

# Re-examining CCTV Footage and Re-imagining Justice through a Critical Black Gaze

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# **Re-examining CCTV Footage and Re-imagining Justice through a Critical Black Gaze: The ‘Justice 4 Dea-John Reid’ Campaign’s Dark Sousveillance<sup>1</sup>**

Katharina Karcher

## **Abstract:**

On 31 May 2021, a 14-year-old Black boy was racially abused, chased through the street by a white mob, and fatally stabbed in Birmingham, United Kingdom. Dea-John Reid’s family and friends had the hope that the trial in 2022 would result in a racially aggravated murder conviction. However, a jury with no Black members dropped the racism charges, acquitted most of the defendants and convicted the main suspect of manslaughter. As this article shows, the ‘Justice 4 Dea-John Reid’ campaign’s dark sousveillance challenged the jury’s white innocence by publicly re-examining and re-narrating key CCTV evidence used in the trial through a critical Black gaze. Driven by the critical hope for a more inclusive and diverse justice system, the JFDJR campaign is proposing concrete steps to improve how suspected racism cases in the UK are handled.

**Keywords:** Dea-John Reid, racism, UK, darks sousveillance, CCTV, white innocence, jury, trial, justice

The life of Dea-John Reid, my son, a young Black man, did not matter.

Joan Morris (2022)

According to Nikki Sullivan and Samantha Murray (2011: vii), somatechnics can be conceptualised as ‘a form of ethico-political practice’ interrogating the materialisation (and violent destruction) of embodied being. Seen from this perspective, corporealities are neither natural nor stable. Instead, embodiment is analysed as a dynamic process shaped and regulated by a range of everyday practices, administrative processes, and technologies. What makes this process political is that it enables some bodies to thrive, whilst reducing others to expendable bodies ‘whose right to be is put fundamentally into question’ (Perera and Pugliese 2011: 2). A critical mapping and analysis of embodiment and violence is therefore not only a political but also an ethical challenge. Often, such research entails working hand in hand with victims and grassroots activists to document and analyse manifestations of violence that have received little or no attention by scholars and political authorities. In this context, researchers are not neutral observers and could not possibly claim this status. Rather, this kind of research is characterised by a ‘radical entanglement’ (Geerts and Carstens 2019: 918) and ethical commitment to support grassroots movements ‘answering back to the necropolitical command to be’ (Perera and Pugliese 2011: 2).

As the ‘Justice 4 Dea-John Reid’ (J4DJR) campaign<sup>2</sup> discussed in this article illustrates, this ‘answering back’ to necropolitics can take many forms. The JFDJR campaign was founded in response to a brutal act of violence against a body marked as Black, young, and male. On 31 May 2021, Dea-John Reid was out to play football with friends in his hometown Birmingham, United Kingdom. On his way home, he was racially abused and attacked by a group of five people, including two adult men. Several members of the group were masked and armed. Dea-John was unarmed. He ran for his life. When he had to slow down because of his asthma, one

of the attackers caught up with him and stabbed him in the chest. Dea-John died alone without being able to say good-bye to his family and friends.

The attack on Dea-John occurred in broad daylight in a busy part of town. The last 90 minutes of Dea-John's life including the moment when he was killed with a large kitchen knife were captured on closed-circuit television (CCTV). Within 24 hours police identified and arrested the main suspects. After collecting and analysing more than 800 witness statements and 1,000 hours of video footage, investigating officers charged the perpetrator with racially aggravated murder. Key CCTV evidence was shown in court during the trial against the main suspects in the case. However, despite seeing the attack unfold on CCTV, the jury decided to drop these charges and to acquit most suspects involved in the attack. Dea-John's family and friends experienced this as a second violent blow. The trial and court decision left Dea-John's mother Joan Morris feeling that the life of her son, a young Black man, did not matter. Anti-racist campaigners and critical scholars have long warned that allegedly neutral surveillance technologies such as CCTV monitoring in public spaces operate differently upon Black and white bodies. In the late 1990s, John Fiske described the rapid expansion of video surveillance in United States cities as 'a control mechanism directed particularly upon the Black male' (1998: 69). According to Fiske (1998: 71), CCTV surveillance is an ideal technology for 'non-racist racism,' because the ubiquity and apparent impartiality of cameras can be used effectively to mask racial differences in the use and effects of this technology. He stressed that in 'a racially unstable society, where whites are about to lose their dominance' (1995: 68), this surveillance is deeply racialised: the seeing eye is white, and its object is coloured.

The 1990s saw a rapid expansion of CCTV monitoring in the US and Europe, including Britain. The British government was particularly keen to embrace this new technology. In 1995, Britain

had more CCTV systems in public places than any other advanced capitalist nation (Graham et al. 1995: 2). However, not everyone was convinced that CCTV monitoring would reduce crime and make everyone feel safer. In fact, Fiske (1998: 72) rightly points out that Birmingham City Council was among a few local authorities refusing to install CCTV systems for ethical reasons (that is, concerns around data storage). However, Birmingham City Council soon changed course and established a control hub in the city centre to monitor a quickly growing number of CCTV cameras in public spaces in the city. Today, the Birmingham Control Centre (2023: n. p.) claims to be one of ‘Europe’s leading centres for public space CCTV monitoring’ and offers a range of services to public authorities and private clients.

According to one estimate, there were more than 109,000 surveillance cameras in Birmingham in 2022, making it one of the cities with the most CCTV cameras in the UK.<sup>3</sup> The ubiquity of CCTV cameras should not obscure the fact that this form of surveillance remains deeply controversial. In fact, the use of CCTV in Birmingham offers a fascinating case study of the dynamic and complex relation between bodies and technologies. In the early 2000s, hundreds of cameras were installed on the three motorways encircling the city (AMG Systems 2009). While there was little resistance to the use of CCTV to monitor traffic flow, the installation of cameras in some public spaces and residential areas sparked protests. In 2009, counter-terrorism funding was used to install 216 CCTV and Automated Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) cameras in two areas of the city that were home to almost half of its Muslim population (Isakjee and Allen 2013: 755). The official narrative was that the aim of this surveillance scheme was to monitor and tackle all sorts of crime – but this was later revealed to be ