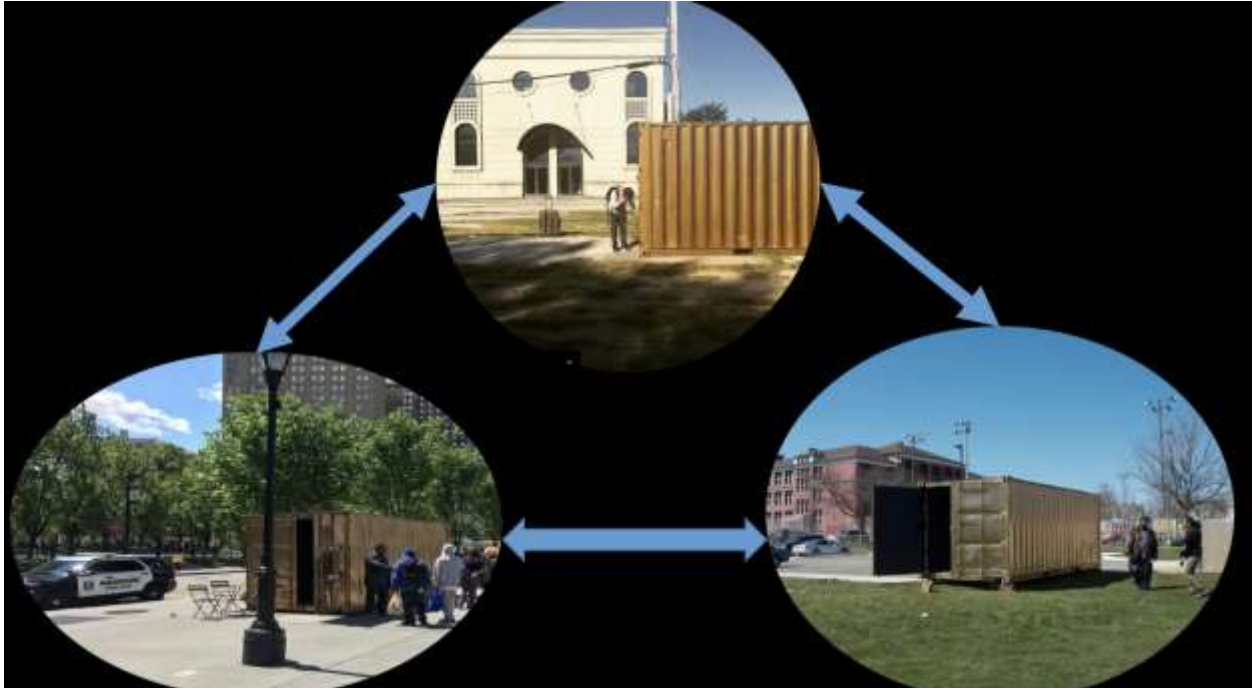
*

Today I had a conversation – and connection – with a new friend in Afghanistan that was deeper and closer than anything I experienced while working at the Pentagon. Thank you for bringing this to life.

Soon, we realized that we were missing an opportunity. Conversations were happening across disparate locales – a rich archive of collective memories and experiences between people who would not otherwise encounter each other – and they would vanish as quickly as the pair left the PORTAL.

We have begun to use PORTALS specifically to initiate conversations about policing and incarceration in communities felled by police violence – communities like Freddie Gray’s, Michael Brown’s, and Eric Garner’s. Our motivation for this was two-fold: first, current research on policed populations is totally inadequate to help us understand how the residents of neighborhoods characterized by a deep reservoir of adversarial citizen/state relations where discipline and extraction was built into the architecture of community life come to experience the police and state authority more broadly. Second, we believed that to reach this understanding, it was necessary to disrupt the traditional method for understanding American citizens through survey questions that ask people whether they strongly agree, somewhat agree, and so on with this or that policy or practice. Instead, we wanted to actually *listen* to what members of these impacted communities said in their own words in interaction not with researchers, but in conversation with others distant physically but from similar neighborhoods. And third, we wanted to empower communities so often marginalized by contemporary discourse to have a say and to amplify the voices of those who are often unheard. We began documenting the conversations.

