



## World Histories of Big Data Policing The Imperial Epistemology of the Police-Wars of U.S. Hegemony

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### Abstract

*Textbook presentations of U.S. policing name the present as new stage of professionalization: the homeland security era, where the application of “big data” promises “smarter” policing. Within this framework of gradual progress, liberal police scholarship has become the official criticism of big data policing to organize a project of liberal reform. Of course, this scholarship is being written in the context of both militant social movements within the United States and the terminal decline of U.S. global hegemony. To clarify the stakes of this moment, this paper connects the Marxist anti-security perspective and anti-racist critiques of surveillance and big data policing from within the Black radical tradition. It argues that the emergence of big data policing is the latest development in ongoing processes of pacification that have expanded, organized, and reproduced the colonial/modern world-system over the longue durée. The paper extends and elaborates conceptualizations of hegemonic cycles in relation to work on the maturation of intelligence tradecraft, focusing on two interrelated developments: (1) two information revolutions that reorganized social relations and (2) the police-wars that shaped the rise and decline of the United States as a world hegemonic power. It concludes that big data policing is the latest outgrowth of the imperial epistemology that organized and continues animate the work of pacification and obscure the politics of anti-systemic struggle.*

**Keywords:** Police, Security, Surveillance, Hegemony, Coloniality



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According to textbook presentations (Oliver 2019), policing in the United States is well into its fourth stage. In the current “homeland security era,” police use new technology to gather intelligence, share information, and analyze multiple, massive databases in order to manage diverse threats in an increasingly efficient, “smart” manner. In this liberal tale of progress and professionalization, the first police departments of the political era (1840s-1890s) were ill-disciplined products of nineteenth century political machines. In the reform era (1890s-1960s), modernizers broke the link between police and politics and transformed policing into professional crime fighting. The tumultuous politics of the 1960s tarnished police legitimacy, prompting a turn toward community policing. In this third policing era (1960s-2000s), police and “the community” worked cooperatively to address crime and quality of life issues. Then, the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 “changed everything,” policing included. According to this perspective, the current homeland security era and the increasing emphasis on intelligence are a response to this new and dangerous world.

Two decades and untold billions of dollars later, new intelligence sharing programs link the smallest municipal police departments to other law enforcement agencies, the private sector, and federal intelligence community. Police now access massive amounts of data, both information collected by the state (law enforcement, social service agencies, census data) and the private sector (credit card records and the dossiers assembled and sold by private data brokers). In most jurisdictions, some combination of new surveillance technologies supplement these database with more targeted and sophisticated methods for the collection and analysis of intelligence. These different data streams flow into bewildering, overlapping, and opaque networks of police-intelligence centers: the 80 fusion centers recognized by the DHS, 33 Investigative Support Centers set up under the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area Program, the six Regional Information Sharing Systems administered by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, 104 Joint Terrorism Task Forces and 56 field intelligence groups that sit under the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and countless more “crime analysis centers” and “real time crime centers” operated by state, county, and municipal governments. At all these sites, intelligence analyst use powerful computers and specialized software to “fuse” different data streams into a mass of “big data” and, sophisticated software and refine a signal out of the noise.

Big data is changing policing but how did we get here and what is the significance of this change? What is the historical momentum behind big data policing and where is it taking us? Recent scholarship has begun to explore the immediate impacts of big data policing (Ferguson 2017; Lageson 2020; Brayne 2021). They rightfully argue that big data policing has transformed the way executives manage police agencies and how investigators pursue criminal cases. They raise important concerns about privacy, criminalization, and racial biases built into the technologies. At the same time, however, these accounts also hold on to hopes that big data can be reformed in ways that will reduce bias and other abuses. This belief in democratically controlled and scientifically managed policing positions them as the official criticism of big data policing to organize a project of liberal reform. While this type of scholarship may help ameliorate some of

the worst abuses of contemporary policing, it also threatens to codify and legitimate the expansion of police power that has taken place in “the homeland security era.”

This danger is especially acute now after three—and increasingly powerful—crests of the Black Lives Matter movement have put police abolition on the agenda. Case in point: Brayne’s (2020) recent advocacy of reforms to bring greater “transparency” to the use of surveillance technology by Los Angeles Police Department. She failed to mention that the Stop LAPD Spying Coalition (2020)—an autonomous, grassroots, and abolitionist organization—had already and explicitly rejected her preferred reforms as “surveillance bureaucracy,” wherein “police publicize some information about their surveillance systems, and then regulations create ‘public’ approval of those systems.” In response, Rahman and McQuade (2020) chided liberal professionals with the rejoinder that “no one is taking to the streets facing down tear gas to demand police bureaucracy,” arguing that these kind of procedural reforms “are meant to pacify social movements, replacing community self-determination with the “expertise” of lawyers, academics, and other professionals who are complicit in oppression.”

To clarify the stakes of this moment, this paper considers the rise of big data policing in relation to the police-wars that punctuated the rise, crest, and crisis of the United States and world hegemonic power. It connects the Marxist anti-security perspective (Neocleous and Rigakos 2011), and anti-racist critiques of surveillance (Browne 2015) and big data policing (Jefferson 2020) from within Black radical tradition. In this way, it considers U.S. hegemony in the context of the colonial/modern world-system, which is not just world-economy orientated toward the endless accumulation of capital (Wallerstein 1998) but also a global system of racial classification and racialized knowledge production (Quijano 2000). Within this historical system, police power does not just reproduce the working class (Neocleous 2000a). It also produces the racial difference within the working class in ways that organize the accumulation of capital and reproduce capitalist social order (Kelley 2020). Surveillance, then, is more than a potentially neutral administrative technique defined by “context and comportment” (Marx 2016: 10). “It is the fact of antiblackness” (Browne 2015: 21). It cannot be recuperated in the ways imagined by liberals.

Instead, security practices—policing, warfare, surveillance and intelligence, and, even, social policy—are refined and continually reformed through a world-encompassing police-wars, the global pacification projects oriented toward creating and maintaining the conditions for capital accumulation on a world scale. Police-wars are systematic mobilizations in the name of security to (re)produce—which is to say “police” (Neocleous 2000a )—the conjunctural structures of capitalist hegemony. Police-wars are the passive revolutionary mobilizations to repress and accommodate successive waves of antisystem struggles (Arrighi 2005). They are global class projects: pacification oriented toward the accomplishment and maintenance of capitalist hegemony and the management of systemic cycles of accumulation. The work of liberal professionals essential to this process, the velvet glove of “reform” to the iron hand of “security.”

Specifically, I argue that the emergence of big data policing is the latest development in on-going processes of pacification that have expanded, organized, and reproduced the colonial/modern world-system over the *longue durée*. In this way, the paper extends and elaborates

Arrighi's (1994) conceptualization of hegemonic cycles in relation to McCoy's (2009; 2012) work on the maturation of intelligence tradecraft, focusing on two interrelated developments: (1) two information revolutions that reorganized social relations and (2) the police-wars that shaped the rise and decline of the United States as a world hegemonic power. Organizationally, the argument proceeds in four sections: first, a critique of the recent liberal scholarship as consolidating and legitimizing the "homeland security era" of policing drawn from black radical and anti-security perspectives; second, an account of the two successive information revolutions that shaped processes of pacification constitutive of U.S. hegemony; third, a historical analysis of how big data policing emerged in relation to the police-wars of U.S. hegemony; and fourth, a concluding reflection on the implications of this argument for antisystemic demands to defund and abolish police.

