

Starbucking

Chapter Eight

Criminology

“Oh, be careful of them in the dark”

Director Miloš Forman is best known for *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, regarded as one of the greatest films ever made, and other noteworthy films like *Amadeus* and *The People vs. Larry Flynt*. His 1981 film *Ragtime*, based on the novel by E. L. Doctorow, is not as well-known and rarely referenced, yet I found the story quite compelling as I watched in the fall of 1987, during my sophomore year in high school, as part of Mr. Mallam's American Literature curriculum.

After screening a big chunk of the film, Mr. Mallam tasked the class with composing an essay analysing the actions of protagonist Coalhouse Walker Jr., a victim of racism who found no relief in the legal system and then turned to violence and engaged in a campaign of terrorism against firehouses. A few days later, after I turned in my essay, Mr. Mallam was so impressed that he read it out loud to the class, and to this day I still marvel at how naive I was in expressing the views that I did.

I argued that respect for the law and the police are crucial for maintaining order in a society, and even if some laws are unjust or some police officers or judges are racist, a citizen still has an obligation to follow the law. Never could I have imagined then that, decades later, I would find myself seething with hatred for some asshole cop, and the institution of policing in general, as I sat on the ground next to a rented SUV, clad only in shorts and a t-shirt, baking in the heat of a South Florida summer, as that selfsame asshole cop questioned my identity, called me a liar over and over, and screamed at me that “IF YOU'RE LYING I'M TAKING YOU IN!”

Nor could I have imagined that a decade later still, during the summer of 2020, my perspective on policing had evolved even further, from a passionate hatred to a calculated, rational assessment that the institution itself needed to be abolished. Thus, when the nation and world erupted into months of protests following the death of George Floyd, a Minneapolis man murdered by a police officer over an allegedly counterfeit twenty-dollar bill, I felt that I had no choice but to take time out of the Starbucking tour that I had just begun, to join in as many protests as I could, from state to state, city to city.

Well into my forties, an avid news junkie and observer of the world, I was finally able to see that policing is a *fundamentally* flawed institution, a truth that had escaped me when I wrote that essay as a teenager. That truth took a few decades to dawn on me, and, initially, I shrugged off my bad experiences with cops as just something that happens occasionally. Even when I had my first

experience with police racism, I had not inkling that this was a systemic problem with the entire system.

I was seventeen, and while I had only held a driving licence for a few months, I had possessed a hyperactive imagination since I was quite young. As I neared my family's home in southwest Houston, I noticed that a pickup truck had been following me for a few miles. When I turned into the neighborhood, the truck also turned, and while anybody else would have assumed that the driver lived in the area, my mind immediately jumped to a rather more fanciful place--*he was after me!*

The driver was doing no such thing, of course, and when I made an abrupt turn onto a side street, the pickup drove on, leaving me feeling silly as I made a quick turnaround in driveway, directly in view of a police officer who was chatting with a resident and rapidly motioned for me to stop. He questioned me for a few minutes with a patronising and suspicious tone in his voice, and after I explained what had happened, he sent me on my way, but not before saying “you'd better watch your black ass!”

I grew up in a predominantly White middle-class neighbourhood, and I never experienced the routine police harassment that most young Black or Brown men in the inner city experience. True, I did attend a magnet school program that was collocated inside an high school in a lower-class area of Houston, but when I was in high school, in the late 1980s, a police presence in schools was not ubiquitous like it is today. Save for one minor incident as an adolescent, my encounters with police did not begin until I began driving, and the really bad ones, the ones that contribute to the rage that I feel today, began in earnest after I began Starbucking around the nation.

Once my encounters with police began, then quickly became plentiful, but they differed from those of minorities who grow up and live in the shadow of steady harassment that ranges from being detained and questioned while simply walking or driving in their neighbourhoods. In my case, at the beginning, I really was guilty most of the time, of speeding or other traffic infractions, and I do not condemn officers who execute legitimate traffic stops. What I had a problem with were the officers who immediately adopted a condescending, abusive attitude, clearly intending to assert control and leave me feeling powerless, or those officers who, with no probably cause, asked me questions that they would not have asked an older White woman, like “have you ever been arrested” or “are there an illegal drugs in your car” or “can I search your vehicle”. And I *really* had a problem with the way that police, nearly all, would react whenever I tried to assert my rights. For example, the cop who pulled me over on I-80 in Wyoming when I was going *under the speed limit*, and when I asked why I was being pulled over, he ordered me out of my car into the subzero weather and forced me sit in his vehicle for questioning.

