

Alicia Garza: “The Shooter Wrote A Manifesto, And My Name Was Included In It”



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The 18-year-old white supremacist who traveled to Buffalo to shoot Black shoppers at the local supermarket didn't only target the 10 Black people whom he killed. His hate-filled manifesto made clear that he aimed to target all Black people in the U.S. — and also mass organizing for racial justice.

“Black communities and Black families must once again grieve the loss of loved ones — mothers, fathers, partners, siblings, friends — at the hands of white supremacy and racialized violence,” Radical organizer and activist Alicia Garza, cofounder of Black Lives Matter and Principal of Black Futures Lab, told *Truthout* in the wake of the attack. “I am heartbroken and my heart extends to every family who lost a loved one in this weekend's senseless violence.”

Garza added: “The shooter wrote a manifesto, and my name was included in it. This is the second time in two years that this has occurred. The first time, I was targeted along with several others in a plot to cause violence and destruction.”

According to the [New York Times](https://www.nytimes.com), the manifesto published by the mass shooter,

Payton S. Gendron, stated that he had decided to target east Buffalo “because it held the largest percentage of Black residents near his home in the state’s Southern Tier, a predominately white region that borders Pennsylvania.” The killer’s manifesto praised the white supremacist who [killed nine Black churchgoers in Charleston, South Carolina, in 2015](#) and also praised the [white supremacist shooter who killed 51 Muslims in Christchurch, New Zealand, in 2019](#).

The attack has spurred [renewed calls for mass organizing](#) across the country. Garza is also calling for swift action to curtail the proliferation of racial terror and broader participation in ongoing mass organizing efforts in the U.S. to push back against the emboldening of white supremacists nationwide.

Garza emphasizes that combatting the emboldened forces of white supremacy in the U.S. while simultaneously confronting other forms of inequality, poverty, climate crisis and environmental injustice will require building broad-based social movements with the power to significantly alter how capitalist institutions function and the strategic vision to initiate a transition toward a new socioeconomic order beyond capitalism. These have never been easy tasks, yet they are even more important in our own time as global neoliberalism has intensified economic and social contradictions and the climate crisis threatens to end organized human life.

In the interview that follows, Garza explains why racism continues to play such a critical role in our society, how to build independent Black political power, which is the mission of Black Futures Lab, and what is needed in the face of attacks like the white supremacist shooting in Buffalo.

C.J. Polychroniou: What words would you like to offer up in this moment, as people absorb the horrifying news of the anti-Black mass shooting in Buffalo?

Alicia Garza: White nationalist violence is escalating — and the leadership of this country refuses to do anything significant about it. For the last six years, the former president, his supporters and like-minded politicians have taken up a bullhorn to work up white nationalists, white supremacists and vigilantes. They have gained political capital by stoking the fears of people who fear demographic change, and given political and moral cover to those who respond to these changes — and to their fear of and anxiety about this country’s undeniable future

— with violence. This is not new. We know the backlash that occurs when Black communities flex our power. The response has always been racialized terror and racialized violence, and it is being used on purpose.

While the president tours the country encouraging states to spend COVID dollars on expanding police forces, white supremacists are wreaking havoc in our government and in our lives. White supremacists are emboldened when they know that there are no significant consequences for their actions, and when they realize they have sympathizers and allies in our government. Which political party will take real action to save lives and to save this country? We don't need any more empty words, statements, or symbolic gestures. We need action, and we deserve real change.

Companies like Wikipedia and Facebook are also complacent, as they shelter and provide information that allows white nationalists to carry out racial terror. The existence of a profile I did not initiate has been leveraged to obtain sensitive information about myself and my family for the second time. Despite our safety being compromised, Wikipedia continues to refuse to do anything about it, ostensibly in the name of free speech and protecting “user generated content.” But what happens when those users are white supremacists? I am not the only one Wikipedia will not protect — journalists and other activists are experiencing these same challenges on their site. They are just one of a few sites that excuse and condone the invasion of our privacy and leave us vulnerable to attacks from people who want to harm us because of the work we do.

Without swift and decisive action, we will continue to see racial terror proliferate, and more innocent lives will be stolen.

You have been an organizer and a civil rights activist for over two decades. You are the co-creator of Black Lives Matter (BLM) and principal at Black Futures Lab (BFL). Could you share your thoughts on why racism remains a foundational feature of U.S. society?

Racism remains a foundational feature of U.S. society because it is key in distributing power. Power is the ability to make the rules and change the rules, and racism helps to determine who gets to make the rules. Racism provides the justifications for why some people have and some people don't, why some people live longer than others, have roofs over their heads and jobs, why some people

can be doing really well while others are really struggling. Racism keeps us from fighting back, together, against these rigged rules, because racism helps to obscure that the rules are rigged in the first place.

Tell us about Black Futures Lab. How did it come about and what are its primary aims and ultimate goals?

The Black Futures Lab works to make Black communities powerful in politics, so that we can be powerful in the rest of our lives. We work to equip Black communities with the tools we need to undo the rules that are rigged against us, and to replace rigged rules with new rules that move all of us forward, together.

