

There's a Riot Goin' On: Political Violence in Torah Law and Lore

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I. The Torah's Core Scene of Political Violence

Background to this story: Twelve sons and one daughter were born to Ya'akov and his two wives, Leah and Rachel, and their concubines, Zilpah and Bilhah, during the 20 years that they lived in the home of Leah and Rachel's conniving father, Lavan. Now, they've fled back to the land of Cana'an. The eldest four sons, all Leah's, are Reuven, Shim'on, Levi, and Yehuda, their younger full brothers are Yissachar and Zevulun, and their younger full sister is Dinah.

1. Bereishit (Genesis), Chapter 34

1 Now Dinah, the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Ya'akov, went out to see the girls of the land. 2 Shekhem son of Hamor the Hivite, chief of the land, saw her, and took her and laid her, raped her. 3 Being strongly drawn to Dinah daughter of Ya'akov, and in love with the maiden, he spoke to the maiden tenderly. 4 So Shekhem said to his father Hamor, "Get me this girl as a wife." 5 Ya'akov heard that he had defiled his daughter Dinah; but since his sons were in the field with his cattle, Ya'akov kept silent until they came. 6 Then Shekhem's father Hamor came out to Ya'akov to speak to him. 7 Meanwhile Ya'akov's sons came in from the field when they heard, and the men were distressed and very angry, because he had committed an outrage in Israel by lying with Ya'akov's daughter—a thing not to be done. 8 And Hamor spoke with them, saying, "My son Shekhem longs for your daughter. Please give her to him in marriage. 9 Intermarry with us: give your daughters to us, and take our daughters for yourselves: 10 You will dwell among us, and the land will be open before you; settle, move about, and acquire holdings in it." 11 Then Shekhem said to her father and brothers, "Do me this favor, and I will pay whatever you tell me. 12 Ask of me a bride-price ever so high, as well as gifts, and I will pay what you tell me; only give me the maiden for a wife." 13 Ya'akov's sons answered Shekhem and his father Hamor, speaking deceitfully, because he had defiled their sister Dinah, 14 and said to them, "We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to a man who is uncircumcised, for that is a disgrace among us. 15 Only on this condition will we

א וַתֵּצֵא דִּינָה בִּתְּלָאָה אֲשֶׁר יָלְדָה לְיַעֲקֹב לְרֵאוּת בְּבָנוֹת הָאָרֶץ: ב וַיֵּרָא אֶתָּה שִׁכֶם בֶּן־חַמּוֹר הַחִוִּי נָשִׂיא הָאָרֶץ וַיִּקַּח אֶתָּה וַיִּשְׁכַּב אִתָּה וַיַּעֲנֶה: ג וַתִּדְבַק נַפְשׁוֹ בְּדִינָה בִּתְּיַעֲקֹב וַיֵּאָהֵב אֶת־הַנְּעָר וַיְדַבֵּר עַל־לֵב הַנְּעָר: ד וַיֹּאמֶר שִׁכֶם אֶל־חַמּוֹר אָבִיו לֵאמֹר קַח־לִי אֶת־הַיְלִדָה הַזֹּאת לְאִשָּׁה: ה וַיַּעֲקֹב שָׁמַע כִּי טָמְא אֶת־דִּינָה בִּתּוֹ וּבְנָיו הָיוּ אִתּוֹ מְקֻנְהוּ בַשָּׂדֶה וְהַחֲרָשׁ יַעֲקֹב עַד־בָּאָם: ו וַיֵּצֵא חַמּוֹר אָבִי־שִׁכֶם אֶל־יַעֲקֹב לְדַבֵּר אִתּוֹ: ז וּבְנֵי יַעֲקֹב בָּאוּ מִן־הַשָּׂדֶה כְּשָׁמְעֵם וַיִּתְעַצְבוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים וַיַּחֲרִי לָהֶם מְאֹד כִּי־נָבְלָה עִשָּׂה בִּישְׂרָאֵל לְשֹׁכֵב אֶת־בִּתְּיַעֲקֹב וְכֵן לֹא יַעֲשֶׂה: ח וַיְדַבֵּר חַמּוֹר אִתָּם לֵאמֹר שִׁכֶם בְּנִי חֲשָׁקָה נַפְשׁוֹ בְּבַתְּכֶם תָּנוּ נָא אֶתָּה לּוֹ לְאִשָּׁה: ט וְהִתְחַתְּנוּ אִתָּנוּ בְּנֹתֵיכֶם תִּתְּנוּ־לָנוּ וְאֶת־בְּנֹתֵינוּ תִּקַּחוּ לָכֶם: י וְאִתָּנוּ תֵּשְׁבוּ וְהָאָרֶץ תִּהְיֶה לְפָנֵיכֶם שְׁבוּ וּסְחָרוּהָ וְהֶאֱחָזוּ בָּהּ: יא וַיֹּאמֶר שִׁכֶם אֶל־אָבִיהָ וְאֶל־אֲחֵיהָ אֲמַצְאֶחֶן בְּעֵינֵיכֶם וְאֲשֶׁר תֹּאמְרוּ אֵלַי אֲתָן: יב הֲרַבּוּ עָלַי מְאֹד מִהָרָ וּמִתָּן וְאִתְּנָה כְּאֲשֶׁר תֹּאמְרוּ אֵלַי וּתְנוּ־לִי אֶת־הַנְּעָר לְאִשָּׁה: יג וַיַּעֲנוּ בְנֵי־יַעֲקֹב אֶת־שִׁכֶם וְאֶת־חַמּוֹר אָבִיו בְּמִרְמָה וַיְדַבְּרוּ אֲשֶׁר טָמְא אֶת־דִּינָה אֶחָתָם: יד וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיָהּ לֹא נוֹכַל לַעֲשׂוֹת הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה

