BUT WHAT ABOUT POOKIE?:
GRAPPLING WITH THE PROSPECTS OF MARIJUANA POLICY REFORM
AS A MEANS TO PROTECT THE BLACK COMMUNITY

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ABSTRACT

In 2014, the District of Columbia revolutionized what marijuana policy reform campaigns have typically looked like throughout the United States. Founded by race-conscious, frustrated residents, the leading pro-legalization campaign, DC Cannabis Campaign and the anti-legalization campaign, Two Is Enough DC, took on a much different tone than the campaigns that legalized marijuana in states like Washington, Colorado, and Alaska. There was an active, unprecedented desire to campaign for their respective positions on marijuana under the framework that they wanted to protect the Black community. Historically and today, Black advocacy has been riddled with the politics of respectability, which arguably, can be understood as a survival tactic within White America. However, through the lens of both of these campaigns and their implications, I evaluate intra-Black community advocacy and the way their approaches to defining community affect their goals of protecting the community. I argue that regardless of promises, advocacy for the Black community that aligns with traditional, conservative respectability politics cannot comprehensively protect the entire community, and in order to wholly do so, advocates must actively resist that kind of rhetoric. Fundamentally, through both campaigns and their opposing approaches to liberation, my research evaluated the fight for Black liberation and worked to unpack and decolonize the historical and current comprehensiveness of advocacy for the Black community, particularly around “vices.”
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INTRODUCTION: Unraveling An Uncelebrated, Hood Folk Hero

“You’ve got to get that cousin Pookie sitting at home on the couch — he’s watching football right now instead of being here at the rally — you’ve got to talk to him and let him know it is not that hard to exercise the franchise that previous generations fought so hard to obtain.”
– President Barack Obama

Shifting the Narrative: Who is Pookie?

Despite my culturally innate understanding of the recurring character Pookie in President Obama’s speeches to crowds of color, I find it difficult to translate and convey the significance of Pookie to people who would not characterize where they grew up as a “hood.” Pookie is sort of an uncelebrated, hood folk hero – “a proverbial ominous ‘hood’ character and/or family member that every person with a connection to the ghetto knows.” People typically find Pookie, whether they are in one’s family or among one’s community, embarrassing and a source of consternation. Understanding the essence of Pookie is essential in grappling with what I present in this thesis. President Obama personified Pookie in the context of a “layabout kin” who lies on the couch all

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2 I am an African American woman of Nigerian descent who grew up in the South Bronx; Hood is derived from the word “neighborhood” and is used in the context of areas that are considered a “ghetto.” Hoods are typically characterized by poverty, violence, gang presence, etc.


day and fails to get civically engaged. Most, if not all, renditions of Pookie are negative and based on stereotypes; however, Pookie is “the average Black every-youth.” As hard as it is to bring Pookie’s essence to this paragraph and academia-at-large, it seems to be just as difficult for many to acknowledge and validate Pookie’s humanity and the circumstances of their characterization.

In the context of marijuana policy reform, community advocacy, and this thesis more generally, I will have Pookie signify a gender-neutral placeholder for “the brother [/sister] on the corner, who we used to patronize for our marijuana purchases.” Pookie represents “Black people who maintained the market through the underground economy within marginalized communities while marijuana sale and use was illegal.” As exemplified by the current states that welcomed the legal marijuana industry into their state, legal marijuana is a billion dollar industry. In the era of recreational and medicinal marijuana legalization, where does that leave Pookie?

From Alaska and Colorado to Oregon and Washington state, mainstream and national marijuana policy reform movements typically focused on marijuana legalization as an issue of personal and civil liberty, medicinal accessibility, economic benefits, and a non-racialized

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 I will be mostly using Pookie in the singular sense as to intimately present them as a person. I intentionally use gender neutral pronouns for the singular Pookie in order to be gender-inclusive.


negative view of the War on Drugs. For example, the Marijuana Policy Project’s campaign committee has coordinated current and past ballot initiative campaigns titled, “The Campaign to Regulate Marijuana like Alcohol.” The winning recreational legalization campaigns of Colorado and Alaska were spearheaded under that title. The three main reasons to regulate marijuana listed on Alaska’s “Campaign to Regulate Marijuana like Alcohol” website characterizes the winning campaigns of the above mentioned states, as well as the majority of current marijuana policy reform campaigns:

- **Put decision-making back in the hands of Alaskans.** Marijuana prohibition has failed, and it’s time for a more sensible approach that honors the ideals of personal freedom and liberty which unite us as Alaskans.
- **Bolster our economy by creating jobs and generating new revenue for Alaska.** Marijuana sales will be conducted by legitimate, taxpaying businesses that test their products and require proof of age, instead of criminal enterprises in the underground market.
- **Allow law enforcement to focus on dangerous criminals.** Responsible adults 21 and older should not be punished for simply choosing to use a substance that is objectively safer than alcohol. Police and prosecutors should spend their time addressing serious crimes.

Despite Pookie’s role in the underground economy and in the prison system due to mass incarceration, Pookie and the racialized nature of the War on Drugs has remained absent from the above-mentioned campaigns. However, in 2014, the District of Columbia shifted that narrative. The District’s marijuana policy reform campaigns were founded by “frustrated,” race-conscious residents that took on a much different voice — one that had concern for the welfare of the District’s Black community. The prominent anti-legalization campaign, *Two is Enough*

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10 “Campaign to Regulate Marijuana Like Alcohol in Alaska,” [http://regulatemarijuanainalaska.org](http://regulatemarijuanainalaska.org)

11 “About,” [DCMJ.org](http://dcmj.org/about/)
DC, and the pro-legalization campaign, *DC Cannabis Campaign*, had racialized sentiments within their founding stories, as well as an unprecedented amount of intentional, racialized imagery and language used throughout their campaign strategies. Both individual campaigns were community-focused with clear desire to “fight for” and “protect” the Black community, particularly Black youth, whom in the District, have been disproportionately affected by racially-biased marijuana arrests.\(^{12}\) While evaluating both campaigns, a difference in how they understood Black “community” was revealed within their campaign voice and strategy. This difference, in many ways, set a value scale for who is worthy of protection and even, who the community needs to be protected from. This unconscious division affects the efficiency of Black advocacy and neglects the structural and institutionalized realities of some of the most marginalized within the community. Despite having the same goals of protecting the Black community, *Two Is Enough DC*’s conscientious disregard for the Black drug dealer and the consequential implications hinders the campaign’s ability to thoroughly “fight for” and “protect” the entire community. In this thesis, I argue that regardless of promises, advocacy for the Black community that aligns with traditional, conservative respectability politics cannot comprehensively protect the entire community, and in order to wholly do so, advocates must actively resist that kind of rhetoric. Fundamentally, my research sought to evaluate the fight for Black liberation and the breadth of Black-led advocacy on an intra-community level through the lens of the two opposing drug reform campaigns, in order to evaluate, unpack, and decolonize the historical and current comprehensiveness of Black-led advocacy around “vices.”

**Important Terms**

Beyond understanding how Pookie operates outside of academia and within my thesis, there are a couple of significant terms that are used throughout my argument that are integral to following me through my research and my conclusions. “Black community,” when referenced in this thesis, should not automatically evoke the image of a unified, cohesive community. The phrase “Black community” will be used in two ways throughout this thesis. The first way is similar to that of “Black population,” where the intention is to refer to people of the same race within a geographic space. Black people, particularly within the District, have a long, racialized history and face racially specific circumstances that are particular to that geographical space. This usage of “Black community” is not cognizant of social or political inclusions or exclusions of persons, as it recognizes every individual that is of the Black race as a part of the “Black community” or Black population. The other way that “Black community” will be used is in reference to the cultural and political collective that is referred to when an individual or an organization asserts, for example, that “x” is not good for the “Black community.” This usage incorporates inclusionary or exclusionary rhetoric and is based more on different perceptions within the population. Though it is important to appreciate the personal perception of individuals, understanding the “Black community” as the “Black population” within the context of advocacy is crucial in evaluating how efficient said advocacy is in uplifting the marginalized community.

First expressed by Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham in her book, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880–1920*, “respectability politics” or “politics of respectability” within this paper refers to the attempts of marginalized communities policing behavior, amongst other elements, of individuals within their population in order to demonstrate
the marginalized group’s social values as “being continuous and compatible with mainstream [White, hetero-normative, capitalist, middle-class, patriarchal etc.] values” instead of pushing back against the ways that the mainstream works to exclude difference and structural oppression. As curated by NPR, respectability politics, no matter how well meaning, has overwhelming failed to protect Black people from racialized structural and institutionalized oppression and violence:


Furthermore, respectability politics manifests as viewing problems within Black communities as problems that are inherently tied to one’s Blackness, and by adopting behaviors and a lifestyle closely tied to the mainstream White standard, “[B]lack people can inoculate themselves from discrimination.” Typically, an individual or organization that adheres to respectability politics consciously or unconsciously accommodates neoliberalism, neglects economic and social realities of being Black in the United States, and touts American society as one “full of

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14 Leah Donnella, “Where Does The 'Pull Up Your Pants' School Of Black Politics Come From,” NPR.com, last modified October 22, 2015, http://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2015/10/22/450821244/where-does-the-pull-up-your-pants-school-of-black-politics-come-from; The whole block quote, including the links to a relevant news story that demonstrates how the listed behavior was not enough to “protect” Black individuals from racialized violence and oppression, was taken from the cited NPR article.

15 Ibid.
opportunities” based on the success of Black elites who have been able to achieve mainstream success.16

Lit Review

Michelle Alexander’s The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness is arguably an era-defining exposé. Coupled with the foundation of the Black Lives Matter organization and the increasing national outcries over police shootings, The New Jim Crow and its thorough outline of racial injustices helped provide the language for the newly sparked conversation around the issue of mass incarceration, policing, and systematic oppression.17 Though debuted in 2010, the account has sold over 600,000 copies and has spent over 100 weeks on the New York Times best-seller list since its 2012 spike in attention.18 Cornel West has described The New Jim Crow as a “grand wake-up call in the midst of a long slumber of indifference to the poor and vulnerable.”19 Even more audaciously and in many ways, ironic, it has been deemed “a call to action” by Benjamin Todd Jealous, former President and chief executive officer of the NAACP.20


18 Ibid.; It is not coincidental that The New Jim Crow received spiked levels of attention in 2012 as that is the year that the nation was shook by the death of Trayvon Martin.


20 This statement is audacious and ironic based on the 1970s NAACP support of the Rockefeller Drug Laws; Ibid.
There are numerous examples of universities, organizations, and scholars who have followed up on the wake up call projected by *The New Jim Crow*. In 2014, Columbia University’s transitioned their *Justice Initiative* into their current *Center for Justice*, which is committed “to reducing the nation’s reliance on incarceration and advancing alternative approaches to safety and justice through education, research and policy.”

Georgetown University just launched their own *Prisons and Justice Initiative* in January 2016 focused on examining mass incarceration from “multiple [scholarly] perspectives.”

Claiming direct inspiration from *The New Jim Crow*, The Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference has devoted their faith-based efforts to “consciousness raising” and “ending mass incarceration and building a new moral consensus.”

Even Grammy award-winning artist John Legend launched a multiyear awareness-raising campaign against mass incarceration called FREE AMERICA, where he has performed at correctional facilities and co-hosted reform focused events with state legislators and collaborators such as Politico.