Taken together, this de-colonial, anti-security perspective shows how liberal dreams of putting ostensibly neutral technologies to work for the purposes of scientifically managed and democratically governed policing are ahistorical. The technocratic and racializing assumptions of the managers of state violence—what McCoy (2009) calls the imperial epistemology—are inscribed in big data policing. "Big data" abstracts away the social context of complex problems and reduces them to technical matters of management. It allows for "smart" policing but shallow politics. Historical depth is the best counter to these responses, these depoliticizing, formalist accounts. Big data policing developed through a series of police-wars that constituted U.S. hegemony within the colonial/modern world-system. At every stage, liberal professionals played a central role: defining problems, deploying expertise, reforming institutions and, above all, pacifying antisystemic struggle. Understood in these terms, reforming big data policing is a hegemonic project of preserving the coloniality of capitalist power. Full reckoning with big data policing means locating it within its constitutive historical ground: the arch U.S. global hegemony. Redressing its harms requires an internationalist approach to abolition.

### **Police Power and the Peril of Reform**

Before "big data" was a common phrase and even before the security surge associated with the U.S.-led "war on terror" that inaugurated the "homeland security era" of policing, it was clear that policing was dramatically changing across the capitalist core through: (1) the expansion of private security (Jones and Newburn 1998; Loader 1999); (2) the emergence of risk-based strategies (Freely and Simon 1992; Ericson and Haggery 1997); (3) the impact of technological innovations in surveillance and data processing (Marx 1988); (4) the globalization or transnationalization of policing (Anderson et al. 1995). Organizationally, policing ceased to be a public good monopolized by the national state but a commodity provisioned by a diffuse network of private and public actors. Temporally and practically, police become less concerned with controlling and prosecuting crime than pre-empting potential risks and minimizing future loss. Bayley and Shearing (1996: 585) even proclaimed that "future generations will look back on our era as a time when one system of policing ended and another took its place."

A longer historical perspective, however, suggests that this contemporary change in policing may be more cyclical than singular, a return to an earlier moment not a definitive break from the past. “Rather than present the emergent trends as betokening the arrival of a new system of policing,” Zedner (2006: 79) “suggests that they are better seen as displaying significant links with an earlier before ‘the police’ in the sense that we have come to use the term.” Here, Zedner (2006: 90) is referencing policing in early modern Europe, where security was a private good delivered by an assemblage of actors, “commercial, communal and voluntary.” With this history in mind, Neocleous (2000a: 5) divides the history of modern policing into three periods that “parallel stages of state formation (early modern, absolutist, representative) and the rise and consolidation of a system of bourgeois rule.”

The broader mandate of policing was explicit in both the early modern and absolutist period but—as capitalism consolidated and liberal theories of social order premised on individuals atomized by private property increasingly came to match social realities—the concept of police narrowed to crime control, masking the link between the formal police and the broader state’s social regulatory function. Indeed, during nineteenth century, the original, expanded concept of police fragmented into the various genres of social policy and social science that we would recognize today as public law, administrative science, public health, urban planning, and, of course, law enforcement (Rigakos et al 2009). The uniformed police of the nation states the late nineteenth and twenty centuries “may come to be seen as a historical blip in a more enduring schema of policing as an array of activities undertaken by multiple private and public agencies, and individual and communal endeavors” (Zedner 2006: 81).

Debates on periodization obscure the practical and functional consistency in policing, and the related institutional and practical blurring of social policy, war, and security as order-making strategies of bourgeois civilization. The recuperation of the original “expanded concept of police” by anti-security scholars is an effort to grasp “the expansive set of institutions through which policing takes place” (Neocleous 2000a: x). Police encapsulates the varied administrative mechanisms that fabricate capitalist forms of order, reproduce the working class, and shape state formation. The deep history of the police idea reveals the way the police *powers* of the state share common roots. Not only are prisons and penology a “police project” but much of “social policy” should be understood as softer “social police” (Neocleous 2000b; McQuade 2021, forthcoming). Police-as-order-making and social-policy-as-social-police converge in a more foundational process: pacification. Given perpetual change that defines capitalism, bourgeois order is one “of social *insecurity*,” which “gives rise to a *politics of security*” (Neocleous 2011: 24, emphasis in original). This is why Marx (1978: 43) concluded that “security is the supreme social concept of civil society; the concept of the police;” he continues that “[bourgeois] society exists only in order to guarantee for each of its members the preservation of his person, his rights and his property.” To see security “as a constitutive power...is to read it as a police mechanism...for the fabrication of a social order organized around a constant revolutionising of the instruments and relations of production” (Neocleous 2011: 26).

If—following Foucault’s (2005) inversion of Clausewitz—politics is war by other means, then police is simply the name given to “war power in terms of what is, after all, the most fundamental and violent conflict in human history: the class war” (Neocleous 2014: 6). From this perspective, anti-security scholars reappropriate the term “pacification” to critique bourgeois governance as a systematic police-war against all enemies: foreign, domestic, and imagined (Neocleous 2016)—that simultaneously fabricates a social order conducive to capitalist accumulation (Rigakos 2016). Security—understood as the as the preservation of property and the production of atomized individuals—is the ultimate end of bourgeois politics. Pacification is the means to security. Police-wars are the global pacification projects to defeat and incorporate the antisystemic struggles constitutive of a world-historical conjuncture.

More measured criticisms of policing do not extend their critique of police power as constitutive structure of the colonial/modern world-system. As a result, they get caught up in “the prose of pacification...the productive play of discourse that organizes and animates the state apparatus” (McQuade 2019: 24). Hence, liberal accounts of big data policing do not set a political horizon beyond regulative, police-preservationist reforms. Ferguson (2017: 151), echoing Obama-era proposals, praises “blue data”—big data for police accountability—as means through which “new efficiencies can be discovered and old biases reduced.” Legeson (2020: 15-16) maintains that “technology can be harnessed for positive ends,” and holds out hope for the “enormous potential for reform that better addressed the relationship between criminal punishment, individual privacy, and governmental oversight in the digital age.” Brayne (2021: 116) notes that “big data has the potential to ameliorate discriminatory practices, yet as currently employed, simultaneously amplifies and obscures inequality.” To make good on this potential, she recommends more “accountability from tech companies,” (Brayne 2021: 117) something she equates with a more diverse pool of programmers and corporate managers

These proposals are rooted in a shared misunderstanding of both technology and police power. As Jefferson (2020: 9) contends “a formalist approach deflects attention from the concrete social relations in which those architectures were designed in the first place;” and as such, “is common among the apologists of mass criminalization. If we only adjust the parameters, they tell us, criminal justice algorithms will be invulnerable to antiracist critiques.” The problem, however, is not simply the design of technology but the contexts in which they are used. It “is not that such tech companies cause racist law enforcement but that they capitalize on its ongoing legacy” (Jefferson 2020: 9). In other words, the fact of coloniality—systems of racialized domination, classification, and knowledge production—upends simplistic claims of the supposed neutrality of technology. In this way, Browne’s (2015: 16-17) conceptualization of “racializing surveillance” is not just “a technology of social control...involving a fixed set of practices that maintain a racial order of things,” but an epistemological argument about “how things get ordered racially by way of surveillance.” It varies historically and geographically but “most often upholds negating strategies that first accompanied European colonial expansion and transatlantic slavery that sought to structure social relations and institutions in ways that privilege whiteness” (Brown 2015: 17).