agree with you; that you will become like us in that every male among you is circumcised. **16** Then we will give our daughters to you and take your daughters to ourselves; and we will dwell among you and become as one kindred. **17** But if you will not listen to us and become circumcised, we will take our girl and go.” **18** Their words pleased Hamor and Hamor’s son Shekhem. **19** And the youth lost no time in doing the thing, for he wanted Ya’akov’s daughter. Now he was the most respected in his father’s house. **20** So Hamor and his son Shekhem went to the public place of their town and spoke to their fellow townsmen, saying, **21** “These people are our friends; let them settle in the land and move about in it, for the land is large enough for them; we will take their daughters to ourselves as wives and give our daughters to them. **22** But only on this condition will the men agree with us to dwell among us and be as one kindred: that all our males become circumcised as they are circumcised. **23** Their cattle and substance and all their beasts will be ours, if we only agree to their terms, so that they will settle among us.” **24** All who went out of the gate of his town heeded Hamor and his son Shekhem, and all males, all those who went out of the gate of his town, were circumcised. **25** On the third day, when they were in pain, Shim’on and Levi, two of Ya’akov’s sons, brothers of Dinah, took each one his sword, came upon the city powerfully and killed all the males. **26** They killed Hamor and his son Shekhem by sword, took Dinah out of Shekhem’s house, and left. **27** The sons of Ya’akov came upon the corpses and plundered the town, which had defiled their sister. **28** They seized their flocks and herds and asses, all that was inside the town and outside; **29** all their wealth, all their children, and their wives, all that was in the houses, they took as captives and booty. **30** Ya’akov said to Shimon and Levi, “You have ruined me, making me odious among the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites and the Perizzites; I am but few in number, so that if they unite against me and attack me, I and my house will be destroyed.” **31** But they answered, “Should our sister be treated like a whore?”

