

Portals to Politics:

Grassroots Narratives of Policing in the Low End, North Station Baltimore, South LA, and

53206

Abstract

In 2015, Americans learned that public authorities in Ferguson, Missouri and several other municipalities had imposed a ‘predatory system of government’ on poor black citizens through the police force. Yet, social scientists had few theories for describing how Americans in highly policed neighborhoods experience state authority and how they innovate in response. This paper uses a new technology, Portals, to initiate conversations about policing in communities where these forms of state action are concentrated. Portals are virtual chambers where people in disparate communities can converse as if in the same room. Based on over 800 recorded and transcribed conversations across ten neighborhoods in five cities, we analyze patterns in political discourse around the police and argue that a common form of distorted responsiveness and institutionalized expendability characterizes the relationship between policed communities and the state. Methodologically, we argue that the Portal allows us to transcend certain limitations of traditional survey techniques and study politics in beneficially recursive ways.

Introduction

In the United States the year 2014 marked a turning point in the way that residents of this country understood the institution of policing. On August 9, 2014, unarmed teenager Michael Brown was shot and killed by a white police officer in Ferguson, MO, and by December of that same year, video footage of Eric Garner's choking death in Staten Island, New York blanketed social media and more traditional news outlets. In response to these events, President Obama convened the first national commission in the nation's history devoted to policing, and seven months after Michael Brown's death, the United States Department of Justice delivered a blistering indictment of Ferguson's police department based on its in-depth investigation of practices in the city noting that nearly every aspect of law enforcement in the city was marked by racially disproportionate practices. In particular, Americans learned that public authorities in Ferguson, Missouri had imposed a 'predatory system of government' on poor black citizens through the police force.

In the years since, scholars have sought to understand and respond to the national conversation regarding discrimination in police practice, the seeming newly discovered regularity of police violence against citizens (especially citizens of color), and the prevalent practice of using police to line the coffers of local governments in a world of declining state and local tax revenues (Gordon & Hayward 2016), but there have been precious few systematic analyses of the views of the groups of people most affected by the police practices criticized by the federal government and by the problems related to crime that purportedly justify these practices. Even in the face of numerous first-hand accounts reported in traditional and social media sources, serious gaps in knowledge remain.

Without breadth and depth of such accounts, it is difficult to answer important questions about the relationship those with the greatest stake in local policing have with their government, which means that it is difficult in turn to develop organizing theories of these relationships. In no particular order, here some questions to which existing sources of data cannot answer and which this current project seeks to engage. How do people in highly policed neighborhoods come to understand state authority and how do they characterize the logic and role of the state? What discourses and ideologies do race-class subjugated communities draw on to make sense of their interactions with street-level bureaucrats? How do race-class subjugated communities reinterpret dominant discourses around the state and political authority to “better fit the realities” of their lived experience (Dawson 2001)? How do they redefine or reframe conceptions of black and brown life and worth, public safety, American democracy? How do they innovate in response to local police practices? How do they counter the daily portrayals of their neighborhoods and confront the daily practices that encompass state action there? How does policing shape their collective memories and future aspirations? And how are these discourses patterned across space, gender, generation, race, and class? In sum, how do police interactions shape civic agency?

This paper explores these questions using a new technology, “Portals,” to initiate conversations about policing and incarceration in communities where these forms of state action are concentrated. We analyze patterns in collective political discourses around the police and crime gathered from Portals. Our analysis suggests that those who live in places most marked by criminal justice practices and crime characterize their relationship with the key institution of government present in their daily lives – the police – as one colored by what we call *distorted responsiveness* flowing from a logic of *institutionalized expendability*. We also explore how

Americans respond to this state of affairs. Do they retreat from civic engagement? Or are they, as some accounts of the Black Lives Matters movement indicates, becoming more politically active as a result of the fraught relationships they have to local government?

The paper unfolds in this way: First, we describe the Portals themselves and why we think they are an important innovation methodologically and substantively. Next, we spell out how we used to Portals to engage citizens in civic dialogues about the police. In this section we describe our sites, our approach to the data, and the characteristics of our participants. The last section presents a qualitative analysis of data from about 800 transcribed conversations in urban neighborhoods in six cities. Here, we introduce the concepts of distorted responsiveness and institutionalized expendability. And, we close by offering some future directions.

What are Portals?

Portals are gold shipping containers containing technology that allows people who are geographically disconnected to occupy the same virtual space and converse as if in the same room. The gold shipping containers can be placed anywhere – in a neighborhood, in a community gathering spot, in a public square, outside a university, art gallery, or county jail. Upon entering the dark chamber, 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 or country, creating the illusion of being in the same room with someone who is, in fact, on the other side of the country or world. Unlike other forms of video communication, a Portal is intended to be a highly intimate, secure space in which participants can be fully present in real time, without cropped images or curated personas. 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. As one participant put it, "I don't like to fly so this is like my own virtual airplane."

Since December 2014, the founder of the Portals, artist and entrepreneur Amar Bakshi, has used Portals to enable 25,000 conversations among nearly 9,000 participants, in more than 15 countries, including in Erbil, Iraq; Berlin, Germany; Mumbai, India; Tehran, Iran; Mexico City, Mexico; Herat, Afghanistan; Za'atari, Jordan; Havana, Cuba; Seoul, South Korea; Detroit, New York City, San Francisco, Washington, DC, and several others.

Seeing the potential for a domestic-based version of the Portal to create a "wormhole" in locales often under-sampled through traditional survey techniques, we partnered with Bakshi to locate Portals in several neighborhoods in U.S. cities. Crucially, by making access to these wormholes easy and free, we believed that Portals could transform the capacity of disparate people and communities to define their narratives and create connected political spaces thereby expanding the possibility of studying politics in beneficially recursive ways.

Using Portals for Civic Dialogue about Policing in the City

In April of 2016, we launched the Criminal Justice Dialogues, placing two Portals installments in our pilot sites: Moody Park in Milwaukee, WI and Military Park in Newark, NJ. Later that year, we incorporated a new Portal in the Bronzeville/Grand Boulevard area of Chicago, IL and by mid-2017, a Portal was operating in Lexington Market in Baltimore, MD, the

Chicano neighborhood of Boyle Heights in Los Angeles, CA, and Mexico City, Mexico.¹ To date, we've collected over 800 conversations in these six cities.

The Portals are often located in areas with high concentrations of police-citizen encounters, though there is significant variation across the cities and the sites within each city.² They stretch across distinct policing regimes – from one reformist regime after high profile scandals to one in the midst of oversight by federal government (Baltimore) after it planted toy guns on “suspects”, severed the spinal cord of a local teen, to Milwaukee, who most recently had tased the body of football player Sterling Brown.

Within cities, we moved the portal to different neighborhoods with very different local histories, police presence, and social relations. For example, a Portal could be eliciting conversations between an upwardly mobile working class Latino student population at CSU Dominguez Hills founded after the Watts riot and residents of the the Amani neighborhood in Milwaukee, in the 53206 zipcode, which has the highest share of incarcerated black men in America, only 38% of whom have not spent time in a correctional facility by their thirties.

Around a single portal, there is dynamism. A Portal will draw in 2nd generation immigrants, former gang members, budding activists, college students, working class people on their way to work, sex workers. A site might be near a bus stop, an open air drug market, a housing project or halfway house, a homeless encampment, and a workers coop. It might draw in police officers as well as ex-inmates on ankle monitors.

¹ We do not discuss our Portal installation in Mexico City in this paper because those conversations are in the process of being translated from Spanish.

² The places were selected largely because of convenience and connections – the existence of community partners who would help run the Portal and share space. We often partnered with local nonprofit organizations that have an artistic and justice-oriented mission; they typically provide the Portal a physical space in a central location with high foot-traffic as well as an enduring connection to the community. They were deeply involved in the programming beyond our criminal justice dialogues.

And the dyadic nature of the Portals involves yet another source of variation – that of the participant pairings themselves which span generations, race and class position, and gender.

Conversations between Chicago and Los Angeles, for example, could be between two young Latinas, between a working class black man and a retiree, or a number of other combinations.

Portals also capture differences not just in city spaces, but in the *same neighborhood over time*. For example, we observe communal dialogues and oppositional frameworks in Milwaukee before, in the midst of, and just after the uprising surrounding the police killing of Sylville Smith. We hear Baltimore residents before and after the gun trace task force corruption case.

The Portals project thus encompasses different contexts, different people within those contexts, and even different moments and markers within those contexts. In addition to connecting across large geographic divides, the fact that the Portals are mobile invites other sources of variation. Broadly speaking, the Portals occupied a range of neighborhood “types”: segregated, downtown, and in transition. Importantly, and unlike most existing single site studies, we able to capture different levels of empowerment within similarly disadvantaged contexts (see Table A1). These sources of variation allow for an exploration of how meanings shift across cities, spaces, groups, and time. Readers should refer to the Appendix for further details on each location, dates, number of conversations that occurred in each site.