Similarly, liberal scholars systematically misrecognize policing as law enforcement. The work of policing, however, is order maintenance: the post-facto handling of the law to justify how police used discretion to restore order (Neocleous 2000a). Procedural reforms always fail to stop police abuses (Vitale 2017) because police *was never meant to be held accountable*. As Wall and Linneman (2021, forthcoming: 4-5) contend the “logic of discretion—the arbitrary power to act in and on the social world in the name of *security and order*—is the law of police.” Hence, courts have always refused to define discretion because to define discretion would be to limit police power. Discretion, moreover, is organizational and institutional. It is not just a matter of individual decision making. “The discriminatory nature of discretion therefore has its foundation in the permissive structure of law and the powers given to the police to preserve order” (Neocleous 2000a: 101). In other words, police consistently use discretion in a racist manner because policing is order maintenance and racial classification and domination is a core and constitutive structure of capitalist order (Quijano 2000).

This perspective upends the terms of the debate. When Ferguson (2017), Lageson (2020), and Brayne (2021) discuss the abuses of big data policing they do so in terms of privacy, understood as an unqualified good to be asserted against outside encroachments. In these terms, “*the right to privacy*” becomes an independent entity that stands apart from social relations. “Privacy” is not a natural condition, however. It is a particular claim first made within a particular context: 16th century liberal theory. A concession that the consolidating administrative state made to “the public,” privacy is a fluid boundary that shifts with social struggle. The opposite of “private” is not the state—the “public”—but the “criminal,” the other activities positioned outside the state but, unlike the “private,” disallowed by the sovereign. In a social world already constituted commodity form and the wage relation, privacy is pacification: “It entrenches the very separation between people presupposed by capitalist social relations that security is used to enforce and maintain” (Henry 2013: 106).

Fully reckoning with data policing necessarily requires a critique of bourgeois administration. Police are beyond reform, law organizes the violence of administration, and privacy—a “right” so easily lost to the police gaze, whether in the garb of law enforcement or social services—is pacification. This requires contextualizing the figure of big data policing on the historical ground of actually existing social order: big data as constitutive of and constituted by the colonial/modern world-system (Hopkins 1983; McQuade and Schrader 2021, forthcoming). Big data policing has not changed policing. It is the form in which police power is institutionalized in the contemporary moment and, through the present police-war, big data policing blurs with other pacification practices. The rise of big data policing is really a story of changing information technologies which have organized pacification during the rise, crest, and crisis of U.S. hegemony.

### **Information Revolutions, Pacification, and Hegemonic Cycles**

Information revolutions and related police-wars play a neglected role in the cycling of hegemonic powers in the world-system. In Arrighi’s (1994) account, the cycling of hegemonic powers is

connected to systemic cycles of accumulation, an application of Marx's circuit of capital or M-C-M'—money-commodities-money—from the firm level to the system level:

(MC) phases of material expansion...consist of phases of continuous change, during which the capitalist world-economy grows along a single developmental path. And (CM') phases of financial expansion...consist of phases of discontinuous change during which growth along the established path has attained or is attaining its limits, and the capitalist world-economy 'shifts' through radical restructurings and reorganizations onto another path. (Arrighi 1994: 9)

For Arrighi, each world hegemonic power and related systemic cycle of accumulation defines a distinct epoch of capitalist history: United Provinces in the mercantile long sixteenth century, United Kingdom in the industrial-competitive capitalist long nineteenth century, and the United States in the mass industrial-monopoly capitalist long twentieth century. In each of these periods, the hegemonic power created the global conditions for a stable period of capital accumulation and economic expansion, which eventually runs its course and unravels in an unstable period of conflict and competition. Information revolutions are integral to the global conditions for phases of accumulation.

As the scope and intensity of the circuit of capital increases with each successive systemic cycle of accumulation, it creates greater "insecurity" and organizational and logistical challenges. Leaps in information processing help overcome both these problems.

Information revolutions are part of the organizational innovations that help launch a systemic cycle of accumulation. During ascendant MC periods, a "generative sector" centered around new forms of transportation provide engines of economic growth:

Key centers of capital accumulation, bases for series of interlinked industries, sources of technological and organizational innovations that spread to other sectors, models for firms and for state-sector-firm relations in other sectors and catalysts for innovative and broadly encompassing political and financial relations. (Bunker and Cincantell 2006: 88)

In creating needs for new transportation technologies, MC periods also produce logistical problems that create the conditions for revolutionary leaps in information technology (Beniger 1989).

In CM' phases of hegemonic decline, in contrast, information revolutions interact with increased system wide demands for "security." Hegemonic decline is punctuated by two crises: (1) a signal crisis, which marks a period of relative decline for the hegemonic power and increased conflict system-wide and (2) a terminal crisis, which connotes the full collapse of the hegemonic-system-of-states and sets off an interlude of sharp politics and unpredictable social change. This period of decay, the C-M' phase, leads to a transformation of the mode of accumulation. Grounded in financialization, this downturn of the cycle is defined by increasing economic instability (finance-driven booms and busts) and escalating conflict within and between states. New technologies are put to work in the various fronts of police-wars.

Here in lies the neglected role of such information revolutions in hegemonic cycles (McCoy 2009; 2012). The decline of UK world hegemony was characterized by the late nineteenth century information revolution, centered on typewritten files, numeric codification, and some mechanical assistance for data transmission and tabulation. While the first stirrings of the nineteenth century information revolution begin with the invention of the telegraph in 1832, it was the spate of inventions and innovations in the 1870s and 1880s—the quadruplex telegraph (1874), the typewriter (1874), the telephone (1876) the smart number and decimal classification system (1876), fingerprinting (1877) photoengraving (1881) the Bertillonage biometric system (1884), the adding machine (1885), punch cards (1889) and roll film (1889)—that truly revolutionized the production and dissemination of information (McCoy 2009). The capstone of this information revolution came in 1892 with Chicago Edison’s first experiments of utility power, which created the conditions for further innovations in media—radio and television—and the creation of markets and a new kind of consumer. The consolidation of a manual information regime is also the story of industrialization, mass society, and, with it, the consolidation of the welfare state in the capitalist core (Beniger 1989; Mattelart 2000).