PORTALS are the first large-scale public arts initiative to connect residents of highly policed communities to one another and to allow them to speak, unscripted, about their experiences and to convey their narrative. Traditional survey approaches come at a cost. They constrain subversive forms of expression by avoiding the articulation of ideas that the researcher does not ask. Moreover, survey research can sacrifice dynamic interactions for replicability and generalization. By placing PORTALS in several neighborhoods around the country that are sites of concentrated policing, including Milwaukee’s 53206 zip code, which endures the highest rate of incarceration in the nation, PORTALS have enabled a fuller understanding of the thoughts, beliefs, experiences, and resistance of urban poor citizens. To date, community residents in Newark, Chicago, and Milwaukee have participated in hundreds of conversations, and many hundred more will occur over the next few months in these locations as well as in Baltimore and Los Angeles. While our current focus is connecting highly policed neighborhoods with one another, we plan to connect such neighborhoods with dissimilar communities without high police contact.



Portals in Military Park, Newark, NJ, Bronzeville in Chicago, IL, and the Amani neighborhood in Milwaukee, WI.

The process is powerful in its simplicity. The PORTAL is staffed by a member of the community – a curator – who does outreach, holds events, and describes the study. Two things are critical here: 1) The curators have longstanding connections and trust in the communities; 2) they use the PORTALS for many informal initiatives (showing movies to kids on the big screen, a space for art and performance, a spot to gather around community projects) on the days and times that conversations are not being recorded for our study.

Individuals enter the PORTAL typically after wandering in out of curiosity or word of mouth and engage in an approximately 20-minute conversation with someone else in a paired city that they do not know. Crucially, as the individuals speak to one another, their conversation is not moderated by a researcher or even guided by traditional research questions posed in a survey. Instead, PORTAL participants are prompted with a single question, “How do you feel about police in your community?” Each of the PORTALS dialogues is video recorded so that it can be transcribed and used for a systematic analysis of how police authority is experienced, how policing is shaping the political thought and action of communities where it is concentrated, and to identify patterns across different ecological contexts. Through PORTALS we can listen to several hundred people discuss their experiences in broader ways than traditional surveys which allows for dynamic interaction across communities. Unlike qualitative case studies or ethnographic studies of police-citizen interactions, PORTALS allow us to study multiple cities and view a much larger sample.



Portals curators Lewis Lee (Milwaukee) and Divad Saunders (Newark) talk about their plans for the Portal. Lewis created a Facebook page, "100 Ways to Use the Portal."

These analyses will advance our understanding of the ways understudied groups engage in politics. PORTALS are more than a much needed methodological approach to better understand the nature of political engagements of more Americans. This project is also an intervention that *is geared towards advancing justice, empowerment, and creative ways to dismantle incarceration from the ground up.* The PORTALS project does not treat individuals in these communities as tokens, but, rather, makes them the center of the national conversation on the deleterious effects of incarceration and policing. It was all too common in the aftermath of the social unrest in Ferguson, MO following Michael Brown's death at the hands of a white police officer, to hear news commentators, academics and pundits opining, "people who live in places like Michael Brown's neighborhood think ..." They did this by speaking to one or two randomly selected people at best and certainly they editorialized without "walking a day in our shoes." In like manner, too often reformers at the policymaking table regularly make invisible the very individuals, families, and communities whose neighborhoods are ground zero of our nation's failed policy experiment of mass incarceration.

PORTALS gives the microphone to places like the Amani neighborhood in Milwaukee, a place where only one-third of the men have not been confined in a cell. It takes a difficult topic of policing, so often the source of trauma, stigma, joblessness, and community destabilization, and turns it into a space for ideas, activism, shared meaning, and resistance. It acts as a bridge to other communities in the black diaspora and empowers residents. People from some of our nation's most disinvested, most surveilled communities have a space to share ideas across communities. They may come to see their experience linked to strangers in neighborhoods many miles away and they may come to feel they are heard and have ownership over the issues that dog their lives. And through making our nation's conversation about criminal justice more democratic, more inclusive, and more informed by the people directly affected, it has the potential to affect wider political discourse.