The process is powerful in its simplicity. Each Portal is staffed by a member of the community – a curator – who does outreach, holds events, and describes the study (and is paid a living wage). Two things are critical here: 1) The curators have long-standing connections and trust in the communities; 2) they use the Portals for many informal “pop up” initiatives (showing movies to kids on the big screen, a space for art and performance like poetry slams, running a barbershop, a spot to gather around community projects, holding chess tournaments, having

community “shared meals,” or dialoguing with global Portals that are not a part of our study) on the days and times that conversations are not being recorded for our study. In this way, the curators create the Portal to be a community gathering spot and interesting place for all kinds of discussions and collaborations, not just for discussing the topic of policing. For just one instance, Portals founder Amar Bakshi says “we have people making a rap album in 15 countries, now being produced out of Milwaukee.”

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 (sometimes, there is more than one participant on each side). After participants hear about the study and give consent to participate but prior to beginning a conversation, they fill out a basic iPad survey consisting of 12 brief questions, including basic demographic background as well as queries about the frequency of interactions with police (age at onset, how many times stopped in last five years), trust and confidence in police, and crime victimization. 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?” Once participants enter the Portal container, they are alone, except for the person they are speaking to in the other city. Each of the Portal dialogues is video recorded, transcribed, then coded for analysis.

Portals participants are not a strictly random sample and we cannot say how representative they are of communities of interest. We believe the Portals exhibit the virtues of a more ethnographic or qualitative method – observing people in their communities and in their own words – while also demonstrating the powerful insights gained from scale and ecological

diversity. We do not know who elects not to have a conversation after learning about the Portal. We do not know what kind of response rate we are getting or whether we are systematically undersampling introverts, those who are more reticent to discuss their experiences with police, or people who are working during the operating hours.

While we cannot systematically assess who we are missing from the communities (and it is not only likely, but certain, that we missed many different kinds of neighborhoods), we believe that not having a representative sampling design is an acceptable tradeoff when gathering narratives and dialogues; we are after richer data that reveals not just a snapshot of opinion that is “representative,” but how people reason together, how they frame things in their own words not those of the survey researcher, and how they develop a theory of state action and power. Interpersonal interactions capture aspects of political life that traditional large-N, representative surveys do not (Sanders 1999) – complexity, reasoning, disagreement, explanations for a given belief.

In explaining her turn to intensive listening in local groups, Cramer puts it this way: “I find mass-sample public opinion surveys enormously helpful for capturing what a large population of people think at a given point in time. But for the task of figuring out why people think what they do I have found no better substitute than listening to them in depth and hearing how they piece the world together for themselves.... Poll-based analyses of opinion ought to be accompanied not just by focus groups or in-depth interviews but also by listening methods that expose us to the conversations and contexts of everyday life” (2016, 20, X). We agree.

Second, we would be more concerned about representativeness or bias if we were testing hypotheses about the distributions of attitudes (*how many*) or causal relationships between

variables (how related), studies based on a “sampling logic.” Our study is more akin to a “case study logic”, “critical when asking *how* and *why* questions, with which a sampling logic has greater difficulty” (Small 2008, 6). That said, our focus on narrative will likely enhance and improve survey data collections and resulting studies that do focus on *how many* type questions. Other scholars can use the discursive themes we locate in Portals conversations to conduct their own larger representative surveys to specifically measure what specific proportion of the population thinks X or Y.

Finally, existing large-N surveys are notoriously inadequate at capturing the experiences of highly policed communities. (See Pettit 2012 for an excellent discussion of how modern social and population surveys regularly disappear incarcerated people from their samples). In these cases, scholars are in a much better position when they design studies to include large numbers of respondents with police experiences, “even if this meant finding them through non-random means, such as organizations” or placing a Portal in a highly policed area (Small 2008, 3). In such cases, researchers usefully turn to non-probability, non-random purposive samples. Indeed, 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 2008, 645).

Our Approach to the Data

We follow the constitutive and “active listening” approaches of scholars like Katherine Cramer (2012), whose “listening investigations” uncovered a “rural consciousness.” Though our topics are quite different – hers of visits to local café klatches of working class whites in rural Wisconsin and ours of dense urban neighborhoods of mostly black and brown people – our

approach is motivated by a similar logic – that listening can yield unmatched insight into political understandings.³ Our approach is an interpretive exercise in hearing their analysis take shape through listening to how they make sense of the world, how they describe the “rules of engagement” with the state, and how they perceive their communities power and position. Through this bottom-up approach, our hope is to identify a collective consciousness and its components: themes that animate or anchor the conversation, rhetorical strategies and metaphors, distinctions draw, references to historical touchpoints, and variations by gender, city, or city.

And at one level up from these questions, once we identified common vocabularies, resonant frames (Woody 2015), and ideological anchors we can begin to answer larger questions about oppositional frameworks, systems of thought, and political morality within RCS communities: What are the ideational currents and collective memories that flow through race-class subjugated communities? What are the competing visions of freedom? What forms the core of ideas? How do race-class subjugated communities reinterpret dominant discourses around the state and state authorities to “better fit the realities” of their lived experience? How do they seek to redefine and reframe dominant conceptions of black and brown life, public safety, American democracy, etc.? Are there radical departures from dominant narratives, discourses, ideologies? What components of liberalism do they reject or adapt? What alternatives are presented to core American traditions? What alternative logics course through the dialogues? Are there concepts or appeals not in the broader public sphere that surface? What futures are

³ Unlike Cramer, and most political ethnographies to date, we purposefully don’t insert ourselves into the conversations at all. Whereas Cramer participated in pre-existing forums for discussion amongst community members with well-established relationships, Portals is a convening of strangers. While the Portal experience is designed to facilitate intimacy and connection in a short amount of time, we believe that revealing our roles as researchers would introduce both a professional and power dynamic that would turn intimate dialogues into an interview. Relatedly, we see Portals as a forum for reciprocity, meaning-making, and connection that traditional interviews and focus groups do not. By de-centering ourselves as researchers, we were able to maintain our commitment to the Portal as a public good, not simply a tool for extraction. Cramer did this through her participating in pre-existing spaces for civic dialogue. We do so by providing a new forum for civic dialogue, and then getting out of the way.

imagined? What are the primary and secondary analytical categories operating at one level up from experiences?

So, instead of asking whether people think police are fair or whether they trust police all the time, sometimes, or never – what a survey might ask -- instead we ask how do they “define the limits of the permissible” of police and residents (Dawson 2001)? Instead of asking does having a police encounter *cause* a particular attitude or behavior -- as those analyzing surveys might do, with some difficulty – we instead listen to hear their “causal story” of state action in their communities. Instead of trying to measure mere mentions of topics, or distributions of anti-police attitudes, we seek to explore *how people reason through their experiences*, the ways they frame and don’t frame problems with security from violence. And by doing all of this, we can locate the various strands of political discourse and beliefs structured by personal and communal experience with the state.

We rely on an in-depth reading and coding of the transcripts to provide a broad accounting of some of the most prominent categories, themes, and ideas that surfaced in conversations and attempt to pull it into a broader framework or vision of how the state operates, the role and function of police in constructing their own positions and that of their communities, and their collective aspirations and visions of justice. Like any dataset, we expect further analysis to uncover how additional metaphors, themes, and ideologies and how they may vary across time, group or place. But these are themes that potentially recast how we understand the politics of race-class subjugated communities in the city in an era of high and targeted police action.

Participant Characteristics

Portals participants gave information about their demographic background, experiences with and trust in police, and victimization on a short iPad survey. Based on this information, the sample was 51 percent black, 24 percent Latino, 10 percent white, 2 percent Asian American, 1.7 percent Native American, and 11 percent mixed race or other. The modal participant had a HS education, was male, and young. Almost half of the sample (48%) reported having a high school education or less and 32 percent reported having at least a Bachelor's degree. 43 percent were under age 30, and 15 percent were 18. These characteristics varied greatly by city (see Appendix figures for site differences); most of our Latino participants are in Los Angeles, participants in Milwaukee and Chicago are younger, and a larger share of participants were female in Baltimore. Los Angeles drew a more educated sample: only 14 percent had a high school education or less in that city compared to 69 percent in Milwaukee, 61 percent in Chicago, and 54 percent in Baltimore. Conversation transcripts reveal even more variation; many in Chicago describe being southern migrants, some in all the cities describe having middle class ties, and many in Los Angeles have law enforcement in their extended families. We will eventually systematically code these mentions.

