



Copaganda: Police Trials as a Media and State Kettling Tool

A Collaborative Toolkit Created by MediaJustice and MPD150



Forward from MPD150

This toolkit was created in collaboration with MediaJustice and their ongoing work to combat disinformation as a resource for people and organizations engaging in work to dismantle, defund, and abolish systems of policing and carceral punishment, while also navigating trials of police officers who murder people in our communities. Trials are not tools of abolition; rather, they are a (rarely) enforced consequence within the current system under the Prison Industrial Complex (PIC) for people who murder while working as police officers. Police are rarely charged when they commit these murders and even less so when the victim is Black. We at MPD150 are committed to the deconstruction of the PIC in its entirety and until this is accomplished, we also honor the need for people who are employed as police officers to be held to the same laws they weaponize against our communities.

We began working on this project in March of 2021 as our city was bracing for the trial of Derek Chauvin, the white police officer who murdered George Floyd, a Black man, along with officers J. Alexander Kueng and Thomas Lane while Tou Thao stood guard on May 25th, 2020. During the uprising that followed, Chauvin was charged with, and on April 20th, 2021 ultimately found guilty of, second-degree unintentional murder, third-degree murder, and second-degree manslaughter.

Municipalities will often use increased police presence in an attempt to assert control and further criminalize Black and brown bodies leading up to trials of police officers, and that is exactly what we experienced in Minneapolis. During the early days of the Chauvin trial, Daunte Wright, a 20-year-old Black man was murdered by Kim Potter, a white Brooklyn Center police officer, during a traffic stop on April 11th, 2021. Once again, community members were exposed to violent state repression while protesting and processing ongoing, and now even further compounded, grief and rage. With the Chauvin trial underway, Minnesota State Troopers and the National Guard were staged to activate Phase 3 of Operation Safety Net (OSN), a task force formed during the uprising following the murder of George Floyd. Because of this, local police, state troopers and the national guard were swiftly deployed to the streets of Brooklyn Center, eight miles from Minneapolis City Hall where the Chauvin trial was taking place. We talk more about OSN in the "Minneapolis Case Study" section of the toolkit.

Six weeks after Chauvin was found guilty - during a trial that served as a stage for the Minneapolis Police Chief and other officials to promote their department and the idea of good and bad apples, instead of focusing on the system as a whole - another young Black man, Winston "Boogie" Smith, was murdered in the Uptown neighborhood of Minneapolis by members of a U.S. Marshals Service task force on June 3rd, 2021. Again, Minneapolis community members came together to mourn, protest, and hold space. On the tenth day of these protests, Deonna Marie Erickson, a white community member who had parked her vehicle to shield fellow protestors, was hit and killed by Nicholas Kraus, also white, as he sped into the crowd, injuring those nearby. Our community is still working to put together the details of these murders while responding to effort after effort by private and public security forces to clear the memorials for Winston Smith, Deonna Marie and George Floyd Square.

What's happening here in Minnesota is also happening throughout the U.S. and internationally. Black, brown and Indigenous peoples have been laying the groundwork for abolition for years. What we're experiencing now is a continuation of occupying forces, with roots in colonialism and slavery, asserting power and control. Policing - the pain and trauma it inflicts on family members of those murdered as well as witnesses and the community as a whole; the people it imprisons; and the resources it takes - is a continuation of this genocide and enslavement.

Until we abolish the prison industrial complex as a whole, we will not only see municipal police continue to harm our communities, but increased operations by state and federal forces. Policing in all forms, whether it's "special jurisdiction" departments like transit, parks, airport, and university police, county sheriffs, or state and federally controlled forces all inflict harm on our communities. One of the tools used to carry out this repression and instill a narrative that these types of policing are necessary is media manipulation. We are grateful to MediaJustice for providing a framework to more deeply understand how this can play out and honored to delve more deeply into it with them throughout this toolkit.