Young artists in Newark hang out at the Portal after a performance.



Women at the Milwaukee Portal after their conversations.

The positive/transformational potential of PORTALS has been on full display in neighborhoods that have a PORTAL. This is what Lewis, a curator of the Milwaukee PORTAL, had to say:

I have a lot invested in this community. My daughter goes to high school here, I went to high school here. I even was shot in this neighborhood, I lost my brother in this neighborhood.... I've been incarcerated before. I've been shot. I've lost siblings to gang violence and gun violence. I'm a person who a lot of kids look up to in this neighborhood. I have an intimate connection to this neighborhood. And I thought who better to run this Portal than me? And it's been working wonders for this neighborhood..... We been utilizing it in so many ways and it's been helping control the violence that goes on in these neighborhoods. It's been doing a world of a difference. We have made lots of progress on this discussion of criminal justice. So what we're trying to do is just raising awareness and have been shining a light on the fact that there is a problem of mass incarceration of minorities.

Lewis goes on to describe how the conversations have initiated a groundswell of local projects like building a vocational school, conversations with public officials, and describes a portrait of a community rising up to change the terms of the conditions facing their lives. What emerges from these conversations is not ours to define – it may be a fleeting conversation, a renewed sense of shared possibility, an enduring connection, or an altered worldview.

We can learn about each other through the news media—a medium that more often exacerbates our stereotypes of distant communities—or we can learn from each other through interaction. We can try to understand what Ferguson meant to its residents through journalistic depictions

and second-hand accounts, or we can put a human face on the policed. We can try to promote understanding and accountability between police and residents through mandating new codes of conduct, but we can also promote understanding by coming to know the communities we police. We can learn what people think by asking them neat dichotomous survey items on whether they disagree with this or that policy, or we can actually hear people describe their own ideas and dreams for reform and see what policing is through the eyes of those who have firsthand experience. We can substitute Facebook “likes” for conversation that disagrees with or challenges us. We can disengage, feeling the politics of our time are a futile endeavor, or we can build a grassroots narrative, one that can become a resistance politics.



Portals hosts a police-community dialog between Newark and Milwaukee.

Book Outline

Portals to Politics

Introduction

Portals to Politics uses digital technologies to enhance political activism and engage citizens, create connected political spaces, and expand the possibility of studying politics in beneficially recursive ways. The more we understand the politics of ordinary folks, the more effectively we can enhance what exists and create new space for a new “politics from below” (to use Robin Kelley’s apt phrase).

As Cathy Cohen (2004) argues in her path breaking *DuBois Review* article, “Deviance as Resistance,”

It is time for a new generation of scholars to put forth a new analytic framework for the study of Black politics, that of deviance. This, of course, means hearing from and listening to those who many would silence and make invisible in Black communities, individuals like single Black mothers, including those on welfare and/or teen-agers; . . . and young Black men and women who are currently or have been incarcerated and who seem to engage uncritically in unlawful behavior with knowledge of the growing consequences of such behavior. Only by listening to their voices, trying to understand their motivations, and accurately centering their stories with all of its complexities in our work can we begin to understand and map the connection between deviant practice, defiant behavior, and political resistance.

Cohen juxtaposes the politics of lived opposition with the politics of “respectability” noting the failure of the latter to make a real difference in the lives of the marginal. We follow Cohen by leveraging Portals to listen to the voices of ordinary people with limited agency and thereby transform both the meaning of public opinion by upending the method of its capture *and* transform politics in communities of limited agency by connecting them to similar communities, engaging them in the process of politics, and amplifying their voices in policy that impacts them.

I. The Reality of Persistent Political Marginalization of Racially, Economically and Geographically Segregated Groups

The first section of the book will sketch out the existing research about the groups most impacted by adversarial citizen/state relations – relations which suppress political mobilization and activism (Lerman and Weaver 2014). This summary will demonstrate that the current understanding of the politics and perceptions of a key aspect of the state in policed communities—the police—is woefully inadequate. That reality, combined with the fact that recent polling data demonstrate that black Americans’ political engagement is very much tied up with their sense of criminal justice fairness (African American Research Collaborative Report 2016), sets the stage for what is to come.