This is just at the level of the individual; conversations also varied in who was paired with who. Conversations may take place between an older black man in Chicago and a Latina in LA or a white young Baltimorian with an older black woman in Newark (Table A2). Many conversations are between an older and younger generation so conversations cross not just geographic space but also generational time.

Portals participants are familiar with police contact – 72 percent reported that they had been stopped by police (not counting minor traffic violations). Almost half of those in Chicago, Baltimore, and Milwaukee reported that they had been stopped over 7 times (Table A1). And

strikingly, contact was quite recent – about 46 percent of participants who had been stopped at all in their lives in Milwaukee and 40 percent of respondents in Chicago had an involuntary encounter *in the last week or month* (Figure 2). 21 percent of all participants in Milwaukee reported that they had been stopped in the last week. Not surprisingly, women had fewer involuntary contacts with police – almost 40 percent had never been stopped compared to over half of men who had been stopped over 7 times in their lives (Figure 3). Women also had less recent contact; 40 percent of male participants had been stopped in the last month or week compared to one-tenth of women. Though we did not ask them specifically, many revealed in conversations that they had been incarcerated or had a felon conviction. The majority of Portals participants were early in adolescence when they had first encounter being stopped, patted down, or sat in handcuffs (Figure 4). The testimonies in conversation regularly described their first encounter as a defining memory in childhood:

I've been having problems with them since I was 12. I've ... I will remember this day because it was my first police interaction. Me and my cousin was walking down the street from the store and we, it was some girls that went in after us, like a group of girls. But we had came out. Because I told my cousin, she was younger than me at the time, she was like 10. So I'm like come on, I think they on some stuff. So we leave. And the girls ran past us, they went in there and stole some stuff. They ran past us and the police just came and just grabbed up me and my cousin. We like, we not with them. We don't even know them. ...And I remember this officer. He was Officer [], yep that was his name, Officer []. He a real big

dude, like, I was scared as shit. I was 12 years old. I thought I was gon' die. [18 year old black woman, Milwaukee]

At a young age, like twelve years old, I, I experienced the police, they come in, into my house, they lookin' for one person but still they feel the need to put a gun to the head of a twelve-year-old, and I'm, that's my first time seeing a gun, and it's like, wow, this is what I'm exposed to, like just predetermined by who knows what, but not me being a young person. [19 year old black man, Milwaukee]

Like, uh, I wasn't at school one day so the officer, like, came on, he came on me and tried to slam me, and he threw me down a hill. So he tried to put handcuffs on me, and then he said I was resisting, jumped on my back,... And then he tripped me and threw me down a hill... He gave me a ticket, uh, for resisting, and then truancy, and then that's it... That was like two years ago. I'm a senior now. That was like sophomore year. [18 year old black man, Newark]

When I was about 14 and 13, I always been a full figured girl. The police would stop me when I was walking outside with my friends at night, "Are you a prostitute?" As me questions like that. I'm a 13 year old girl at the time. [18 year old black woman, Milwaukee]

When I first got locked up man, and put in a jail cell, I was eight years old. I was, I was in second grade. And after that bro I was like 10, 11, 12, 13, each one of

those years the police called me....They used to pick me up and drop me off on the other side of the [expletive] tracks. [59 year old black man, Chicago]

Trust in the police skewed low in all cities, particularly Milwaukee. Distrust in police was particularly high among younger groups, men, and distrust rose with amount of police contact and recency of contact. For example, just over half of Milwaukee participants who were under 30 said they *never* trusted the police. And just under half of those stopped more than 7 times in their lifetime never trusted police.

[Figure 1 Here]

[Figure 2 Here]

[Figure 3 Here]

[Figure 4 Here]

ANALYSIS: Citizenship & the City

The Portals conversations shed light on how race-class subjugated citizens characterize both the nature and logic of their citizenship based on their experiences with police. The nature of their citizenship is marked by what we will term *distorted responsiveness*, or the feeling that police are both selectively vigilant and negligent. And the logic that motivates the state's orientation to its citizens is a sense that all community members are "up for the taking". When the police see civilians as perpetrators instead of victims, agitators instead of agents, civilians become *institutionally expendable*--available for scapegoat, sanction, or abandon. The

remainder of this paper will define these terms and the discursive patterns that gave rise to them. We conclude by highlighting ways in which this experience of citizenship shapes the civic aspirations of race-class subjugated citizens; while some participants remain hopeful about traditional channels for political change, many exhibit signs of disillusionment with the state all together.

Distorted Responsiveness

Across Portals conversations and across sites, a duality characterizing police orientations to the community comes quickly into focus: penetrating influence and a torturous silence. Conversations did not describe the police as performing a coherent mission but as doing two things simultaneously that made police authority at once useless *and* harmful. What characterized police authority and relationship to the community was something we term *distorted responsiveness*, though it was called many things by participants. The police were omnipotent and ubiquitous, powerful and visible *and* inattentive, unheeding, oblivious. These seemingly opposed orientations described police actions vis-a-vis their community. Participants described what police were doing and what they were not doing as two sides to the same coin. In the end, high levels of distrust of police stemmed from both experiences within this duality - the hyper vigilance in “busting us down” and the aloofness to their real victimization and community hurt other times. The collective understanding was one that positioned the police as not just exhibiting overreach in their communities, as is a common focus in media and academic narratives; but rather, that aggressive patrolling was *yoked* together with invisibility or ambivalence in the face of immediate danger.

In some ways the conversations reflect longstanding ideas of over and under policing, long present on legal and social science literature (Kennedy 1998). Typical conversations describe the police as “doing too much,” “they be like extra,” or they “sweat people about cigarettes” These terse phrases were followed by extensive elaborations on police dispositions to their communities and families; the police were extremely attentive to small infractions, to seeing who people were and where they were going, and to hounding people for minor quibbles. They were “petty.” But this energy and attentiveness to their family and friends did not translate into greater action when people were at risk of violence, predation, or had already endured violence; in these critical moments, the police were absent or slow to respond or responded in illogical ways that further victimized them or transformed them into suspects. Though they easily recognized the duality and described its pattern, participants were also confused by the contradictions inherent in policing, wondering aloud why police seemed to be there at a moment’s notice to check them for insignificant but technically unlawful things but withdrawn and reticent to protect them when it was really desired. Participants described their communities as having a sense of being on a tight leash sometimes but in a free fall of abandonment at key moments in their personal lives and the lives of those around them.

In important ways, however, the conversations reflect an understanding of the contemporary reality of policing, which has a self-understanding located in effectiveness at crime reduction (Meares 2016). This is a relatively new self-understanding. For the bulk of the 20th century it was generally thought, by policing scholars and police themselves that police could not do much about crime except to respond, highlighting the second concern of our respondents – that police fail to come when called for serious crimes (see also Leovy 2015). In our Portals conversations we see respondents describing the newer policing focused on crime

reduction in the form of hyper attentiveness to small offenses. For example, one man details being harrassed for selling “loose squares” but when he hears gunshots and calls an officer over, it’s “nope, I didn’t hear anything.” His conversation partner concludes in agreement that “Yeah, they do shit when they ready to do it. When it’s beneficial to them. They really don’t give a fuck about how you is.” To him, it’s a “gimmick.” There is a keen sense that police are focused in pursuit of drug crime but that life and death situations were not of interest to law enforcement. (“Like a lot of them here in Baltimore, they sit on a corner, and they basically be like, you know, after, they after the people that sell drugs. But they don’t really, they don’t catch the crime. You know, people that’s dying here, getting shot and stuff, they don’t catch that. And, a lot of times, like, a lot of inflictions and I think people anger towards the police, it comes from that. Because, we feel like we’re not safe and secure as we supposed to be.”). At the same time, the participants discuss the failure of police to come when they are really needed because, at least in their understanding, they are obsessed with petty jaywalking.

In this frame, police are both fast *and* slow, vigilant *and* reticent. It was common for participants to highlight this duality, describing the police as being like “johnny on the spot” when they or a friend was selling a loose cigarette but as nonresponsive or blasé when they really needed and tried to enlist their help – it’s gonna be like just callin’ a phone with nobody on the other end, you know.” The juxtaposition of extreme responses to things like a “10 year old walking across the street” without using a crosswalk or “speed walking” with shoulder shrug responses to people being shot in the head was a common feature of conversations. For example, one young black woman in Chicago started to describe the police to her Portal partner: “Well, the police in Chicago, I feel like they’re real picky, because you can call them for one thing and they take forever to come but if they hear it’s another thing that they rush, and that’s not fair.”