*The New Jim Crow* did more than raise awareness on the United States’ high incarceration rates. Alexander’s book situated the War on Drugs as a significant cause for the racial and class-based discriminatory policies that allow for such an epidemic. *The New Jim

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22 “About,” *Georgetown University Prisons and Justice Initiative*, [http://prisonsandjustice.georgetown.edu/about](http://prisonsandjustice.georgetown.edu/about)


Crow’s introduction describes the overflow of Black and Brown bodies within prisons and jails for drug offenses despite blatantly similar rates of using and selling drugs amongst Blacks and Whites. Most notably, Alexander affirms a level of White intentionality within the War on Drugs and mass incarceration. Her metaphor of “The New Jim Crow” stems from her assertion that this phenomenon is in fact a part of a “new racial caste system” and even further, represents “the most damaging manifestation of the backlash against the Civil Rights Movement.” There is value in such an undaunted claim, particularly when describing such an institutional problem. However, in alignment with Professor James Forman, Jr., I have found Alexander’s text moderately neglectful and minimizing of the complicated history of violence and fear that characterized many Black communities in the 1970s and in turn, the unrelenting push among many Black folks for vigilant and harsher approaches to drugs and crime. Though there were community leaders who did not support such a harsh, punitive approach for drug users and sellers within the community, the voices of the “respectable” leaders who did, were amplified and heard the most. Black political and community leadership have historically been plagued


26 Alexander, 11.


by respectability politics and a class-based social hierarchy which has allowed for their failure to push-back on White-centered capitalist ideologies that continuously have vilified victims/survivors of an economy and society that value them collectively.

Beyond *The New Jim Crow*, there is a large body of scholarship that currently addresses race and the War on Drugs. More specifically, this literature engages with the mass incarceration problem and the way in which class, by way of race, affects how one’s marijuana engagement is policed. While most dialogue around the issue of marijuana and the War on Drugs includes some class/race analysis, my project hones in on intra-Black community debates around marijuana legalization through the “protect the Black community” framework that is present among the narratives of many racial justice organizations, as well as, Black activism more broadly. Though other scholars have discussed the pros and cons of marijuana legalization, my project is distinct in that it explores the implications of opposing racial justice-focused views on marijuana policy reform and digs deeper into how Black community organizers and political leadership view the community they are advocating for based on respectability and class-biases.

Katherine Tate, James Lance Taylor, and Mark Q. Sawyer’s *Something’s in the Air: Race, Crime, and the Legalization of Marijuana* explores the racialization of the War on Drugs and why legalization is imperative “for the sake of the ‘beloved community.’” The authors’ approach focuses on the unequal and unfair consequences of the War on Drugs on communities of color and what legalization would do and/or not do for communities of color. The consequences of legalization, the historical backdrop of the War on Drugs, and the growing

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support of the Black community for legalization are all presented in conversation with White-Americans and White-centered politics. While this book is helpful with engaging the pro-legalization and The New Jim Crow-esque thought, my project seeks to consider both the racial justice arguments present in pro- and anti-legalization campaigns, in order to explore how Black leaders and activists view and define the community they seek to protect based off of their proposed legislation. It is similar to Merrill Singer’s Drugging the Poor: Legal and Illegal Drugs and Social Inequality, where Singer racialized class and presented how marijuana legalization affected people culturally, hinting towards legalization as a liberating move. In many racially focused conversations around ending the War on Drugs and marijuana, legalization has dominated the dialogue.

Though limited, there is scholarship that counters the popular rhetoric that pins prison growth to the War on Drugs, which inherently discredits the idea that legalizing marijuana actually protects the Black community. Though this popular narrative simplifies the complexity of mass incarceration, it has dominated most of the rhetoric within racial justice focused pro-legalization spaces. John F. Pfaff’s “The War on Drugs and Prison Growth: Limited Importance, Limited Legislative Options,” debunks a huge part of the pro-legalization argument that says legalizing drugs like marijuana would significantly alter the current Black mass incarceration problem. His work debunking the connection between high levels of incarceration and drug

30 Ibid.

31 Merrill Singer, Drugging the Poor: Legal and Illegal Drugs and Social Inequality (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2008)

laws was an important find because it is a perspective that is silenced by the louder Alexander-inspired narrative. Though Pfaff’s rhetoric is not a significant part of the TIE DC's position, this text informed me of how the racially focused pro-legalization voice fails to address certain realities. This makes room for the exploration of Black folks who believe protecting their community does not involve legalizing marijuana.

Lastly, there is limited, but interesting scholarship that further evaluates class, privilege, and the disparities on how drug laws are policed, particularly through A. Rafik Mohamed and Erik D. Fritsvold’s *Dorm Room Dealers: Drugs and the Privileges of Race and Class*. The majority of scholarship on this issue cites statistics on arrests, which is significant evidence of disparity, but this ethnographic work vividly depicts the way that the social and economic consequences of race and class when it comes to marijuana use. It helps reveal how deeply stigmatized and racialized marijuana is. In conversation with Pfaff, this work reaffirms the importance, though it should not be the only priority, of marijuana policy reform. With data from this book in mind, my project will evaluate the way class and negative views on marijuana use contribute to the way these local organizations define community and protection.

**Methodology**

Inspired by a “Legalization Ends Discrimination” campaign sticker that I saw in Northeast DC in 2014 and discovering the noteworthy impact of the prominent anti-legalization founded in racial consciousness, this thesis strays away from the dominant narrative presented by the current *The New Jim Crow*-esque era. It focuses on the intensely divided current and historical intra-Black community relationship to drug policy, particularly marijuana, and

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33 See Appendix A.
evaluates what it means to “protect” the Black community through marijuana policy reform. This thesis was written with the following question in mind:

How does the racial justice language of the pro- and anti-marijuana legalization campaigns within the District inform what and who the ‘Black community’ encompasses and therefore visions of how marijuana policy reform can serve as a way to protect the established community?

There is a constant examining of exactly how “community” is defined based on the way respective approaches to marijuana policy reform implicitly and explicitly dis/regard the theoretical, but very much based on reality, character of Pookie.

My research and analysis began with reading widely about marijuana policy reform, the War on Drugs, mass incarceration, and works that put race into conversation with the above. I particularly tried to focus on literature, scholarship, and lived experiences of Black individuals, as my entire focus comes from the intra-Black community perspective. I used the racialized and complex story behind the 1970s Rockefeller Drug Laws, in addition to the social and political atmosphere in Harlem, New York during that time period, as historical context for marijuana policy as it coincides with race today. I looked at marijuana legalization campaigns throughout the nation, especially campaigns that ran in states that legalized marijuana recreationally. I examined the founding stories of said campaigns. With background information on what other pro- and anti-legalization campaigns did, the unique nature of the 2014 campaigns held in the District of Columbia became more apparent. I then honed in on the prominent pro- and anti-legalization campaigns in the District of Columbia from 2014.

The prominent pro-legalization campaign, the campaign that ran the sticker that I saw as a spring-semester sophomore in 2014, came out of DCMJ. DCMJ, a community group “fighting
for equal rights” regarding marijuana, users, sellers, and their families, was founded in Spring 2013 by “frustrated residents of the District of Columbia who were tired of outdated marijuana laws.” In order to pass Ballot Initiative 71, DCMJ transitioned into DC Cannabis Campaign in July 2013. After the successful campaign, DC Cannabis Campaign transitioned back into DCMJ. The prominent anti-legalization campaign, Two Is Enough DC, founded by Will Jones III, believed that the disproportionate presence of alcohol and tobacco, two legal drugs, has been detrimental to the Black community. They are motivated by the rationale that “a third legal drug would decimate the Black community.” Explicitly in their mission, Two Is Enough DC sought to protect the District’s Black community from the companies that disproportionately target their neighborhoods with substances that negatively affect productivity and motivation amongst youth, families, and the community as a whole. I chose these campaigns because of their prominence as the leading pro-legalization campaign and the leading anti-legalization in the District based on media coverage, following, and reach. Both campaigns happened to have racial justice language in their missions and founding stories, which further highlighted the exceptional nature of the District’s campaigns. They both had active language around “fighting for” and “protect[ing]” the Black community in their missions and goals, despite having very different stances. I outlined and analyzed everything about each respective campaign including, but not limited to, its mission and founding story, campaign images and wording, implications of their

34 “About,” DCMJ.org


proposals, etc. I situated the uncelebrated, hood folk hero, Pookie, in order to evaluate how each campaign regarded the Black drug dealer in relation to their community.

In addition to videos, articles, and the homepages of both campaigns, I conducted a three-hour interview with the founder of Two Is Enough DC and I attended the 2015 International Drug Policy Reform Conference held by the Drug Policy Alliance, in order to get a more in-depth look into both campaigns.\textsuperscript{37} There I met and spoke with key, racial justice focused leaders in the pro-legalization movement who either had direct impact on the District’s legalization campaign or weighed in on it: asha bandele, Deborah Peterson-Small, Dorsey Nunn, Seema Sadanandan, Dr. Malik Burnett, etc. Dorsey Nunn, my inspiration for the use of Pookie in this context, also inspired me to look into Prohibition and form the analogy present in Chapter IV between Jewish bootleggers and Black people who maintained marijuana’s underground market.\textsuperscript{38} Lastly, I also interviewed one of my Jessup Correctional Institution classmates of my GOVX 400: Prison Reform Project and read the memoir of another. Their lived experience and their reflections on it provided concrete insight on the social and economic conditions/realities of “Pookie.”

Chapter Breakdown

In Chapter I, my argument begins by engaging with Professor Michael Javen Fortner’s book, \textit{The Black Silent Majority}, as well as his \textit{The New York Times} op-ed and other interviews

\textsuperscript{37} See Appendix B.

\textsuperscript{38} See Appendix C.
pertaining to his findings.\textsuperscript{39} He seemingly uncovered the “real roots” of stringent, drug policy and the active Black Americans role in its implementation as an attempt to protect the Black community. This chapter looks into the political and social conditions of the 1970s in order to understand what allowed for the Black elite and Black activists, particularly within the \textit{NAACP}, to call for and side by punitive drug policies that very intentionally demonized and criminalized drug users and dealers. Though my thesis has a focus on the campaigns and communities within the District of Columbia, there are lessons to be learned from New York City. Both New York City have very similar policing issues, and historically, both New York City and Washington, DC were places where both the Black urban poor and the Black elite were present and prosperous. Beginning my thesis with this research is crucial as it investigates how the politics of respectability has manifested in the past, particularly how the draconian laws that have been attributed to mass incarceration and the War on Drugs all came about. Additionally, this research was crucial as it highlighted ways in which 1970s NAACP Black civil rights activists used language like “protect” and “Black community,” exactly the way both campaigns in the District did in 2014. This chapter also looks into exactly who was centered within their conceptualization of “protecting the Black community”.

With the historical backdrop of Black involvement in the way current drug policy looks, which is far different from the current \textit{The New Jim Crow} era, Chapter II goes into the two 2014 marijuana policy reform campaigns in the District. Each campaign’s goals, motives, strategy, etc. are outlined, as well as, how each campaign defined and viewed “the Black community,”

\textsuperscript{39} Michael Javen Fortner is an Assistant Professor and Academic Director of Urban Studies at the City University of New York’s Murphy Institute for Worker Education and Labor Studies.
“Pookie,” and more generally the sentiments behind why they believed their campaign benefited Black individuals in the District. Beyond the profiles of both campaigns, this chapter frames that data in the context of how their perspectives on decriminalization and legalization play into their vision for their Black community. I present some of the implications of their language and proposals on Pookie throughout the chapter.

Chapter III looks into decolonizing how we view the character Pookie. With information on effects of the War on Drugs, the reach of what marijuana arrests did to families and individuals, and how it affected communities-at-large, Pookie is humanized and Pookie’s circumstances reveal why they need not be ignored when it comes to community uplift and advocacy. This chapter features some anecdotes from an interview with one of my Jessup Correctional Institution classmates, Ren Hynson, and discussion on the memoir of another one of my incarcerated classmates, Arlando “Tray” Jones. This chapter follows a large discussion on the campaigns because the understanding of who Pookie is and why they are puts into perspective their significance and why how they are positioned within an organization’s attempt at advocacy reveals how comprehensive their abilities to protect are.

Chapter IV transitions into addressing solutions and assesses what a broader vision of racial justice, both in the context of drug policy and more generally, would look like. With a profile of the Black Lives Matter organization and its guiding principles, this chapter will take a look at how there is generational shift in how civil rights activists envision “protecting the Black community.” In broadening “community” and being intentional about including all Black folks at the table, this chapter will discuss what “protection” and liberation look like beyond the reach of White hetero-patriarchal society, and how marijuana policy can be a part of racial justice
solutions moving forward. This information coupled with the negative effects of advocacy that aligns more with what is described in Chapter I further demonstrates the conclusion that I came to within my thesis.