That Wyoming officer was Black, and it is worth noting that sytemic racism within society and the institution of policing leads to implicit bias that affects officers of all races. This means that I am no safer at the hands of a Black or Brown police officer than I am when facing a White one. In fact, among the worst experiences I have had with police, two of them were at the hands of Black officers, and it really is true what Ice Cube rapped in the classic NWA track, “Fuck Tha Police” (often heard during BLM protests)...

*But don't let it be a black and a white one
Cause they'll slam ya down to the street top
Black police showing out for the white cop*

Returning to that night in South Florida, it was a Black officer who was yelling at me, calling me liar, and his buddies were Black and Asian. I still find that night traumatising because not only had I been

cooperative from the beginning, the entire incident had *nothing to do with me*. I had merely been camping out on a street in Hollywood, FL, in a rented SUV, after having flown down to Florida from Princeton to compete in a Scrabble tournament in Fort Lauderdale. After Saturday's game I drove south to pick off some new Starbucks, and when I finished I found what seemed a safe place to sleep. When I was awoken by voices, as well as the heat, in the middle of the night, I gleaned from the dialogue that the police were questioning some hapless schmuck who had just happened to choose the space next to mine for a place to get busy with a prostitute. Between the heat, the noise, and the call of nature, I needed to drive elsewhere and cool down the car, but the officers would not permit that and began to question me. Despite my having all my papers in order, the aggressive Black officer repeatedly accused me of lying about having been arrested, lying about knowing someone named "Dennis Rogers", and threatening to take me in. He finally handed me back my papers and told me to get the hell out of there, but even a decade later, as I recall the incident, I find myself shaken up and seething with rage.

I long ago lost track, but if I had to guess at a number, I would say that I have had at least 70-80 interactions with police in my life, and while most of them, at least in the early years, did result from traffic stops, the worst of the interactions, like Hollywood, came about because of the stupidest, most unnecessary reason imaginable—sleeping. That fact alone goes to the core of a fundamental problem with the institution of policing, that is has created a class of human who actively drive around seeking to create conflicts where there are none, because, really, who is more harmless than a sleeping individual?

Even the pseudo-legitimate interactions, the traffic stops, were rarely pleasant, because no matter how benign they seemed, the air of danger hung over each and every one, the possibility that for any reason whatsoever, that officer could decide that he was going to take out his frustrations on me. Sometimes the stop started out oppressive, like the Massachusetts deputy who approached my window with a "what the hell are you doing!!!" after I, not recognizing the vehicle behind me as a cop, sped up to pass a line of cars and clear the left lane for him. Or the Wisconsin cop who pulled up behind me on the shoulder as I was looking for my pain relievers. I was exhausted after a delayed return flight, my skull was splitting, and yet the officer seemed determined to escalate the situation, asking questions meant to instigate trouble, like "why are you angry?"

Or the Philadelphia cop who spouted off "don't give me that crap!" as I was literally apologising for having misjudged the yellow and run a red. That guy was an asshole, sure—all of the aforementioned cops were—but, to be fair, I would not call them "bad" in those instances, in the sense of clearly violating my rights, and probably the law. By contrast, that sheriff's deputy in North Carolina who drew his weapon was definitely a bad guy, out to dominate, not serve and protect, and unwilling to accept any challenge to his authority, especially not my assertion that the Supreme Court had ruled that people who are stopped on the street with no probable cause are not required to provide identification (let alone answer questions).

In retrospect, I actually had the law mixed up.

I was thinking of *Hiibel v. Sixth Judicial District Court of Nevada*, in which the Court upheld state laws requiring citizens to provide ID when the officers have a reasonable suspicion of a crime. I had inferred from this that, without reasonable suspicion, I did not have to show ID, but the legality is more complicated because I was sitting in the driver seat of my car, with the engine on (to defog the windows). Even though I was at a roadside table (essentially a picnic area) and not moving, I expect that a court would readily side with the interpretation that I was still "operating" the motor vehicle, and all states have laws requiring operators of a motor vehicle to identify themselves. North Carolina,

moreover, defines a failure to provide ID in such a situation as “resisting an officer”, so the deputy was indeed correct when he said that he could arrest me for resisting.

Of course, the deputy could have explained all of this in about sixty seconds, but instead he chose to draw his weapon, and that dramatic act demonstrates one of the central problems with policing as it is practised in the United States and much of the world. Power corrupts, and those who are given power or authority often tend to abuse it. In the United States, there is the added element that police are trained to have a warrior mentality, and this training leads them to almost always assert physical dominance, often with weapons, rather than attempting to deescalate, or, in the case of that North Carolina deputy, to educate.