You can learn more about our work and order copies of the 2020 expanded edition of the "Enough Is Enough" report and abolitionist toolkit at www.mpd150.com

Towards a police-free future, and one where the people control our sources of information,
MPD150

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Introduction

The invention of the Internet and its adoption by the masses as a tool for seeking information and sharing ideas has been one of the most transformational pivots for media our communities have seen. Prior to its adoption, narratives about communities of color were often left to white-owned corporate media who advance harmful tropes and stereotypes. While minority-owned media worked to undo these harmful narratives, the damage from these harmful stereotypes continues to have material impacts on the lives of Black, brown, Indigenous, low income, and other marginalized communities.

The Internet has acted as a powerful tool for communities of color to bypass corporate media gatekeepers and make interventions on these violent narratives, allowing people to share the real experiences of our communities to wider audiences. From Black Lives Matter to Standing Rock to #SaveSheikJarrah, we've seen the way the Internet has been leveraged as a liberating tool, expanding our movements, our power, and our ability to make material changes in our lives. However, the outcome of this expansion of information and access hasn't been entirely positive. Governments and right-wing actors, seeing the impact access to information has had for our movements, have shifted to disrupting this space by strategically deploying disinformation to disorganize and demobilize our demands for justice.

Context + Grounding from MediaJustice

After witnessing the uprisings around the country in the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd, and with a backdrop of a global health crisis and extremely dysfunctional political system, MediaJustice began to track the ways disinformation was impacting our network members' and allies' ability to mobilize and fight for meaningful change in their communities. The state, often in coordination with right-wing elements, moves swiftly to demobilize movements through defaming victims of police violence and saturating social media platforms with intentionally misleading information to impact public perceptions of protests.

On March 8th, 2020, Derek Chauvin, one of the officers who killed George Floyd, began his trial. In high profile cases of police killings, states of emergency and media narrative distort the causes of community response. The trials that arise from these incidents also become visual and narrative spectacles that are easily manipulated by the state and media corporations.

We created this toolkit in collaboration with MPD150 to help communities in Minneapolis and all across the country better understand how disinformation is used as a tactical response in light of police violence, as well as to develop responses rooted in healing and community care. Here are some key terms we use to describe the nature of media manipulation in the digital age:

Key Definitions

- Misinformation: False or inaccurate information that is communicated regardless of an intention to deceive.
- Disinformation: False information deliberately and often covertly spread (as by the planting of rumors) in order to influence public opinion or obscure the truth.
- Malinformation: Information that is based on reality, but is often taken out of context and used to inflict harm on a person, organization or country.
- Racialized disinformation: Both the impersonation of Black people and people of color online in the service of advancing disinformation campaigns; and disinformation that uniquely targets and disproportionately impacts communities of color (ex. Voter suppression, deceptive ICE stings, COVID disinformation, etc.).

Common Patterns of Media Manipulation in Police Trials

Last summer, following the murder of George Floyd, we witnessed the largest mass mobilization against police violence of our generation. At the time of these nationwide and global uprisings, the media struggled, if not failed at times, to tell the right story. Instead of explaining the core demands of activists to defund and abolish the police, sensationalized images of "looting" by protesters and violent clashes with police dominate the media. We've seen time and time again that the media's coverage and portrayal of our movements can undermine our political power while reinforcing the state's narrative (i.e. "one bad apple") to explain away decades of institutionalized racist policing.

In the high profile cases of police killings, media coverage of the trial can become another instance that distorts the facts and details of the case. Just like the media's coverage of mass protests, the subsequent police murder trials (if they even happen) that follow in the aftermath of police violence also become visual and narrative spectacles that are easily manipulated by the state and media corporations. The media continues to provide the state with a platform to reinforce the narrative that our judicial system is fair and capable of delivering justice and accountability. This is why media coverage of police trials often portray the trial as an objective process rather than a political one. Here are some other common examples of media bias in police trials:

- Media will put the dead on trial and paint them in a negative light, while rarely linking racism to their murder. This can take the form of sharing social media posts or past interactions with police and the PIC without including the framework that race likely played into those situations and that no matter anyone's past, under the current judicial system, everyone has a right to due process.
- The media will most often feature former cops, prosecutors, and other state officials to provide commentary on the case instead of impacted community leaders or local activists.
- If community leaders, local activists and/or witnesses are featured, they will often be discredited or framed as either having a political agenda or being overly emotional and are often followed by a state-sanctioned "expert" to undermine what they said.
- Media will repeat the police's justification for their actions as an independent, neutral narrative.