Though she used the term “picky”, what she describes is distorted responsiveness. Another person revealed succinctly how things work: “In my city, it's more of a they will put you in jail for weed or something little but if somebody gets shot in the head down the street, they can't find who did it. That's how it is here.” A 21-year old Latino in Los Angeles observed: “I grew up in, mostly like, minority groups area community, so I think policing was, like, really heavy... And then unfortunately when you did call them for help or like attention, they weren't really as productive when you did.” Others described how police made arbitrary decisions, suddenly having the budget and manpower to police scruples and to harass but not to protect: “the police where I live at,” one 31-year old black woman in Milwaukee noted, “they just take a long time to get there. Like, you can call them for anything. It don't matter what it is. And they be talking like, like they don't got enough force out here to come and help you when you really need them. But they be harassing people who ain't got nothing. Absolutely nothing.”

Collectively, participants described police spending a lot of time and energy on arresting people for selling loosies or drinking out of paper bags but when people need the police or there's a chance for police to do something to help the community, they vanish. For others, memorable personal experiences formed the basis for their perceptions of distorted responsiveness. Take one young black woman in Milwaukee, who recalls a personal experience being questioned coming home and police flashing their lights in her sleeping son's face before questioning her about being out late: “I really don't like the police. Like, they don't respond fast enough when you really need them. They rude as ever, they stop you for no apparent reason at all. Like, they just.... I feel like they do too much... Your mission is to serve and protect, but we see you as threats now. Me and my son, we scared to walk down the street. We go home, we shut all the doors, let all the blinds down. We go to bed.” She goes on to say “They worn out they

welcome. They're not even needed.... They're pointless." And after admitting that her biggest fear is having her 2 year old son shot by police, she says "I want to be able to take him to a park, or take him swimming and not be no police up there. Because now they everywhere." Some had had personal experiences with violecnt victimization and police not responding:

I happened to get a bullet in my spine, which is still there. I haven't heard anything about anybody being caught or anything. There's cameras right there on that corner and on the building.

They come but they don't never come on time. Like whe I had got shot they ain't really... they weren't too concerned. They came like, it took them like a hour to come. I mean where I got shot at, it wasn't too serious, but it's still a fact that a person gets shot and y'all taking all day to come.

This fifteen year old girl just got shot in her kitchen and she dead. They couldn't save her. So like you said they don't come fast. *They give you time to die.* They give you time to die. You know it be like oh well they probably be deceased by the time we get there.

These personal experiences were followed by exasperation and confusion; policing logics made very little sense to them and were contradictory and inconsistent. After describing calling the police when his life was threatened and "they never even came," his conversation partner blurted out the question: "So who do we call to protect us? The people that's here to protect us is

pumping fear in our hearts, so who do we call when we need..." Who was their guardian? That question hung heavy on the conversations. After noting that police "show a lack of regard for the community, but then again we're supposed to look up to them," one man admitted being confused ("I don't know what they want us to do, or how they want us to feel.")

Because of distorted responsiveness, participants saw police protection as a hoax; policing was not understood to be a public good at all. For some, it was just an accepted wisdom not worth lingering on. They mocked the official logo of police - "protect and serve." For others, nearly the whole conversation went back and forth describing the duality. This conversation between a man in Los Angeles and a man in Baltimore describes a game to measure how nonresponsive police were to gun violence, and their resulting interpretation that some areas get more responsiveness than others. Notably, these Portals participants disagreed about virtually every other topic that arose -- particularly the Rodney King shooting -- but shared a common description for why gunshots went unresponded to and the perverse reality that the highest crime areas had the least protection.

Los Angeles man: ... in the early 1990s, I lived in Venice and Crenshaw, which was not a good area back then. I used to listen to, to gun fire at night, with my friend.... We used to sit out on the balcony trying to figure out whether it was a 9 millimeter, a 38, an AK-47..... And we used to time them, time they're roll out, and how long it took, took to, to get to the, the crime, to the gunshots, and it was average 15 minutes to half an hour.... And that just does not make sense, you know what I mean? You got a police station which is, is several blocks away from gunshots, occurring all the time...

Baltimore man: Because they're not, they don't care about Watts and Crenshaw.

They worry about Downtown.

Los Angeles man: Right, where the money is.

[A lengthy discussion on why there are no cameras in those areas but there are in downtown ensues.]

Baltimore man: But they don't care! But, but, if there's a community that is predominantly European with trickles of black in it, working class, they do have those cameras.

Los Angeles man: Yeah.

Baltimore man: They, they do. Protecting them.....You ask me, "Well, why do you want to move out?" Because I don't have any protection! I want my kids to go and play also. I don't want to abandon my area.

Los Angeles man: You want your kids to go to a good school, to be able to go to a park unmolested, to have real estate prices go up.

Baltimore man: Yes.

Baltimore man: To have the American Dream. And you cannot have that with drug dealers on the streets, prostitutes, murder, gunfire at night, um, that's just my point of view.

Police were perceived as having incredible power on one side of the duality -- "the police is always gonna be able to do what they wanna do. You know and I know that and I know you know that." Or as another person put it: "[Police are] a legalized gang on their own. They can do whatever they want to. Get you out the way if they want to and then nobody will never find out." Many people who personally experienced unfair treatment would conclude that the badge made police untouchable, and therefore, as the woman noted above, would just "mind their business" and not get involved. However, there were individuals for whom an experience led them to pursue an official complaint, taking their concerns up the chain of command. It is here that they would receive further evidence of distorted responsiveness. A black Baltimore man recounts his experience having his young child beaten by police and eventually dropping the case:

When my son was nine years old, he was beaten very badly by a police officer. Nine years old. This man was a 160 pounds. My son was 86 pounds. He was climbing the tree. One of the neighbors said that he, uh, vandalized his car, which wasn't true. We were having a problem with the man showing the other children in the neighborhood pornographic material and I reported him, so he went after my children. And at that time, I- I was getting a divorce and I was, uh, just coming out of cancer surgery. And, um, he didn't understand to stay outside like the police officer. He said, "No, I'm going to sit in the house." When a police

officer, when he tried to push past and go in the house he lifted my son off the ground with his elbow, where his legs was dangling, in a choke hold. My son started kicking. He kicked him in the groin. He threw him down on top of his shoulders and- and bruised him. All my neighbors said, "That's a child. Please, stop." ...These were all different races coming out and saying, "You don't need to treat that child like that. He doesn't understand." And when I called the supervisor of the police and the NAACP, they were all telling me to report it to the chief of police. But meanwhile the, uh, who investigates the police? Who was that, uh, came in and intimidated my neighbors. Would not come to court. Some showed up but they kept postponing it six different times. They could no longer show up because it was taking money out of their pocket because they were missing work. I ended up dropping it, but it has scarred my son for the rest of his life. You know, um, it scarred me, too. So what I did, I went to the Big Brothers program and I looked for a police officer that was white to be my son's big brother to show him that every officer is not like that. There's good and bad people everywhere.

His conversation partner responded, "That was- that was excellent."

Part of the anger participants voiced in describing distorted responsiveness came from their belief that the practice was reserved for the "hood"- that police authority did not orient itself this way in more affluent communities. "They go out there to show what they doing," one argued speaking of another part of the city, "but they come here only when we got chaos going on. That bothered me, too." One of the LA Portal participants spoke about moving all over the state and "when I go to certain areas there's a community spirit. Like when I go to certain areas

and the police go by, they're like, "Hey, how long have you lived here?" It's like, "I just moved here for about six months." "Yeah, I haven't noticed you." But then when I come back down to the hood where I grew up at, right, they're like, "Put your hands up!" (laughs)." One of the Chicago participants in a distinction regularly drawn between the North and South Sides said: "y'all understand the issues that we deal with when it comes to the South Side; ain't nobody pulling anybody over the same way they are on the North Side where all the white folks are. And I said to them [the police who stopped him], we're the ones that don't have the liquid and the capital to be able to pay for all of this, so that don't even make sense to me."

Interestingly, even those who were sympathetic to the dangers police faced or to the difficulty of the job or revealed positive experiences with an officer, largely agreed with the distorted responsiveness. Many who relied on this frame also spoke vividly about the role their own people and communities played and “neither of them get a pass” -- people who are committing violent crimes and police who violate their rights.