While I often fantasised about being arrested illegally and then winning a large settlement in court, practically speaking, that rarely happens, and when it does, it takes years, so I had no real choice but to comply that night. I had learned fairly early in my travels, during trips into Canada, as well as my routine applications for contract jobs, that an arrest record creates serious difficulties in life, both financial and logistical, even if one is never convicted. That fact, more so than the fear of physical violence, has caused me to hold my tongue when I desperately wanted to resist what I perceived to be an abuse of power. Make no mistake, I view waking people up in the middle of the night, just because they are parked, in a legal parking space, to be an abuse, and a far cry from the duty to protect and to serve that police often tout as their motto.

I faced a somewhat similar situation five years later, after winning a Scrabble competition at the Youth & Community Center in Ardsley, NY. When I arrived that morning, I was given incorrect parking instructions ended up in the wrong lot. After the tournament, I was warming up the engine while reviewing games when a police car came over, and two officers came up to my window and began to question me. Now, in the decade that had passed, my views on identification had change, and I had concluded that anonymity enables harmful behaviour and should be eliminated. So, I had no problem being identified, but I did have a problem with being singled out for no apparent reason, when I was simply sitting in my car. Just as in North Carolina, I protested that I was not required to provide ID if there was no probable cause, and I asked to see the officer's ID. In this case, the officers, who were White (unlike the North Carolina deputy, who was Black) immediately showed me his badge number, and then asked, pointedly, “are you refusing to provide identification?”

The way that he asked the question seemed like a clue, that New York, or the county, or the city, had some law requiring identification in that situation (again, simply sitting in a car *could be* interpreted by a court as “operating a motor vehicle”), and I was in a hurry to begin the drive to Philadelphia for another competition, so I did not want to prolong the interaction and handed over my licence. As I drove away from Ardsley, I was seething, feeling powerless, as many of my police interactions had left me, and I literally fantasised about firebombing the Ardsley police headquarters. An extreme sentiment for sure, but one shared by many I am sure, and in fact, during the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020, the 3rd Precinct building in Minneapolis was set on fire, and the East Precinct building in Seattle was targeted by an explosive that failed to detonate. So, yeah, I am not the only person filled with so much rage over police oppression that bombing police stations, in the way that Coalhouse Walker, Jr., bombed firehouses, seems like a necessary recourse.

While I could absolutely relate to the rage that BLM protesters were feeling, in the decade that had passed between the Ardsley incident and the George Floyd murder, my views had evolved even further as I absorbed new perspectives on society and its problems. Many of the negative interactions that I have had with authorities related to the issue of identification—either I felt that the request for ID was

not warranted, or the officers questioned the legitimacy of my ID, or, in more benign cases, simply wanted to check with a superior because they had never encountered a mononymous ID before. After countless such experiences, it dawned on me that there is no good reason for identity to be a source of doubt, sometimes leading to conflict, in the 21st century with all of its wondrous technologies.

Many Americans might be surprised to learn that the United States is in the minority when it comes to the issue of identity cards. Most countries require citizens to carry a national ID, and an increasing number are implementing electronic ID cards utilising biometrics. From the technological perspective, there is no reason why I should ever have my identity questioned. The problem is not one of technology, but rather of politics and philosophy, and here in the United States, various groups oppose a national ID card, including the American Civil Liberties Union. While the ACLU has unquestionably done much to protect the rights of Americans, they are regrettably dogmatic in their misguided belief that a national identification card is a slippery slope that will lead to increased surveillance and an erosion of our rights.

In fact, the ACLU's viewpoint is *backwards*, and they lack the imagination to see that a national (or even global) electronic ID, if used to implement a system of transparency (not surveillance) that would require ID to enter businesses, schools, or other public spaces, or to engage in financial transactions, could go a long way towards accomplishing the goal of defunding or abolishing the police, a goal that hundreds of thousands of people worldwide marched for in 2020. Whatever minor impacts on privacy resulting from a national ID would be far outweighed by the increase in freedom and equality that would wash over minorities in a society without police.