II. Portals to Politics – A Better Understanding of Politics in Marginal Spaces

A central purpose of this project is to describe and analyze the experiences of race-class subjugated Americans in order to develop better theories of how communities understand and react to police authority and legal authority more generally in American communities. The community is our unit of analysis.

This section will explain the method and its limitations. We are using a non-probability purposive sample.¹ A key aspect of the approach is that it disinhibits the audience and that, while similar to, it is distinct from ethnography or focus groups. This section will also explain the key role of the curator, describe the five cities and neighborhoods where we placed Portals, as well as other aspects of the data collection process (the accompanying survey and participant characteristics, the Gold Book entries, and the observations of curators).

The next three sections will highlight themes that have emerged from the conversations that potentially recast how we understand politics in these communities. In addition to qualitative coding, we will use supervised learning methods to do a systematic text analysis and to examine important patterns by gender, city, race, generation, among others.

A. Being Linked but Not Linked Up: *Nobody is going to hurt me if I am by myself*

Linked fate is a canonical concept in the study of black politics. The idea is that when evaluating a political decision, blacks (and other marginalized groups) make a utility calculation – what’s good for the group is what’s good for me. Linked fate is a political resource for subjugated groups in that it helps them mount collective action problems and interracial differences by seeing a common foe and a common purpose. It is, by now, well documented that those who are high in linked fate are more likely to take political action, to unite behind a candidate or policy, and to support things that advance the race.

In this section, we will show that linked fate-inspired political action that should have emerged in communities like Lewis Lee’s was interrupted by the incentives to remain alone stemming from police actions. It was only as a loner that one could remain under the police radar to have some quiet from police intrusion. Many residents, particularly men, described informal prohibitions on being in a group of friends or neighbors, which would lead to unwanted police attention.

It’s like, I can’t be with, like, we can’t be, like, three or more.... We can’t walk to a park to go play basketball with, like, three or four people without expecting to have to, you know, worry when a police pulls up because they like to sit us in handcuffs, sit us directly on the sidewalk, then check us and act like we’re a major threat.

¹ Purposive samples “can be logically assumed to be representative of the population” by “applying expert knowledge of the population to select in a nonrandom manner a sample of elements that represents a cross-section of the population” (Battaglia 2008a, p. 645). Purposive sampling can be thought of as a subset of convenience sampling, in that respondents are chosen subjectively.

Still others described police incentivizing snitching and how it made people turn against one another:

We're in a dog eat dog world. Everybody for them self.... They make us turn our back against each other and that's what we're out here doing. Cause of these [expletive] police out here. You know, they getting paid for us to do that.

Nobody literally wants to link up, because we are scared of each other.... We are not sticking together as a Black community, man. Me personally, I am antisocial for my own good. Nobody is going to hurt me if I am by myself, but if I am with a clique of people, 9 times out of 10, somebody is going to pull up on you... When you are with a group of people, you become suspect....

This section concludes with an analysis of how indigenous black politics and political action has been constrained in large part through police actions despite the rise of a fervent insurgent movement against police violence from Ferguson to Baltimore and beyond and conversations reveal a recoiling from engagement with the state and each other.

B. I call that a ransom: Profit, Revenue, Exploitation

This section emphasizes narratives reflecting the collective sense of residents of highly policed communities that the system functions beyond its stated goals of public safety, crime control, and punishment for running afoul of the law. Scholars and journalists have begun to point out the ways in which criminal justice systems across the country exploit their less financially secure residents through the criminal justice apparatus (Katzenstein and Waller 2015, Harris 2015). Indeed, systematic extraction was a key plank of the Department of Justice's finding that the city of Ferguson systematically violated the constitutional rights of the people of Ferguson (US DOJ 2015).

