In the summer of 2014, as we have seen, a lie overtook significant parts of
the country and grew into a kind of mass hysteria. That lie holds that the
police pose a mortal threat to black Americans—indeed, that the police
are the greatest threat facing black Americans today. Several subsidiary
untruths buttress that central myth: that the criminal-justice system is
biased against blacks; that there is no such thing as a black underclass;
and that crime rates are comparable between blacks and whites, so that
disproportionate police action in minority neighborhoods cannot be
explained without reference to racism. The poisonous effect of these lies
manifested itself in the cold-blooded assassination of two NYPD officers
in December that year.

The highest reaches of American society promulgated those untruths
and participated in the mass hysteria. President Barack Obama, speaking
after a grand jury decided not to indict the police officer who fatally
shot Michael Brown, declared that blacks were right to believe that the
criminal-justice system was often stacked against them. Obama repeated
that message as he traveled around the country subsequently. Eric Holder
escalated a long-running theme of his tenure as U.S. attorney general:
that the police routinely engaged in racial profiling and needed federal
intervention to police properly.

University presidents rushed to show their fealty to the lie. Harvard's
Drew Gilpin Faust announced that "injustice" toward black lives "still
thrives so many years after we hoped we could at last overcome the troubled legacy of race in America... Harvard and... the nation have embraced [an] imperative to refuse silence, to reject injustice.” Smith College’s president abjectly flagellated herself for saying that “all lives matter,” instead of the current mantra, “black lives matter.” Her ignorant mistake, she confessed, drew attention away from “institutional violence against Black people.”

The New York Times ratcheted up its already-stratospheric level of anti-cop polemics. In an editorial justifying the Ferguson riots (as quoted in Chapter 3), the Times claimed that “the killing of young black men by police is a common feature of African-American life and a source of dread for black parents from coast to coast.” In reality, however, police killings of blacks are an extremely rare feature of black life and a minute fraction of black homicide deaths. Blacks are killed by police at a lower rate than their threat to officers would predict. To cite more data on this point: in 2013, blacks made up 42 percent of all cop-killers whose race was known, even though blacks are only about 13 percent of the nation’s population. Little over a quarter of all homicides by police involve black victims. Moreover, there is a huge, unacknowledged measure of support for the police in the inner city: “They’re due respect because they put their lives every day on the line to protect and serve. I hope they don’t back off from policing,” a woman told me on the Staten Island street where Eric Garner was killed. (This was two nights before Officers Wenjian Liu and Rafael Ramos were assassinated in Brooklyn.)

Among all the posturers, none was so preening as New York’s mayor, Bill de Blasio. In advance of a trip to Washington for a White House summit on policing, he told the press that a “scourge” of killings by police was “based not just on decades, but centuries of racism.” De Blasio emblazoned on that theme several days later, after a Staten Island grand jury declined to indict an officer for homicide in Garner’s death. (Recall that the 350-pound asthmatic Garner had resisted arrest for the crime of selling loose cigarettes; officers brought him to the ground, provoking a fatal heart attack.) “People are saying: ‘Black lives matter,’” de Blasio announced after the grand jury concluded, “It should be self-evident, but our history requires us to say ‘black lives matter.’ It was not years of racism that brought us to this day, or decades of racism, but centuries of racism.”

De Blasio added that he worries “every night” about the “dangers” his biracial son, Dante, might face from “officers who are paid to protect him.”

The mayor’s irresponsible rhetoric was a violation of his role as the city’s leader and as its main exponent of the law. If he really believes that his son faces a significant risk from the police, he is ignorant of the realities of crime and policing in the city that he was elected to lead. There is no New York City institution more dedicated to the proposition that “black lives matter” than the New York Police Department; thousands of black men are alive today who would have been killed years ago had data-driven policing not brought down the homicide levels of the early 1990s. The Garner death was a tragic aberration in a record of unparalleled restraint. The NYPD fatally shot eight individuals in 2013, six of them black, all posing a risk to the police, compared with scores of blacks killed by black civilians. But facts do not matter when one is crusading to bring justice to a city beset by “centuries of racism.”