Moreover, a distorted responsiveness frame sometimes branched out to other arenas beyond police authority in the conversations. The conversations reveal a widespread consensus of the state selectively responding, simultaneously a hammer and torturous silence. They spoke of how white kids got civil provisions for getting hooked on heroin, while their children got railroaded for crack. Unarmed blacks are shot in the black or have their “asses whipped” while Dylan Roof shoots an entire church of blacks and is taken to McDonald’s by the arresting officers. In Baltimore, where the opioid epidemic raged long before its current manifestation in rural white areas, participants described with disgust how assistance, treatment, and basic concern were withheld from black communities and the crisis was addressed by sending them to prisons. People are quite astute in recognizing the layers of distorted responsiveness. As the

Baltimore resident describes below, a drug epidemic is met with silence by the municipal government, but when it envelops the wealthier white suburbs, government concern and funds are rolled out. At the individual level, addicts in white areas can “go to the nearest fire department” and get help. Black addicts are arrested. Whites who go into the city and buy drugs are left alone. But when blacks cross the boundary to the rich suburbs, they get arrested.

But now it moved out to the white community.... If your child is an addict, it will be no harm, go to the nearest fire department, and they will help you. Excuse me, fifteen years ago, you didn't say nothing about that....in Maryland, they have Prince George's County, one of the richest, PG County, Potomac, Bethesda, Annapolis, now it's out there, and it's, "Oh my God! My kids are opium, they do, they've been stealing my stuff from the cabinet!" Um, oh, oh. "I'm one too! I been taking it also! Now I'm addicted!" Well, who's going to help you? Da-na-na! We're going to help you. The government's going to give you money for it. Well, 15 years ago, in the black community, we came to you for money. You said, "It's a epidemic. Um, we'll see what we can do." Long as it's here, it's okay, but when it get out there to your children, oh no! To your schools? Oh no! And how did it get there? Those same kids came into the city. No, we go out there, we get arrested. You know that. We out of place. They come to the city, they got carte blanche. everything gets taken care of it when it hits the money community.

Not being heard, not being cared for when you are a victim, not being taken seriously is a form of nonresponsiveness and disregard. It is painful in its own right. But being treated harshly

in the company of perceived abandonment is what we mean by distorted responsiveness. Both inflicted pain, each exacerbated the other. What does it mean to not be heard but to be crushed on a lark? To not be defended one day but targeted the next? Watched over and sanctioned for slights while their real wound went unresolved? Does it give rise to a certain kind of citizenship in race-class subjugated communities? What does it mean to hold accountable each other when the state is withholding?

These two types of vulnerability, rooted in distorted responsiveness, are what characterize their relationship to powerful authority. It meant that their bodies were vulnerable on both flanks, and stories of both kinds of susceptibilities accented the conversations. And it meant being a citizen in their community demanded a kind of tightrope dance -- to stay out of the way of law enforcement (sensing their vulnerability to police actions) while also knowing that enlisting police was perhaps futile, perhaps derailing but sometimes their only recourse. This tightrope usually meant curling into oneself: “I try to stay to myself and mind my business because things can go left at any moment. Whether it’s a fellow brother or whether it’s a police officer. Whether HE’S a fellow brother. You know what I mean?”

Distorted responsiveness was a prominent motif coursing through conversations that bridged various divides, among participants who said “the police ain’t shit” at one end to those that said “the police do the best they can.”

Institutionalized Expendability

In explaining and interpreting their encounters, many conversations revealed a notion of their person, their family, their community as being categorically “up for the taking.” Police had broad warrants to approach them, demand from them, humiliate them, fleece them, or assault

them. In their formulations, displacement, bodily harm, financial seizure, and arbitrary stops were easily accomplished precisely because their value to the city or before society was not recognized. Respondents projected understandings that they were not in a position—through being in the “pure ghetto”, or because of not “knowing any white people,” or because they “looked like a thug” -- to contest. There seemed to be deep recognition that police *knew* that our participants knew that no one was in a position to demand better or hold them accountable because they belonged to overlapping groups with degraded status, and thus were expendable. In theoretical terms, the written rules, the “overt curriculum” (Justice and Meares 2014), could be elided because they were members of a group that was not seen as having clout or significance, or as one person remarked “You know, black already means nothing to America at the end of the day....” A prominent frame in the Portals conversations was how the polity renders them available for profit or un-protection, available to be targeted easily with little consequence. We call this *institutionalized expendability*.

A prominent feature of being “up for the taking” was the idea that police could seek you out in almost any circumstance, however ordinary, for no reason at all; being law-abiding was inconsequential. Going to work, getting gas, walking to your neighbors, being on the porch “enjoying the weather”. Take the following testimony as one example:

Baltimore man: Um, there have been many times where, um, just because I have black pants on and a white T-shirt going to work, I get pulled over, handcuffed on the sidewalk and sat there and I'm 2, 3 hours late to work, getting fired from jobs and, uh, cops never ask, just search. They asked me to search my bag all the time just from walking down the street. Um, after, I mean, I would even, like you

know, I'd even smoke a cigarette outside, they'd come and bother me, it's whenever they see me, wanna know what I'm doing. And I could be, I could be sitting in front of a restaurant, I wouldn't ... with a sandwich and a coffee and they wanna know.

Milwaukee man: Right, right, right, right. Well, hey, it's the same thing these ways, bro. I'm from Milwaukee, know what I'm saying.And ain't nowhere I can really go in my city without these ... the police and the higher authority harassing.... You barely can pull up a pump and pump your gas without the police asking what you doing, you know what I'm saying. You barely can walk your child to the park to see fireworks without the police wondering why you at the park. This is a time for play, you know what I'm saying, for my child, you know what I'm saying. That's like when you a child, your dad tell you, son, I got your back. Anything happen to you, son, I'm here. But instead your father is the one that's abusing you and beating you. Why is you protecting me? You the one harming me. You know what I'm saying? It's the same way with the police and the higher authority here, you know. And we go through this every day. I just got pulled over by the police last week. Not even 3 to 4 days ago, you know what I'm saying. Of harassment. I mean, I got a good license and everything, so what more can you do, you know what I'm saying. What more can you do when I get pulled over? Man, I got a good driving license. I'm a high school graduate. I'm not a felon, you know what I'm saying. I don't smoke, but you still wanna search my car and, and, and harass me like I murdered someone, you know. So. Yeah, bro.

Another participant recounted a particular officer coming around the block repeatedly:

So he constantly harassing us, cussing us out. I mean, all that. I mean, for nothing.

That don't make no sense that you gotta live like that. And he slowing, like he slowing down in his, in his police car. Just to try to look for something that, to try to lock somebody up or shoot somebody. He constantly blasts his bright lights up on us and still harass us. I n- ... and I'm tired of living like that. That mean you can't come on your own porch just to set and just chill and enjoy the good weather.

People made sense of their encounters by drawing on a logic of expendability, rooted in various status designations -- race, youthfulness, neighborhood clout. Each status lessened the likelihood that they would be seen as someone who could push back. One woman described seeing police treatment of a pregnant woman:

I know this girl, she was 7 months pregnant, got dumped on her shit by a police officer.... He dropped her right on her stomach and did not care. Now if she would have lost that baby, then what? Oh nothing because she was black. He would have still had his job and she'd have just lost her child.

The woman was “up for the taking” despite her pregnant status which might have protected her because of her status as a black woman. To some, police exhibit vast displays of power without consequence, even with reward:

If a black man shoots another black man, he go to jail.

Immediately.

If they shoot a black man, he get a pension.

He get a pension.

He start a GoFundMe and become a millionaire.

Another more complex face of being “expendable” was the perception of being viewed as a profit source. Police could not only approach them without justification but saw them as being available for confiscation. “Up for the taking” here reflected a collective experience of having resources appropriated or police as making money off of their families. This idea came out in various ways but it was surprising how often nouns like revenue, profit, tax-collectors or verbs like seizing and profiting animated the conversations. They spoke of how profit loved disorder. They spoke of being fleeced. They wondered aloud why their communities had to pay for being disrespected and killed via city settlements. And how their resources were depleted so the police could protect the interests and assets of the rich. Their neighborhoods and families were used to “collect a dime for the city and the government” and they were “nothing but a check” to the police:

You black man and you young, they don't care about you... ya dig? They want to keep you behind the walls so they can get paid. See they get paid from you good money, man, you know good money. That's how they sending they kids to college and all that stuff man. Buying houses and Mercedes Benz, you know. See, we can't have that, they don't want us to have it, so they kill us, they kill up all our blacks. [53 yr old Black man, Chicago]

A lot of these police departments and criminal justice systems, they all about the money, the dollars and stuff. They like to invest in private prisons and make money off of people getting arrested rather than, like, uh, put them back in the community on a positive path. [Black man, Newark]

It's funny because the police, we're nothing but a check to them. When we do stuff bad, we get sent to jail and they get a paycheck while we just sit in there. None of that money is going to us, they just a paycheck for it. [19 yr old Black man, Milwaukee]

They come in your house and steal out your crib. That's another form of bribery to them. Instead of them asking for some money, they come in your house and find some money and keep it.

peace is not attractive to them, because it does not make them any money. They do not make money off peace, they make money off chaos. [19 yr old Black man, Milwaukee]

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. [19 yr old Black man, Newark]

Academic and legal scholarship has mostly taken as its starting point that policing is outcome to be explained or merely described – what predicts police violence, what share of police encounters are unconstitutional, how police stops correlate with social context, and so on. These are important, to be sure, and a natural starting point given that some of these academic disciplines are more focused on interpersonal violence than state violence, more on social relations than state/citizen relations, and more attuned to bureaucratic procedure than state power. But positioned as an outcome, we deny it's ability to be a crucial input to political life, racial order, and lived citizenship. Portals testimonies demand that we also conceive of policing as a mechanism. It's stated function was to control crime and ensure safety of the public. But most saw at is a means to achieve something else. Narratives conceive of police as loyal foot soldier's of racialized state, gentrification projects, capitalism, keeping them poor and others rich, and as central to the reproduction of violence and control. This was easily accomplished because the point was not public safety but control of groups and resources.