The issue of defunding or abolishing the police is highly controversial, even alarming to a great many people, in part because we have been taught the Big Lie that police are necessary to maintain social order. What most people do not realise is that the institution of policing, as we know it in the United States (a system imitated in many other countries) is relatively new. In the past, communities had ways of policing themselves, and higher-level authorities were called in only when necessary. In the United States, specifically in the South, modern policing actually grew out of slave patrols, and after the Civil War the primary purpose of these police was to control freed slaves. While, technically speaking, police, both in the U.S. and other countries, existed to preserve the social order, that social order was built on the preservation of power and privilege for a certain class of people at the expense of other classes.

Policing has never been about promoting a society that maximises freedom and equality for all while minimising harm, and if you can see that, then you can understand why a movement to defund or abolish the police makes sense. The fact remains, however, that humans are a deeply flawed species, and within any human population exist those who would prey on others when given the opportunity. In the past, in smaller communities where most members knew each other, a citizen who harmed another would be ostracised or otherwise punished by the community itself. In our modern world, this means of keeping order is impossible, and thus modern society does need some mechanism for ensuring order and safety—but that mechanism should not be human policing.

Instead, a society can use modern technology, with an electronic biometric ID as its cornerstone, to introduce a level of transparency that will enforce accountability and act as a replacement for the trust that smaller communities can rely on. In such a society, most of what we consider today to be “crimes” would simply disappear, because they would be impossible, and thus the need to maintain a police force (except for a small emergency response team) would disappear.

In the society that I envision, there would have been no police officers driving around Ardsley, NY, then questioning me about what I was doing in that parking lot. In this society, there would not have been a deputy patrolling picnic areas in Northampton County, NC, and I would never have been awoken and threatened with a weapon. In fact, the whole idea of patrolling would disappear, and with it the countless instances of harassment that I have faced during my travels, ranging from the outright dangerous, like that deputy in North Carolina to the annoyances, like the scene depicted in the documentary *Starbucking*.

Those who have watched the 2007 film saw me being questioned by two police officers in the parking lot of a motel in Slidell, LA. What viewers did not see were the officers shining their flashlights through the window, banging on my window and yelling “get out of the car!” When I asked, as per usual, if any crime had been committed, or if there had been a complaint, the officer said that he had the power to investigate crimes, like *possible* loitering, without a complaint, and that statement alone is emblematic of why so many people suffer at the hands of police. Officers have been given the power to go out *looking for trouble*, even when nobody has asked them to, and with that mindset, combined with the systemic racism that exists in America, it is no wonder that so many interactions lead to abuse or tragedy.

Oppressive and abusive policing seems all the more tragic when you realise that it is simply not necessary, not when we can create a society like the one I describe above, one where police have been made obsolete because when harm does occur, electronic records can be used by investigators to identify and hold accountable those responsible. No need for patrols, no need for arrests, definitely no need for weapons, and the end result would be a society no less safer, but without the oppression that arises from both systemic racism and the warrior mentality drilled into the psyche of American police.

The technology that I describe is relatively new, did not exist in the 1990s, but if it had, I would not have faced serious harm the first time that an officer pointed his weapon at me, when he stopped me for speeding in Texas and saw me looking for my driver licence in the glovebox. I was only eighteen or nineteen at the time, and that powerful lesson taught me to never reach into my glovebox, or anywhere else in the car, while being pulled over. Of course, with electronic identification, there would be no need for a driver to retrieve a licence, and, as a matter of fact, if we do move to a society that eliminates human policing as we know it, then there would not be these routine traffic stops either—instead, traffic safety would be enforced by electronic means and thus not be subject to the racism and danger that affects a significant portion of traffic stops in America.

As I dream about my vision for a society without police, I cannot help but think back to all of the incidents that need not have happened. So many nights woken up to the sounds of a police radio and powerful headlights shining into my car, or, when those did not wake me up, the pounding on my window. That pounding is associated with so many bad experiences that my response to it is almost Pavlovian—if I am watching a show or film in my car, listening through the audio system, and there is a scene in which a character knocks on the window of a car, I perceive the sound to be real, if only for an instant, and my heart begins to race.

So many nights facing officers who clearly felt a need to dominate, asking inappropriate questions like “have you ever been arrested”, “what drugs have you done”, “have you ever been in a mental institution”, “do you have any contraband in the car”, “do I have permission to search your vehicle” and on and on.

Stand over here. Stand over there. Sit down on the ground. Sit on the hood of the car. Do this. Do that. Do not question my authority (*fuck you, Cartman*).

