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**Matt Taibbi.** *I Can't Breathe: A Killing on Bay Street*. New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2017. 322pp. ISBN: 978-0-812-98884-0.

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In *I Can't Breathe: A Killing on Bay Street*, Matt Taibbi sketches a biography of first Eric Garner, whose death at hands of the Staten Island police as captured on video changed the conversation surrounding police brutality in the United States, and then the systemic approaches that both produced the type of policing behind the interaction that led Garner's death and informed the city government's response to the incident. To this end, the first half of the book, "Life and Death on Bay Street", introduces the reader to Eric Garner the man: his personality, his family and those closest to him. In these chapters, Taibbi details his most important interpersonal relationships and the overall trajectory of his life, including the development of his relationship with the legal system in general, and law enforcement officers in Staten Island in particular. As Garner's story unfolds, the story of New York City during this same period also unfolds, including the story of its incorporation of the "Broken Windows" approach toward policing. The history of "Broken Windows" is recounted from the founding theorist, George Kelling, to its evolution as a tactic, to its adoption by the law enforcement community of New York City and the resulting social and political repercussions. The first half ends with an account of the final days and hours of Eric Garner's life, and the memories of those closest to him as they recount the ways in which they learned of his unexpected, violent death, and their reactions to his passing.

The second half, "The Perpetual Injustice Machine", recounts the immediate aftermath of Garner's death, the release of the video, the social and political fallout, the family's search for justice, accountability and information, and the systematic denial of all three through the machinations of a city bureaucracy intent on exculpating its officers and its policies. In tracing the contours of the Garner case and its broader implications, Taibbi introduces the reader to the most important figures in the developing drama – the Garner family, District Attorney Dan Donovan, Officer Daniel Pantaleo, Ramsey Orta – and to the extensive history of precedents – legal and social – underpinning key aspects of the case. Other important figures emerge along the way: Ibrahim Annan, a living case study of the normal life cycle of police brutality cases in Staten Island; Carnell Russ, whose wrongful death in 1971 helped establish precedent for the federal government's involvement in a local case involving police brutality/wrongful death; and James Meyerson, who served as counsel for the Russ family and later argued powerfully for the release of the court records for the special grand jury that ruled against indicting the officers involved in Garner's death. Taibbi brings the reader in on all aspects of the

Garner case, and sheds light on the ways in which individual officers are held accountable within the criminal justice system, connecting the dots as some of its most arcane features are brought into play in this drama. In the end, he argues convincingly that an autopsy of the Garner case reveals not a miscarriage of justice, but rather another example of the “Perpetual Injustice Machine” working in accordance with its design.

While there is much to recommend *I Can't Breathe: A Killing on Bay Street*, the attention to detail, the literary quality of the work, perhaps Taibbi's greatest skill rests in his ability to connect the dots in all of their complexity and then present the picture plainly to the reader. For example, after relating the circuitous route of the “Broken Windows” theory of policing from early 1960s rural Minnesota to early 1990s New York, Taibbi succinctly crystallizes the ways in which entrenched institutional and societal racism would transform it via application, writing,

Killing, unwittingly perhaps, had set in motion a massive governmental program that would be warped from the beginning by a chilling syllogistic construct:

New Yorkers who are afraid of crime are already victims.

Many New Yorkers are scared of black people.

Therefore, being black is a crime. (p. 64)

Taibbi's attention to detail never obscures the basic realities of the story of Eric Garner and its implications for Garner, his family, or those occupying the racial and economic underclass in Staten Island, New York City, and the country as a whole. As James Meyerson so eloquently puts it, “the abstractions can drown us” (p.216); Taibbi appears acutely aware of that potential in a story with this level of complexity, and is determined that this will not happen. His triumph, his ability to bring forth clarity from complexity, leaves the reader with an awareness of the intricacies of both the Garner case and the justice system's historical treatment of individuals and communities of color, and a sense of gratitude that the author has taken a balanced approach between the nuances of the case and the overarching principles that made it relevant to the national conversation in the first place.

*I Can't Breathe: A Killing on Bay Street* is a critique of the institutionalized racism and systematic economic, political and social discrimination with which individuals and communities of color (particularly poor communities) have had to contend in the United States. But beyond that, it implicitly speaks to the treatment of Africa and the African Diaspora in many of the Western-centered institutions of economic, political and military governance (e.g. the World Bank). Many of the injustices cataloged within the pages of this work – economic discrimination and predatory lending, unequal application of the law, failure to acknowledge a shared humanity – vis-à-vis the post-Civil Rights African-American experience within the United States are equally, and in certain instances more, applicable to the experiences of the nations of Africa, the Caribbean and throughout the Diaspora. When a civil rights attorney explains that the Kerner Commission's report of the conditions of the African-American community in the late sixties found “...that police are viewed as an occupying

force in black and brown communities” (p.227), it is an acknowledgement of the treatment of the treatment of these communities as internal colonies. When he goes on to say that “everything’s changed but nothing has changed” (p.227), it points to the continuation of the practice. The fundamental continuities between the pre-Civil Rights Movement and post-Civil Rights Movement treatment of African-Americans, as members of colonies *within* the United States, is instructive for those interested in the pre-Independence and post-Independence treatment of individuals and nations throughout Africa and the Diaspora, the former *external* colonies of much of the Western world, as it shows the ability of the levers of economic, political and military exploitation to change radically, yet rigidly maintain their basic functions. To this end, *I Can’t Breathe: A Killing on Bay Street* is required reading for anyone interested in these issues, especially as they apply to Africa and the Diaspora.

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