My conclusion juxtaposes the issue of marijuana policy reform with that of the Prohibition era and connects the racialized differences in the legalization process in that time period. In using Prohibition and the Jewish bootlegger as a case study, this chapter will further highlight the way respectability politics, as well as other social and political disadvantages faced by Black people, affect the way that they perceive and approach community, drugs, but also liberation. Envisioning the similarities between the Jewish bootlegger during the Prohibition Era and Pookie during the time of the War on Drugs exhibited how a radical, unapologetic kind of advocacy, far different from that of the Civil Rights Era, has more potential to comprehensive protect the Black community.
Chapter I: The Black Silent Majority- 1970s New York City

“LAST WARNING TO ALL DOPE PEDDLERS AND GANGSTERS. BLACK. WHITE. PUERTO RICAN. GET OUT OF HARLEM & NEW YORK CITY. We are going to return Harlem back into the hands of Decent People. Dope gangsters are lynching addicts with overdoses. Stop it now. Stop it now. 1200 dead since January 1st 1968..... We are calling for federal troops, state and local law enforcement forces to move into the streets of Harlem and New York City now and clean it up.”**40

– Anti-Crime & Anti-Narcotic Committee, Rev. O. D. Dempsey, Director

Though this thesis primarily focuses on campaigns born of the District of Columbia in 2014, it is important to visit 1970s New York City in order to understand how the “protect the Black community” sentiments have historically manifested. In examining Michael Javen Fortner’s *Black Silent Majority*, as well as his op-ed and other interviews surrounding the issue, we will be able to get a look into the mentality of Black community and political leaders who called for what became one of the most unsuccessful and damaging, punitive drug policies in the nation.41 While using divisive language that actively demonized Black drug dealers and users, Black advocates and community leaders whose rhetoric invested in respectability often situated their intentions within the desire to protect the Black community. This demonstrates nuance in Black advocacy that typically is skipped over, particularly because of how issues of “the Black community” are often over-simplified. 1970s New York City serves as a comparable case study on the relationships between Black communities, heightened drug presence, crime, and the racialized consequences of failing to regard the Black drug dealer as a member of the

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40 Appendix D.

community worthy of protection and advocacy. Racialized politics, policy, and advocacy has continually been a game of reversing historical precedents in order to level the current playing field as we better recognize the effects of structural marginalization, so it is appropriate to look back in time while dealing with current issues.

The story behind the 1970s political and social Harlem community is one that includes the complex nuance in how to protect one’s community from intra-community crime, to the significant increase of court-involved individuals yet no measurable decrease in the crime problem – demonstrates the dreadful effects of attitudes aligned with respectability and its failure to efficiently protect the Black population. Additionally, it highlights how respectability and living within the white gaze, particularly during such a politically significant time period, contributes to the inclination to carve up the Black community into one that distances itself from people or things that further “others” Blackness. Respectability as a survival tool within a white supremacist society has manifested in the avid support of policies that actually do more harm than good for the Black community in greater numbers, ultimately sacrificing the lives and potentials of non-respectable brothers and sisters plagued by structural marginalization.

Beyond Class Lines: The Black Bourgeoisie


The Black Silent Majority, a play on the “silent majority” term popularized by President Nixon, comprises of Black working and middle class people who mobilize and push for more policing and harsher punishments for crimes in their neighborhoods.\(^{45}\) The people within the Black silent majority are characterized as older, working, and law-abiding.\(^{46}\) They are the people within the Black community who are exposed to or victims of the crime, particularly during the 1970s and even today, within their respective neighborhoods. They experience the brunt of illicit drugs and crime within Black communities and are forced to cope with how the cycle of poverty, the lack of quality opportunities, etc. manifests in communities of color. No matter their actual socio-economic status, if they have not had to resort to the underground economy for stability or survival, they want to be socially distanced from that culture.

… [B]eing a member of the [B]lack bourgeoisie is almost as much a state of mind and comportment of body as it is an actual reflection of one’s wallet. This recognition suggests an expanded definition of the [B]lack bourgeoisie – [B]lack professionals and other well-paid workers, plus the people who keep their company.\(^{47}\)

These individuals have supported heavy drug laws, zero tolerance policies, etc., for public safety and social distancing without fully recognizing how these policies affect Black people within...


\(^{47}\) Mary Pattillo, Black on the Block: Politics of Race and Class in the City (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 83. Electronic book, https://books.google.com/books?id=2EN0ZagpA1AC&pg=PA83&lpg=PA83&dq=Black+people+are+not+a+monolith+middle+class&source=bl&ots=7_kTTA0lZq&sig=YGhHv2tENXDgoezil8hohTulNnQ&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiD0qPJ8azMAhUNxQKHa8tDoAQ6AEIHTAA#v=onepage&q=Black%20people%20are%20not%20a%20monolith%20middle%20class&f=false

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their community. Without full understanding or acknowledgement of how structural oppression manifests in Black communities, many of the Black silent majority hold political and social positions that actively refuse to empathize or humanize those who are involved with drugs and/or commit crime within their neighborhoods.

Muted by the prevalence of discourse around Michelle Alexander’s *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* and the high profile nature of the #BlackLivesMatter narrative against police brutality, the historical role that the voices of the Black silent majority played in the passing of the 1970s draconian drug laws and policing practices are swept under the rug, which has simplified the overarching conversation that ties race, the War on Drugs, and mass incarceration. In Michael Javen Fortner’s *The Black Silent Majority*, he refers to this widely unrecognized part of the Black population as a sort of “Cain and Abel” story -- an “uncomfortable” and “fundamentally tragic” story that reveals how African Americans, from the political and social elite to the working or middle class person who had to live in environments plagued with drugs and violence, are “‘partially responsible’ for the misery suffered by African American ‘sons, brothers, and fathers’” who have become profitable commodity within an industry that is estimated to be worth 70 billion dollars. The 1970s vocal Black support for punitive approaches to drugs and crime as a way to preserve and protect the Black community reveals a nuance in how one defined community, as this rhetoric inherently

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48 Ibid.

created a “them” versus “us” mentality. The “them” represented drug dealers and users, and the “us” seemingly represented well-to-do, law-abiding individuals, across class lines, who wanted protection from the consequences of those who resorted to crime and drugs for survival.

Drugs, Crime, and Terror in 1970s Harlem

Fortner provides damning evidence held within 1969 NAACP Anti-Crime Report of the Black working and middle class’ involvement and intentions behind the support of a harsh, punitive approach to the presence of drugs and crime in Black communities. The report, written by Vincent Baker, proclaimed that the “[Black] silent majority” in Harlem would “welcome a police order to get tough” as Harlem had become a “reign of criminal terror.”

It warned that the ‘decent people of Harlem’ had become the prey of ‘marauding hoodlums’ and proposed that criminals, including muggers, pushers, vagrants and murderers, be subjected to steep criminal sentences. The civil rights organization reaffirmed its battle against police brutality, but added, ‘We favor the use of whatever force is necessary to stop a crime or to apprehend a criminal…. He even advocated for a ‘stop and frisk’ policy.’

There seemed to be an atmosphere where Harlem residents were living in fear of their own community members due to social disorder and violence aligned with drug addiction. The continuous use of the adjective “decent” to describe respectable, law-abiding residents. There was a desire to “reclaim their streets” from the indecent, who were destroying it without regard. The complexity of the issue is revealed within the development of the “they” and “us”


51 Ibid.

52 Parry, “Defending Their Homes: How crime-terrorized African-Americans helped spur mass incarceration.”

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distinctions, which manifest as an inside/outside group dichotomy around words like community and streets. The Black working and middle class that were law-abiding and respectable people were protected within the framework of community, while the drug addicts and petty thieves were pushed out and ostracized.\textsuperscript{53} This report and the discourse around the criminal activity in Black communities deeply stigmatized drug dealers and other criminals as destroyers of the community and therefore outside of the scope of their advocacy. These criminals, typically male, are fathers, brothers, sons, nephews, etc. within the community. Despite who these individuals were within the community outside of their criminal activity, the mentality was that Harlem’s decent Black community needed protection from these persons at all cost. Alexander’s book humanized the people who ended up in the system in unprecedented ways, namely by revealing that are distanced from the perceptions of many people who are from or advocate within affected areas.

Respectability Politics: Public Safety and White Gaze

According to a 1973 \textit{New York Times} poll, 71 percent of Black people supported life sentences without parole for those who dealt drugs.\textsuperscript{54} Oberia Dempsey, a Harlem reverend, advocated for the removal of “junkies” from the streets and suggested that they be put in “camps” so that terror can cease.\textsuperscript{55} Dempsey also suggested that Black people stop “fighting all


\textsuperscript{54} Fortner, “The Real Roots of ‘70s Drug Law.”

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid.
the time for civil rights” when “[they] should be fighting civil wrongs.” The civil wrongs that he describes are as much the criminal activities as it is the actual individuals themselves. His statement falls right in line with the “what about Black on Black crime?” question that is constantly brought up when people protest against police brutality against Black individuals today. The presence and prevalence of respectability politics in the language and attitudes of the 1960s and 1970s community leaders, political figures, and members of the working and middle-class made room for the open demonization and rejection of the personhoods of those affiliated with drugs and/or crime.

Beyond public safety, Black reformers and the Black middle class have historically employed respectability-cognizant methods to deal with the presence of drugs and crime in their communities, in order to control how the Black community was perceived from a white gaze. In this context, Frantz Fanon, a Black intellectual and political radical, best illustrates what the white gaze looks like when it is internalized and manifested as an investment in respectability:

I cast an objective gaze over myself, discovered my blackness, my ethnic features; deafened by cannibalism, backwardness, fetishism, racial stigmas, slave traders, [. . .] Disoriented, incapable of confronting the Other, the white man, who had no scruples about imprisoning me, I transported myself on that particular day far, very far, from my self, and gave myself up as an object. What did this mean to me? Peeling, stripping my skin, causing a hemorrhage that left congealed black blood all over my body. Yet this

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56 Ibid.


58 Fortner, The Black Silent Majority, 35.
reconsideration of myself, this thematization, was not my idea. I wanted simply to be a man among men.\footnote{Frantz Fanon, \textit{Black Skin, White Masks}, (United Kingdom: Pluto Press, 2008), 92.}

While living with marginalized identities, being able to distance oneself from negative associations seemingly helps with acceptance by dominant culture. This is a strategic tactic, nevertheless, we should consider the costs on others who do not or cannot live according to an internalized white gaze.

This time period is a politically significant one due to the key moments that occurred during the Civil Rights Movement and the fight for Black liberation. However, even in the fight for liberation, many of the Civil Rights Era’s key players and accolades existed within the confines of respectability and strategic decisions, often times to the detriment of others within the marginalized identity. Their goals were to address the civil and political rights that were actively denied to Black people on the basis of race, such as “access and use of public accommodations, the right to vote, and ensuring fair employment and housing opportunities.”\footnote{Harris, “The Rise of Respectability Politics.”}

Unlike what we are seeing today after the death of Trayvon Martin, Black advocacy in the 1960s and 1970s “… did not directly confront the racialized degradation black people [have and continued to] endure …” in the manner that today’s social and political movements have.\footnote{Ibid.} Both approaches are valuable in their own right, but in critically assessing who is protected and advocated for in both processes helps identify the most efficient of Black advocacy strategy.
Through a lens of internalized white gaze and respectability politics, 1970s vocal Harlem community leaders would often try to establish the Harlem community as one that is not inherently a crime and drug-ridden place, all while boldly drawing a distancing, dehumanizing line between “Black criminals and decent Black citizens.” Elmer Carter, a Black Republican politician and writer, specifically proclaimed that it is the duty of the “decent colored citizens [of Harlem]” to impress upon their local police departments “[their] desire and [their] willingness for that department to invoke severe and extraordinary efforts in order to make Harlem safe at least for its own citizens.” He distinguishes between decent Black Harlem residents and those “men to whom no appeal can be made on the basis of decency, or pride or anything else...”