Civic Retreat or Civic Resurgence in the Politics from Below

The *policy feedback* of repeated police interactions with police have been a concern for social scientists over the past decade. Through this research we've learned that arrests and

incarceration result in decreased political participation and trust in government (Lerman and Weaver 2014, White 2015, Burch 2013), while the incarceration of a loved one may increase one's engagement in the polity (Walker 2016). Yet there is much to learn about how particular (and persistent) interactions with the police motivate particular civic behaviors and aspirations, and our hope is that the Portals conversations shed light on this nuance. How do they seek to build power in the face of police interventions characterized by distorted responsiveness? Two themes seemed to figure prominently in participants' civic sensibilities: retreat and recommitment.

Retreat refers to a loss of faith in the state or a desire to "lay low," and steer clear of spaces where police may be in order to avoid encounters. This theme emerged frequently when participants described how they cope with their status as citizens. Retreat discourse takes on two different forms in the dialogues. The first is resignation toward government and citizens' ability to actualize change. "Anything that's got to do with government is straight bullshit" one man explains. This feeling of political dejection often had a temporal component, referencing a sense that the situation has only "gotten worse" with time. "No. I don't. I don't think it can change. I don't ... It is what it is right now. If it was gonna change it would've changed already. And if it's gonna change then it's just getting worse, and it's gotten worse," explains one man. The second type of retreat discourse involved a retreat from civic life altogether. Many describe feeling the need to "keep to myself," to "lay low" avoid being in groups or out in public. One participant describes feeling powerless to help his little brother navigate his adolescence as a Black man in Chicago:

He asked me what can we do to change that. What advice can I give him to change that? Right now, I cannot give you an honest answer.... I'm still trying to

figure that out for myself. Right now, what I'm doing out here in the streets of Chicago, little bro, is staying to myself, minding my own business, and doing what I gotta do to survive in these streets as a black man.

Participants who appear to have had repeatedly negative interactions with the criminal justice system are most likely to deploy the rhetoric of civic retreat. They feel these interactions, coupled with their marginal status of being Black, nullifies their standing with state authority; their resistance would never be taken seriously. Many directly connected their decisions to "stay in" or to themselves to police actions. For example: "The police.. they got badges, they can do what they want. And it don't make no sense. And they can harass you for no reason. I don't have my ID on me right now, but I'm not doing anything. 'I don't want you standing in this spot. You gotta move.' That's why I don't even hand out no more. There's no point in hanging out. I stay in my house every day."

The second theme, recommitment, describes a desire to "come together" and rebuild the community from within. Often this theme is rooted in solidarity amongst racially marginal groups, or amongst Black Americans in particular. It is prevalent both among participants who were most likely to express frustration toward members of their own community as well as among those inclined to diagnose crime and violence as a product of deprivation. Take the dialogue below:

Milwaukee participant: I don't think that's fair at all, man. But that's how this world was set up, you know? I feel like...I don't know how we gonna deal with the police situation, I really don't. I just feel like we all gonna have to, like, we gotta stop aiming at each other.

Chicago participant: Right.

Milwaukee participant: You know what I mean?

Chicago participant: We gotta come back together.

Milwaukee participant: Exactly.

Chicago participant: Everybody trying to kill each other, worry about the game.

You supposed to be trying to make some money, why you out here trying to kill each other?

Milwaukee participant: For real, man, for real. Like, I think that if we organize together then, you know what I'm saying, there's nothing really wrong with that.

Cause we...

Chicago participant: Right, they know...

Milwaukee participant: And not apologize, uh, like the Black Panthers. They didn't do anything to the Black Panthers cause we stronger when we together.

Some describe solidarity in direct reference to public safety and community surveillance. “We the only people in America don’t police they own neighborhoods,” one participant explains to the other. Other forms of solidarity are more holistic, focused on community empowerment through art, intergenerational dialogue, and the frequently recited phrase of “coming together.”

Yeah, I agree man. Exactly what you were saying, that is my thoughts too. It is time for us to just come together as a united group. We just got to all come together, like you said. Like you and all the people that you know of your generation, and all of you that are coming together taking care of the situations at home. You all are setting that platform for me, and my people, and our generation to come in, and then take it to the next level. Then we set that platform for younger people to come in, and then take it to the next level. We cannot depend on them no more, it is obvious, and we can all agree that they are not going to help us.

The language of recommitment fits smoothly within the vision of the Portals as a public square, as a space for imagining the radical potential of civic dialogue and creativity. And the prevalence of this theme may even suggest that more abundant and innovative spaces for civic engagement create new possibilities for civic life in these communities. Furthermore, the instinct may be to read retreat and solidarity as oxymoronic—that there are groups who are withdrawing and others drawing in. But perhaps interpreting retreat and solidarity as two sides of the same coin is a better representation the aspirations of race-class subjugated communities. Perhaps residents *want* strong, safe, and self-policed communities. They aspire for unity, for

agency, and autonomy. In its absence, however, and with the status quo of their citizenship, the safest choice is retreat.

Conclusion

“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.”

This paper employs a new technology to make methodological and, in turn, substantive headway on better understanding policing and incarceration in communities where these forms of state action are concentrated. Methodologically, we argue that Portals provide a means of listening to the public beyond the confines of narrow survey questions, and it does so specifically for a constituency that traditional methods fail to meaningfully reach. And as we've demonstrated in this paper, the substantive gains from this method are plentiful and have important implications for policy.

Policymakers concerned with criminal justice reform have a lot to gain from the wisdom captured in the Portals project. The Department of Justice reports on policing in Baltimore and Ferguson revealed that the city used the police as their surrogate to raise local revenue through fines and fees. What these reports did not consider, however, were the ways in which this form of predation would mean for the way citizens interpret their value—or *expendability*—in society. Similarly, opponents of stop and frisk have critiqued these practices for their injustice and ineffectiveness, but they have done less to examine how the lived experience of *distorted responsiveness* may incentivize a certain kind of retreat and disengagement.

The nuance that Portals offers should not only alert policymakers to the more complicated story of policing happening on the grounds of race class subjugated communities, we hope it also reveals who is missing at the table during the policymaking process. For generations, many intellectuals and activists of color have argued that those most failed by police practices must be a central part of the solution. This leads to a natural extension of this research, where we hope to trace the way discourse in the Portal aligns with or diverges from more historical critiques by Black intellectuals and activists about the particular role the police play in shaping the lives of Black Americans. What is the same or different since Du Bois' *Philadelphia Negro*? To what extent has a vision for community control evolved since Black Power? In addition to tracing this discourse in the dialogues we've collected thus far, we could also imagine using the Portal as an intervention: a space to convene activist groups similar in their mission but distant in their location to provide a space for collaboration and learn more about regional distinctions of local movements.

There are other extensions of this project. The cities we've examined are large, mostly northern, dominate their media markets, and are experiencing significant redevelopment and gentrification. How would citizens in southern, suburban, and/or divested cities characterize their relationship with the police and the state more generally? Another extension in this vein is exploring how white working-class neighborhoods in the same cities experience the police, and how or to what extent these experiences shape their sense of power and belonging. Do these experiences lend themselves to the same feelings of expendability and blame as their neighbors of color? Lastly, as mentioned throughout this paper, we hope to think more about this project's power to intervene as a "public square of the 21st century." The expediency through which

intimacy is developed and ideas are exchanged, suggests that Portals can be a forum for learning more about political socialization, deliberative democracy, and reconciliation.