In our Portals dialogues, participants commonly articulated how the system made money off of them, that their communities endured disproportionate taxation and financial drain, and how their limited resources were often seized: phrases like “we’re nothing but a check to them,” “they lock people up to make money,” “jailing is big business here”, and “we’re cheaper to imprison than educate” littered the conversations. It was taken for granted that their communities were actually paying for the city settlements of police misconduct suits. A young man was leaving the Portal on one of our visits. He held a paper bag in his hand with his county inmate number on it. He had left the county jail only moments before encountering the Portal. He spoke bitterly about men like him being held at ransom:

We're being locked up and held at a ransom. I call that a ransom, not a bail because this is a system that's created for the rich to get richer, you understand what I'm saying? We're not the rich.... I feel as though that system is created, why? To generate more money for, for commissaries, for my family to spend more money on commissary food and other families for other inmates who are in there..... I have a four-year-old son. I don't wish to spend my money on commissaries. I don't wish [to pay] lawyer's fees, and court fees, and pawns,

and things like that. No, I want to give this money to my son. You know, the summertime is coming, my son loves nature, so you know, what I thought about while I was in the cell was doing more things that involve nature with him. Taking him to the zoo. Taking him to the park. Taking him to the beach....that's where I wish to, to put my money at, not back into this, into this injustice system.

Alongside the findings of “delinking”, being positioned as potential profit sources and the redistribution of resources away from their communities also hindered a “politics from below.”

C. Gender Politics: *I can't keep calm, I have a black son*

This section takes a deeper look at conversations between women in the five sites. We argue that policing has made motherhood a contested authority in many poor communities. While many women articulated their own foundational memories of police treatment, they very quickly went to the experience of their sons and brothers. They braced for the day their young boys entered teenage years; they were embarrassed at being relieved a son was of small stature; they chided President Obama for not understanding what it was to have a black son; they prepared their children. Consider a conversation between Kim and Tina:

Kim: I can't keep calm, I have a black son.

Tina: Right. ...

Kim: [Describes living in Bronzeville]. Anyway, the police have stopped my son twice coming from the train.

Tina: Why?

Kim: Because he was walking too fast. Yeah, that was recently. That pisses me off. I'm like, "what the hell? You supposed to walk slow, dragging?" I don't allow him to wear his pants down and none of that.... I cannot let the police dictate to me how to control my household. I cannot let the police dictate to me how to raise my kids.... Now they want to tell us we can't put our kids outside... It's too much.

D. Justice means JUST US: Lessons across race and class position

This section leverages the fact that through Portals we can move across communities. Instead of studying communities in isolation, Portals brings together people and neighborhoods with non-overlapping experiences. Portal conversations will occur across several divides – sociopolitical, class, race, generation, and city.

In contrast to many middle-class Americans who experience government as a “submerged state” that rarely interferes with personal autonomy and distributes various material benefits in ways unobservable by this class of citizens (Mettler 2011), for residents of communities such as

Ferguson, MO, state interference is routine and expected, making the state an obstacle and frequently an adversary. The revenue system is dependent on fees for minor transgressions and bolstered by informal, private systems of financial seizure like payday lending, commercial bail bonds, and postal code profiling (Fergus 2013); schools are oriented to disciplining/monitoring in addition to educating; the safety net is not only less uplifting, but designed to regulate behavior and sanction people for non-compliance with a host of rules; and the police and penal system constitute a major way citizens interface with government. If the mark of middle class living is “reduced contact with the public sector” (Fernandez-Kelly 2015, 115), for the poor, “the state is all over.”

The juxtaposition of expectations of one’s relationship with the state creates a “hidden curriculum,” (Justice and Meares 2014), a set of lessons contrary to the liberal-democratic conception of criminal justice as egalitarian, procedurally fair, and just. In this section, we explore the different ‘lifeworlds’ of citizens across boundaries of race, class, and location, paying particular attention to conversations across these divides.

Because I'm a white guy and you're an African-American male. So, I haven't been stopped by the police in a year, believe it or not. You said in the last 6 months, you've been stopped 5 times.... I honestly don't know what to tell you because I don't experience that. I can say things, but I don't know what you go through on a day to day basis.

