

This Ain't Your Parents' Civil Rights Movement

**Cori Bush, Christine Hendricks, Calvin Kennedy, Jihad Khayyam, and
Ebony Williams**

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Christine Hendricks is a member of the University City School Board and one of the members of the Ferguson Frontline. She is a mother of three boys and is also part of the Yarn Mission. Calvin Kennedy is one of the members of the St. Louis Peacekeepers, and also a member of the Ferguson Frontline. He is the father of two boys and one girl. Ebony Williams is a member of the Lost Voices, and a mentor for girls. Jihad Khayyam is a member of Better Family Life, and a financial literacy educator. Pastor Cori Bush is a nurse working in underserved communities, and is the co-director of the Truth-Telling Project.

David Ragland: What is this movement? Why is it not our parents' movement? Why are you in it?

Christine Hendricks: This movement is everything right now. I guess it's taking over, for me. It's not our parents' movement because when I became knowledgeable about what happened on August 9th—I don't watch a lot of television so I didn't get my information from the news—I got my information from social media. I am a millennial, and a lot of times we get things from social media. I saw videos of people my age in the streets, chanting in front of the police, saying “Fuck the police,” which is what I grew up listening to with the tail end of N.W.A. That was major to me because I had never seen anything like that in my lifetime, people actually standing up against their government. I got in it for many reasons, the least of which is I have three boys. I graduated from high school with Lesley McSpadden. We weren't friends or anything, but we did graduate from high school together, so that could have been my son. So why wouldn't I go out there?

You know, a lot of times people talk about what they could do, what they want to do, what they should do, but they don't do it. I was tired of that and I saw all of these young people in the streets with passion. On the news they showed us looting and rioting, but it wasn't even really that. People were saying that they were going to decide to step out of the box, step out of the matrix, decide not to be programmed and not to believe that what happened to this young man was okay in any stretch of the

imagination. That's why I came. Because I'm a mother of three kids I couldn't be out there on day one, but as soon as I could find somebody to take care of my kids I was out there.

You want to think that the things you see on TV with the tanks and the tear gas, you want to think that's fake or you want to feel removed from it because you're not there. It's something psychologists call cognitive dissonance. You don't really understand it because you're not there, you don't have any real feel for what people are actually going through.

Actually being out in Ferguson and witnessing it was like being in occupied territory. We went there but then left early because we heard they were tear-gassing people. We couldn't even get back to our cars that night. It was August 12th. The police stopped us and told us that we weren't allowed to be out in our own city after a certain time. I don't even think it was ten o'clock. The police officer said, "Hands up." Of course everybody said, "Don't shoot." I was frustrated the cops wouldn't let us past, get to our own car and get home, a block and a half away. He pulled his gun up at me, and told me it wasn't a game, it was serious. This is the second or third night. Imagine how it escalated from there. Imagine seeing the tanks on the street, day after day. To me it wasn't, "Oh this is scary, let me back out." To me it was like, "This is scary, why is this okay to happen? Let me go all the way in." That's basically how I became part of the movement.

A lot of times, police brutality does not have a face to it. You see abstract people on television, on YouTube or whatever, and you don't know who they are. You're desensitized to it, because you're used to seeing it everywhere. So now you can put a face to it. You might not actually be able to see my face in the video because, not only am I the victim, I'm also the photographer, the cameraperson.

We were doing an action at Busch Stadium. It was maybe thirty or forty of us, it was very peaceful, it was the regulars, people that are out there all the time. We were not violent and for the most part did not agitate the crowd, although they did agitate us. Somebody threw a cup of ice and it landed on somebody's children, because people do bring their children to protest. We moved on about our night, we did a few chants. At some point we all broke up. We marched down Washington Street, which is in the party district. On our way back we took to the street, said a few chants, "Black Lives Matter," we got on the sidewalk and tried to go home. At this point a bike cop tried to arrest a friend of ours, and it kind of goes from there.

He tased me three times for walking on the sidewalk, for using my voice to speak out about police brutality. He abused his power. He knew I was out there a lot, he knew I was a protestor, but he didn't realize that I had political connections. He didn't realize that one of the people who sat on the School Board at the time is also a State Senator, Maria Chappelle-Nadal. The police got on television and said "She was resisting aggressively." But once it got out there, they couldn't sweep it under the rug. That happened Friday night, and Sunday morning I watched the video five times and cried, counting each and

93 | Juniata Voices

every time he electrocuted me. And for what? For doing what we're all told to do? To stand up like MLK and the other civil rights leaders they teach you about in school? And when we do, this?

Calvin Kennedy: I serve as a peacekeeper and what we do is work as a buffer between civilians and law enforcement. A lot of people really don't understand Missouri because it was one of the last states to be free of slaves. Not only are we fighting against our law enforcement, but we try and fight against the ways and acts of the government in our city and state. We grew up seeing cops harass black communities every day. They would pull up, arrest guys, and sit them on the curb. I have friends who have had their teeth knocked out just for making a comment like, "Why are you arresting me?" These days, they mistreat women. When I saw the young generation react during the Ferguson uprising because they were tired of police brutality, I had to let my children know, "I gotta be out there." They understand, because not only am I doing it for me, I'm doing it for my children. They've got to grow older in this world.

Witnessing Mike Brown laying on the ground for four hours and a half—in Missouri they don't let a dog lay out that long—showed me that this system do not care. We're protesting, we not promoting hate, but the newscasts showing burning buildings and American flags turned upside down. We just basically saying, the system is guilty. How can we walk around with the red, white, and blue flag, and look at what they doing to us? When we got out there we realized that it wasn't just our black communities who was upset. We had whites, different cultures, people coming from all across the world just to get the experience in Ferguson because they was upset. In reality, they could have just did this where they live at. But they travelled because it meant something to let it out, and these days law enforcement really lost their authority. I know a lot of times I say I hate the police, but that's only because of what they stand for. I don't hate all of them—I know there are some good cops. But if they don't stand up against the bad ones, then what are we to expect? If a good cop ride along with a bad cop and he not checking his partner or doing the right thing, then they're both guilty.

They kill us, they plant guns on us, and they plant drugs on us. In the Ferguson uprising we've seen them slam pregnant women on the ground. We've seen them stomp people. They shoot tear gas. We saw four year-old kids come in contact with this gas. We saw them shoot this stuff in people's backyards with multiple families in the house. It was just not a good sight. It was like we were in a movie or something. It just seemed impossible. Why would you bring a tank through these communities, when all you gotta do is just tell the police, "Clean up y'all department, quit the racism, quit the evil acts?" This been going on for so long, and it's not just St. Louis, Missouri—it's worldwide. It's not like black communities are all violent. It's not like we're out here killing cops, or killing unarmed black kids. We not doing that. So why are the cops getting away with this stuff? I want you all to think about that. Why

they getting away with it? Because if we don't stick together to face them and tell them "You all gotta stop," then it will just get ten times worse.

Ebony Williams: This conversation is going to be uncomfortable. It is not our job, it is not Ferguson Frontline's job, to tell y'all how to treat us, how to treat other minorities, how to treat other black people. It is not our job to teach you, your family, your cousins, sisters, brothers, and peers, how to respect somebody like they would want to be respected.

Back in my parents' movement days, stuff ain't go like it went now. See, we reasoned with some people, we tried to work with some people because we thought it would be better. We asked questions because we thought that we would actually get the answers that we wanted. Today, we not asking no questions. It's either you're giving it to us, or we're shutting that shit down. It's either you give us what we came for, or ain't nobody leaving. You gotta understand just this right here: most of y'all got privilege. Why would you be afraid of me because of my skin color when we all the same on the inside, for real? I had to really take some time and think about it. I've even had conversations with some people that acted as if they were scared of me. Somebody would tell me, "I never saw a black person before." That's the problem.