Similarly, the decline of U.S. world hegemony was characterized by the mid-twentieth century computer revolution. While the Turing Machine in 1936 provided the template for the digital computer, the period following the invention of the monolithic integrated circuit in 1958 began a period of sustained technological innovation: the modem (1960), the mouse (1963), the floppy disk (1967), the relational database (1969), APRAnet, the military precursor to the internet (1969), the fiber optic cable and microprocessor (1970), and TCP/IP, the software protocol of the future Internet (1973). The capstone of this information revolution came in 1975 with the personal computer. Subsequent inventions—the mobile phone (1977), compact disc (1982), radio frequency identification (1983), iris scanner (1987), World Wide Web (1990), smart phone (1992); and IEEE 802.11, the physical layer standards for wireless networking (1997)—eased the penetration of computers in consumer markets and consolidated the computerized information regime at the level of material life (McCoy 2012). These changes broke mass markets into “individuals” to be socially sorted—targeted advertisements for the socially included and risk assessments for the socially excluded (Deleuze 1992)—and transformed the centralized bureaucracies of welfare states into the interlocked systems of governance that defined workfare regimes (Jessop 2002).

These information revolutions reorganized social relations and transformed cultural conditions. They compressed space into time, effectively shrinking the world (Harvey 1991). They dramatically increased the technical capacities of complex organizations to render the social legible and manage—or attempt to manage—complex processes (Scott 1999). On the one hand, new information technologies enable new organizational forms and new capital accumulation strategies that present hegemonic contenders opportunities to reorganize the world-economy and hegemonically center a new period of relatively consensual material expansion. On the other hand, these information revolutions also revolutionized pacification. They are security surges that further fuel the escalating police-wars that define period of hegemonic breakdown and transition.

	<b>Late-19th Century Information Revolution</b>	<b>Mid-20th Century Information Revolution</b>
<b>Originating Technology</b>	Telegraph (1832)	Turing Machine (1936)
<b>Period of Rapid Innovation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Qaudrulplex Telegraph &amp; Typewriter (1874)</li> <li>-Telephone, Smart Number &amp; Decimal Classification System (1876)</li> <li>-Fingerprinting (1877)</li> <li>-Photoengraving (1881)</li> <li>-Bertillonage Biometrics (1884)</li> <li>-Adding Machine (1885)</li> <li>-Tabulating Machine (1889)</li> <li>-Roll film (1889)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Monolithic integrated circuit (1958)</li> <li>-Modem (1960)</li> <li>-Mouse (1963)</li> <li>-Floppy Disk (1967)</li> <li>-Relational databse (1969)</li> <li>-APRAnet (1969)</li> <li>-Fiber Optic Cable &amp; Microprocessor (1970)</li> <li>-TCP/IP (1973)</li> <li>-Mobile Phone (1977)</li> <li>-Compact Disk (1982)</li> <li>-Radio Frequency Identification (1983)</li> <li>-Iris Scanner (1987)</li> <li>-World Wide Web (1990)</li> <li>-Smart Phone (1992)</li> <li>-IEEE 802.11 (1997)</li> </ul>
<b>Capstone Technology</b>	Utility Power (1892)	Personal Computer (1975)

Police-wars punctuate the rise, crest, and crisis of hegemonic powers and hegemonic transitions. They pacify the planet and reassert the class hegemony required to launch a systemic cycle accumulation or manage the turbulent transition from a MC to CM’ phase or from one hegemonic power to the next. Police-wars organize “passive revolutions” or the “repression-accommodation process’ through which successive hegemonies of world capitalism has increased the social inclusiveness of the modern world-system” (Arrighi 2005: 87). In the MC phase, pacification proceeds on more consensual grounds. The dialectic tilts toward accommodation. For example, the consolidation of British hegemony involved the decolonization of Latin American, the cementing of the Anglo-American alliance and the extension of the franchise in Britain. While the accomplishment of U.S. global hegemony entailed the decolonization of almost the entire planet, the recognition of labor unions, and the incorporation of worker’s demands in the reformist class compromises the welfare state (McQuade 2017).

In the CM’ phase, in contrast, the dialectic tilts toward repression, reinforcing and remaking systems of racial classification. On this point, Santiago-Valles (2012) has:

Examine[d] the large-scale structures shaping the distinctive information and regulatory modes central to imperialist domination during the fin de siècles of British global hegemony (1873-1914) and U.S. global hegemony (mid-1970s-to present). Such modes merged the panoptic inspection practices (data collection, surveillance, disciplinary procedures) characterizing each imperial leader’s protracted collapse with biopolitics. (Santiago-Valles 2012: 182-183)

Specifically, the nineteenth century information revolution and manual information regime brought the era of “small data.” As McCoy (2009: 21-22) explains, the state moved from “compiling mute lists for purposes of taxation and conscription” to assembling “the political intelligence with which to identify individuals and surveil groups deemed subversive, amassing incriminating information and monitoring movements.” Ideologically, “civilizing missions oriented by social Darwinism and eugenics” (Santiago-Valles 2012: 183) animated this pacification project associated with the decline of the UK-centered hegemonic-system-of-states.

These were police-wars to create or maintain “exploited and/or repressed populations as identifiable-manageable bodies” Santiago-Valles (2012: 183). These included, the reduction of legal slavery and the continuation of “other forms of racialized forced labor”—chief among them “Coolie” Labor—and a “spike in genocidal famines and pogroms in the peripheries of world order” (Santiago-Valles 2012: 183). This period also saw the quasi-scientific formalization of pacification as “counterinsurgency,” the military doctrine that combines “humanitarian” civic action and paramilitary operations in an intelligence-driven effort to stabilize “weak” state forms that keep the peripheries open to economic penetration and political interference from the core states. With reference to the United States, counterinsurgency became a coherent doctrine through a series of conflicts—Boxer Rebellion in China (1898), the Philippine Insurrection and Moro Rebellion (1898-1913); the occupations of Cuba (1898-1912), Dominican Republic (1903-1924), Honduras (1903-1925) and Haiti (1915-1934)—that simultaneously helped evaluate the United States as world-power “in the same process that created comprador regimes on the periphery of the US imperium” (McQuade 2012a: 78-79).

Similarly, the CM phase of U.S. hegemony and the information revolution of mid-20th century recapitulated the spirit of the earlier British decline: “biologicistic positivism based on parasitological perspectives transforming certain citizens into denizens” and “the neo-Malthusian and neo-Victorian reintroduction of the capitalist ‘work ethic,’ the refeminization and reinfantilization of poverty, the erosion of trade union rights and...the resurgence of the most despotic forms of work, disproportionately focusing on today’s ‘lesser races’” (Santiago-Valles 2012: 187). These changes in labor regimes are supplemented by a series of regulatory controls including “high-tech information retrieval; generalized policing and formalized racial profiling; more severe sentencing and confinement; massive persecution, detention and deportation of immigrants; greater extracarceral supervision (parole, probation); and both formal and extrajudicial executions, torture and beatings by government agents, state paramilitary groups, mercenaries and warlord armies” (Santiago-Valles 2012: 187). Similarly, this period saw the post-Vietnam delegitimation of counterinsurgency, its reformulation paradigm as “counterterrorism” and “community policing,” and the eventual resurgence of counterinsurgency on the battlefields of the war on terror (McQuade 2012b).