לִתְּתֶנּוּ אֶת־אֲחֹתְנוֹ לְאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ עֶרְלָה
כִּי־חֲרָפָה הוּא לָנוּ: טו אַךְ־בְּזָאת נָאוֹת
לָכֶם אִם תִּהְיוּ כָּמֹנוּ לְהַמְלִי לָכֶם
כָּל־זָכָר: טז וְנִתְּנוּ אֶת־בְּנוֹתֵינוּ לָכֶם
וְאֶת־בְּנוֹתֵיכֶם נִקְחָלָנוּ וְיִשְׁבְּנוּ אִתְּכֶם
וְהִיינוּ לְעַם אֶחָד: יז וְאִם־לֹא תִשְׁמָעוּ
אֲלֵינוּ לְהַמּוֹל וְלִקְחָנוּ אֶת־בָּתְנוּ
וְהִלְכְנוּ: יח וַיִּטְבוּ דְבָרֵיהֶם בְּעֵינֵי
חָמוֹר וּבְעֵינֵי שָׁכֶם בֶּן־חָמוֹר: יט
וְלֹא־אֲחֵר הִנְעֵר לַעֲשׂוֹת הַדָּבָר כִּי חָפֵץ
בְּבַת־יַעֲקֹב הוּא וְהוּא נִכְבָּד מִכָּל בֵּית אָבִיו:
כ וַיָּבֹא חָמוֹר וּשְׁכֶם בְּנוֹ אֶל־שַׁעַר עִירָם
וַיְדַבְּרוּ אֶל־אֲנָשֵׁי עִירָם לֵאמֹר: כא
הָאֲנָשִׁים הָאֵלֶּה שְׁלָמִים הֵם אִתְּנוּ
וְיִשְׁבוּ בָאָרֶץ וְיִסְחָרוּ אֹתָהּ וְהָאָרֶץ הַזֶּה
רַחֲבַת־יָדַיִם לִפְנֵיהֶם אֶת־בְּנוֹתֵם
נִקְחָלָנוּ לְנָשִׁים וְאֶת־בְּנוֹתֵינוּ נִתֵּן
לָהֶם: כב אַךְ־בְּזָאת יֵאָתוּ לָנוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים
לְשִׁבְתֵּן אִתְּנוּ לְהִיּוֹת לְעַם אֶחָד בְּהַמּוֹל
לָנוּ כָּל־זָכָר כְּאִשֶׁר הֵם נְמַלִּים: כג
מִקְנֵהֶם וּקְנִינָם וְכָל־בְּהֵמָתָם הֲלוֹא לָנוּ
הֵם אַךְ נָאוֹתָהּ לָהֶם וְיִשְׁבּוּ אִתְּנוּ: כד
וַיִּשְׁמָעוּ אֶל־חָמוֹר וְאֶל־שָׁכֶם בְּנוֹ
כָּל־יֹצְאֵי שַׁעַר עִירוֹ וַיִּמְלוּ כָּל־זָכָר
כָּל־יֹצְאֵי שַׁעַר עִירוֹ: כה וַיְהִי בַיּוֹם
הַשְּׁלִישִׁי בְּהִיּוֹתָם כְּאֵבִיִּים וַיִּקְחוּ
שְׁנֵי־בְנֵי־יַעֲקֹב שְׁמַעוֹן וְלוֹוִי אֶתְּחֵי דִינָה
אִישׁ חֲרָבוֹ וַיָּבֹאוּ עַל־הָעִיר בְּטַח
וַיַּהֲרֹגוּ כָּל־זָכָר: כו וְאֶת־חָמוֹר
וְאֶת־שָׁכֶם בְּנוֹ הֲרָגוּ לְפִי־חָרֵב וַיִּקְחוּ
אֶת־דִּינָה מִבֵּית שָׁכֶם וַיֵּצְאוּ: כז בְּנֵי
יַעֲקֹב בָּאוּ עַל־הַחֲלָלִים וַיִּבְזּוּ הָעִיר
אֲשֶׁר טָמְאוּ אֲחֹתָם: כח אֶת־צֹאֲנָם
וְאֶת־בְּקָרָם וְאֶת־חֲמֹרֵיהֶם וְאֶת־
אֲשֶׁר־בְּעִיר וְאֶת־אֲשֶׁר בְּשָׂדֵה לְקָחוּ:
כט וְאֶת־כָּל־חֵיָלָם וְאֶת־כָּל־טָפָם
וְאֶת־נְשֵׂיהֶם שָׁבוּ וַיִּבְזּוּ וְאֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר
בְּבַיִת: ל וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב אֶל־שְׁמַעוֹן
וְאֶל־לוֹוִי עֲכַרְתֶּם אֹתִי לְהַבְאִישׁנִי בִישָׁב
הָאָרֶץ כִּנְעָנִי וּבִפְרִזִּי וְאֲנִי מִתִּי מִסְפָּר
וְנֹאסְפוֹ עָלַי וְהִכּוּנִי וְנִשְׁמַדְתִּי אֲנִי
וּבֵיתִי: לא וַיֹּאמְרוּ הַכְּזוֹנָה יַעֲשֶׂה
אֶת־אֲחֹתְנוּ:

What does this text think about Shim'on and Levi's actions? What about Ya'akov's actions? The other brothers' actions?
 What do you think?