Back in our city, we call that white folk work. That's where y'all have to go tell y'all cousins, y'all daddies that say these Confederate flags are their heritage, they mean hate. Y'all know that, right? It is not a heritage to go on about flashing a flag that for so many years has shown so much hatred to minorities. In rural areas, big cities, all over the world, it should never become a point where any type of race should ever feel like they do not belong. I don't want to feel like I'm being judged just because of my name, because of my skin color, or because of the way I talk. Just because I don't give you words out of an encyclopedia doesn't mean I'm not smart. It just means I'm going to tell you the quickest way that I know how so I don't have to spend half of my time talking to you mostly in large words. You know what I mean. I'm not going to tell you to dumb yourself down to talk to other people. If I was your professor and I was talking to you, I would tell you something so that you can understand. Everybody has their place—it's the teacher and the learner. The point of me being the teacher is so that I can adapt to your learning habits. If I was trying to explain something to you, I would have to explain it all the way down to where I know you understand and you can tell me that you understand. How helpful is it to me if I treat you like, if you don't understand that's just up to you. No, we have to be able to actually look into each other and make stuff happen together. We gotta be able to unify.

I started in this movement mostly because I was tired. I'm still young, but I feel like everyday that I walk the streets I got the weight on my shoulders. Every day that I walk the streets, I know that there's a chance I might get stopped, and that if they stop me I don't know what's going to happen. It's kind of hard to explain. It's like every day that I wake up, I gotta pray that I make it through the day. I gotta pray

that I live once I walk outside my door. Sometimes even sleeping in your house you still gotta feel unsafe, because now they coming in people's houses, killing them. Don't ever feel safe because you think you got the media or because you think people got cell phones and stuff, because that don't even help. I can videotape somebody getting executed right now and even though the state see it, the officer still walk free. In some type of way, shape, or form they are going to justify it.

At the end of the day we all—black, white, Mexican, Chinese, it really don't matter—in the same category up under them. We all working for them. We all paying them. In some type of way, we all a slave to the system. Ain't none of us free. I don't care how much you trying to sit here and educate yourself out of these books that they giving y'all, at the end of the day the only thing they doing is like when you go to art class and mold those little bowls and stuff and put it in ceramic. That's all they doing to you, they molding you into what they want you to be so that you can make them richer, so you can make the rich richer and the powerful more powerful. This is not a game. When it rains, everybody getting wet. Y'all need to be paying attention to that, all the time.

Jihad Khayyam: What happened in Ferguson was an uprising, not a riot. An uprising is when you are challenging government and leadership. When I talk about five million dollars in damage, 140 injuries, nine of those injuries being police officers, seventeen police cars being burned, and countless businesses destroyed, I'm talking about the Vancouver Stanley Cup of 2011. I'm not talking about Ferguson. It has shown the hypocrisy of America—that everybody is not getting treated the same. Essentially, what we are fighting against is racism and white supremacy. They killed a teenager who was walking, Mike Brown, Jr. They killed Tamir Rice, a little boy playing. Sandra Bland, walking. Eric Garner, standing. It appears that racism and white supremacy doesn't ask you what you believe in. It oppresses us because of who we are. They don't ask if I'm Baptist or Catholic, they don't ask if I'm Alpha or Kappa. They just deliver their predetermined fate for you, which is death by their hands. This is what we're fighting.

Allowing Mike Brown, Jr. to lay on the ground at the height of the summer for four and a half hours, as his mother is standing on the side, was a historic move. When they used to lynch us they used to leave the body hanging so that the community could see what would be done to them, and know to stay in their place. But this is not our parents' movement. See, they made a mistake this time. We are up now. I don't know how long they think they can oppress a people and we not stand up. They was pointing guns at us and teargassing us, but we would rather die on our feet than to live on our knees. When history is told, we will be the real patriots for America because we going to make her say who she is. We going to make her promise real. And if we can't have it, we gon' shut it down. That's why we shut the highways and byways down. It's not going to be business as usual. We will stop commerce. They never expected us to be free, and they don't know what to do with 40 million black people here. This is a perfect time for us

to stand up. When you wake up in the morning and you in a rush, you may not have time to take a shower so you just put a little cologne on and go on about your day. But throughout the day the cologne wears off, and the funk comes back. America's funk is here, because she never really addressed race here in America. This isn't our parents' movement. I was in Washington, D.C., and I went to the Dr. King monument. If you go and look at it, the bottom half of Dr. King, there's no construction there. And what that signifies is the unfinished business of King.