In the specific context of U.S. hegemony, these macro-historical processes are on display in a series of wars:

In the Philippines, Vietnam and Afghanistan/Iraq, a mix of guerilla resistance, protracted conflict and unfamiliar Asian cultural terrain forced the U.S. military

beyond conventional tactics into the unfamiliar domain of unconventional warfare. During each of these protracted conflicts, the U.S. military was pushed to the breaking point and responded by drawing together contemporary information technologies and fusing them into an infrastructure of unprecedented power, and forging an advanced array for data management. (McCoy 2012: 361)

These wars correspond with both the shifting “eras” of U.S. policing and the periods of crisis that shaped the rise, crest, and decline of the United States as a world hegemonic power. The shift from the political era to the reform era coincides with the Philippine-American War, which, along with related wars in the Caribbean and Pacific, marked the emergence of the United States as a global power during the relative decline of the UK as a global hegemon, between its signal crisis (the long depression of the nineteenth century, 1873-1896) and terminal crisis (the collapse of the British pound’s gold standard in 1931). The dawn of the community policing era, similarly, took place in the context signal crisis of U.S. hegemony: the Vietnam War, the world revolution of 1968, and breakdown of “the mode of production and regulation of world money established at Bretton Woods” (Arrighi 1994: 309). Finally, today’s homeland security era unfolds in the context of terminal decline of the United States: the war on terror and the long depression (Roberts 2016) Each of these crisis formed new conjunctures: existing social compacts and racial regimes broke apart, and security surged as new information technologies were put to use in fabricating social order.

These wars and related information regimes also drove the increasing abstraction and quantification of social problems, producing a unique “American imperial epistemology.” Where the older European empires were administered by learned Orientalists with elite educations and deep knowledge of their colonial dependences, the new American empire was animated by a utilitarian, positivist and empiricist worldview. As McCoy (2009) notes:

If Europeans prized erudition, the Americans preferred information, accessible and succinct. If Europeans emphasized deep cultural knowledge of oriental societies for the manipulation from within, Americans amassed contemporary data for control from without...embedded within this seemingly surface engagement was a relentless drive for omniscience, even omnipotence, imbued with the capacity, if challenged, for a lethal response unchecked by any of the empathy that might have come from deeper cultural engagement. (McCoy 2009: 44-45)

This extreme form of positivism and empiricism abstracts phenomena out of their historical and social contexts and transforms them into measurable metrics. It reduces social problems to technical issues to be managed from without. In other words, big data policing is not a break but continuation of the prose of pacification animating the police-wars that have structured the rise, crest, and crisis of U.S. hegemony.

### **World-Histories of Big Data Policing**

The late nineteenth century marks a critical shift in the production and use of data by the state security apparatus; a security surge made possible the manual information revolution. As Jefferson

(2020: 17, 26) explains it, a “bloc of industrial firms, nativists, police scientists, progressives, quantitative, social scientists and social reformers” mobilized to put “descriptive and reliable data” to use “to transform urban ‘social waste’ into desirable and useful ‘social beings.’” This security surge, however, was a world-relational process: the police-war marking the rise of the United States as hegemonic contender, imperial wars, exemplified by occupation of the Philippines, and the professional era of policing. The subsequent arch of U.S. hegemony and constitutive security surges would, similarly, be shaped by world encompassing police-wars.

***Philippine-American War and the Professional Policing Era.*** The Spanish-American War coincided with the shift from the political era of policing to form one globally integrated police-war made possible by late nineteenth century information revolution. It marked the emergence of the United States as a world power and a contender to hegemonically center the world-system. While the war with Spain was brief, the occupations of Cuba and the Philippines were protracted counterinsurgencies. This period saw the formation of an increasingly centralized state security apparatuses, from the bureaucratizing police departments of the professional era of policing to the growing and increasingly entrenched military and intelligence agencies of a rising world power.

During this time, the United States set up permanent bodies for the collection of foreign intelligence. In 1882, the U.S. Navy established the Office of Naval Intelligence. The U.S. Army followed suit in 1885, setting up the Military Information Division (MID). These new intelligence operations made use of the new technologies for file management. Using a system of hanging files indexed with smart numbers, MID expanded its databases of files from four thousand in 1892 to over three hundred thousand. In preparation for the invasion of Cuba, MID officers mapped the island and gathered human intelligence on the population. During the Philippine-American War, Captain Ralph Van Deman linked the military’s 450 disparate posts throughout the 7,000 island archipelago and established a file card system of information on guerrillas and suspected insurgents. He disseminated all pertinent information to both military and civil personnel (McCoy 2009).

These intelligence operations successfully pacified the Philippines, which became a model of information-led pacification to be put to use and elaborated in different fronts of the police-war. In Manila, the occupation authorities built a cutting-edge information infrastructure: a centralized phone network, telegraph call box system of police-fire alarms and electrical street lights, which provided the backdrop for aggressive operations that rapidly filled police files. By the time of nominal independence in 1935, the Manila Metropolitan police had amassed files on 200,000 Filipinos, or 70 percent of the city. The Philippine Constabulary, now a 6,000 man strong paramilitary force, had pacified the country and built a nationwide intelligence network that included Manuel Quezon, future Philippine president, as an informant and collaborator. These police operations “contain[ed] and then cripp[ed] the radical left, advancing collaborating elites and shifting the center of gravity from militant nationalism to patronage politics” (McCoy 2009: 129).

Domestic policing was another front in this global police-war (Schrader 2019). Progressive reformers sought to break the link between police and political machines. Up to that point, police were untrained, un-uniformed, decentralized and controlled by patronage politics (Platt et al. 1982). Progressive reformism of policing was a manifestation of the United States' rise as a core power and world hegemonic contender after the Civil War. To professionalize policing, reformers instituted civil service systems to end patronage in hiring. They centralized policing in a hierarchical system of precincts under control of the administrative branch of the city government. In larger municipalities, they created specialized units focusing on vice crimes, juvenile offenders, alcohol (during prohibition), narcotics, and intelligence (the infamous "red squads") (Platt et al 1982; Donner 1990; McGirr 2015; Balto 2020). August Vollmer, the chief of the Berkeley Police Department, drew on his service with the Marines in Philippines-American War to break the link between police and political machines. He went on to found the Berkeley School of Criminology, fashioned as "a 'Westpoint' for the domestic 'law enforcement army.'" The faculty "included a chief of police, a district attorney, an FBI administrator, and an assistant chief of security from one of California's concentration camps for Japanese-Americans during World War II" (Dod et al. 2013: 131). He is now canonized as the "grandfather of police professionalization" (Schrader 2020: 67-71).

Similar dynamics were at work with the "State Police Movement." From 1900 to 1920, progressives advocated for a state-level paramilitary police force to address rural crime and suppress labor unrest. Proponents of state police were explicitly worried about "the appearance of a politically active and aggressive labor movement." (Betchtel 1995: 8 The state police were created as "highly centralized, paramilitary forces combining the structure and skills of the army with the civil, order-maintaining aspects of the city police." (Betchtel 1995: 26) Reformers drew on the example of the Royal Irish Constabulary, formed in 1814 to pacify Ireland, and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, created in 1873 to secure Canada's massive rural hinterlands. Pennsylvania formed one of the first and most influential state police forces after a period of sustained and violent militancy in the state's coal mining regions, which featured the prominent involvement of private security, the Pinkerton Detective Bureau and the Coal and Iron Police. Set up in 1905, the Pennsylvania State Police were a paramilitary force that patrolled the rural areas on horseback, armed with rifles.

