# Horror is Different than Terror (draft)

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It strikes me as we respond to this week's police murders in Louisville and Minneapolis--aka Charleston, aka Ferguson, aka Cleveland, aka Sanford, aka Staten Island, aka aka—that horror is different than terror. As we try to talk across race about these endless murders, I want to explore both horror and terror, and the important gaps between them.

Terror—extreme fear—exists in the body. There is no distance from it. (Except, perhaps time, and even then, it is so powerful as to cause time to loop back on itself.) It exists in the intense fear just before a horrible act is done to you, it exists during that act, and if you live through it, it exists in the on-going fear of that act being done again. In the case of terrorism, it exists in the endless possibility of that act being done to you.

I have never had to experience terror.

This is part of my white privilege, and one of the privileges that I am most grateful for. (Which is not to say that no whites have to experience terror, just to say that the U.S. arranges itself to support my safety in many ways.)

When I hear about the police murders of John Lloyd and Breonna Taylor, I experience horror—repugnance, shock, dread. I experience it as an anti-racist white activist, but even so, with the remove of an on-looker, with the privilege of being able to choose when I look at it and when I look away. To me the difference between terror and horror exists in that distance and that option to look away. *Horror exists in my mind, not in my body.* The endless police murders of Black and Brown people horrify and deeply sadden me, but they cannot cause me terror. As acts of terrorism, they are not aimed at me.

Which gets me to thinking about terrorism. Terrorism, as defined by Merriam Webster's online dictionary, is *"the systematic use of [terror](terror) especially as a means of coercion"*. Terrorism does this using two tools we talk about a lot in our work at DS4SI.

1) SCALE—Terrorism aims to invoke intense fear in a larger population—not just those directly impacted by the act itself.

2) SYMBOL—Terrorism invokes fear in a larger population by the weapons and targets chosen. To generate widespread fear, acts of terrorism use symbols to make sense easily and to many. For an example here, I want to quote from the Sonic Insurgence Lab:

> "Through the sounding of the siren, policing appears to be a force that exists outside of human bodies. An inevitability. An always already present impending reality. In this way, the siren not only signifies, but enacts a future. It does not precede state-sanctioned violence, the physical manifestation of repression and control, but predicts it. Welcomes it. Unveils the reality of power's effects on the body." ([Notes on the Siren and Social Space](#), Josh Rios and Matt Joynt, from DS4SI's Spatial Justice 2.0).

So how do we respond to this terrorism? How do we not look away, if we are privileged enough to do so, and how do we take responsibility for changing behavior in an *equally massive way*?

In the fight against white supremacist terrorism (by police forces and other vigilantes), I want to introduce my notion of horrorism. **If terrorism is intended to instill fear in more than just those directly impacted by the violent act, then horrorism should instill horror in more than just that act and that actor.** It is not enough to condemn (or forgive) the individual cops or vigilantes. It is not even enough to bring them to justice (as rare as that is). As [Reverend William Barber said in a sermon](#) after Dylan Roof's killing rampage at the AME Church in Charleston in 2015, "The perpetrator has been caught, but the killer is still at large."

As whites who experience horror at police killings, we need to figure out how we can generate widespread, on-going, show-stopping horror at the real killers: racism, anti-blackness and white supremacy. We need to generate horror in all the daily elements of racism that yield this white acceptance of Black death. We need to say stop, and we need to mean it. As New York Times opinion writer Charles M. Blow put it in his column entitled [ate "An Insatiable Rage"](#) (emphases added):

> "Black people are saying: "See me! See what you have done to me and continue to do to me. ***Stand naked in your sin, and stare, unflinching, at your reflection. You did this.***"

> They are saying, "Stop killing us!"

> And in that, they mean killing in every conceivable way.

> Stop underfunding schools and overfunding police. Stop anti-black bias in all fields, from medicine to employment to entertainment. Stop using 911 calls as a deadly weapon. ***America, just stop***."

We need to generate enough horror that we refuse to go back to the killing.