II. What is the Human Duty for Criminal Justice?

2. Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin 56a

<p>Our Sages taught: Seven mitzvot were commanded to the descendants of Noah: 1) Civil laws; 2) "Blessing" The Name; 3) Idolatry; 4) Incest; 5) Bloodshed; 6) Robbery/kidnapping; 7) and a limb from a living animal.</p>	<p>תָּנּוּ רַבָּנַן: שִׁבְעַת מִצְוֹת נִצְטוּ בְּנֵי נֹחַ: (1) דִּינִין, (2) וּבְרַכַּת הַשֵּׁם, (3) עֲבוּדַת זָרָה, (4) גְּלוּי עֲרִיּוֹת, (5) וְשִׁפְיֹת דָּמִים, (6) וּגְזֵל, (7) וְאַבְר מִן הַחַי.</p>
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Noah lived 10 generations after Adam & Eve and 10 generations before Avraham & Sarah. God destroyed the whole world in Noah's day, except for his family and a remnant of all animals. If laws are commanded to "descendants of Noah", that means to all civilization, not just to Jews.

What is the Requirement for "Civil Laws"/Dinin?

Before you read the Rambam and Ran, take a moment to verbalize your own interpretation, guess, or hunch as to what it means for all humans to be obligated in "Civil Laws".

3. Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Melakhim 9:14

(Rav Moshe ben Maimon, aka Maimonides, 1135-1204, Spain, Egypt)

<p>And in what way are people commanded with regard to civil law? They are obligated to seat judges and magistrates in each and every municipality, to adjudicate those six mitzvot, and to warn the people. And a descendant of Noah who violates one of these seven mitzvot must be killed by the sword, and for this reason, all the people of Shekhem were liable for the death penalty, for after all, Shekhem kidnapped, and they saw it, knew about it, and did not prosecute him.</p>	<p>וְכִיצַד מִצְוִין הֵן עַל הַדִּינִין, חַיִּיבִים לְהוֹשִׁיב דִּינִים וְשׁוֹפְטִים בְּכָל פֶּלֶךְ וּפְלֶךְ לְדוֹן בְּשֵׁשׁ מִצְוֹת אֱלֹהִים, וְלִהְזַהֵר אֶת הָעָם, וּבֵן נֹחַ שֶׁעָבַר עַל אַחַת מִשִּׁבְעַת מִצְוֹת אֱלֹהִים יִהְרַג בְּסִיף, וּמִפְּנֵי זֶה נִתְחַיְבוּ כָּל בְּעָלֵי שְׁכֵם הַרְיָגָה, שֶׁהָיָה שְׁכֵם גָּזֵל וְהֵם רָאוּ וַיִּדְעוּ וְלֹא דָּנּוּהוּ.</p>
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4. Ra"N, Commentary to Talmud, Sanhedrin 56b

(Rabbeinu Nissim of Gerona, Spain, 1320-76)

<p>...And so, the Rambam, z"l, wrote that "for this reason, all the people of Shekhem were liable for the death penalty", since they didn't prosecute Shekhem for capital punishment. But some challenged him: Obviously, any descendant of Noah who corrupted judgment and violated "Do not do perversion in judgment" (VaYikra 19:15), would of course have to be executed. But the citizens who were sitting and keeping to</p>	<p>וְכֵן כָּתַב הַרַמְבַּ"ם ז"ל שֶׁל יְדֵי זֶה נִתְחַיְבוּ בְּנֵי שְׁכֵם מֵיַת' מִפְּנֵי שֶׁלֹּא עָשׂוּ דִין בְּשִׁכְמָם שֶׁלֹּא דָּנּוּהוּ לְמִיתָתוֹ. וְהִקְשׁוּ עָלָיו דּוּדָאֵי בֵן נֹחַ שֶׁהָטָה אֶת הַדִּין וְעָבַר עַל לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ עוֹל בְּמִשְׁפַּט וְדָאֵי נִהְרַג אֲבָל בְּנֵי</p>
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<p>themselves, and did not establish judges in each and every city and jurisdiction, are not liable for the death penalty, to actually be physically executed; that's just an additional positive commandment.</p> <p>Moreover, [the Rambam's statement] is difficult to me, because in Shekhem's place, it's possible that there were judges, but since Shekhem, son of Hamor, lorded over them, they couldn't prosecute him, just as we have seen with several kings of Israel who did evil in the eyes of Hashem, but the Israelites did not execute them.</p>	<p>העיר שישבו להן ולא הושיבו דיינין בכל עיר ועיר ובכל פלך ופלך אין חייבין מית' להרגם בידי' שזו מצות עשה הוא להם. ועוד קשה לי דהא במקום שכם אפשר שהיה שם דיינין אלא שלפי שהיה שכם בן חמור אדון עליהם לא יכלו לשופטו כמו שמצינו בכמה (חכמי) [מלכי] ישראל שהיו עושים הרע בעיני ה' ולא היו הורגי' אותם ישראל.</p>
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How would you translate each of their positions to our society?
Make an argument on behalf of each position, and then ask which one you prefer and why.

