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ROOM *for* DEBATE

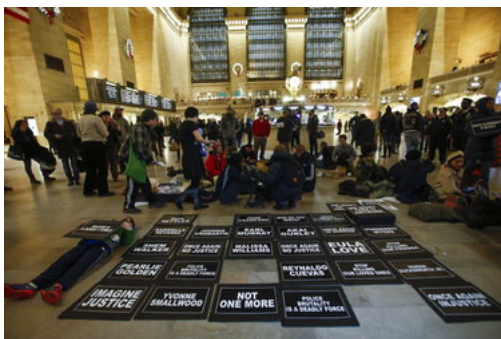
The Latest Protests Are Similar to the Occupy Movement



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The recent protests over police aggression have a great deal in common with Occupy Wall Street demonstrations. Indeed, occupy activists are sharing tactics with organizers in Ferguson and elsewhere.



A boy lies next to placards, some bearing the names of people whom protesters allege were victims of police violence, at Grand Central Terminal in New York, on Dec. 12. Eduardo Munoz/Reuters

In both cases, young Americans are the principal victims of the injustices being condemned. Occupy Wall Street was a revolt led by white middle-class young adults against the predatory practices of high finance and the failure of government to punish the bankers adequately. The protagonists of the current protests are young African-Americans who are indignant about institutional racism in our criminal justice system. In both cases, young Americans are expressing their frustration with the oppressive power structures that are destroying their lives and their dreams of a better future. They believe that our government is more inclined to protect the interests of ruling elites than the rest of us. They are joined by a multiracial coalition of social justice and faith-based groups that share their frustration. Having a more liberal mayor in New York City now probably contributes to a less contentious atmosphere during the protests here, but I see many of the same people at the marches.

The protests against police killings of unarmed black men and the failure of grand juries to indict them are not spontaneous. They are the culmination of years of activism that has raised awareness about stop and frisk policies and the alarming rate of incarceration of African-American men for nonviolent crimes. Social justice activists are getting better at mobilizing supporters through social media and alliances are forming among activists and community organizations across the country and around the world. It is heartening to see young people taking to the streets to protest injustice and it also makes me hopeful to see more and more people offering their technical expertise and creative skills in support of the most important civil rights movements of our era: Black lives matter.