III. Portals as Intervention in Politics

Until recently, civil society thrived in physical, public spaces – town squares, churches, barbershops, civic associations, and bowling leagues. It was here that we connected to other human beings, had conversations, created relationships, and spoke with those who were different from us. With the advent of modern technology, however, we began to disconnect from one another, consuming media but only sporadically engaging others in person. And with the arrival of the Internet, our communities began to exist digitally.

Today, social media dilutes the conversation by allowing us to edit our public personas. Dissenting views are filtered from our media feeds through customized algorithms. We are rarely exposed to those with whom we disagree and can quickly silence differing opinions. Our personal spheres have become separated and curated. Our worlds support fiercely exclusionary group identities. If we do not meaningfully engage with people from different walks of life, our capacity for empathy weakens and divisions expand.

By placing Portals in city squares, we are exploring whether an architectural-technical-media intervention can enable new types of human encounters and new spaces for politics. We are trying to create the global public square of the 21st century. We believe people are curious about other citizens and neighborhoods and want to engage, debate, collaborate and talk to others not like them. They also want to connect to others like them in other places. It is through these connections that we understand that our voices are not singular and can be amplified.

A. Community Dreams: Liberation, Self-Determination, and Resistance

This section takes up Cohen's call and documents the ways in which Portals opens a space for vulnerable people to see and exert their own agency. The dialogues answer critical questions: How do people seek autonomy from police intrusion? How do they mobilize? How do they counter the daily portrayals of their neighborhoods and confront the daily practices that encompass state action there? How do they seek to preserve a positive identity and regain dignity?

As police powers advance marginalizing and controlling forms of racial socialization, they also foster insurgent political resistance. Social movements that target systemic abuses of police powers ([Taylor 2016](#)) find their counterpart in everyday practices designed to obstruct policing--practices that are often dismissed as personal rather than political defiance but that [Cohen \(2004\)](#) rightly theorizes as politically meaningful opposition. These aspects of policing and racial socialization tend to receive very little analytic attention because of a longstanding tendency to view these communities in terms of their deficits (e.g., lacking in organization, resources, efficacy) rather than as resourceful, creative, and deliberate political actors. It is clear to us now that these communities regularly engage in collective opposition to policing abuses in their neighborhoods, to processes of criminalization, and to systematic racial injustices in the legal system. Contemporary examples range from the #BlackLivesMatter movement to "no snitch" campaigns (refusing to speak to police or serve as witnesses) to collectively pursuing jury nullification of convictions in drug cases to efforts to become 'copwise' and reverse police ([Butler 1995](#), [Rios 2011](#), [Stuart 2016](#)).

That's why we need to be able to control our narratives. We need to be able to tell these stories. ...We can't wait for the news to talk about the positive things we do. We can't wait for the news to talk about what Lewis is doing in the community. We need to be able to do that and use social media and these other platforms that we got to promote ourselves. We can't wait for them to do that, you know what I mean?

I don't feel like a person who don't come from this area, who don't come from especially the ghetto, I don't think they should be policing and teaching, because they don't understand us. There's things about us they don't understand. Then they could never understand, because they haven't been through what we been through. They haven't seen what we seen. They think, okay it's a choice. You had a choice to do this, you had a choice to do that. They think it comes down to simple shit, when you know it's more complex than they really fucking know. And instead of busting everybody down ASAP, I think they should get to know the niggas that's always on the block. I think they should get out their cars, smoke a square, chop it up. Talk to everybody. Get to know people. You in this neighborhood.

B. Lived Perspectives on Policy and State Legitimacy

We close this book with examples of politics happening in real time in our communities of interest. We see in the dialogues concrete, complex, worked-out policy responses to stakeholders' challenges. They are simply waiting to be heard.