- Media will frame protests as “riots” to color the trial negatively, while rarely linking racism to police responses and the murder itself.
- Right-wing or conservative media in particular will cover the trial and protests unfairly by relying on conservative talking points instead of the details and impacts of the case.

By no means should this be considered an exhaustive list of media manipulation tactics, however, the purpose here is to help illustrate how the state and the media often work together to co-create narratives with the intention to control public perception of the state's war against our communities and keep existing oppressive structures in place. These narratives help justify the racist brutality and violence of the judicial system and prison industrial complex as a whole, while also attempting to defame and delegitimize demands to radically transform the PIC system of punishment into one of consequences and accountability with an emphasis on shifting policies and power dynamics based in white supremacy. Just as police use the tactic of 'kettling' to control large crowds during mass protests, the media and the state use trials as excuses to 'kettle', or contain and control, the various counter-narratives working against their dominant narrative.

Kettling is a police tactic used to contain and control protestors and crowds by surrounding people, confining them to a small space and/or using geographic or temporary barriers to block exit paths. This cordons off the demonstrators from pathways that would allow them to disperse, including access to transportation and often separates them from outside support and resources such as on-the-ground coverage, legal observers and medics. When used as a media tactic, kettling is a way of controlling what information is shared with the public in order to influence public perception and contain the public response. This is accomplished by dominating the news cycle and pushing a police-centered narrative in an attempt to invalidate the life of the person murdered, their family's response, the community's response, and calls for consequences, accountability and/or justice.

In today's digital age, we have harnessed the power of the internet, particularly social media platforms, to challenge these narratives and tell a different story that's rooted in the experience of those most impacted by policing and mass incarceration. However, social media platforms are not a neutral space, and when the bottom line of our digital media environment is profit, hate and misinformation is allowed to flourish. As a result, we often find ourselves having to protect ourselves from and challenge the echo chamber of deeply harmful disinformation and conspiracy theories online. Furthermore, social media platforms can be weaponized by the state to control and force a particular narrative that criticizes political dissent and protest while presenting policing as the solution to our public safety. The next section is a case study on “Operation Safety Net” as an example of how the state is also using social media platforms as both a surveillance tool and a kettling tool to control our public narratives and undermine political dissent.

“Operation Safety Net” Minneapolis Case Study

Days before Derek Chauvin’s trial for the murder of George Floyd, we learned that the City of Minneapolis was planning to spend \$1.2 million on a community communications plan that included hiring local social media influencers to report city approved updates about the trial to the public.

The plan was designed to specifically target Black, Native American, Somali, and Latinx communities to prevent future protests in light of the trial. This plan wasn’t an isolated Minneapolis program, but part of a wider strategy within the state’s Operation Safety Net (OSN), an inter-agency/multi-agency task force designed for the trial of Derek Chauvin. According to their website, OSN’s mission is to:

- Preserve and protect lawful First Amendment non-violent protests and demonstrations.
- Prevent large scale violent civil disturbances, assaultive actions, property damage, fires, and looting to government buildings, businesses, and critical infrastructure.

In reality, these assertions by OSN set up a “good protestor/bad protestor” narrative, while, in fact, attacking both.

According to their website, OSN is a “joint effort between the City of Minneapolis, Hennepin County, and the State of Minnesota, as well as the Metro Transit, Ramsey County, and other local jurisdictions. Agencies that are part of the effort include: Minneapolis Police, Metro Transit Police, Hennepin County Sheriff’s Office, Ramsey County Sheriff’s Office, the Minnesota State Patrol, the Minnesota National Guard, and other entities operating under unified command in order to coordinate their services and resources.”

It’s also important to note that similar inter-agency law enforcement task forces are being created in other cities. For example, the City of Saint Paul, which neighbors Minneapolis “is leading a parallel planning effort as part of the East Metro Response Group which includes Ramsey County Sheriff’s Office, Washington County Sheriff’s Office, Dakota County Sheriff’s Office, the State Patrol, the Minnesota National Guard and other entities. Operation Safety Net and the East Metro Response Group are working together closely to ensure a unified response.”