New communication technologies accompanied these reforms, enabling the control of police precincts from central headquarters. Starting in Boston in 1855, police reformers linked the patrol officer to the precinct with networks of call boxes, and, eventually telephones and alarms. Commanders could now direct cops on the beat (Jefferson 2020). By 1902, there were 148 of these systems installed in U.S. cities (Harring 1983). Successive technologies were grafted on this basic model: teletype system, a telegraph-typewriter hybrid (1923), one-way radio (1928) and two-way radio (1934). By the 1930s, the automobile and centralized call collection set the basic model of policing recognizable today (Kelling 1978). The reforms of the professional era of policing, along with wider package progressive reforms—understood as social-policy-as-social-policing—put in place the "infrastructure of the...wired-piped-tracked metropolis" (Tarr 1992: 6), a new urban

organization which allowed for “the coordinat[ion of] the police forces...for action against riots” (Tarr 1992: 10). Between 1889 and 1915, an estimated 57,000 strikes mobilized 10 million workers (Harring 1983). During this period, police acted as the principal strike breakers, preferred over the army, state militias and private security precisely because professionalization meant they could manage the upheaval with less chaos and political backlash.

The suppression of nationalist resistance in the Philippines and labor unrest in the United States, coupled with the routine policing of racial order, were interlinked fronts in a global police-war that transformed the United States into hegemonic contender and set model for future patterns of pacification. Indeed, Go’s (2020: 1197) mixed method study of the “imperial-military regime” finds U.S. police and military were developing in tandem in “the early 20th century (thus further back than dominant historiography and popular discussions of policing portray).” This “imperial feedback” mechanism was not unidirectional. Rather, “imperial importers (military veterans or not)...classified urban changes in terms of racialized threats homologous with colonial threats overseas” (Go 2020: 1237). Police modernized through a process of imperial feedback, where the problems of working class militancy and the influx of Black and Brown populations migrating internally from the South, “rendered domestic sites more analogous with colonial sites” (Go 2020: 1238). Indeed, Ralph Van Deman, who connected the pacification projects on both ends of the “imperial-military regime” as the founder of the U.S. Military Intelligence Division which organized counterintelligence in the Philippines and domestic countersubversion during World War I, saw the world through an “imperial lens...ethnic communities [were] almost... domestic colonies. In Van Deman’s view, Irish Americans, German Americans, ‘Hindus’ and ‘Negroes’ were all dangerously susceptible to enemy propaganda and required constant surveillance” (McCoy 2009: 299).<sup>1</sup>

These opinions were not unique. They captured the spirit of the Progressive Era, a period of enlightened conservatism when reformers sought to address social problems with technical solutions. These developments inscribed the imperial epistemology within institutions and practices of the U.S. state apparatus. With the manual information regime now embedded in the material life, the pacification projects of the United States became driven by a worldview that privileged information over interpretation, depoliticizing class struggle and revolution as crime and subversion. By the end of World War I, the U.S. state apparatus was larger and stronger: permanent foreign intelligence entities; multiple administrative layers of increasingly bureaucratized law enforcement; proliferating and still partially privatized systems of social-

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<sup>1</sup> Go (2020: 1238) incorrectly asserts that McCoy does “not directly connect domestic race relations with colonial relations and instead emphasizes overseas methods of surveillance and policing were brought home and deployed against the *white* working class.” This misinterpretation is likely rooted in the tedious and formal distinction Go draws between “class-control” theories of policing and his “imperial feedback theory” (Go 2020: 1226). To do so, Go anachronistically views early 20th century “European ethnics” that formed the core of labor movement as “white,” which, of course, oversimplifies the contested and shifting terrain of race and whiteness in the period (Roediger 2005). In contrast, this in paper and related work I see racial- and labor-formation as inseparable processes that create historically specific class compositions (McQuade 2019)

policy-as-social-police. These developments continued as the United States assumed the role of global hegemon after World War II and inaugurated a new systemic cycle of accumulation.

***The Vietnam War and the Community Policing Era.*** When the United States confronted military defeat in the Vietnam, radical revolt around the world, and rebellion at home, another global police-war interacted with a unfolding information revolution in ways that helped restructure U.S. global hegemony and manage the transition from the MC to CM' phase of the systemic cycle of accumulation. In addition to the crisis of accumulation that broke Bretton Woods, radical revolt from below—the anti-colonial struggles exemplified by the Vietnam War and the militancy of Black Power expressed in the urban rebellions—shattered the political compacts that underpinned U.S. global hegemony in the MC period. A new arrangements would, in part, be produced through another global police-war, now supercharged by the technological leap of the digital information revolution.

During the Vietnam War, the CIA and U.S. military computerized data management to direct and evaluate counterinsurgency campaigns at the heart of the war effort. At the Combined Intelligence Staff, Americans uploaded the names of 3000 suspects into an IBM 1401 computer, creating a “computerized blacklist” called the Viet Cong Infrastructure Information System (VCIIS). It was “the first of a series of computer programs designed to absolve the war effort of human error and war managers of individual responsibility” (Valentine 1990: 259). While VCIIS provided operational intelligence, the Hamlet Evaluation System (HES) analyzed data for managerial control. HES measured eighteen variables on a six point scale to quantify the relative stability and degree of government influence in every settlement in South Vietnam. While HES was notoriously inaccurate (it classified 75 percent of South Vietnam’s population as secure on the eve of the Tet Offensive), it gave the war managers means to evaluate their efforts—and defend them to increasingly skeptical public (Gibson 1986). This linear and obsessively casual thinking, however, failed to apprehend the social, cultural, and political bases of Vietnamese nationalism and led to a series of miscalculations that resulted in the shocking defeat of the United States.

Despite this failure, the police reformers drew on the example of Vietnam to reform policing and computerize pacification in order to quell mounting domestic insurgency. In response to the urban rebellions that rocked U.S. cities through the 1960s, the Kerner Commission recommended community policing and modernization, and led the formation of the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA), which drew on the example of the Office of Public Safety, a program of the U.S. Agency for International Development which sent U.S. advisors to train police abroad, often as parts of larger counterinsurgency campaigns (Schrader 2019). From 1968 to 1976, the LEAA dispersed \$758 million in grants to municipal police departments, \$90 million of which went to over 100 computer-driven command control or data processing systems. In 1968, ten states had automated criminal justice information systems. By 1972, only three states lacked such systems (Platt et al. 1977). At the federal level, the FBI created the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) in 1967. By 1974, the NCIC connected all 55 FBI field offices with 94 other law enforcement agencies. It contained 4.9 million total entries, and 400,000 criminal histories. It was

accessed 120,000 times daily. In 1974, the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) created the Regional Information Sharing System (RISS), which set up six multistate intelligence centers.<sup>2</sup> In 1997, BJA created RISSNET, a secure intranet to connect the six RISS centers (Rogers 2004). Drug trafficking provided the impetus for similar initiatives.<sup>3</sup> The “database [was] becoming the central technology of the punitive state” (Jefferson 2020: 47).