III. Biblical Reverberations, Rabbinic Unpacking

Shim'on and Levi's act of political violence has a sequel. How does the following story connect to the story of Dinah, Shim'on, and Levi? How do you evaluate the characters' actions?

5. Bemidbar (Numbers), Chapter 25

<p>1 And Israel settled in Shittim, and the people began to whore themselves with the daughters of Moab. 2 And they called the people to the sacrifices of their gods; and the people ate and bowed to their gods. 3 And Israel joined fast to Ba'al-Pe'or; and the anger of YHWH was kindled against Israel. 4 And YHWH said unto Moshe: 'Take all the chiefs of the people, and hang them before YHWH in broad daylight, so that the kindled anger of YHWH may turn away from Israel.' 5 And Moshe said to the judges of Israel: 'Kill: every one his men that have joined fast to Ba'al-Pe'or.' 6 And -- LOOK! -- a man from the Israelites came and brought near to his brethren a Midianite woman, before Moshe's eyes and before the eyes of the whole Israelite congregation, while they were crying at the door of the Tent of Meeting. 7 And when Pinchas, the son of El'azar, the son of Aharon the Priest, saw it, he stood up from the midst of the congregation, and took a spear in his hand. 8 And he came after the Israelite man into the chamber, and stabbed both of them -- the Israelite man and the woman -- through her belly. So the plague was halted from the children of Israel. 9 And those that died by the plague were 24,000.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>New Parasha</i></p>	<p>א וַיָּשֶׁב יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּשֵׁטִים וַיַּחֲלֵה הָעָם לְזִנוּת אֶל-בָּנוֹת מוֹאָב: ב וַתִּקְרְאוּ לָעָם לְזִבְחֵי אֱלֹהֵיהֶן וַיֹּאכְלֵם הָעָם וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ לְאֱלֹהֵיהֶן: ג וַיִּצְמַד יִשְׂרָאֵל לְבַעַל פְּעֹר וַיַּחַר אֶף יְהוָה בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל: ד וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל מֹשֶׁה קַח אֶת כָּל רֹאשֵׁי הָעָם וְהוֹקַע אוֹתָם לַיהוָה נֶגֶד הַשָּׁמַשׁ וַיָּשֶׁב חֲרוֹן אֶף יְהוָה מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל: ה וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל שְׁפָטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הֲרֹגוּ אִישׁ אֲנָשָׁיו הַנִּצְמָדִים לְבַעַל פְּעֹר: ו וְהִנֵּה אִישׁ מִבְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בָּא וַיִּקְרַב אֶל אַחִיו אֶת הַמִּדְיָנִית לְעֵינֵי מֹשֶׁה וּלְעֵינֵי כָל-עֵדֹת בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל וְהִמָּה בָכִים פָּתַח אֱהִל מוֹעֵד: ז וַיֵּרָא פִּינָחָס בֶּן-אֶלְעָזָר בֶּן אֶהֱרֹן הַכֹּהֵן וַיִּקֶּם מִתּוֹךְ הָעֵדָה וַיִּקַּח רֶמֶחַ בְּיָדוֹ: ח וַיָּבֵא אַחֵר אִישׁ-יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל הַקְּבֵה וַיִּדְקַר אֶת-שְׁנֵיהֶם אֶת אִישׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֶת-הָאִשָּׁה אֶל קִבְתָּהּ וַתַּעֲצֹר הַמִּגְפָּה מֵעַל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: ט וַיְהִיו הַמֵּתִים בַּמִּגְפָּה אַרְבַּעַה וְעֶשְׂרִים אֶלְפִי: (פ)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">פרשה חדשה</p>
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10 And YHWH spoke unto Moshe, saying: **11** ‘Pinchas, the son of El’azar, the son of Aharon the Priest, has turned My wrath away from the children of Israel, in his zeal for my zealotry among them, so that I did not consume the children of Israel in My zealotry. **12** Therefore, say: Behold, I give him My covenant of peace; **13** and it shall for him and for his seed after him, a Covenant of Eternal Priesthood; because he was zealous for his God, and atoned for the children of Israel.’ **14** Now the name of the man of Israel that was slain, who was slain with the Midianite woman, was **Zimri, the son of Salu, a Chief of a Familial House among the Shim’onites.** **15** And the name of the Midianite woman who was slain was Cozbi, the daughter of Tzur, Head of the Peoples of a Familial House in Midian.