Experience this long enough, and it should become apparent that the fundamental flaw in human policing, more fundamental than racism, militarisation, or the warrior mentality that we have instilled in American police, is that power corrupts, and a significant percentage of those who are given authority over others, with the weapons needed to exert that authority physically, will abuse that power. This is a fact of human nature that no amount of retraining can ever change.

Abolition is the only solution, and abolition is only possible in a society that has some other means of keeping citizens safe (because, like it or not, predators will always exist), and the ability of modern technology to introduce transparency (sunshine is the best disinfectant) offers the promise of creating such a society.

Thinking beyond policing, a society that uses transparency to maintain social order will also benefit from smoother interactions between individual citizens. Humans are by nature distrustful of strangers—we had to evolve that way, in order to survive--to a greater or lesser degree, and suspicion of others, especially of those who are othered, leads to countless negative interactions. For example, in the United States, a demographic known as Karens has taken to calling the police on minorities who are just going about their business.

In the summer of 2002 I visited a now-defunct Starbucks in Williamsburg, VA, at the Marketplace Shoppes, and while the barista that attended me was quite friendly and offered me the sample coffee that I requested, her supervisor, serious look on her face, instructed her partner to charge me anyway. Outside, a pair of locals were sitting in front of the store, their SUVs in the way of the photo that I wanted, so I waited for the store to close so that they would leave and clear my intended frame. They chatted quite a while past closing, and by the time that I was finished setting up my photo, the supervisor finished closing, exited the store, and looked at me as she went to her car. Before she pulled out onto the street, she stopped, and I could see that she was on her phone. I finished taking my photo and quickly left, and just as I pulled out and headed down the street, a police car passed me and pulled into the retail plaza. I quickly inferred what had happened and considered myself lucky to have escaped.

I was not so lucky the next time that a Starbucks partner called the police on me, a few years later in Yakima, WA. I drove into the city in the early evening and first stopped at the Starbucks just outside of the Valley Mall. The year was 2006--Starbucks had not yet begun offering free wifi at their U.S. stores, and the modern smartphone was still a year away which meant that I could not look up store information like operating hours on the fly. Instead, I often relied on partners at one store to help me out with information about other stores in the area, and the baristas at Valley Mall said that the next store on my list, N. 40th & River Rd, would close at 10 PM.

Trusting them, I stopped at a Borders bookstore to use their wifi, and shortly after 9:00 PM I headed over to the Starbucks and pulled on the door, only to find it locked. I waved at the manager, and when she came over to speak to me through the glass (she would not open the door to speak to me), I explained that I was on a mission to drink coffee from every Starbucks in the world, I showed her the copy of the magazine article that I used to carry around to impress baristas as I asked for a sample, and I explained that the baristas at the Valley Mall store had told me this one closed at 10 PM. The manager said that she could not let me in after hours, which was indeed Starbucks policy, but after a brief back-and-forth, she said that if I waited until they finished closing, she would bring me out a canned

DoubleShot drink.

Then she did the most Karenest thing ever.

I sat in my car, just as she had instructed me, and shortly after 10 PM, a patrol car approached, pulled up next to my car, and Officer Garcia asked what kind of shirt I was wearing. Odd question, but I quickly realised that Manager Karen had described me as a person wearing a Starbucks shirt. He proceeded to question me--"what are you carrying in the car", "are you currently working", "how can you afford to travel", "what are you writing on your computer", "were you at another Starbucks earlier", "what did you tell them".

He finally took a look at the article that I showed him, walked over to discuss it with Manager Karen, and returned with that DoubleShot as Manager Karen and a couple of partners left the store and walked to their cars, content in their White Privilege and completely oblivious to the reality that Manager Karen had just put my life in danger.

That statement might sound extreme to some, but only to those blind to the systemic racism and abusiveness of police in America which contributes to interactions that are not only oppressive by their very nature, but pose the real risk that they can turn dangerous in a heartbeat. Just as that deputy in North Carolina drew his weapon upon my mentioning the Supreme Court, my interaction with Officer Garcia could have turned bad in a heartbeat if I had said the wrong thing or resisted his questions in the wrong way.

A decade and a half later, I still want Manager Karen to acknowledge what she did and to *understand* that what she did was wrong, that her irrational fear did not justify putting my life in danger ("I don't think I'm allowed To kill something Because I am Frightened.") When I characterise her fear as irrational, you have to understand that this Starbucks was in a retail plaza near a Fred Meyer grocery store, with plenty of other people milling about, and that Manager Karen was not alone as she closed the Starbucks. Furthermore, she could have called the baristas at the Valley Mall Starbucks—they had all been friendly and amused by my mission—or even her district manager to verify what I had told her.