At the same time, the liberal wing of the national and local ruling class partnered with private research institutes and non-profits to an in effort to pacify the urban crisis with technocratic expertise. For example, New York City Major John Lindsay partnered with the RAND Corporation to bring the managerial methods of the Defense Department to bear on problems of the country’s largest city. Starting in 1969, 40 analysts at the New York City RAND Institute produced “a number of studies using a ‘systems analysis’ approach...focus[ing] on a narrow objective—preventing crime—and... compar[ing] a wide range of different alternative policies to try to determine the most efficient” (Harcourt 2013: 253). They considered educational and self-defense programs, providing recreational facilities, subsidies and other financial incentives, more stringent requirements for housing assistance, and more police. Ultimately, “the most efficient technique, according to RAND, had a decidedly coercive edge...a style of prevention indexed on policing and punishing.” (Harcourt 2013: 254). Lindsay also tasked with non-profit Vera institute to design plans for riot control. “Vera and other progressive agents of New York City’s non-state civil society,” Shanhan and Kurti (2020) explain, “took on the technocratic tasks of building a local urban counterinsurgency strategy that put into practice Kerner’s recommendations for managing social unrest.” This is the true history of community policing: the domestic application of counterinsurgency (Williams 2011).

These changes further encoded the imperial epistemology into the state apparatus as hot spot policing:

Banishing all context from consideration, ignoring all discoveries in human geography in the past four decades, these theories introduced their own scalar terminology suited for the geographically concentrated War on Crime...No thought was given to the relations between hot spot microareas and the externally imposed social and punitive policies used to manage them. All sources of illegal activity are seen as intrinsic characteristics of microspaces. Even the physical characteristics of these communities have been construed as if they were causes of criminogenic behavior...No distinctions are made between the individual who sells narcotics to

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<sup>2</sup> Middle Atlantic Great Lakes Organized Crime Enforcement Network, the Mid-States Organized Crime Information Center, the New England State Police Information Network, the Rocky Mountain Information Network, Regional Organized Crime Information Center (for the Southeastern states) and the Western States Information Network

<sup>3</sup> In 1974, Drug Enforcement Administration created the El Paso Intelligence Center (EPIC) to be a clearing center and intelligence analysis hub for information on the cross-border traffic in drugs, guns and undocumented immigrations (DOJ Office of Inspector General 2010). Starting in 1988, the DEA’s EPIC was complemented by Investigative Support Centers, interagency intelligence centers funded through High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area initiative—a program of Office of National Drug Control Policy, one the federal partners in the aforementioned Hemisphere Project. As of 2013, there are 32 of these centers (GOA 2013).

support a family and the individual who sells them for a gun cartel in computational criminology's system of reference, yet both are coded as targets for heightened police scrutiny. Nor can this criminology grasp the qualitative differences between the crime events it analyzes. No meaningful distinction is made between a chemically addicted person who commits a drug offense, the homeless person who steals food, or the youth who murders for sport. Each subject is an interchangeable target for differential patrolling and punishment. This is extreme positivism, as that which is posited, that which is given, that is, the state's datasets, establishes the limits of intelligibility. (Jefferson 2020: 53, 55-56)

In this way, the imperial epistemology now in the guise of hot spot policing "facilitated the century-old practice of decontextualizing the outcomes of racialized governance, this time through digital computing architectures" (Jefferson 2020: 56).

While hot spot policing has a longer lineage, it became dominant after highly acclaimed experiments in New York City. In 1994, the NYPD launched "computerized statistics" or CompStat, which compiles "up-to-date computerized crime data, crime analysis, and advanced crime mapping as the bases for regularized interactive crime strategy meetings which hold managers accountable for specific crime strategies and solutions in their areas" (Silverman 1999: 258). Like the VCIIS and HES during the Vietnam War, CompStat operates on two fronts. Operationally, it uses crime analysis to identify crime trends and plan targeted deployments to address them. It is closely related to "public order" and "broken windows policing," which emphasize the focused application of police power to target "problem people and places" and address "quality of life issues" such as vagrancy, vandalism and other "anti-social behaviors" (Harcourt 2009: 47-51). Managerially, it tightens control over police labor. The NYPD replaced more than a third of its precinct commanders in the first year and half of CompStat (Walsh and Vito 2004: 60).

Proponents credit CompStat with New York City's dramatic decrease in crime rates between 1993 and 1999: murders decreased by 66 percent, assaults declined by 36 percent, robberies dropped by 58 percent, rapes fell by 40 percent and motor vehicle thefts declined by 65 percent. With these seemingly self-evident results, the CompStat model has spread to cities across the United States and world (Henry 2003). The falling crime rate, however, was a nationwide trend, making the link between specific policing policies and crime difficult to prove. "New York City's spectacular drop in crime tells us little, if anything," Harcourt (2009: 9) explains; "Many large cities—including Boston, Houston, Los Angeles, St. Louis, San Diego, San Antonio, San Francisco, and Washington, D.C.—have experienced significant declines in crime."

The imperial epistemology creates the illusion of control. The inability to link CompStat to falling crime—like the spectacular failures of computerized counterinsurgency in Vietnam—has not created major problems for the managers of state violence. Indeed, the data-driven and intelligence-led policing models continued to spread through the 1990s and 2000s, despite evidence that they may actually increase crime (Harcourt and Ludwig 2006) and hurt police-community relations (Manning 2008). Such nuances, however, did not dissuade American policymakers from running headlong into the illusory clarity offered by reducing complex social problems to measurable units and performance metrics. As Sampson and Raudenbush (1999: 638) observed, "tough police tactics may thus be a politically popular but perhaps analytically weak

strategy to reduce crime” or, as Williams (2020: 55), puts it “the political function that underlies the steady march of digital computing into criminological knowledge is twofold. The process is conservative, as it ignores the conditions in which populations are criminalized, and liberal in that it does so in the name of scientific objectivity.”

***Iraq/Afghanistan and the Homeland Security Era.*** In the last two decades, “big data” has emerged in the context of War on Terror and the homeland security era of policing, prompting a tremendous leap in the pacification powers of U.S. security agencies. There are the programs exposed by Edward Snowden: The NSA collects virtually all communications through a series of programs it operates in partnerships with telecom firms and other governments; PRISM, a searchable database of internet and telephony metadata, allows NSA analyst to recreate an individual’s web of relations by data-mining their communications; X-KEYSCORE, the NSA’s “widest reaching” system which allows real-time monitoring of a person’s online activities, including emails, social media activity, and browser history (Greenwald 2014). The NSA even provides its analytic tools for the rest of the intelligence community. ICREACH, a “simple ‘Google-like’ search interface,” allows analysts with other agencies to search 850 billion records and perform advanced types of surveillance “such as ‘pattern of life analysis,’ which involves monitoring who individuals communicate with and the places they visit over a period of several months, in order to observe their habits and predict future behavior.” Leaked documents list the DEA, FBI, CIA and Defense Intelligence Agency as the main users of the system (Gallagher 2014).