It is time for scholars of politics to pursue more creative ways to listen to the public and understand the contours of citizenship across race and place in the United States. While survey data and even scraping social media has proven revelatory, a public art project like Portals is an example of how researchers may begin to partner with organizations and community members to listen to frequently marginalized or under-studied publics. The Portals project not only sheds light on how some of the most policed civilians in Baltimore, Newark, Chicago, Milwaukee, and Los Angeles characterize the nature of their citizenship and logic of government action, it reveals a desire for solidarity and agency in an environment where retreat continues to seem like one's safest bet.

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APPENDIX

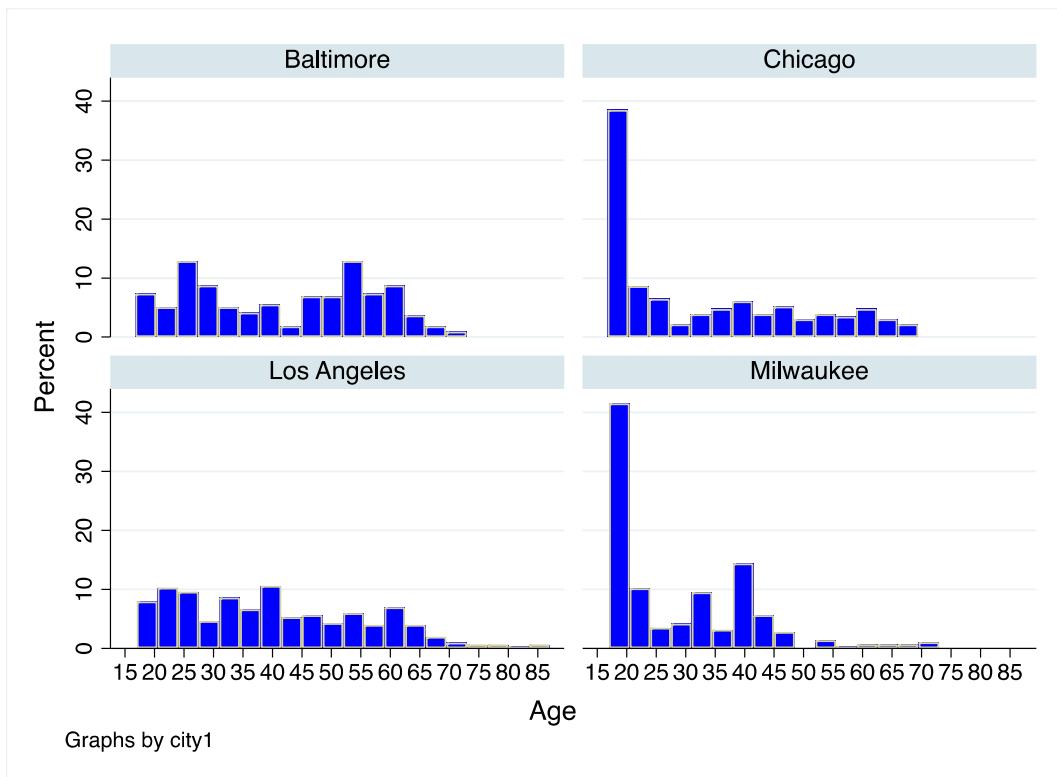
A Portal from the outside:



The Portal experience from inside:



Appendix Figures: Participant Demographic Background by City



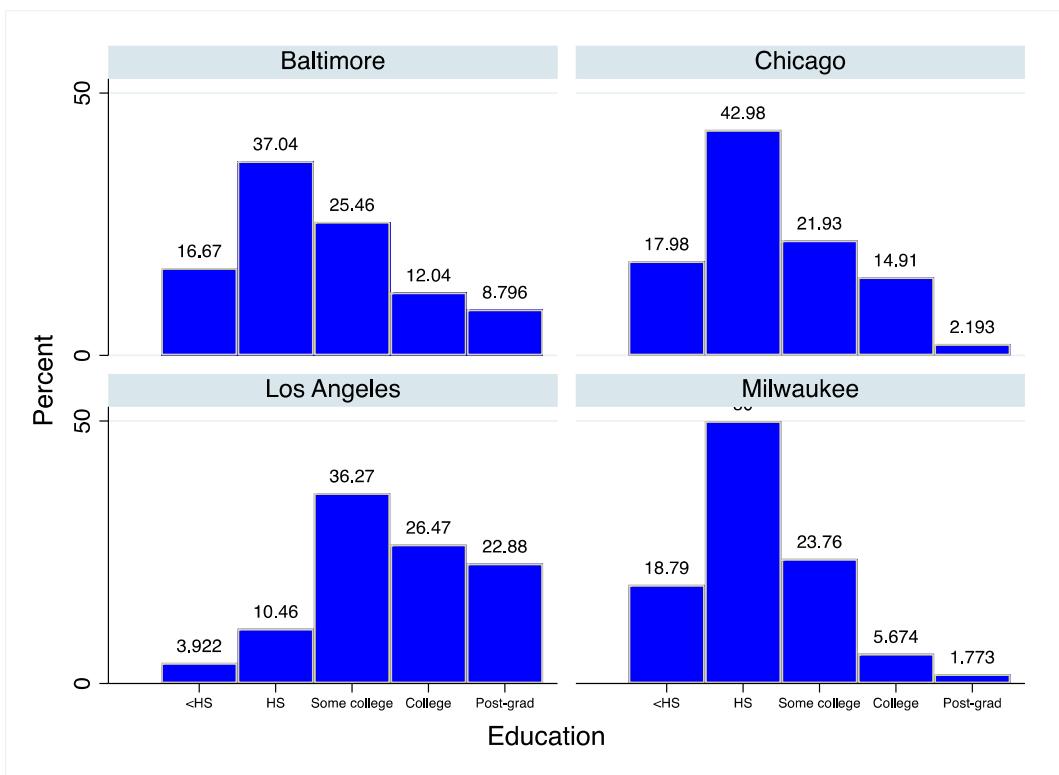
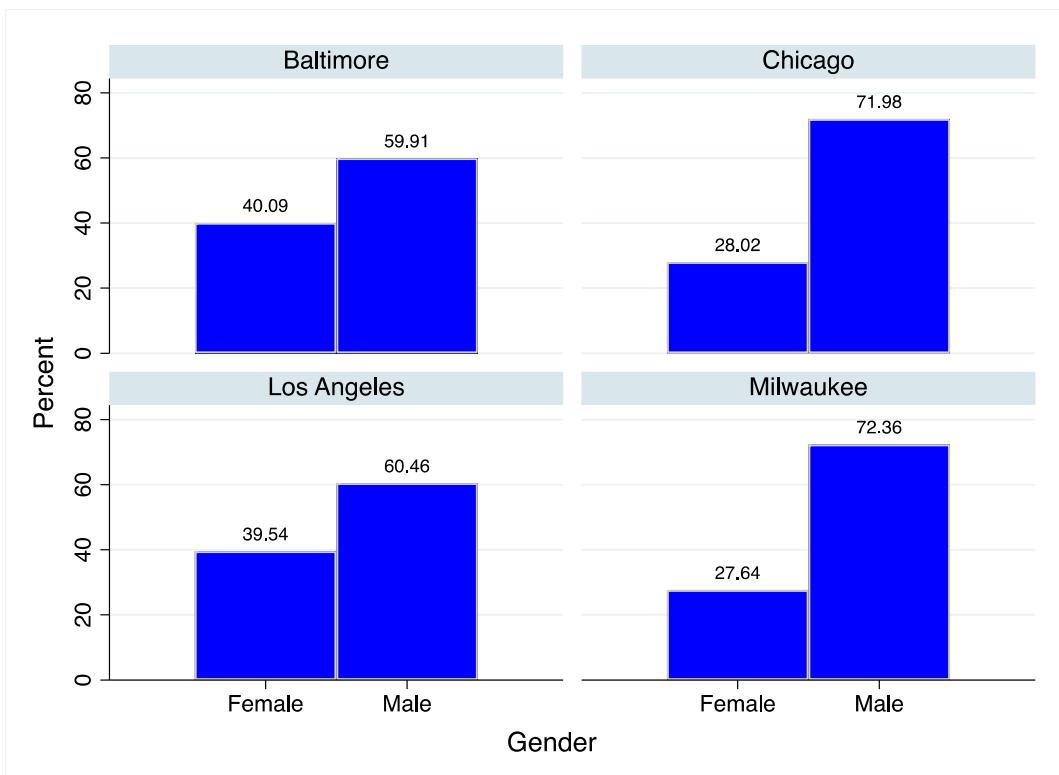