When the Black community seeks refuge within the criminal justice system for their junkies and petty thieves, they are inherently investing in the structural discrimination and violence that comes with the heavily punitive approach, despite the fact that the perpetrators that they need protecting from are in fact a part of their community. For many, due to class-based bias and politics of respectability, this was a sacrifice people were all too willing to make because respectable Black people are not actually junkies or petty thieves anyway. This understanding of how “Black community” has been defined within mobilization around equity is

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62 Fortner, The Black Silent Majority, 36.

63 Ibid., 35-36.

64 Ibid.

65 “Mass Incarceration’s Black Support,” The Brian Lehrer Show.
significant because it reveals intra-Black community social stratification that further marginalizes through a hierarchy based on respectability that determines a person’s citizenship and worthiness of protection through policy and community advocacy efforts.

Since police brutality and unfair policing has headlined in more recent times, the *NAACP* has released a report on the injustices of racial profiling. The conversation around mass incarceration is dominated by the idea that the Rockefeller drug laws, and eventually Broken Windows policy, and other policing strategies were a result of White desire to terrorize urban Black America.\(^66\) Fortner finds that Black agency and involvement in these policies are often neglected and suppressed in literature and media.\(^67\) Through polls/surveys, reports, and rallies held by Black individuals in that time period that called for the reclamation of the streets at all costs, New York’s Republican governor at the time capitalized off their pursuits and produced the most severe drug statutes that the country has seen.\(^68\) The voices of these Black individuals were selectively heard the most on “the question of crime,” which has complicated the direct role of Black people in the investment of punitive drug laws.

There’s no question that by the early 1990s, blacks wanted an immediate response to the crime, violence and drug markets in their communities. But even at the time, many were asking for something different from the crime bill. Calls for tough sentencing and police


\(^67\) “Chicago’s Morning Answer” featuring Michael Javen Fortner, *AM 560*, aired on August 13, 2015. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MhNPt1jtu5A&feature=youtu.be&t=2h1m](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MhNPt1jtu5A&feature=youtu.be&t=2h1m)

\(^68\) Parry, “Defending Their Homes: How crime-terrorized African-Americans helped spur mass incarceration.”
protection were paired with calls for full employment, quality education and drug treatment, and criticism of police brutality.

It’s not just that those demands were ignored completely. It’s that some elements were elevated and others were diminished — what we call selective hearing. Policy makers pointed to black support for greater punishment and surveillance, without recognizing accompanying demands to redirect power and economic resources to low-income minority communities.

Since President Bill Clinton’s administration and his crime-related legislation that many people attribute to a majority of the criminal justice woes highlighted today, his legacy has continued to overwhelmingly invest in the idea that “vulnerable urban communities are best managed through harsh punishment and heightened surveillance.”

This ideology employed by the United States government was coupled with the selectively elevated, loud voices of the Black elite and the desperation emitted from the Black working and middle class that wanted to deal with the conditions of their communities.

In diving deeper into how Black community has been historically defined amongst Black community members, Black civil rights organizations, etc., one would be able to more holistically evaluate about how to reform current drug laws for the maximized benefit of all Black community members – not just the inside/outside group that was indirectly created based on the White gaze and the respectability approach to gaining racial equality and safety. This information complicates the enriching information presented in Michelle Alexander’s piece, but it is information that is pertinent to bridge the gap between all Black community members,


70 Ibid.
public safety strategies in the Black community, and revamping what community organizing looks like.
Chapter II: Marijuana Policy Reform Campaigns: District of Columbia

“The thing about legalizing marijuana in a place like Washington, D.C., is you can't talk about it without talking about race.”71
– Rebecca Sheir, WAMU 88.5

Background
When looking into the 2014 marijuana policy reform campaigns in the District of Columbia, an evaluation of self-led Black community advocacy arises. These two campaigns, both of which actively claimed to seek to protect the Black community, further inform the assessment of intra-Black community advocacy and the historical and current inhibitions that racial uplift strategies such as, the politics of respectability and internalized White gaze have on Black community relations and Black liberation more broadly. In finally viewing the Black community as multifaceted and multilayered, I have been able to reveal a much more complex, nuanced narrative around what it means to “protect the community” through contentious legislation and further, the social and economic barriers in the way of historical and current Black advocacy.

Data-Driven Motivations and Campaign Strategy: Language and Imagery

The marijuana policy reform movements organized in the District of Columbia were the first of its kind. As previously mentioned, the campaigns associated with both pro-legalization and anti-legalization in the District of Columbia, were rooted in racial justice and the specific desire to “protect the Black community.” Both campaigns cite important racialized statistics and data from major reports as prime motivation for the founding of their work, which differs from

the typical revenue, taxation, and public health arguments that have characterized the marijuana policy reform movement throughout the nation.\textsuperscript{72}

\textit{DC Cannabis Campaign} recognizes the data provided in the \textit{American Civil Liberties Union}’s report titled “The Marijuana War in Black and White” and the \textit{Washington Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs}’ report titled, “Racial Disparities in Arrests in the District of Columbia, 2009-2011: Implications for Civil Rights and Criminal Justice in the Nation’s Capital” as what highlighted the urgent need to end marijuana arrests within their neighborhoods.\textsuperscript{73} The District of Columbia specific findings such as, “Blacks are 8.0 times more likely than [W]hites to be arrested for marijuana possession” and the alarming truth that:\textsuperscript{74}

While there fewer arrests from wards where the residents were majority white, even among wards where the African American population is comparatively smaller, African Americans were disproportionately represented among arrests: while only about a third of Ward 1’s population was African American, almost 81 percent of the drug arrestees in Ward 1 were African American.\textsuperscript{75}

\textit{DC Cannabis Campaign} centers individuals involved with marijuana and whom are victims of police over-enforcement, but also victims of structural racism and classism that has allowed for

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid.


them to maintain a market, be criminalized for it, but fail to be given access to it as it becomes a legal industry despite the generational impact it has had on families and communities.

Comparatively, Two Is Enough DC, cites alcohol and tobacco statistics from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention and applied it to the Black community – a community that Two Is Enough acknowledges has a disproportionate amount of liquor stores and tobacco access. Data included, “In 2010, 25,692 persons died of alcohol-induced causes in the United States” and “Tobacco causes more than 480,000 deaths annually and is the #1 leading cause of preventable death in the U.S.” Additionally, Two Is Enough DC was founded in alignment with the paternalistic want to decrease the amount of access to vices within Black communities in the District:

“…walking down Georgia Avenue to my house and there is a liquor store on both sides of the street, and there is a playground there, and there’s the convenience stores, but you can’t even see inside them because of the cigarette and tobacco advertisements that are plastered all over the windows… so why do we want to do that with marijuana too? We already have these [alcohol and tobacco] legalized and for sale, in stores, freely available, and we see the [negative] results. Our concern is not the 50-year-old guy, or even the 30-year-old who already has their education and wants to relax. That’s not what it is about.”

Speaking as a descendent of the District’s Black elite, Jones III’s idea that the mere presence of alcohol and tobacco, not the structural oppressive realities that plague the urban poor, is what results in high unemployment rates, low graduation rates, and industries capitalizing off of addiction. His care for the way Black communities look and products sold within those communities are based in respectability. Essentially, Two Is Enough DC, as described by its

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76 “Homepage,” Two Is Enough DC.

77 Jones III Interview.
founder, advocates that there should be far less vices, especially marijuana, within Black communities because Black communities cannot handle vices. White and Black people in the District engage with marijuana at similar rates, White people are arrested far less for it, yet legalizing marijuana sounds preposterous for Black people because of their lack of mainstream signs of success and responsibility.

Jones III emphasized how marijuana was not a drug to legally endorse in the Black community because of the current marginalized status of the community. He believes that the Black community cannot socially or economically risks the legal presence of marijuana.

Marijuana use has been medically proven to increase the lack of motivation, decrease one’s IQ, and can lead to serious mental health issues like depression, schizophrenia, anxiety, and/or suicide. These are risks that the Black community could do without because of the social and economic risks already present within the community.

Two Is Enough DC strongly believes that industries thrive off of addiction. Jones III describes an active effort to legalize marijuana in Black communities in order to thrive off of what addiction looks like in marginalized communities. “The tobacco company gets 80% of its revenue from only 10% of its users. If marijuana is legalized and sold throughout our neighborhoods, wealthy white people, who have been championing social justice only all of a sudden, will be making a huge profit.”

Two Is Enough DC also believes that legalizing and commercializing marijuana will increase the use of marijuana among Black youth because it will

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78 Jones III Interview.


80 Ibid.
destigmatize the drug and the person selling it. He describes the Black drug dealer as “creepy” and “sketchy.”

I am walking down the street in DC and a guy in not-so nice clothes approaches me and asks me if I want some weed. I look at him and say, ‘No….’ I thought to myself, ‘I don’t know you. I don’t know what you have. It wasn’t attractive.’ There are some people who are going to take that, unfortunately. But there is a natural deterrent when it is not in a nice, shiny package in a store. When you remove that natural deterrent, it can increase use.”

His positioning of Pookie, from previously stated comments to when he ended the interview with “Drug dealers should get real jobs,” dehumanizes and neglects their reality, which falls far from what comprehensive advocacy should look like.

Throughout Two Is Enough DC’s campaign, they relied on paternalistic language around the “African-American community” and scare-tactic, respectability invested imagery featuring children. Will Jones III, the founder of Two Is Enough DC, is the son of the man that did the first sit-in to desegregate schools in the District. His grandparents were fortunate enough to go to and graduate from Howard University in their generation, and his father graduated from the elite Sidwell School in the District. With the framework of his family’s approach to civil rights, Jones III heavily invested in respectability within Two Is Enough DC’s campaign and marketing strategy:

“Even if it is legal, it is not going to help you get a good job, or help you keep a job. Employers are looking for someone – even if you’re a substance user – employers are

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81 Ibid.

82 Jones III Interview.

83 Appendix F.
looking for responsible, put together employees. They would choose non-users over users if they could. It’s not helping us – us being minority [Black] communities.\textsuperscript{84}

As exemplified by the DC Metrobus advertisements that \textit{Two Is Enough DC} took out during their campaign, there is a direct correlation between engaging with marijuana and being irresponsible, likely to drop-out, etc. \textit{Two Is Enough DC} ran a bus advertisement that displays a graduation cap and gown on the left and a joint on the right. Next to the graduation cap and gown are the words, “We need more of this…” and next to the joint, it proclaims, “…and less of this,” as if those items are mutually exclusive. In its attempt to dispel the myths of legalized marijuana impacting rates of incarceration and the myth that legalization can resolve issues within the criminal justice system, \textit{Two Is Enough DC} has this highlighted on their site:

\textit{TIE DC} definitely appreciates everyone who is genuinely concerned about how to help the African-American community but let’s help in a rational way. Let’s truly address racism, discrimination and racial profiling in our criminal justice system. Let's introduce comprehensive counseling and treatment for drug users. Let's work on better schools and job opportunities for minorities. Let's erase criminal records for simple marijuana possession. Let's not legalize a third drug. The truth is that legal marijuana is not really about helping our community or fixing the broken criminal justice system - \textit{it’s about money.}\textsuperscript{85}

\textit{Two Is Enough DC} is content with ridding the Black community of marijuana completely, despite how it operates as a means of survival for many people within the Black community on both ends of the dealer and the user, due to the manifestations of structural oppression that allow the underground economy to seem like the most viable option to continue on.

\textbf{Protecting the Black Community: The Difference Between Advocating “For” and “With”}

\textsuperscript{84} Jones III Interview.