The military and the CIA also leverage “big data” for the purposes of pacification. In 2004, the Pentagon’s Defense Science Board called for a “New Manhattan Project” to exploit the full potential of a computerized information regime for pacification, what military planners call “identity dominance” (Graham 2010). One of the results of this effort is the “disposition matrix,” a database that integrates the kill lists of Joint Special Operations Command and the CIA. While the details of the system remain classified, “the disposition matrix” begins with the analysis of telephony metadata, which is combined with more traditional sources of intelligence information to both formulate a list of “high value targets” and recommend methods to “neutralize” them. It even targets individuals whose identities are unknown but fit a certain profile of demographics and behaviors. These attacks are called “signature strikes” (Scahill 2013).

Domestically, police are using comparable systems. The DHS funded a national network of “fusion centers” to link the over half a million law enforcement agencies in the United States with the rest of the intelligence community, enabling the “800,000 plus law enforcement officers across the country...[to]...function as the ‘eyes and ears’ of an extended national security community” (Rollins 2007: 7). Like the big data systems of the NSA, DOD and CIA, fusion centers attempt to coordinate the varied information systems and data streams that characterize the computerized information regime. Fusion centers have a potentially limitless “all crimes, all hazards” mission rather than a narrower focus on, for example, counter-narcotics or case support for law enforcement (Rollins 2007). They are clearinghouses where “disparate data are drawn together as

needed, invested with meaning, communicated to others, and then discarded such that no records exist of such surveillance activities” (Monahan and Regan 2012: 302).

Some fusion centers have developed intelligence capabilities similar to the “disposition matrix.” The New Jersey Regional Operations Intelligence Center (ROIC), for example, uses “predictive analytics” to forecast future events. At the ROIC, a private contractor from GeoEye, a geospatial mapping and data analytics firm, uses a proprietary algorithm to mine big data for statistically significant correlations. The first step is to geo-code crime data and create a density map. Using GeoEye’s propriety software, Signature Analyst, this crime map is run against hundreds of layers of other data concerning the physical and human geography of the region to predict future occurrences. Before being acquired by GeoEye, Spatial Data Analytics Corporation, an early innovator in predictive analytics, developed Signature Analyst to predict the locations of the improvised explosive devices used against U.S. forces in Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>4</sup> At the NJ ROIC, the GeoEye analyst uses the same software to forecast shootings and serial crimes (GeoEye Analyst 2013).

At sites like fusion centers, technologies from the battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan are put to work to manage problems specific to this conjuncture. Fusion centers play an unacknowledged role in decarceration, the 9 percent drop in state and federal prison populations in the last decade. They pull together police, community supervision, the courts, and other government and private sector entities in aggressive police operations to manage criminalized populations outside the prison. Intelligence generated at fusion centers and similar police intelligence hubs are the starting points for warrant sweeps, compliance checks, chronic offender initiatives, saturation patrols, and other more specialized policing programs. In different ways, these operations target the same populations that cycle in and out prison and jails and are overly administered by social services, child ware, and other institutions adjacent to the criminal legal system. In this way, the rise of big data policing should, perhaps, be better understood as part of an ongoing shift from mass incarceration to mass supervision. Police surveillance increasingly supplement the contracting prison but without addressing the underlying social problems that made the United States the world’s top jailer (McQuade 2019). This is the bipartisan reform agenda known as “smart on crime.”

To counter dominant narratives of police professionalization, this world-history positions big data policing as an emergent property of the complex and contingent concatenation of forces that constitute this conjuncture: the information revolutions that reorganized social relations and cultural conditions, the police-wars shaping the arch of the U.S. hegemony, and the extreme form of positivism and empiricism that animates the pacification projects of the United States. This history reveals big data policing as the latest outgrowth of constitutive imperial epistemology that reduces social problems into technical issues of management. Across the successive police-wars

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<sup>4</sup> SPADAC was bought out by GeoEye for \$46 million in December 2010. After GeoEye lost a large contract from the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency in 2012, GeoEye agreed to \$900 million merger with their largest competitor Digital Globe, which will lead the enlarged company. In 2017, Digital Globe merged with Maxar Technologies,

of U.S. hegemony, the increasingly sophisticated pacification obscures disruptive political questions. “The modern approach,” Harcourt (2013: 257) explains “claims to be objective, apolitical and neutral. It claims to be merely pursuing the most efficient policy option given an agreed-upon narrow objective. But it ultimately reintroduces political values and choices into the analyses, paradoxically, by bracketing explicit discussion of politics.”

### **Smart Policing and Shallow Politics**

In the current moment, the use of “big data” by security agencies obscures one of the most important questions in global politics: how to manage the decline of U.S. power in the context of hegemonic crisis grounded in the exhaustion of the MC’ phase of U.S. hegemony. The rate of profit is falling and the world-economy is mired in a “long depression (Roberts 2016). At the start of the Cold War, the United States hegemony was guaranteed by a network of 500 military bases. This arrangement was sustainable when the United States accounted for half the global gross product in a CM period expansion. Today, however, the United States struggles to maintain 40 percent of the world’s weapons with less than a quarter of the global economic output. In this context, the NSA’s \$11 billion for global surveillance and cyberwarfare looks like cost effective solution for the problems of declining world power, especially in comparison to the \$3 trillion cost of the invasion and occupation of Iraq (McCoy 2014). A leaked NSA report (2012: 3) confirms as much. It predicts that “the rise of emerging powers, a globalizing economy, historic transfer of relative wealth and economic power from West to East and the growing influence of non-state actors” will make the global system “constructed following the Second World War...almost unrecognizable.” In order to meet these new challenges, the NSA called for “a profound and revolutionary shift...to a SIGNIT system that is as agile and dynamic as the information space we confront.”

This is the context of current debate between those hoping to realize the liberal dream of scientifically managed, democratically controlled policing through a reform of big data policing and abolitionist who seek fundamental structural change. This effort to historicize “big data” and its use by police is a small effort to disabuse us of the utopian claims that accompany “big data” and direct our attention to the urgent political problems that the paradigm threatens to obscure. Locating a large and complex phenomenon like “big data” and its use by law enforcement in a larger global and historical context provides important perspective. For this reason, I historicized “big data” in relation to the progressive consolidation of the manual and computerized information regimes and the police-wars that structured the rise and decline of the United States as a global power. These police-wars and associated period of political crisis trigger security surges. They are periods of “punctuated equilibrium” where an information regime consolidates within the material life and practices that constitute policing. Fully reckoning with the problems of (big data) policing requires a paradigm shift that expands the parameters of discussion: from governing through crime (Simon 2007) and policing a system of needs (Neocleous 1997) to “a positive politics rooted in a

conception of human need, one that not only seeks to meet human needs as needs but builds momentum toward systems transition” (McQuade and Neocleous 2020: 9).

This was precisely the main point communicated by the George Floyd Rebellions that gripped American cities in the summer of 2020: an emphatic rejection of prevailing order things combined with an expansive solidarity oriented toward the construction of a new world. The efforts of liberal dream of democratically controlled, scientifically managed policing muddles the moral clarity and political imperative that emerged from the tear gassed choked streets: defund the police. This demand, however, has implications far beyond U.S. politics. Understood in the context of the police-wars of U.S. hegemony, defunding the police also means dismantling the security apparatus—the global policeman (Schrader 2020)—and reviving the left internationalism necessary to apprehend and address the scale of social problems in the world today.

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