Table A1: Typology of Sites

City (N)	Neighborhood Area & Site	Total Participants in Location	Dates	Dominant Race/Ethnicity	Neighborhood Type	Site Type
Milwaukee 227	Amani & Moody Park COA Goldin Youth and Family Center	227	April 2016- March 2017 (minimal thereafter)	Black	Segregated	Community Center & public park
Chicago 250	Grand Boulevard Harold Washington Cultural Center	53	Sept 2016 – Dec. 2016	Black	Segregated	Cultural Center
	South Chicago Christian Center	94	Dec. 2016 – May 2017 & Aug. 2017-Oct. 2017	Black	Segregated	Small thrift store
	Little Village /Pilsen Instituto del Progresso Latino	58	Nov. 2017-Feb. 2018	Latino	In Transition/ Educational	Alternative School
	Back of the Yards LetUsBreathe Collective Breathing Room	45	March 2018- present	Black	Segregated	Activist
LA 521	Figueroa Corridor	217	Dec. 2017-	Latino	Downtown	Community Market

	(South LA) Mercado La Paloma		present			
	Boyle Heights	9		Latino	In Transition	Community arts organization
	LA Law Library	188	June 2017- Sept. 2017	Majority Black	Downtown	Public library
	CSU Dominguez Hills	107	Nov. 2017- Dec. 2017	Latino	Educational Institution	College campus
Baltimore 462	Downtown Lexington Market	162	Feb. 2017-Oct. 2017	Black	Downtown	Community Market
	Station North YNot Lot	301	Nov. 2017- March 2018	Black/African- American	In Transition	Activist/Arts
Mexico City 118	Centro de Cultura Digital in Chepultepec park	118	June 2017- March 2017	Latino	Downtown	Entrance to park
Newark 100	Lincoln Park & Military Park	100	April 2016-Oct. 2017	Black/African- American	In Transition	Public park

Participants span cities and sites but conversations tend to be between particular paired cities:

Table A2: Total # of Conversations between City Pairings⁴

	Milwaukee	Newark	Chicago	Baltimore	Los Angeles	Mexico City
Milwaukee	100?	137	56	34	0	
Newark	100	0	0	0	0	0
Chicago	137	0	56	51	6	
Baltimore	56	0	56	337	13	
Los Angeles	34	0	51	337		99
Mexico City	0	0	6	13	99	

⁴ The dates of Portals city pairings are:

April 2016 – September 2016 (Pilot): Newark and Milwaukee

September 2016 - January 2017: Chicago and Milwaukee

February 2017 - March 2017: Chicago, Milwaukee and Baltimore

June 2017 - September 2017: Baltimore, LA, Mexico City and minimal Milwaukee

November 2017 - March 2017: Baltimore, LA, Chicago and Mexico City

Portals to Politics Figures

Figure 1: Frequency of Police Encounters

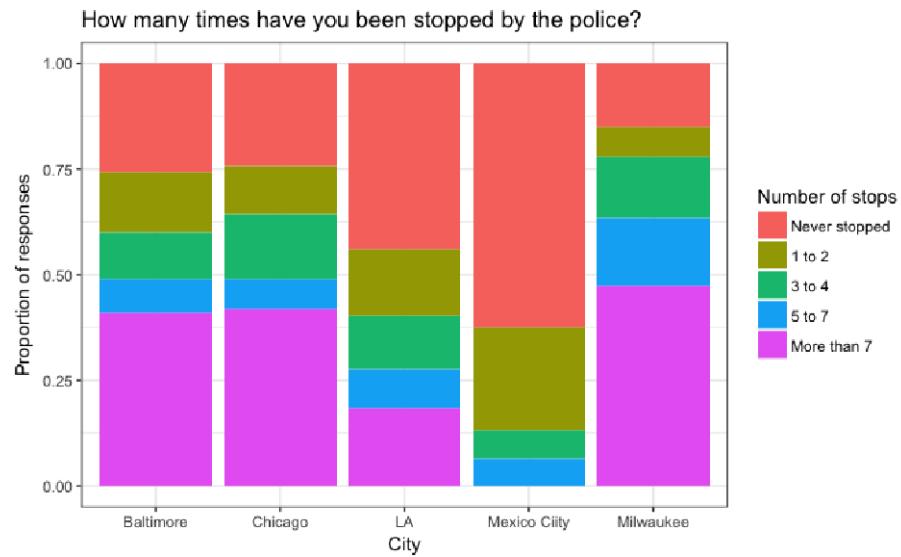


Figure 2: Last Police Contact

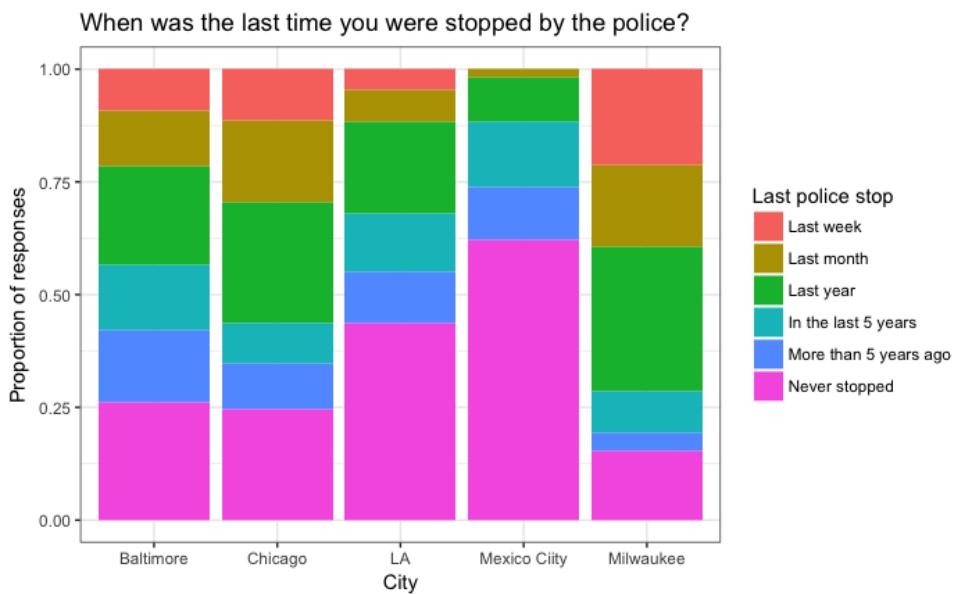


Figure 3: Exposure to Police by Gender

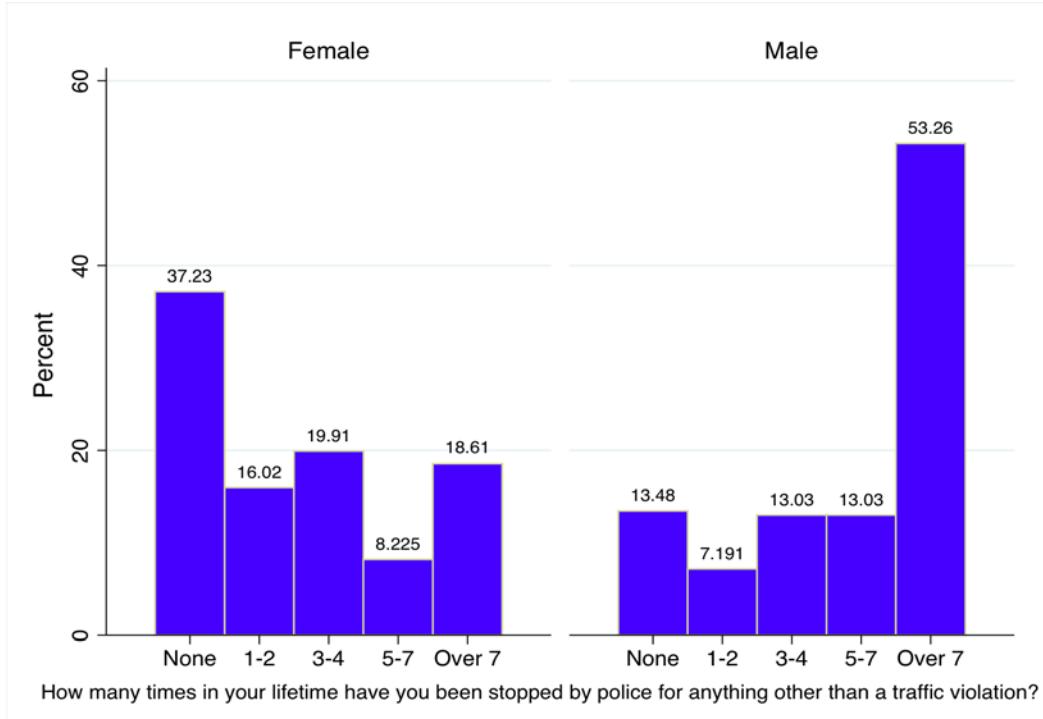


Figure 4: Majority of Participants in Early Adolescence at Initial Police Contact