New York police officers were rightly outraged at de Blasio’s calumny. The head of the officers’ union, Patrick Lynch, circulated a form allowing officers to request that the mayor not attend their funeral if they were killed in the line of duty—an understandable reaction to de Blasio’s insult. De Blasio responded primly on The View: “It’s divisive. It’s inappropriate.” The city’s elites, from Cardinal Timothy Dolan on down, reprimanded the union. The New York police commissioner called the union letter “a step too far.”

Meanwhile, protests and riots against the police were gathering force across the country, all of them steeped in anti-cop vitriol and the ubiquitous lie that “black lives don’t matter” to the police. “What do we want? Dead cops,” chanted participants in a New York anti-cop protest. Two public defenders from the Bronx participated in a rap video extolling cop-killings. Few people in positions of authority objected to this dangerous hatred. The desire to show allegiance with allegedly oppressed blacks was too great. The thrill of righteousness was palpable among the media as they lovingly chronicled every protest and among politicians and thought leaders who expressed solidarity with the cause. At another march across the Brooklyn Bridge, a group of people tried to throw trash cans onto the heads of officers on the level below them; police attempts to arrest the assailants were fought off by other marchers.
The elite’s desperation to participate in what they hopefully viewed as their own modern-day civil rights crusade was patent in the sanctification of Michael Brown, the would-be cop-killer. He was turned into a civil rights martyr. His violence toward Wilson, and toward the convenience-store owner he had strong-armed, was wiped from the record. Protesters at anti-cop rallies across the country chanted “hands up, don’t shoot,” allegedly Brown’s final words before Wilson shot him. Never mind that the source of that alleged final utterance, Brown’s companion Dorian Johnson, was a proven liar. There is no reason to believe his claim regarding Brown’s final words.

Protesters’ willingness to overlook anti-cop homicidal intent surfaced again in St. Louis in November. A teen criminal who had shot at the police was killed by an officer in self-defense; he, too, joined the roster of heroic black victims of police racism. This sanctification of black aspiring cop-killers would prove prophetic. It’s profoundly irresponsible to stoke hatred of the police, especially when the fuel used for doing so is a set of lies. Hatred of the police among blacks stems in part from police brutality during this country’s shameful era of Jim Crow laws and widespread discrimination. But it is naïve not to recognize that criminal members of the black underclass despise the police because law enforcement interferes with their way of life. The elites are oblivious both to the extent of lawlessness in the black inner city and to its effect on attitudes toward the cops. Any expression of contempt for the police, in their view, must be a sincere expression of aggrievement.

Cop-killer Ismaaiyl Brinsley, who assassinated NYPD officers Wenjian Liu and Rafael Ramos on December 20, 2014, exemplified everything the elites have refused to recognize as the antipolice crusade marches on: he was a gun-toting criminal who was an eager consumer of the current frenzy of cop-hatred. (Not that he paid close enough attention to the actual details of alleged police malfeasance to spell Eric Garner’s name correctly.) His homicidal postings on Instagram—“I’m Putting Wings on Pigs Today. They Take 1 of Ours . . . Let’s Take 2 of Theirs”—were indistinguishable from the hatred bouncing around the Internet and the protests that few bothered to condemn. That vitriol continued after the assassination. Social media filled up with gloating at the officers’ deaths and praise for Brinsley: “That nigga that shot the cops is a legend,” read a

typical message. A student leader and a representative of the African and Afro-American Studies department at Brandeis University tweeted that she had “no sympathy for the NYPD officers who were murdered today.”

The only good that could have come out of this wrenching attack on civilization would have been the delegitimation of the lie-based protest movement. That did not happen. The New York Times, instead, denounced as “inflammatory” the statement from the head of the officers’ union that there was “blood on the hands [that] starts on the steps of City Hall”—while the Times itself has promoted the inflammatory idea that police officers routinely kill blacks without cause. The elites’ investment in black victimology was too great to hope for an injection of truth into the dangerously counterfactual discourse about race, crime, and policing.