\textsuperscript{85} “Incarceration,” Two Is Enough DC, \url{http://www.tiedc2014.com/incarceration.html}
Unlike *DC Cannabis Campaign*, *Two Is Enough DC* had no policy proposals outside of declaring that instead of talking about marijuana, we should “invest in schools” and keep Pookie as a “deterrent for people to purchase marijuana, as [Pookie] is typically a sketchy, street figure.”86 The rhetoric of *Two Is Enough DC* stigmatized drug use and directly/indirectly excluded “the Black drug dealer and user” from the valued community. Their proposed impact of marijuana legalization prioritized respectability politics and rejected access to capitalistic opportunities as the means to liberation. *Two Is Enough DC* claims to want to actively protect the Black community, yet the entire campaign served simply as a negation to the pro-legalization campaign, without any added insight on legislation or mechanisms to protect the Black community. Legalizing marijuana with the sole reason being the collective benefit of Black community is a move towards radical advocacy that would not be imaginable during the Civil Rights Movement, or any racial uplift attempts prior to that. Jones III had strong feelings about marijuana legalization actually being an issue of making White people money off the backs of Black individuals, but when the reality that pro-legalization organizers are pushing for institutionalized mechanisms to better include Pookies was brought up to Jones III, he could not see passed surface-level aversion to having marijuana associated in any manner with the Black community. *DC Cannabis Campaign* seeks to gain access to the legal market of marijuana for the criminalized Black drug dealer who has been historically criminalized for selling marijuana based on a system of reparations, instead of shooing away Black drug dealers as the “creepy” and “sketchy” individuals of the community. The pro-legalization movement in the District

86 Jones III Interview.
views those criminalized for marijuana as victims and values how they are affected by marijuana policy reform.

Suggestions on what increasing access for those affected by the War on Drugs, particularly marijuana, looks like: 1. Don’t make the licensing fees too high. 2. Don’t exclude people with criminal records from licensure. 3. Do provide access to capital for low income entrepreneurs.\textsuperscript{87} Deborah Peterson-Small, founder and executive director of \textit{Break the Chains}, proposed a community reinvestment fund that would be started with even just 2% of revenue from marijuana legalization. She spoke of social venture funds, which are ways of creating pools of money that can be used to start business:

My idea is that we take 2% (small but reasonable) of profits from marijuana sales and set up a social-venture type of fund that is available for low-income people. I would call it the Fund for Growth (all pun intended). People can have some skin in the game. People from the communities where the pool of money was set up for should set up a Community Assistance Self-Help (CASH) Fund. You put aside a certain amount of money each month. When it becomes your turn to get your distribution, the money from the social fund/Fund For Growth matches your money. People will have an incentive to save because they can double their savings. The folks who contribute feel like everyone has some skin in the game. The money can be used for any legitimate purpose so folks do not need to feel like it is only funding the marijuana industry -- it can be invested in education, to start a business, it can be used to buy a house, a car, etc. For me, it is a way that our people can have a resource other than predatory loans and as a way to have access to cash.\textsuperscript{88}

\textit{DC Cannabis Campaign}, primarily driven by the average, frustrated resident of the District of Columbia, had great help with strategy, proposed legislation, and language from

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{87} Nunn, “What About Pookie?”

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individuals working with or for the American Civil Liberties Union of the nation’s capital and other scholars. According to Seema Sadanandan, Criminal Justice Director of the ACLU of the nation’s capital, the strategy behind making this campaign data driven is the fact that “…we live in a highly segregated community that is situated in a society that believes it is post-racial, colorblind world and has convinced many marginalized people the same.”89 Sadanandan highlights that in order for a campaign flyer that says, “Legalization Ends Discrimination” to be successfully received, community specific language and imagery has to be included. Those three words are powerful on their own. However, with the illustration that discrimination looks like “everyone getting arrested for marijuana lives in Harlem, the South Bronx, Ward 7 and 8 [of the District of Columbia], etc.,” people internalize and grapple with that in a way that is much more sophisticated, allowing for more intimate starting points for conversation.90 DCMJ.org, the organization that launched the DC Cannabis Campaign, even utilized racialized, intimate images, down to the logo of the campaign. With the flag of the District of Columbia in the backdrop, a Black, seemingly genderless person with locs, graces the logo with their handcuffed hand up into a Black power fist.91 Their logo has “Pookie” characterized on the very front of their logo. With the common understanding of the economic and social connotations with Northwest DC and the college kids of the District, racial and socio-economic disparities are even


90 Ibid.

91 See Appendix G.
more evident. People, who may not have been a part of the conversation before, can be brought in with this rhetoric – White or Black.  

Furthermore, *DC Cannabis Campaign* strategically focused on community-based language and “getting the talking points right” in order to get “the [Black] community… [their] community… onboard with this kind of radical reform.” Sadanandan pointed out that in the District of Columbia, “the same community that is primarily subjected to being the victims of violence, the victims of incarceration, is the same community that is overpoliced, but also the same community that calls for more policing services.” Messaging strategy had to be shaped in a way that Black communities could receive it, but also have it “resonat[e] with their experiences.” The national message attached to marijuana legalization is that of marijuana is safe to use and we all should be able to smoke as much as we want – this, according to Sadanandan, did not resonate with the Black community:

> It’s not safe for my kids to smoke weed. It’s not safe for my kids to eff up in school. It’s not safe for them to make a mistake… to put their hands in their pocket on a cold day on the wrong street. The consequences when our children mess up can be life-long and life-altering. To tell communities of color that we are trying to legalize weed just because you should have the civil right to grow the plant in your house, it just would not stick. That is

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95 Ibid.
not the reality of how [Black] people are moving through the world. So we had to deal with that when conveying who and how this was going to better the [Black] community.96

Geographically mapping out data, demonstrating that their parents, siblings, children, neighbors, classmates, etc., no matter how seemingly “guilty” they were in possessing and/or selling marijuana, were overly policed and disproportionately disenfranchised as a result, which exacerbates violence, unemployment in the mainstream economy, etc.

Policy Proposals and Goals: *DC Cannabis Campaign* and the Shifting of Power

One major goal of the *DC Cannabis Campaign* is to shift power to the socially and economically disadvantaged and marginalized within the Black community – people who often are legislated about, but never are at the table, even if people who look like them are.97 One cannot have a conversation around drug law reform that thoroughly advocates for all impacted, “unless we are organizing power and shifting power.”98 Their desired legislation would be, in the words of Sadanandan, dedicated to Pookie, their communities, and families… like a rap song or a book:

… that piece saying that police will not profile people using the odor of marijuana, that’s dedicated to the kids on Georgia Avenue and the piece about possession with intent to distribute and changing that frame, that’s dedicated to the young men in Calvert Terrace, you can go through it piece by piece and it’ll show that we ignited this possibility that we could identify our own problems and we can be the drivers of the solution and that sort of reform and that transformative movement can be owned by the people.99

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96 Ibid.

97 Ibid.

98 Ibid.

99 Ibid.
This campaign asked questions like, “Who is the messenger? Who is talking about these particular issues? How are we showing up to these communities regarding these particular issues? How are we centering people who are most impacted by these issues?” Even further, one of the most important questions they considered when organizing was, “How do hold the marijuana legalization movement accountable from a racial justice lens?” There is strong incorporation of the entire community, including people who may be the least desirable due to their means of providing for themselves and their families operating underground and outside the realm of respectability.

Another major goal of the *DC Cannabis Campaign* is to go beyond legalization and advocate for the inclusion of our nation’s Pookies when it comes to the rising success of this new industry that they have been able to vote into the District:

We have to stay on top of our politicians to make sure that we are in the room. Once we have decided to put policy in place that does collective good, no one is in the room saying, now let’s split up the pie fairly. No one in the room is saying, well we just had a drug war that lasted for decades and has done all of this damage [to the Black community.] No one is sitting in the room saying, let’s use profits that this industry is going to deliver to do some repair. They are not sitting back saying that minorities should get a fair share of these licenses. They are not saying that let’s make sure that impoverished communities benefit from the revenues and the tax dollars that are being generated unless organizations like *Drug Policy Alliance*, *Students for Sensible Drug Policy*, and *DCMJ.org*, etc. are actually in the room pushing that agenda. If we want to make sure that we have the economic impact that we want, we have to stay in the room after the vote is done.

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100 Ibid.

101 Ibid.
This kind of advocacy is able to get passed the historical dependence on impressing dominant society with one’s Black ability to be traditionally respectable, nor is it relying on the White gaze for liberation. Not being able to acknowledge that Pookie’s receipt of disproportionate punitive punishment for a product that is set to make White people the dominant benefactors of a booming industry is a huge racial justice issue that requires people to disconnect from the constructed narrative that marijuana singlehandedly ruins communities:

…people are consistently talking about legalizing a plant… when what [we’re] talking about is legalizing a people. We’re talking about how do we shift the power to be rooted and policy solutions that are rooted in protecting the Black community done by and for the whole community. What does it mean to organize within an issue that is so intricate in its social subjugation of communities of color?\textsuperscript{102}

The shift from blaming drugs or other inanimate objects for the destruction of communities to recognizing that these communities are products of intentional neglect and disregard on the part of dominant society is a radical, profound way to begin looking at protecting the Black community.

Without failing to recognize how difficult it is to have to live in communities that rely on the underground economy, an economy that often times leads to violence, DC Cannabis Campaign also advocated for shifting the narrative among members of the Black community who negatively regarded Pookie and felt security in increased police presence because of their rightful desire to be safe within their own community. When one seeks Black liberation and advocacy outside of the guidelines of respectability, there are large steps taken towards broader space and capacity for actual liberation from the dominant narrative. The colorblind, dominant

\textsuperscript{102} Frederique, “Case Studies (NYC/DC): A Racial Justice Approach to Marijuana Policy Reform”
narrative about police departments equating to safety has influenced the obstructions to stop and frisk that communities of color faced from its own members, despite the clear, disproportionate negative impact on Black individuals that the stop and frisk program has had.\textsuperscript{103}

People want to be safe. And there was this huge demographic dynamic where elderly people of color in our communities, when polled, said they wanted more policing. It shifted towards less policing the younger it got. We had to target this false narrative that police equates to safety. When we began to chip away at that, people began to rethink what that actually meant. If that narrative is true, than all of us should be hella safe considering the amount of police presence that exists in our communities right now.\textsuperscript{104}

Having a liberated, “disconnected from White gaze” state of mind gives room for radical thinking when it comes to policing, criminal justice reform, and the structure of Black communities as they attempt to climb out of social, economic, and political suppression.

Demanding What Is Yours: Reparations, a Radical-kind of Racial Uplift

As described by Marbre Stahly-Butts, the Deputy Director of Racial Justice of The Center for Popular Democracy, “Reparations in this context implies a legal relationship.” This relationship, between the Black community and the government, declares that the community is owed retribution for generational wrong that has been done by “a foolish and costly [War on Drugs].” This scope of advocacy goes beyond that of which we have predominately seen when it relates to intra-Black community advocacy.