י וַיִּדְבֹר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: יֵא
פִּינָחָס בֶּן־אֵלְעָזָר בֶּן־אַהֲרֹן הַכֹּהֵן
הָשִׁיב אֶת חַמְתִּי מֵעַל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
בְּקִנְאוֹ אֶת קִנְאַתִּי בְּתוֹכְכֶם וְלֹא־כִלִּיתִי
אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּקִנְאַתִּי: יֵב לָכֵן אֶמַּר
הֲנִי נֹתֵן לוֹ אֶת בְּרִיתִי שְׁלוֹם: יֵג
וְהִיְתָה לוֹ וּלְזֶרְעוֹ אַחֲרָיו בְּרִית כְּהֵנָּה
עוֹלָם תִּחַת אֲשֶׁר קָנָא לְאֱלֹהָיו
וַיִּכְפֹּר עַל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: יֵד וְשֵׁם אִישׁ
יִשְׂרָאֵל הַמִּכָּה אֲשֶׁר הִכָּה
אֶת־הַמְדִינִית זִמְרִי בֶן סָלוּא נָשִׂיא
בֵּית־אָב לְשִׁמְעוֹנִי:
טו וְשֵׁם הָאִשָּׁה הַמִּכָּה הַמְדִינִית
כֹּזֶבִי בֵּת־צִוֵּר רֹאשׁ אֲמוֹת בֵּית אָב
בְּמִדְיָן הוּא:

How did the Rabbis understand the crux of the problem that Pinchas responded to?

6. Midrash Sifrei Bemidbar, #131 (3rd Century)

“And Moshe said to the judges of Israel: ‘Kill: every man his men that have joined fast to Ba’al-Pe’or” (Bemidbar 25:5).

...Pinchas answered at that moment and said, “Is there no one here who is prepared to kill, at risk of being killed?! Where are those ‘Lions’ -- ‘Yehuda is a lion cub’ (Bereishit 49:9); ‘Dan is a lion cub’ (Devarim 33:22)?! He started to shout out! When he saw that everyone was silent, **he stood up from within his court**, grabbed his spear, put it in his cloak, leaned on his cane and went...

"וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל שְׁפָטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הֲרֹגוּ
אִישׁ אֶנְשָׁיו הַנִּצְמָדִים לְבַעַל פְּעוֹר"
...נִעְנָה פִּנְחָס בְּאוֹתָהּ שְׁעָה וְאָמַר
"אֵין אָדָם כָּאֵן שִׁיהַרְגוּ וְיִהְרָגוּ?! הֵיכֵן
הֵם אַרְיֹת? גּוֹר אַרְיָה יְהוּדָה
(בְּרֵאשִׁית מֵט ט) דָּן גּוֹר אַרְיָה
(דְּבָרִים לֵג כב). הַתְּחִיל צוּחַ. כִּיּוֹן
שְׂרָאָה שְׁהִיוּ הַכֹּל שׁוֹתְקִים עַמֵּד מֵתוֹךְ
סְנֵהדְרֵי שְׁלוֹ וְשִׁמַּט אֶת הַרּוֹמַח
וְהִנִּיחָה בְּפּוֹנְדָתָהּ וְהִיא מִסְתַּמֵּךְ
בְּמַקְלוֹ וְהוֹלֵךְ.