What is the unfinished business of King? His wife said that freedom is never really won, but gained every generation. We have to fight for what we want. Those who do not fight for what they want deserve exactly what they get. We're going to fight forever, until we die, so you might as well get into the fight and wind up on the right side of history. Your children will ask you, "Mommy, Daddy, what did you do to help in the liberation?" What is your response going to be? I didn't do anything? I watched it on TV? Black folks are animals? There's only two conclusions that you can come to: either there's something inherently wrong with black people, or there is a system contributing to their condition. There's only two. If you don't do anything, you're in a messed-up position. To be indifferent to evil is more evil than evil itself. If you to hear us and do nothing, you will be the problem. It's going to take all of us to change this thing around.

This is the new movement. We're going to have to stand up for truth, justice, freedom, and equality, because we're not going to stand for it. Not this group. Not this young generation. The overall sentiment of the police department is that we're animals. I was out there, professionals were out there, straight A students were out there, Dr. David Ragland was out there, and you're going to consider those individuals animals? It's time for us to stand up. We believe in nonviolence but, as King says, nonviolence isn't the absence of violence, but rather it is agitation to the point of change. Good things don't come to those who wait, good things come to those who agitate. We have to agitate the system because they're not going to just give it up. We have to pressure them, and we have to take it.

Cori Bush: This isn't a game for us in any way. This is real life. We are real people, walking out something that we didn't know on August 8th we would have to walk out. We stepped into something we didn't know was about to happen. There was no playbook, no instruction manual that we read and we were able to study before August 9th to know exactly what to do, how to step into it, how to do well enough to where we can navigate the system, how to do what the media wants us to do and still look good for everybody else. I came out because I couldn't understand what in the world was going on. Like, can this be happening for real? I just wanted to see, what is this crazy thing that's happening. I felt in my mind that, if I went out there, I would see justice happen right there in my face. I don't know why I thought that, but that's what I thought at that moment. If I go out there, I'm going to see justice happen. Justice didn't happen, so I had this insatiable desire to see justice. I went back out again, every night. We

97 | Juniata Voices

were there all day and then we'd go home, change clothes, say hi to some kids, and then come back out until three or four in the morning. Because I didn't get that desire taken care of, I had to go back out for more.

At the time I lived about six minutes from Ferguson, and every time I would leave that area, that fish bowl, I would feel like I left my baby there. I felt like I left my kid there. I felt horrible when I left because we still didn't get what we needed. We didn't get justice, we didn't see Mike helped, we didn't see everybody that's out here being beaten, being teargassed, helped. That thing has not left us. That thing hasn't gone anywhere. We stepped into a traumatic situation that kept going, and going, and going, and we didn't expect it. Now, if I'm a firefighter and I know that that's what I do and I know that I could possibly walk into a building and I'm putting my life on the line, then that's one thing. But when I go out thinking that I'm just going out to stand up for my rights, to use my voice, something that I'm told I'm supposed to be able to do, and then I people I know and people I don't know hog-tied and hung upside down and beaten, that's different. At every turn I'm watching that, and the news is saying, "They're violent, they're violent" but the only thing I see when I'm out there is us being beaten, us being abused, us being attacked, us being pushed back. It was a combat zone. If you tell me there's a war going on and I enlist in the service and I know, at some point I might have to go, then that's one thing.