When we decriminalize and eventually legalize, we have to be cognizant that there have been decades and decades of abuse and harm done to these [Black] communities. We have seen millions stolen from our communities, economic and social destruction in our communities… We have to make sure that bills that are passed reinvest to repair that harm. The state has been violent against our communities and we have seen through these


\textsuperscript{104} Dr. Malik Burnett, “Case Studies (NYC/DC): A Racial Justice Approach to Marijuana Policy Reform”
policies, through its enforcement, and a concentrated violence in Black/Brown communities and poor communities. No denying us access to loans. Reparations is not just about reinvesting in the block you destroyed, it’s also giving loans to small businesses so they can traditionally participate, it’s about a quota of licenses for Black/Brown folks who have been incarcerated, who have been directly impacted, can now be a part of this industry.\footnote{Stahly-Butts, “Case Studies (NYC/DC): A Racial Justice Approach to Marijuana Policy Reform”}

This campaign has re-opened the demand for the state to take institutional responsibility for state-sanctioned harm. Conservative, respectable approaches to Black advocacy, similar to that of Two Is Enough DC, clouds the real issues and centers the wrong people when all factors and characters are looked at.\footnote{David Graham, “What Randall Kennedy Misses About Respectability Politics and Black Lives Matter,” The Atlantic, last modified October 2, 2015, http://www.theatlantic.com/notes/2015/10/what-randall-kennedy-misses-about-respectability-politics-and-black-lives-matter/407101/} Instead of truly understanding the impact of the industry, anti-legalization folks cannot get passed “how terrible marijuana is” and the rhetoric that we just should not have access to it because of their paternalistic and respectable reasons. In evaluating the two 2014 prominent marijuana policy reform campaigns in the District of Columbia, from their founding story to their language and marketing strategy, overlooked complexities that plague Black advocacy are revealed. Most literature that goes into the characterization and circumstances of Black drug dealers focuses on them in relation to White people and racial disparities. With more insight into Pookies as recognized and/or unclaimed members of the Black community, the regard given to Black drug dealers within Black advocacy uncovers how class-based and white supremacy-influenced ideologies have been intimately woven into Black liberation rhetoric. These findings serve to help transition the fight for Black liberation as one that is relative and subjective, to one where strategies can properly be accessed in their effectiveness of protecting the Black community.
Chapter III: Decolonizing How We View Our Nation’s Pookies

“Outrageously long sentences are only part of the story. The hundreds of thousands of people who are arrested each year but do not go to jail also suffer; their arrests stay on their records for years, crippling their prospects for jobs, loans, housing and benefits. These are disproportionately people of color, with marijuana criminalization hitting black communities the hardest.”

Marijuana Policy Reform Goes Beyond Mass Incarceration

Despite the current *Jim Crow-esque* era’s focus on the War on Drugs as a prominent cause of mass incarceration, reforming marijuana policy from a racial justice perspective is not simply about reducing the number of incarcerated African Americans. In order to cut the prison population in half, one would need to focus far beyond “nonviolent, non-serious, and non-sex offender criminals.”  

This is important to grapple with because data on the impact of enforcement on drug laws, particularly marijuana, comes in conflict with Alexander’s dominating, wide-sweeping claims about the War on Drugs being the significant cause of the United States’ huge incarcerated population. Though ending the prohibition of marijuana will not necessarily fix mass incarceration, reframing the conversation on the actual effects of marijuana arrests on Pookie will reveal how Pookie represents a victim within the Black community that is in need of advocacy and protection. With a vivid understanding of how Pookie is victimized,


informed judgments can be made about the 2014 racial justice inspired campaigns around marijuana reform policy.

According to The Marshall Project, state prisons hold most of the United States’ incarcerated population at 1,315,000 people. Amongst this population, only four percent of people are there as a result of drug possession. Another twelve percent are there for drug sales, manufacturing, or trafficking. When adding the percentages of other minor, non-violent crimes, such as nineteen percent for property crime and eleven percent for offenses involving public order, a full fifty-four percent of state prisoners incarcerated for violent crimes like murder, kidnapping, manslaughter, rape, sexual assault, and armed robbery are left.

Marijuana policy reform, despite how it is frequently discussed in the context of ending mass incarceration, is much more about advocating for Black community relations. Individuals impacted by marijuana arrests within Black communities are affected socially and economically. Due to the typical social and economic state of Pookie before being court-involved, the impact of marijuana arrests exacerbates their chances of being involved in criminal activity, especially for survival. A simple arrest has the power to negatively impact the quality of life of a person, a family, and a community. Only six percent of marijuana cases end up with felony convictions,

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109 Ibid.

110 Ibid.

111 Arlando "Tray" Jones, *Eager Street: A life on the Corner and Behind Bars*, (Baltimore: Apprentice House, 2010),1-2
the rest of marijuana cases “are often treated as misdemeanors resulting in fines or probation, if the charges aren’t dismissed completely:”

Even so, every arrest ends up on a person’s record, whether or not it leads to prosecution and conviction. Particularly in poorer minority neighborhoods, where young men are more likely to be outside and repeatedly targeted by law enforcement, these arrests accumulate. Before long a person can have an extensive “criminal history” that consists only of marijuana misdemeanors and dismissed cases. That criminal history can then influence the severity of punishment for a future offense, however insignificant.

There are immense consequences to marijuana-related arrests despite the arrests’ outcome: from eligibility to acquire or maintain one’s public housing, eligibility to acquire or maintain one’s financial aid, employment opportunities and maintenance, child custody disputes, and one’s immigration status.


I am one of the inaugural students of an experimental course titled, GOVX 400: Prison Reform Project at Georgetown University. Throughout the course, fifteen Georgetown students and sixteen incarcerated students from Jessup Correctional Institution, a maximum-security prison in Maryland, worked together to produce multimedia projects around prison reform proposals. Several of our class sessions were held at Jessup Correctional Institution, where we worked side-by-side with our incarcerated classmates. This opportunity allowed for us to get to know our classmates on an intimate level. We learned about their experiences before they were incarcerated and all that has occurred while they have been on the inside. The majority of our

112 Wegman, “The Injustice of Marijuana Arrests.”

113 Ibid.

114 Ibid.
classmates have been incarcerated since they were teenagers. They have spent more time incarcerated than they have living as a free person in society. However, they are not ravaged monsters. Their lifestyles prior to incarceration and subsequent criminal activity were directly related to their social and economic circumstances.

Politics of respectability has continually been a significant factor into the failure to position Pookie, as a victim in need of advocacy rather than punishment. This failure is often not recognized as such, and has historically and presently not allowed for proponents of racial justice, particularly Black political and social figures, religious figures, scholars, etc., to comprehensively advocate for the needs of the Black community. In fact, this failure to remove the stigma that plagues how people view Pookie’s inherent character has effectively created “a hierarchy in blackness” that neglects “colonial, imperial, and hegemonic masculine systems [that] already governs society.” Respectability has been illustrated as “a source of power to combat white supremacy[’s] portrayals of [B]lack inferiority and criminality” typically embedded into American culture through racial propaganda spread in media and within American politics. From the development of Black masculinity post-Civil War to the promotion of “uplifting the race” and emphasis on presentation, respectability has been the


116 Ibid.

117 Ibid.
strategy of choice when it comes to intra-Black community uplifting, despite how it has stratified and vilified members of the community.\textsuperscript{118}

When burdened by the need to survive and coupled with the lack of quality opportunities for social mobility and education, many members of the Black community cannot afford to be disconnected from social and economic behaviors that deviate from what some may consider a more traditional, respectable path towards the American Dream of upwards mobility and success. As exemplified by my classmates’ individual stories and many others, as well as formal studies published in journals like \textit{Science}, “…when faced with limited resources, people tend to focus on the needs at hand, rather than the long term…”\textsuperscript{119} Psychology research has resulted in people pushing back against those who overlook the structural and systemic realities that maintain cycles of poverty; poor people are often blamed for the poverty that they live in and are accused of being lazy and lacking self-control.\textsuperscript{120} In reality, “poverty makes it hard for people to care about the future and forces them to live in the present.”\textsuperscript{121} This often manifests in the

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\item \textsuperscript{120} Elliot Berkman, “Poor People Don't Have Less Self-Control. Poverty Forces Them to Think Short-Term,” \textit{NewRepublic.com}, last modified September 22, 2014, \texttt{https://newrepublic.com/article/122887/poor-people-dont-have-less-self-control}

\item \textsuperscript{121} Ibid.
\end{itemize}

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participation in the underground economy and/or the potential for the streets or “the game” to be a social or familial space.\textsuperscript{122}

With the target being racial minorities, the poor, and the powerless, the War on Drugs capitalizes off of social and economic disadvantage. An anonymous officer interviewed for \textit{Salon}’s piece titled, “The true lives of low-level drug dealers: “What’s the point of surviving if you can’t live?” reflects on the conditions that allow for the War on Drugs to ineffectively curb drug use and sale, but instead capitalize off of the backs of those navigating poverty:

A lot of the people I saw, they’re living in the slums or down and out, and the only thing they have to make them feel good is that high. You’d have to get them out of that situation — out of being poor, with nowhere to go — to fix it. And that’s maybe harder than getting them off drugs.\textsuperscript{123}

Often times, literature and scholarship that happen to actual cover the issues of criminality, drug use and sale, and poverty amongst the urban poor and disadvantaged, insights are typically outside looking in. The lived experience of my classmates, and the unfortunate reality that their lives are not unique in nature, demonstrates how dehumanizing the structural oppression they face is, but further, how dehumanizing it is to be directly and indirectly noted as the sole reason “behind their misfortunes” within intra-community advocacy.\textsuperscript{124}

\textsuperscript{122} \textit{Urban Dictionary}, s.v. “the game,” accessed April 27, 2016, \url{http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=the%20game} (defined by urban dictionary as: “Used to describe an underground industry that participants “play” such as selling drugs, making rap music, pimping, or gang activity.”


\textsuperscript{124} Poulson, “The Dangers of Respectability Politics.”
With over twenty-five years locked up and out of the hustling game, Warren “Ren” Hynson, one of my dynamic classmates from my GOVX 400: Prison Reform Project course, reflected on the “how” and “why” behind criminal and violent activity amongst our nation’s Pookies. Ren has been incarcerated since he was seventeen-years-old, for a burglary that ended in death and arson.\textsuperscript{125} In re-examining the decisions he made during his youth, as well as the decisions he observed others in similar circumstances make, Ren speaks of being “in [a] dark place [where] you will do anything to survive… to make it through the day.”\textsuperscript{126}

I don’t like to judge anybody unless I know their whole situation – and even when I do know their situation – I try not to judge them. People who sell narcotics to survive … sometimes people do it because that’s the only thing that they know how to do. They were never taught or shown another way. And they feel that that is the only way to survive.\textsuperscript{127}

With the politics of respectability clouding advocacy, and with the people who invest in respectability primarily leading Black advocacy movements, the legitimacy of the constraints and effects on judgment and rationale within people who are forced to navigate through dysfunctional and inequitable environments is not considered while trying to protect the Black community. Pookies, both within the community and incarcerated, are easily written off because of the effects they have on other members of the community and their connection to the propelled image of Black inferiority and criminality – the very image that the Black elite seek to distance themselves from in order to be more “like-able” and “to be treated like first class


\textsuperscript{126} Warren “Ren” Hynson, 2016, phone interview conducted by Queen Adesuyi, Washington, DC, April 22.

\textsuperscript{127} Hynson Interview.
citizens” with “the ability to exercise autonomy over [their] bodies.” Ren acknowledges how difficult it is to grapple with the realities of criminality being used as a survival tool. Despite the difficulty, it is imperative that advocacy movements, especially forces within the respective community, recognize the impacts of all of the social, economic, and political barriers to traditional success for Pookie in order to properly protect the entire Black community.

The lived experience of another one of my classmates from Jessup Correctional Institution, Arlando “Tray” Jones, as documented in his memoir, exemplify the all-too-common plight of the disadvantaged within Black communities. Though he is not serving time due to drugs, his usage and sale of marijuana and other drugs as a means to feed himself and have a glimpse of life beyond not knowing when or where your next meal will come from, further reveals more about society than it does about who Tray inherently is as a person. His preface ends with the reality that his experience is not unique to him, “[o]ur society abandons or ignores children like me:”

I was created to be better than circumstances ever permitted me to be. For the most part, I did not steal because I wanted to; I stole because I had to. And when petty thievery no longer satisfied my needs, I sold dope. I saw the devastation that dope was causing to the folks in my neighborhood. But I didn’t care. Poverty was devastating me more, or at least, that is how I saw it.