OSN utilized tactical PR and information surveillance in addition to on-the-ground deployment of state troopers and the National Guard. This included the establishment of a joint information system and “two-way” communication with neighborhood organizations that “can be activated during periods of heightened community tension” in 2021 and during trials of police officers. The Neighborhood and Community Relations Department aimed to create multiple channels to distribute information, initially including “cultural social media partners” or influencer funding mentioned above. This funding has now been redistributed to neighborhood organizations through a Request For Applications (RFA) process with the City. This includes weekly meetings with neighborhood organizations, weekly emails, and connects to the joint information system. “We will rely on them to inform us about what’s happening.” (Minneapolis Public Safety Plan & Preparation Briefing, March 1st, 2021)

Just as counterinsurgency tactics are used on the ground, we are seeing them mirrored in the Internet realm. Leading up to trials of police officers, municipalities will use increased police presence as a way to assert control and further criminalize Black and brown bodies while protecting government owned property and business interests. This attempt to intimidate, dominate, and control is rooted in the origins of policing that stems from the enslavement of Black people and colonization of Indigenous peoples and of the land we now call the United States. Modern day policing is modeled after the Metropolitan Police Department in London designed by Robert Peel and based on the Royal Irish Constabulary “Peacekeeping” Force established by the British to control indigenous communities in occupied Ireland. The idea was imported to the US through sheriffs and constables by white European colonizers in the 19th century. Formalized policing began with slave patrols and local militias formed to uphold the enslavement of Black people as property and to protect white wealth.

Policing and the prison industrial complex, including the judicial system itself, is rooted in this same white supremacy and in the valuing of property over people. With the Chauvin trial, this attempt to assert dominance was compounded when Brooklyn Center police murdered Daunte Wright on April 11th, which was the tenth day of the testimony portion of Chauvin’s trial. Protestors and neighbors were targeted by the brunt of that force as Minnesota moved Operation Safety Net (OSN) to stage 3, including the early deployment of the Minnesota National Guard, originally intended for closing arguments. Community members in Brooklyn Center faced days of curfews, restricted movement around the city, chemical weapons, and militarized police presence on residential streets, including the front yards of multiple apartment complexes with families and young children.

Engaging with the carceral system through trials of police officers has always had its complexities. Black and brown people have been laying the groundwork for abolition for years, responding to community needs, and building strategies to resist state oppression and repression while transforming infrastructure. This work will continue to shift and transform to include new strategies in online networks and platforms.

Strategies for Responding to Mis/Disinfo & Media Manipulation

While we have been here before, we are still learning the best ways to counter the harmful attacks and media manipulation in today's digital age. This should by no means be considered an exhaustive list, but rather a few helpful tips and strategies communities have used historically to combat misinformation and media manipulation:

- Organize with your community to develop strategies to challenge harmful media narratives. This could include writing letters to the editor, sharing direct responses and resources online or identifying and sharing counter-narratives.
- Ground yourself and what you share in historical and cultural context. Remember who you are and what patterns are at play in the broader context. Read up on the history of police and the relationship between police and the media. Use this information to frame what you share. Keep in mind how race, culture, gender and/or class analysis shape what happened and the response to it.
- Follow and share the work of journalists or publications that you trust to provide accurate information. Large media outlets are often the first to be used to distribute state propaganda. As we saw with the Minneapolis influencer funding, organizations and individuals can be subject to this too, often under the guise/false narrative of state imposed surveillance, presence, and control marketed as safety and collaboration.
- Look for on-the-ground coverage whenever possible, including trusted community media. We share a Minneapolis-based list below. Find the people and outlets you trust locally by researching on your own and reaching out to fellow community members, activists and organizers.
- Remember to humanize information being shared to counter media attempts to dehumanize or villainize the person murdered by police, their family, and community members grieving and engaging in protest. Police and the state rely on media to share a message that justifies their actions and distracts people from the murder they just committed. You can work to disrupt that in yourself and your community by paying attention to and sharing the human aspects of who the person police murdered was, their story, their family, and what you and those in the community are experiencing. Lift up the family's wishes- if they ask for privacy, respect that and if they put out calls to the community, share those. If you post a photo of the person, make sure it is one that shows them enjoying life and/or with friends and loved ones. Any time you share something, ground it in who the person was and the impact of losing them due to state sanctioned murder.