Instead, she made one of the worst possible choices when it comes to interacting with Black or Brown people, especially young men—calling the police.

Of course, the only reason that she was able to call the police is that the city of Yakima, WA, had a police department in the first place. In a society that had abolished the police and replaced them with electronic identification, Manager Karen would simply have looked at my public profile and quickly seen that I was exactly who I claimed to be, a Starbucks traveler.

After the incident I contacted Starbucks and reported what Manager Karen had done, but the company never followed up on the incident. Starbucks has succeeded as a company in large part because of their attention to customer service, but at the same time, if you read through customer complaints on review boards, you will find that Starbucks often fails to address customer issues, and they have failed me on multiple occasions. A few years after Yakima, I was returning from a trip and stopped at a Starbucks in Gurnee, IL, in the early morning, before the store had opened, and I parked in front of the store to nap while downloading the latest episode of *24*. A few hours later I was rudely awakened by police who went through the usual litany of questions. After they left, I went inside to order coffee and ask the barista why on earth they had called the police. Turns out that it was a customer, an older White man, who had called, simply because he saw a car in the parking lot, and when he overheard me talking to

the barista, he came over and began to harass me, finishing up by shouting “get your coffee and get the hell out of here.”

The manager should have asked the man to leave and explained that they could not allow one customer treating another customer with such hostility, but instead the barista just humoured the man until he walked away, and of course when I returned to my office I sent in a complain to Starbucks—again, I never heard back. A year or two later, I was being interviewed by a reporter at a Chicagoland Starbucks, and the district manager happened to be there, perhaps to speak to the reporter. I relayed my story about Gurnee to see if she could do anything, but, again, I never heard back. I get the impression that unless a story about police harassment makes national news, as happened with the two Black businessmen who were arrested at a Starbucks in Philadelphia, the company is quite happy to ignore the issue of racial profiling or police abuse. Just look at their initial reaction during the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020, which was to prohibit partners from wearing the logo. It was only after a backlash that Starbucks reversed course and commissioned a BLM t-shirt to send to partners.

I could go on and on listing incidents with police, like Laredo, TX, where multiple units surrounded my car in the early morning, in the residential neighbourhood where I had decided to overnight after I hit a deer on I-35 and feared engine damage. Or Clifton, NJ, where officers who just decided to pull up behind me on a side street, wake me, and fish for possible crimes, for no reason other than that they could. Or Exon, PA, in the parking lot of a grocery store, where the officer who seemed convinced that I was mentally ill and determine to humiliate me by ordering me to sit on the hood of my car as he and his buddy asked invasive questions.

But you get the point—once I began traveling around the United States for Starbucking, I quickly learned that this country is plagued by a system of policing that is racist and abusive, and any action, from driving at the legal limit, to sitting in my car, to sleeping in a perfectly legal place, like a rest area, can result in harassment, with the threat of arrest of bodily harm hanging over the questioning. This is not the country that I want to live in, and not the country that I imagined all those decades ago as a sophomore in high school, when I foolishly wrote a defense of the police and the legal system.

More than two decades into my Starbucking project, my experiences with police are fewer in number, but only because I have grown wiser about where to park, how to drive, and how to be on the alert for situations in which someone might call the police. Certainly not because American policing has solved its problems. As the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020 clearly showed, American police have only become worse, more militarised, deployed more frequently in situations that simply should not warrant police.

Before I conclude this chapter, I do want to make it clear that my experiences with police have never been as horrific as those suffered by victims who are roughed up, beaten, or even killed, nor those who are arrested illegally and have their lives turned upside down. In terms of physical or legal ramifications, I have been quite fortunate. The real harm done to me is psychological—studies have shown that the stress of routine police harassment takes a toll on one's health—and as approach my fiftieth year, with bad experiences numbering in the dozens, the cumulative effect of those experiences is to fill me with a rage that I will never truly get over. Think back to *The Avengers* and the scene in which Captain America tells Bruce Banner that “now might be a good time to get angry.”

In response Banner says “that's my secret, Cap—I'm always angry.”

I have hope, though. Just a few months into the Black Lives Matters protests of 2020, multiple

jurisdictions around the country had taken steps, or made promises, to change their systems of policing. My Starbucking project, as originally defined, was never going to be possible and will never be completed, but the issue of oppressive policing is one that we can eventually solve by transitioning away from human police and to a society that uses technology, data, and transparency to keep people safe.