128 Poulson, “The Dangers of Respectability Poltiics.”

129 This reveals more about society than Tray, or “Pookies” for that matter.

130 Tray Jones, Eager Street, xiv.

131 Ibid., 1-2
In grappling with how to think about Pookies throughout the nation, respectability politics in the mix further work to hold Black individuals to a standard that ignores how White supremacy, capitalism, and other marginalizing systems have impacted how they have had to survive. He proclaims that in order to challenge and eventually end the “vicious cycle [of poverty, crime, and imprisonment]” on streets like his throughout the nation, we have to be honest and “[have] a hard and honest look at it.”132 With that logic in mind, we should not overlook the systemic realities that effectively force disadvantaged people, particularly urban youth, to rely on criminal activity to survive their circumstances. Tray, in addition to many of my other classmates, is not incarcerated solely for a marijuana arrest or drugs in general. However, his story is still important because this work goes beyond the ability to sell or use marijuana:

> Just because we want to say that certain nonviolent crimes should not be criminalized at all, doesn’t mean we are leaving out those people who commit violent crimes behind. Their lives matter too. People who commit violent crimes matter too. How do we build out a system that actually heals people in their worst moments and doesn’t leave them in that trauma and that stigma for their lifetime?133

The issue of marijuana policy reform, particularly in such a racially divided area such as the District of Columbia, is about the stigmatization of Pookie, criminalization of poverty, and white supremacy.

> Pookie, Hustling, American Capitalism: The Self-Made Man

Hustling and finessing are fundamental parts of American culture, across racial and class lines. Though “hustling” and “hustlers” are terms mostly used amongst African Americans,

132 Ibid., xiv.

mainstream culture uses “the self-made man” to refer to the exact same behavior and attitude. From renown Herman Melville’s “The Confidence Man” and the glorification of the self-made man in American culture as evidenced by Benjamin Franklin’s life and legacy, one would think that Black hustlers operating within the underground economy would be recognized for their alignment with the American entrepreneurial spirit. According to Urban Dictionary:

A hustler is the way one lives his life. Going out on the streets or wherever making money and working hard for it. A hustler is not lazy he's consistently out earning money. He gets the money by using his smarts and outcunning everyone out there.\(^{134}\)

Given the circumstances of Pookies across the nation, why are their abilities to survive by pulling themselves up by the bootstraps they were given not valued in our capitalistic society? Tray speaks about how he was raised to hustle and he understood that allowing himself to go without necessities and other desires was a betrayal to himself and his abilities to provide for himself by any means necessary, which seemingly falls in line with praised American culture:

I grew up in a home where I was taught to distinguish right from wrong, but I was instructed that nothing could be more wrong than going without when you possessed the talent to secure whatever it was you desired. Survival was the rule of the day. And by all accounts, I am a survivor.\(^{135}\)

Engaging in the underground economy is considered lazy because it operates outside of traditional workspaces, but in reality, underground hustlers work just as hard, if not harder with more at stake. Pookies typically are, or at least aspire to be hustlers. However, due to the impact of race on how one is perceived by those of the dominant culture, as well as one’s internalized obsession with respectability, Black hustlers are rarely ever recognized for their brilliance,


\(^{135}\) Tray Jones, Eager Street, 1.
organizational skills, and ability to create enterprises, providing jobs for themselves and those around them despite systemic restraints. Their behaviors and lifestyles are always regarded as negative.

The racial disparity in the execution of the War on Drugs and the racialized framing of drug dealers are most evident in media coverage, as much as it is in statistics. Sarah Furay, the nineteen-year-old daughter of a “head honcho” at a local, Texan DEA Office, was described as “adorable” and “photogenic” in news reports about her being busted with “large amounts of Ecstasy, cocaine, marijuana, methamphetamine, and an LSD analogue.” Her mugshot, alongside a headshot of her law enforcement father, went viral, as news organizations focused on her “photogenic smile” rather than her criminal activity. Death and Taxes Magazine audaciously included in their original reporting of the bust: “Although reports don’t explicitly state that Furay is enrolled at Texas A&M campus, or any college, we’re gonna go ahead and assume that Furay was taking an entrepreneurial approach to avoiding student loan debt.”

Pookie is not given this same benefit of the doubt, despite the fact that Pookie, is more at risk of sustaining job-related severe injury or job-related death than the “hazardous” job of being a police officer. They face these risks for reasons that stem from their social and economic conditions.

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137 See Appendix H.


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positioning in society that often times leave them out of legitimate employment, making survival difficult. Often times, making the non-traditional, underground economy an attractive option for people trying to live outside of poverty.

Furay was able to post her thirty-nine thousand dollar bail and she walked free. With this case of privilege in mind, I think of the late Ramarley Graham. Graham was an 18-year-old, unarmed Black teenager from the Bronx that was shot and killed by NYPD Street Narcotics Enforcement Unit officers in the bathroom of his home in February 2012. Protesters linked their presence and aggressive force to New York’s “stop-and-frisk” program and “marijuana arrests crusades.”\(^{140}\) They instantly suspected Graham to be armed and affiliated and pursued him, chasing after him as he runs into his home. They kicked down his door down, where they finally shot him in his bathroom. He was allegedly trying to flush a small bag of marijuana down the toilet according to NYPD – all while he was unarmed, all without a warrant.\(^{141}\) The racial discrepancy in how both Black and White people view Black drug dealers is heavily influenced by a subscription to white supremacy and the use of respectability as a means of liberation. This discrepancy has been destructive and fatal, both literally and metaphorically, for the most vulnerable within the Black community.


Chapter IV: A Broader View of Racial Justice: #BlackLivesMatter

Now, I locate the work I do as racial justice. If we're going to continue to say that the war on drugs is war on people of color, if we continue to get nontraditional allies and say marijuana legalization is a civil rights issue and how we are winning, I find it hard to believe the idea that we can win the war on drugs without winning the war on people of color. If we think that, we're doing something wrong. If we adhere to respectability over the lives of our brothers and sisters in the struggle, we’re doing something wrong.142

– Deborah Peterson-Small, 2015 International Drug Policy Reform Conference

For generations, rigid adherence to respectability politics has informed civil rights activism strategy and execution from the inside.143 From the plaintiffs chosen for civil rights cases to the mechanism behind choosing what victims of racialized injustice to rally for, or not rally for, all have some layer of respectability woven into the rhetoric. The concept of respectability politics started with its use upon Black women; Black women within these spaces were subject to these standards of respectability at the intersections of gender and race. The abandoning of Claudette Colvin for Rosa Parks as the face of the Montgomery Bus Boycotts, and even further, Colvin’s seeming erasure from the civil rights movement’s narrative, demonstrates how deeply respectability was wielded, especially among women leaders. Today, three queer Black women, whose lives stray far from former standards applied to women, are the faces of arguably one of the most significant, leading forces in civil rights today. They have made it a point to reject the use of respectability as evidenced by their guiding principles and unapologetic optics in their work since the tragic murder of Trayvon Martin. Claudette Colvin’s narrative


would have panned out differently within this generation of activists. The #BlackLivesMatter organization revolutionized what the fight for Black liberation looks like through the way they outwardly reject strategy that invests in White, heteronormative standardization as strategy.

Despite the authenticity and courage in Claudette Colvin’s narrative, Colvin did not fit the physical, social, and socio-economic mold of what the elite bubble of Black civil rights activists considered to be “safe” enough to properly represent the Black cause and Black people.  

Respectability within the civil rights movement, particularly within the NAACP, went beyond a strategic tactic that was used only to “woo white sympathy or acquiescence,” as it did not operate solely as an expedient that was intended to be “cast[ed] aside [after/when] the new day of black freedom dawned.” From “gender roles, family responsibilities, child-rearing, sexuality, employment [to] frugality, and education,” these standards, informed by White, middle-class American ideals, were genuinely and unequivocally “endorsed by most African Americans.” Particularly by the middle of the 20th century, notions of respectability were deeply woven into the Black consciousness, as the Black elite and/or Black activists pushed for the normalization of these standards and held them as a “tool of protest and an index of black progress.”

Only The Finest of Black Citizenry Can Help Perception After Generations of Oppression


145 Peter J. Ling and Sharon Monteith, Gender in the Civil Rights Movement (Routledge, 2014), 73.

146 Ibid.

147 Ibid.
Proper private life etiquette, social, and physical gender roles were often strategically used throughout mainstream, Black civil rights activism as a way of normalizing to White and Black America that African Americans, without a doubt, are worthy of respect and capable of good citizenship. This strategy translated into investing primarily in Black civil rights figures that would represent “good men and good women roles,” which inherently drew from White hetero-normative values, as well as oppressive colorist, classist, and sexist standards amongst Black civil rights organizers themselves.148 Due to this strategic, but also internalized framework, women figures in particular, had to subscribe to “bourgeois notions of womanhood, femininity, and motherhood,” in order to help “integrationist efforts [in assimilating] into the dominant culture and standards.149 In alignment with this thought, Rosa Parks, as opposed to Claudette Colvin, was the preferred face of this movement, even though Colvin was an authentic, non-staged victim of the system that organizers were rallying against. Rosa Parks, whose staged demonstration did not involve the same kind of fuss that Colvin’s did, allowed for Parks to present herself, even in disobedience, as a non-domineering women. In reference to the idea that systems of oppression tend to breed weak men but strong women, Southern Christian Leadership Conference chief aid to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Andrew Young attempted to validate the idea that “men had a hard time with domineering women…”150 As much as Black men figures within


150 Ibid.
the movement turned to the power reserved for them within masculinity as members of a patriarchal state, Black men and even Black women pushed for the rejection of masculinity within women figures at their organizations and as faces of demonstrations. Since slavery, Black women were defeminized by White American standardization. There were strong sentiments held by Black men, and some Black women alike, that traditional womanhood, a status historically withheld from Black women, was one of the most strategic ways to establish integrity, sameness, and “depth in one’s Christian commitment” -- all qualities that Parks exhibited in her background, in her appearance, and in the way she maneuvered the demonstration. Colvin, unlike Parks, did not look or act in a way that was “delicate, ladylike, and in need of protection,” the way traditional womanhood called for.\textsuperscript{151} Even within an equal rights framework, notions like his affected women figures within civil rights organizations and within general demonstrations through the policing of these women and the pressuring to adhere to physical and social standards that were friendly to hegemonic, White patriarchal society -- all in the name of Black liberation and exhibiting only the finest of Black citizenry.

\#BlackLivesMatter: “Not your momma’s civil rights movement”\textsuperscript{152}

There is a new movement calling for Black civil rights today that radically differs from that of the Colvin vs. Parks era which relied heavily on the politics of respectability and traditional gender roles. The three queer Black women who founded the official Black Lives

\textsuperscript{151} Springer, 32.


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Matters organization have created an unprecedented shift in what Black liberation looks like.

Back in the 1960s, Black students who integrated Southern restaurants wore suits and ties.153 Today, Patrisse Cullors, one of the founders of the Black Lives Matter organization, emphasizes “our duty to fight for our freedom,” which she often describes as a process of “shutting shit down.”154 The Black Lives Matter movement unapologetically radicalized the experience of fighting for one’s freedom, in alignment with Audre Lorde’s sentiments against respectability, “The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house:”

[Black Lives Matter] goes beyond the narrow nationalism that can be prevalent within some Black communities, which merely call on Black people to love Black, live Black and buy Black, keeping straight cis Black men in the front of the movement while our sisters, queer and trans and disabled folk take up roles in the background or not at all. Black Lives Matter affirms the lives of Black queer and trans folks, disabled folks, Black-undocumented folks, folks with records, women and all Black lives along the gender spectrum. It centers those that have been marginalized within Black liberation movements. It is a tactic to (re)build the Black liberation movement.155

In the Black Lives Matter organization’s self-description, and even more so within their thirteen guiding principles, Black Lives Matter purposely and unapologetically rid themselves of the chains of respectability and demonstrated what an inclusive, Black nationalistic empowerment movement looks like when it works to the benefit of all Black individuals. Based on their work and the way they go about their work, they establish that, at least within a generation tired of Black folks being attributed as the root of their own problems, girls like Claudette Colvin and

153 Farah Stockman, “The new face of civil rights.”

154 One of the four lines from Assata Shakur’s “Letter to My People” that is always chanted at official Black Lives Matter protests, especially when attended by one of the founders; Michael Segalov, “We Spoke to the Activist Behind #BlackLivesMatter About Racism in Britain and America,” VICE News, February 2, 2015.