Speaking of trusted media, we often rely on information from those within our communities working to document what's happening on the ground as an alternative to state-sanctioned media. Use your best judgement as you look for who to follow and ask others in your networks who they trust. Here are a few examples of Minneapolis-based individuals and media outlets we've found helpful:

- BLCK press, Georgia Fort
- Chris Juhn
- DocumentingMN
- Liberation Lens Media, Louie Tran
- Patience Zalanga
- Racial Reckoning: The Arc of Justice
- Sahan Journal
- The Neighborhood Reporter
- Unicorn Riot

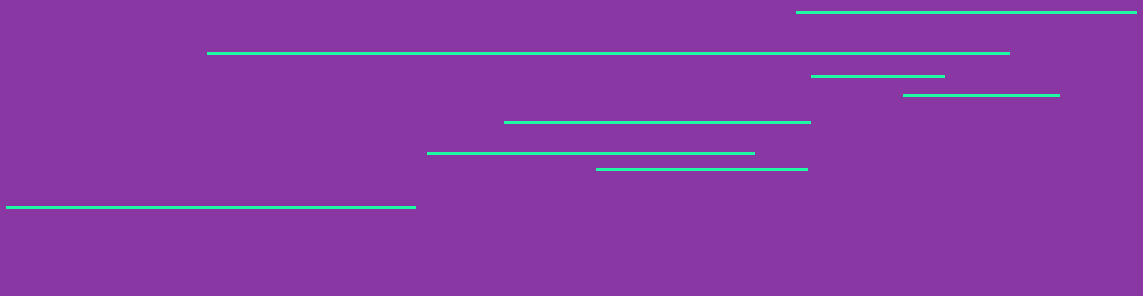
If you would like to learn more about misinformation and media manipulation, there are a number of national organizations, advocacy groups, and researchers that are building campaigns and resources including:

- Dr. Joan Donovan - The Media Manipulation Casebook - check here for definitions and case studies on racialized misinformation/disinformation
- First Draft has several resources exploring misinformation and disinformation
- Free Press Media 2070 Project discussing media reparations
- MediaJustice's Defend Our Movements Resource Guide
- PEN America report Closing Ranks: State Legislators Deepen Assaults on the Right to Protest
- Reframe



Reminders to Support Our Whole Selves

We know that racist narratives can (and are designed to) take a toll on our mental, emotional, and physiological health. Here are a few reminders to support us in taking care of ourselves emotionally and physically:

- Continually processing inaccurate, dismissive and/or intentionally harmful information takes a toll. Listen to your body, remember what you know to be true, and seek out people and places that support your full self.
 - Remember that we all process information, grief, anger, rage and externally imposed harm based on what our nervous systems can handle in that moment, which is also informed by our lived and inherited experiences. Create space for yourself and others to express, process and recharge.
 - Processing this can look different for everyone. Try to keep an open mind and give yourself and those around you permission to freely release and communicate.
 - Take breaks and take turns. It's about balancing immediate and emergent community response with building sustainable practices and movements.
 - Connect with your ancestors, the land, plant medicine, art, healing practices, and activities that feed you and remind you of who you are and where you come from.
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Community Care Resources - Toolkits, Body-based Resources and Lists

These resources are shared as tools for preserving and protecting you, your body and your existence - the most valuable thing - in a time when you are being told you're not valuable. Many of these tools rely on the wisdom of generations and practices either passed down to us or developed in response to state-sanctioned harm as a bridge to the transformed culture we are working to build. It's about self and community care - we have to support each other, build infrastructure based on real needs, find our people, and take care of ourselves.

We are sharing this list during a time when Black and brown people are regularly expected to not only emotionally regulate when police are not expected to do so, but also as a response to grief and pain following state-sanctioned murder. Themes of strength and resilience, while powerful testaments to the endurance of our ancestors, selves and community, often send the message that we are not worthy of rest and of living life without having to constantly heal. We are committed to a future of liberation through abolition and also want to give ourselves as many tools as possible to get there.