This one right here, we didn't sign up for. We didn't sign up for that. We're still walking that thing out. I'm in that combat zone right now. I'm in that place, I'm hearing Chris screaming out when the police officer said, "Just grab all of them, they were all in the street." "In the street," not, "They hit somebody, they hurt someone, did something wrong." They were in the street. In Ferguson, if you step over the white line, off the curb, you could be knocked down, beat with a baton, arrested, hog-tied, hung upside down, shot at. And I'm not just saying with rubber bullets, because I have a bullet hole in my car right now with the bullet still sitting in it. Truth. I'm a truth-teller; we're about truth telling and I'm telling the truth. I'm not afraid to say it, because I'm already considered a terrorist in this country. How does that make you feel? One day, you go out just to use your voice and then they take you and they put you on a terrorist list and now you have no rights, you're under complete surveillance. I'm a mother, I'm a nurse, and I'm a pastor. I teach love, I preach love, I believe in love. I don't care who you are. I take care of the worst.

Do you have any loved ones in a nursing home? Imagine that, right now, at this very moment, your family member that's in the nursing home is being beaten and knocked down. Your family member urinated on themselves and the aides were tired, so they beat him down, beat him up, beat, beat, beat. Tongue split, heart stopped. Dead. Now your family member is gone, because they were in a nursing home. They were disabled in some way, or they were suffering from some dementia, or something that made them a little different. Their fault? No. Did they do something wrong to start the whole thing?

Maybe, but is that a reason for death? This is what we're facing today, this is why we fight and why we continue to fight. The only thing that really is the issue is my beautiful melanin skin. That's the difference, that's it. I will ride just as hard for the one that people say I shouldn't ride for because he had a gun. He pointed it at police. He ran, so he must have been doing something wrong. You know what? I'm going to fight for him just the same, I'm going to stump just as hard, I'm going to ride just as hard for him, and the reason is because that person could have been me. That could have been you. Can you say you've never done anything that could have caused you to be in trouble, with the police? Not one time? Whether you were speeding eight miles over the limit, or you were really doing something wrong. Can you? For that same reason, somebody fought for me. I was a wayward child, but somebody caught me up and now I'm able to speak and help others. In that same way, Mike deserved to live. Aiyana deserved to live. Rekia deserved to live. Kajieme Powell deserved to live. Cary Ball deserved to live. Think about that. Let us not turn our ears every time we hear, "Oh, well they must have done something wrong." Think about your wrong.

Ragland: One of the things we realized with Ferguson is that America has a problem with violence. Violence is the founding act of this society. Violence is used to solve all of our problems. What does the US do when there is a problem abroad? We're not just talking about direct violence; we're talking about economic violence, trade violence. One of the things we have to do is disrupt that violence. I see this movement as disrupting police violence, which essentially is what the rest of America condones. If the majority of white Americans had a problem with the way that police was treating folks in Ferguson, arresting people, would it stand? We're a majoritarian society; majority rules. If white folks said, "Fuck that," it would not happen. We have to think about how we are all complicit in violence. The violence is deep in this society: violence against women, violence against children, and violence in our classrooms. King talked about structural violence as people being denied the opportunities that they need. When we think about crime, most of it is economic, or it happens because of economic reasons. We should not be complicit in it. If we want to be about the business of justice, we have to withdraw our consent from things that are violent against people.

Hendricks: There's one thing that I wanted to add to why I was in the movement: respectability politics. Respectability politics is the idea that the only reason I deserve respect is because I talk proper English, because I'm articulate. That gets batted around a lot. Because I hold a title I'm a respectable negro, I'm a respectable black person. I'm a token black person. I deserve respect because I can assimilate to white culture. But if I was talking all crazy and ghetto and ratchet and saying, "Fuck the police," now I don't deserve respect as a person. I don't care where you're at—we've all done things, we've all fallen short of being a perfect human being. It's hard because people like to judge each other. But just because I've decided who you are does not mean that when I encounter you I'm not going to give you the dignity

and respect that you deserve. It doesn't matter whether you're a millionaire or a toothless bum on the street asking me for a dollar. You deserve love and respect, because you breathe.