IV. An Appendix for Today: *There’s a Riot Goin’ On...*

Ta-Nehisi Coates (1975-), Senior Editor, *The Atlantic*

“Non-violence as Compliance”, April 27, 2015

<http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/04/nonviolence-as-compliance/391640/>

...Now, tonight, I turn on the news and I see politicians calling for young people in Baltimore to remain peaceful and "nonviolent." ...But there was no official appeal for calm when [Freddie] Gray was being arrested....

When nonviolence is preached as an attempt to evade the repercussions of political brutality, it betrays itself. When nonviolence begins halfway through the war with the aggressor calling time out, it exposes itself as a ruse. When nonviolence is preached by the representatives of the state, while the state doles out heaps of violence to its citizens, it reveals itself to be a con. And none of this can mean that rioting or violence is "correct" or "wise," any

more than a forest fire can be "correct" or "wise." Wisdom isn't the point tonight. Disrespect is. In this case, disrespect for the hollow law and failed order that so regularly disrespects the community.

Ta-Nehisi Coates

"The Near Certainty of Anti-Police Violence", July 12, 2016

<http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/07/the-near-certainty-of-anti-police-violence/490541/>

...Last week, 25-year-old Micah Xavier Johnson murdered five police officers in Dallas. This abhorrent act of political extremism cannot be divorced from American history—recent or old. In black communities, the police departments have only enjoyed a kind of quasi-legitimacy. That is because wanton discrimination is definitional to the black experience, and very often it is law enforcement which implements that discrimination with violence. A community consistently subjected to violent discrimination under the law will lose respect for it, and act beyond it. When such actions stretch to mass murder it is horrific. But it is also predictable.

To understand the lack of police legitimacy in black communities, consider the contempt in which most white Americans hold O.J. Simpson. Consider their feelings toward the judge and jury in the case. And then consider that this is approximately how black people have felt every few months for generations. It's not just that the belief that Officer Timothy Loehmann got away with murdering a 12-year-old Tamir Rice, it is the reality that police officers have been getting away with murdering black people since the advent of American policing. The injustice compounds, congeals until there is an almost tangible sense of dread and grievance that compels a community to understand the police as objects of fear, not respect.

What does it mean, for instance, that black children are ritually told that any stray movement in the face of the police might result in their own legal killing? When Eric Holder [spoke about getting "The Talk" from his father](#), and then giving it to his own son, many of us nodded our heads. But many more of us were terrified. When the nation's top cop must warn his children to be skeptical of his own troops, how legitimate can the police actually be?

And it is not as if Holder is imagining things. When the law shoots down [12-year-old children](#), or [beats down old women on traffic islands](#), or [chokes people to death over cigarettes](#); when the law shoots people [over compact discs](#), [traffic stops](#), [drivers' licenses](#), [loud conversation](#), or [car trouble](#); when the law [auctions off its monopoly on lethal violence](#) to bemused civilians, when these civilians then kill, and when their victims are [mocked in their death throes](#); when people stand up to defend police as officers of the state, and when these defenders are [killed by these very same officers](#); when much of this is recorded, uploaded, live-streamed, tweeted, and broadcast; and when government seems powerless, or unwilling, to stop any of it, then it ceases, in the eyes of citizens, to be any sort of respectable law at all. It simply becomes "force."

In the black community, it's the force they deploy, and not any higher American ideal, that gives police their power. This is obviously dangerous for those who are policed. Less appreciated is the danger illegitimacy ultimately poses to those who must do the policing. For if the law represents nothing but the greatest force, then it really is indistinguishable from any other street gang. And if the law is nothing but a gang, then it is certain that someone will resort to the kind of justice typically meted out to all other powers in the street.

...

There is no shortcut out. Sanctimonious cries of nonviolence will not help. “Retraining” can only do so much. Until we move to the broader question of policy, we can expect to see Walter Scotts and Freddie Grays with some regularity. And the extent to which we are tolerant of the possibility of more Walter Scotts and Freddie Grays is the extent to which we are tolerant of the possibility of more Micah Xavier Johnsons.