Voice is critical here. We know from decades of research that people understand the legitimacy of the state when they experience four dimensions in their interactions with state authorities (Tyler & Huo 2006). First, participation and voice is critical. People report higher levels of satisfaction in encounters with authorities when they have an opportunity to explain their situation and perspective on that situation. Research makes clear this matters even when people are aware that their participation will not impact the outcome, they nonetheless want to be taken seriously and listened to. Second, people care a great deal about the fairness of decision making by authorities. That is, they look to indicia of decision-maker neutrality, objectivity, factuality, and consistency of decision making, and transparency. It is important that, in an interaction with a member of the public, a legal authority takes the time to explain what he or she is doing and why. Third, people care a great deal about how they are treated by legal authorities such as police officers. Specifically, people desire to be treated with dignity, with respect for their rights, and with politeness. Note, however, that procedural justice cannot simply be condensed into this one single factor. Fourth, in their interactions with authorities, people want to believe that authorities are acting out of a sense of benevolence toward them. That is, people attempt to discern why authorities are acting the way they are by assessing how they are acting. They want to trust that the motivations of the authorities are sincere, benevolent, and well intentioned. Basically, members of the public want to believe that the authority they are dealing with believes that they *count*.

We submit that Portals is a vehicle for making this happen. Consider a dialogue that provides a window on grassroots policymaking:

Milwaukee
Participant

You ready?

Chicago
Participant

Okay, this is something I wrote. When I was in prison, right? It was a lot of young brothers that's in jail right now. They go, okay? Our drug counselor came back and told us about these brothers, so we came up with something to see if we can assist them. In the future, or just from now to the future. So we came up with what we call the Peer Bridging Program.

I feel like just jumping straight to it. It says:

What is the Peer Bridging concept? *It's a concept that would allow second chances to presently disadvantaged, illiterate, misled, misused, incarcerated children and the ones that committed crimes as children, but are now adults. For it is agreed that most conscience minded people that one's mental state or comprehensive level that holds one accountable for one's actions, not one's physical age. Hence, instead of writing off our children, we should give them a chance at a second chance and make them earn it with a life long commitment to the future citizens of our nation, our children.*

What is the key of the Peer Bridging? *Many teens, children, or those committed crimes in youth are now trapped in a nowhere situation, being incarcerated. They act out due to one or more of the following reasons: peer pressure, enticement from other gang members, loss of contact with family and friends, realization of a dire situation, or death in a family, to name a few.*

As it stands, Pontiac segregations are occupied with young adults that lack basic life skills of a 12 year old. Hence, this should not be a surprising acknowledgement of their actions. Many faculties have been retarded by way of lack of basic education or worldly affairs.

Pontiac or any other prison should not continue to confine these children to learn term segregation confinement. Multiple double digit year segregation time be serious. Unless these children should die in segregation, one should pay close attention to the release. What will you be releasing into the prison population, or into society? Peer Bridging.

What is PB? *PB is a 3 phase program that, if completed, one will be given a second chance in society.*

Phase 1: Communication and programs. The reconstruction of one diminished in mental structure toward abandon. Thus, one must reopen lines of communication. They sat down to undergo a battery of programs. For example, counseling drug program, even if they don't have a history of drug abuse. Gang denunciation, and all levels of school must be completed. A GED is mandatory.

Phase 2: Accept responsibility for work actions. Any participant with a crime against a person must make amends to the victims if possible, or the victim's family, or any representative of the victim. These acts can be made by way of phone or personal order letter. Counselors will set up proper accommodations.

Phase 3: The military and child commitment program. Upon completion of phases 1 and 2, the participant shall enlist in a US military and remain for a term not exceeding 15 years. After the conclusion of the enlistment, want them to remain in the service, though they still must mentor children and not just military children, or discharge with the military assistance with deployment. The participant must mentor children until old age or death prevents it.

In conclusion, as a full one on one democracy peace and forgiveness, America as a whole should wholeheartedly embrace this program to show the world how merciful this is, not only to those abroad but to those at home as well. Every concept has an origin. Thus, let the state of Illinois be the origin of the Peer Bridging concept.