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people characterized like Pookie, are important members of the Black community, despite their inability to be given respect by the White Gaze.\textsuperscript{156}

Example BLM guiding principles: Collectively valuing all and uplifting \textit{all} Black people

Arguably a direct response to the way the fight for Black liberation has been conducted, the non-characteristically traditional founders of the Black Lives Matter organization thoroughly outline guiding principles for their movement that affirm the way a rejection of previous integrationist and respectability-focused tactics can both be inclusive and produce results. Among the thirteen guiding principles listed on their website, two noteworthy principles that demonstrate this shift from the 1960s civil rights activism are “collective value” and “Black women.” Their “collective value” guiding principle states:

“We are guided by the fact all Black lives, regardless of actual or perceived sexual identity, gender identity, gender expression, economic status, ability, disability, religious beliefs or disbeliefs, immigration status or location, matters. ALL Black Lives Matter: Queer Black Lives, Trans* Black Lives, Formerly Incarcerated Black Lives, Black Drug-Involved Lives, Poor/Working Class Black Lives, Differently abled Black Lives, Black Women’s Lives, Immigrant Black Lives, Black Elderly and Children’s Lives. ALL BLACK LIVES MATTER and are creators of this space. We throw no one under the bus. We Rise Together.”\textsuperscript{157}

In this guiding principle, the Black Lives Matter organization has a commitment to the inclusion of \textit{all} Black folks, not only in what they fight and rally for, but also who gets to be that the frontlines of said fight.\textsuperscript{158} For example, Patrisse Cullors, one of the founders, represents

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{156} Stockman, “The new face of civil rights.”
\textsuperscript{157} “Guiding Principles,” \textit{Black Lives Matter}, \url{http://blacklivesmatter.com/guiding-principles/}
\textsuperscript{158} Mike Brown arguably is not the perfect victim and could have been considered too hazardous of a figure to outwardly support in that context.
\end{footnotesize}
everything that would have been shunned back in the 1960s. She is a queer women of color, who was kicked out of her poverty-stricken home at a young age for her queer identity. She had a father who had been incarcerated and a brother who was addicted to crack-cocaine, and funneled through the school-to-prison pipeline and faced incarceration at the tender age of nineteen. Instead of feeding into the idea that these other factors/identities within some Black folk, like queerness, poverty, dis/ability, drug use, etc., detracts from the Black liberation movement, Cullors and her organization fully embrace how collectively valuing all Black lives makes for a liberation movement that benefits off of selectively suppressing the marginalized within the marginalized. With this in mind, they proudly advocate for a radically different kind of movement that values Pookies, and all other shunned member of the Black community, enough to allow her to be one of the faces of the movement, because struggle, though not a part of the collective Black struggle, is still a significant because of the power that exist in rising together.

**Forced Sobriety is a Manifestation of Advocacy Based In Respectability**

As promoted by *Two Is Enough DC* and many political officials who rely on antiquated drug policy language, marijuana is constantly being referred to as a gateway drug or linked with major drug addiction despite science that has disputed and settled against these notions. Many people benefit economically and politically based on the reliance on these false notions, but they

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159 Stockman, “The new face of civil rights.”

in fact, do not serve anyone.\textsuperscript{161} Evidence from reports done by the National Center for Biotechnology Information, National Institute on Drug Abuse, and the Schaffer Library of Drug Policy all link “poverty, trauma, mental health problems, and the effects of criminalization and stigma” to being the prime gateways to addiction.\textsuperscript{162} If academic studies were not enough, the personal lived experiences of my incarcerated classmates, my friends and neighbors back home in the South Bronx, and the historical plight of the Black urban poor all make this same connection. Many people have an investment in the myths of marijuana, but their insistence does not actually keep the Black community safe in regards to crime or public health. These myths justify the forced sobriety of Black individuals in exchange for “respect” and “worth,” from Black and White elite, but it also is profitable for people in power:\textsuperscript{163}

These myths about marijuana justify the use of law enforcement as the principal method to control its use, which is why more than half of all drug arrests annually are for possession of small amounts of marijuana. The myth justifies the use of drug testing of people applying for public benefits or almost any job and the exclusion of otherwise deserving people from needed public housing. The income generated for the companies that create drug tests or that privatize prisons is well-documented. Criminalizing people is a cash cow.\textsuperscript{164}

In addition, the myth of marijuana, and other drugs, allows for people – beyond race lines – to “stigmatize [people] who use [and sell] drugs – especially pregnant, [parenting, or the urban


\textsuperscript{162} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{163} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{164} Ibid.
poor] and use their drug use as the excuse to ignore all other social, economic, and/or political barriers to personal development and mobility.”

[Once we say someone uses drugs we] don’t have to ask whether a [person] is suffering from depression or PTSD or if their use of drugs is a rational choice, which it is more than not. All we have to say is that [they use] illicit drugs or abuse prescription drugs and we can write [them] and [their] problems off as ones of [their] own making and feel self-righteous about our demand that [they] shape up [their] act together if [they] shape up and get [their] act together if [they] want any sympathy or help.”

Throughout our nation, in Black and White communities alike, engaging with drugs is a rational choice, whether for self-care, self-preservation, for fun, or to expand one’s mind.166


166 Ibid.
Conclusion

Respectability will not save us. And even if it could—even if we had proof that dressing up in our Sunday best and never using profanity and always wearing belts to keep our pants up and never throwing a rock at a police officer guaranteed us safety or equality—it would not be intelligent for us to accept or embrace the notion of respectability. Although Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham coined the term in her seminal text “Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church,” the concept of respectability is rooted in a binary set up not by our ancestors, not by those Church women of the late 1800s, but by the very people who enslaved blacks.167

– Barbara Reynolds, veteran civil rights activist

Re-Humanizing Pookie: Including and Investing in Communities of Color Post-Legalization

In today’s age, the kind of advocacy that best and most comprehensively uplifts the Black community is one that operates radically and unapologetically on its own accord, outside the judgment of dominant culture. We ought to take a look at the Prohibition Era and the fate of the Jewish bootlegger as an example of what advocacy and protection for Pookie can look like. Similar to the prohibition of marijuana, the prohibition of alcohol created an intensely active underground economy of bootleggers and maintained access to alcohol despite the legal prohibition. Jewish people dominated this underground industry because of their access to exceptions for “religious, medicinal, and industrial alcohol,” which provided loopholes to the law.168 Jewish bootleggers were involved in major smuggling empires throughout this time period. By the time Prohibition was repealed in 1933, Jewish people were “provided a path to

167 Shannon M. Houston, “Respectability will not save us: Black Lives Matter is right to reject the “dignity and decorum” mandate handed down to us from slavery,” Salon, August 25, 2015, http://www.salon.com/2015/08/25/respectability_will_not_save_us_black_lives_matter_is_right_to_reject_the_dignity_and_decorum_mandate_handed_down_to_us_from_slavery/

status and respectability” and were “among those who [were able to] reroute their illegal operations into legal channels.”\textsuperscript{169} Though recognized as a pseudo, racialized “other,” “alcohol offered a way for American Jews to present themselves as the best sorts of Americans, as the ones who consume alcohol regularly but are not drunkards, who participate in the economy in ways that benefit communities and society at large.”\textsuperscript{170} Despite the similar relationship between Pookies, Jewish bootleggers, and marijuana and alcohol respectively, Jewish bootleggers were racialized and criminalized on different levels – granting them different kinds of access to the legal market after prohibition ended. Many of the Black bootleggers of that time, as well as Pookies of today, were not able to enter the same market, despite the fact that there are liquor stores all throughout Black communities, as well as marijuana steadily being sold at dispensaries. “[They] just don’t own any of them.”\textsuperscript{171}

In light of this outcome, there should be a call to recognize that the Pookies of this nation and their communities have both visibly dominated the underground industry of marijuana, suffered the consequences of targeting and over-enforcement, etc., and their outcome should be similar to that of the Jewish bootlegger. At this point, data affirms that the War on Drugs has decimated Black families, communities, and law enforcement’s profitability off of this war has allowed for them to implement intrusive and often times violent “stop and frisk” policies, in the name of the War on Drugs. As a result, Deborah Peterson-Small, the trailblazer of drug policy

\textsuperscript{169} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{170} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{171} Dorsey Nunn, “It Is Time For A New, New Deal” (panel at the International Drug Policy Reform Conference, Washington, DC metro area, November 19, 2015)
reform strongly advocates for community reinvestments to be written into legalization legislation. Though it was used a survival tactic during the civil rights movement, advocacy in our post-Trayvon Martin nation requires that protection of the Black community unapologetically humanizes all figures within the community, from those who are able to secure traditional forms of employment, Black LGBTQ individuals, especially Black transgendered individuals, the pant-saggers, the sex workers, the drug dealers, the drug users, the college student, the graffiti artists, the people who gamble outside, people who sell loose cigarettes, the survivors of abuse, the formerly incarcerated, those who need government assistance, people who wear colorful weaves, etc. Based on how it plays out within marijuana policy reform, conservative, traditional approaches to Black advocacy that adheres to respectable guidelines when trying to protect the Black community have and will continue to render some of the most vulnerable within the community invisible.

Radical advocacy would view the fact that Black individuals and communities have had to be subject to “literally being caged for the very plant that is currently set to make [White people] and governments billions of dollars” without getting a piece of the pie after it became legal as a major concern. Peterson-Smith, as well as Nunn, suggested that not only should money be reinvested into the affected communities, but also there should conscious initiatives that allow for marginalized communities to gain access to this market on an entrepreneurial level. Often, Pookie lost their ability to get financial aid at higher rates. Pookie and their family were at-risk of losing their public housing at higher rates. Pookie and Pookie’s community had to deal

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with their parents in jail due to this war. Pookies were subjected to over-policing, being labeled
dangerous, disenfranchisement, and even subjected to having drugs planted on them as their
local and national law enforcement had heavy incentives to pursue these “crimes.” Radical,
comprehensive advocacy would be weary that while marijuana steadily becomes legalized, a
new regulatory system that may continue to recriminalize the people who operate outside of the
system. Despite the well intentions and the value in diversity of thought, based on the neglect,
impediment, and implicit/explicit hierarchy that the politics of respectability creates within the Black
community as exemplified by the regard given or withheld from Pookie, conservative
approaches to advocacy within Black communities cannot comprehensively protect the Black
community. #AllOfUsOrNone

173 John B. Carroll, “Leaked Documents Reveal Dothan Police Department Planted Drugs on Young Black
Men For Years, District Attorney Doug Valeska Complicit,” Henry County Report, December 1, 2015. I have a
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amount of people trying to access it or because involved parties have been trying to take down the site.); “Distorted
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APPENDIX

Appendix A:

Source: http://www.usnews.com/opinion/articles/2016-04-20/legal-pot-is-no-civil-rights-cure-all

Appendix B:

List of workshops that I attended within the three days:
1. Youth Drug Prevention and Education: New Paradigms for a New Era
2. When Women Ended Prohibition: The 21st Century Struggle to End the Criminalization of Drug Use
3. The Drug War and the Militarization and Bastardization of Police Practices
4. Porro, Ganga, Mota, Gras: Models for Cannabis Regulation from Around the World
5. It’s Time for a New New Deal
7. Criminalized, Marginalized and “Othered”: Lessons and Strategies for Fighting the Drug War in Hard Places
9. Ensuring Inclusion, Repairing Damage, Diversity, Equity and the Marijuana Industry
10. What’s a Parent to Do When Youthful Experimentation Goes Awry?
11. From Illicit to Licit: Challenges to Marijuana Legalization

Find more information on the conference’s website: http://www.drugpolicy.org/events/2015-international-drug-policy-reform-conference

Appendix C:
Appendix D:

Appendix E:

Source: William Jones III (in my possession)
Appendix H

Source: http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/12/01/when-white-girls-deal-drugs-they-walk.html