I started the Black Futures Lab, and another political organization, the Black to the Future Action Fund, to build independent Black political power — that means to put Black communities in a position to make the rules and change the rules, and to be a part of deciding who gets what, when, and why. At the Black Futures Lab, we have a few strategies that we employ to build Black political power. We collect recent and relevant data about who our communities are and what we want from our government — the Black Census Project is a part of that work.

With the Black Census Project, we are working to collect 200,000 responses from Black communities across the nation, to learn more about what we're experiencing every day, and what we want to see done about it. We do policy and legislative advocacy work, taking the information from our research and using it to inform policy that would improve the lives of Black communities. We also train our communities how to write, win and implement new rules that would improve our lives in cities and states. We design good public policy and work to get it passed in order to motivate and activate Black communities to vote. And we invest in our communities with the resources we need to be powerful. We provide resources for organizing that folk may not have access to otherwise.

Through our first Black Census Project, we provided Black organizations with resources to hire organizers, and the technology they needed to reach as many people as possible; we're doing the same with this year's Black Census Project. This year, we'll be moving about \$2 million to Black organizing work, to Black-led organizations across the country.

The problem of low wages is considered to be the most pressing one among Black respondents who took part in a recent Black Census initiated by BFL. What do

you consider to be the best strategies for raising wages and improving labor standards for people of color?

In order to address the problem of low wages that are not enough to support a family, Black Census respondents favored raising the minimum wage to \$15/hour and increasing government participation in providing housing and health care. In the most recent Temperature Check polls run by the Black to the Future Action Fund, respondents want to see an extension of the COVID-19 stimulus bill in the form of monthly \$2,000 checks until the pandemic is over. Respondents indicate that they would use that stimulus check for matters of survival — rent/mortgage, utilities, healthcare. We also see a desire to strengthen unions and regulate workplaces and corporations in order to address labor standards and wages.

Black communities and people in poverty have disproportionately high exposure to health and environmental risks. Given that environmental racism is very real in the U.S., what do you envision to be the role of Black Futures Lab in the struggle against environmental racism and in the broader task of building a global climate movement?

Black communities are disproportionately impacted by environmental racism. We found in our Temperature Check Polls that Black people understood the environment to be about more than weather — it was also about having access to the things we need to live well. A third of our respondents said that lack of access to clean drinking water was a major concern for them, and 31 percent said that a lack of access to healthy food was one of their primary concerns related to environmental racism. Our role is to show the impact on Black communities, and ensure that the resolution to those impacts present themselves in public policy that we win and implement in cities and states across the country.

Forging a common identity among people from diverse communities, with a shared worldview and a shared strategy in the pursuit of justice and radical social change, defined the mission of social movements worldwide during the 1960s and 1970s. I may be wrong, but I don't see this being the case with many of today's social movements, which seem to concentrate overwhelmingly on single issues and are indeed deprived of an overarching agenda for transforming our world. What are your own thoughts on this matter? Is it possible to build a broad and inclusive social movement in the political, social, economic and cultural landscape of the 21st century that challenges the existing socioeconomic order while

envisioning a future that works for all?

I can completely understand why it feels like our movements are siloed — and I do think that there are and have been many efforts at creating and advancing an overarching agenda to change the world. Because so much of our work happens in nonprofit vehicles that are forced to rely on philanthropy and philanthropic dollars, our work begins to reflect the challenges we face in funding it. Philanthropy is largely divided into single issues, and if our movement is dependent on philanthropy to survive, it means we will likely be organized in this way as well. We also have to keep rebuilding our infrastructure to account for the attacks we experience from the state and, frankly, from inside our own ranks. History is not linear, and there are a lot of different factors that contribute to our state of being. But, from the Movement for Black Lives to Grassroots Global Justice Alliance, there are seeds being planted that aim to coalesce our movements into something coherent and cohesive and hopefully, one day, unstoppable. And that is something that gives me a lot of hope.

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C.J. Polychroniou is a political scientist/political economist, author, and journalist who has taught and worked in numerous universities and research centers in Europe and the United States. Currently, his main research interests are in U.S. politics and the political economy of the United States, European economic integration, globalization, climate change and environmental economics, and the deconstruction of neoliberalism's politico-economic project. He is a regular contributor to *Truthout* as well as a member of *Truthout's* Public Intellectual Project. He has published scores of books and over 1,000 articles which have appeared in a variety of journals, magazines, newspapers and popular news websites. Many of his publications have been translated into a multitude of different languages, including Arabic, Chinese, Croatian, Dutch, French, German, Greek, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish and Turkish. His latest books are *Optimism Over Despair: Noam Chomsky On Capitalism, Empire, and Social Change* (2017); *Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal: The Political Economy of Saving the Planet* (with Noam Chomsky and Robert Pollin as primary authors, 2020); *The Precipice: Neoliberalism, the Pandemic, and the Urgent Need for Radical Change* (an anthology of interviews with Noam Chomsky, 2021); and *Economics and the Left: Interviews with Progressive Economists* (2021).