Milwaukee *You wrote that, bro?*

Chicago *Yeah.*

Milwaukee *That's deep. You wrote that criteria?*

Chicago *Yeah.*

Milwaukee *Hey, this is what I want you to do. Can you find that somewhere?*

Chicago *No. This is the only thing with this.*

Milwaukee *Because I teach in the prisons up here.*

Chicago *Oh yeah?*

Milwaukee *Yeah, and I've been trying to find a criteria to implement, and what you said, that's real tight right there. You ever been to Milwaukee?*

Chicago *No. I knew some young brothers from there back in the 80s. They were young bank robbers. (laughs) I was in Oxford, Wisconsin.*

Milwaukee *Oshkosh?*

Chicago *Oxford. The Federal prison.*

Milwaukee *Oh yeah, Oxford. Yeah, I go to prisons a lot.*

Chicago *(laughs)*

Milwaukee *Criteria like the one you got, an initiative to implement new classes. I think you owe it to someone you're talking about.*

Chicago *Okay.*

Milwaukee *You thought about bringing that to the prisons?*

Chicago *Yeah, when I first started doing this, I would try to give it to the prisons and give it to the people. By me being in prison, "We don't really want it." So I had to snap. "No, motherfucker, this ain't about me. My name don't need to be on this. I'm not looking for applaud and awards or nothing. This is for the people, our children, so y'all can have Lyle Lovett. I don't care whose name gets on it. Use it as a skeleton, and you put the meat on it, or take away from it, whatever it is. Our people are in trouble. That's all. So if this can help, here you can have it."*

By me being in jail at the time, they wanted to lolly gag with it. So, all right, I just hold onto it and when I get out, then I start moving again. Here's the thing: it just so happened that I wasn't even supposed to get out at 47th street. I was supposed to go to 67th, but this is the old neighborhood. I said, "to hell with it. I'm going to get off at 47th and walk through." I meet this sister, here, right? Turns out, you are poor. Turns out your birthday's the same day my birthday is.

Milwaukee *Yeah.*

Chicago *You talk about going to help the prisons, I'm talking about going back to the prisons myself to help them. This is not a coincidence, you know what I'm saying? This is how it's supposed to be.*

Milwaukee *That's how the spirit works, man.*

Chicago *Oh yeah.*

Milwaukee *I would like to...*

References

- African American Research Collaborative Report 2016.
http://media.wix.com/ugd/8b2f7d_dfb86cf8723d473984f8fe72f5149499.pdf
- Butler P. 1995. Racially based jury nullification: black power in the criminal justice system. *Yale Law J.* 105(3):677--725
- Cohen CJ. 2004. Deviance as resistance: a new research agenda for the study of black politics. *Du Bois Rev.* 1(1):27--45
- Fergus, D., 2014. Financial Fracking in the Land of the Fee, 1980–2008. In *The Assets Perspective* (pp. 67-95). Palgrave Macmillan US.
- Fernández-Kelly P. 2015. *The Hero's Fight: African Americans in West Baltimore and the Shadow of the State*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press
- Harris A. 2016. *Pound of Flesh: Monetary Sanctions as Punishment for the Poor*. New York: Russell Sage
- Justice B, Meares TL. 2014. How America's criminal justice system educates citizens. *Ann. Am. Acad. Polit. Soc. Sci.* 651(1):159--77
- Katzenstein MF, Waller ML. 2015. Taxing the poor: incarceration, poverty governance, and the seizure of family resources. *Perspect. Polit.* 13(3):638--56
- Lerman AE, Weaver VM. 2014. *Arresting Citizenship: The Democratic Consequences of American Crime Control*. Chicago: Univ. Chicago Press
- Mettler, S., 2011. *The submerged state: How invisible government policies undermine American democracy*. University of Chicago Press.
- Rios VM. 2011. *Punished: policing the lives of black and Latino boys*. New York: New York Univ. Press
- Stuart, F. 2016. *Down, Out, and Under Arrest: Policing and Everyday Life in Skid Row*. University of Chicago Press.
- Taylor K-Y. 2016. *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation*. Chicago: Haymarket Books
- US DOJ (US Department of Justice). 2015. Investigation of the Ferguson police department. www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/opa/press-releases/attachments/2015/03/04/ferguson_police_department_report.pdf