This list is a combination of Minnesota-based and nationally available tools, toolkits, lists, organizations, and practitioners. There is a wealth of healing and transformative justice resources from thinkers, organizers, and healers in the Twin Cities, in cities across the US, and internationally. Find the resources that speak to you and share them with your community. This is not an exhaustive list, but a quick guide to get you started.

Toolkits and Resources

5 Activities To Help Process The Murders of Adam Toledo & Daunte Wright with Chicago Black and Brown Youth by Jackie Rodriguez Vega via MECA: Movimiento para la Educación Cultural y Autónoma

5 Self-Care Practices Black People Can Use While Coping With Trauma by Taryn Finley

Allied Media Projects Healing Justice Principles & Guidelines

Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice Healing Justice Report & Resources

Bay Area Transformative Justice Pod Mapping Worksheet by Mia Mingus

Caring For Yourself To Care for Others by Blood Moon Healing

Critical Resistance Resources for Addressing Harm, Accountability and Healing

Dignity and Power Now Healing Justice Toolkit

Kindred Southern Healing Justice Collective Website & Resources

MPD150 Resource Page

Points for Grief, Anger & Exhaustion and Points for Abolition by Pointacu

Principles of Emergent Strategy by adrienne maree brown

Racial Trauma and Self-Care in Tragedy - Albany Law School Wellness Initiative

Radical Ecosystem Pods by REP for MN

Self-care Tips for Black People Feeling Overwhelmed by the Media by ReignxShine

The Nap Ministry

Transform Harm: Healing Justice Resources

Trauma Aware Care Posts On Survival Patterns, Traumaversaries, Grounding Tools

Tool Kit: Healing in the Face of Cultural Trauma by The Community Healing Network

Warriors of Light Organization & Card Deck created by Rebeka Ndosi

Some Examples of Minneapolis Orgs Creating Healing Spaces and Resources

Cocoa Butta Futures

Healing Justice Foundation

Million Artist Movement

RARE Productions

Rootsprings

Tru Ruts

Warriors of Light

Places to Find Practitioners and Support Nationally

The Association of Black Psychologists, Inc.

BEAM (Black Emotional and Mental Health) Collective

Healing By Choice Detroit

Inclusive Therapists



Closing

No matter the verdict of any police murder trial, abolishing the prison and police industrial complex and meeting people's needs - from the most basic to the most deep - is still the only way to keep us safe from state sanctioned violence. As we continue working towards a future without police and prisons, we will undoubtedly face all kinds of threats designed to undermine our political power and our right to protest, as well as our trust in ourselves, each other and our capacities to respond. In an effort to protect our liberation work, we believe it's important to explore and interrogate our current media environment. Our media environment can be utilized as a tool to advance the work of Black liberation and freedom for all. However, it can also become the vehicle that advances the institutionalized oppression we seek to dismantle. We created this toolkit as a collaboration to help communities in Minneapolis and across the country better understand how our media environment can be weaponized against us while also presenting some resources rooted in healing and community care.

We are grateful to the people who have come before us in this work, to those working to support our whole selves while abolishing systems of harm, and to those laying the framework to move us from where we are into a liberated future. We honor everyone doing what is needed on the ground to support neighbors and community members through crisis, advocating for transparency, documenting state violence and creating the resources to shift us into that future. We would especially like to thank Erin Shields, National Field Organizer at MediaJustice, for providing framing and support in the creation of this toolkit, as well as MPD150 Core Members UyenThi Tran Myhre, Kyle Tran Myhre and Ricardo Levins Morales for providing fresh eyes to bring the toolkit to completion.

Signed,
Myaisha Hayes, Campaign Strategies Director at MediaJustice
Molly Glasgow, MPD150 Core Member

To learn more about the work of MediaJustice and the Disinfo Defense League, please visit <https://mediajustice.org/>

To access this toolkit and related social media graphics please visit www.mpd150.com/CopagandaToolkit

Citations

<https://safetynet.mn.gov/Pages/default.aspx>

<https://safetynet.mn.gov/Pages/frequently-asked-questions.aspx>

Minneapolis Public Safety Plans & Preparation Briefing, March 1st, 2021

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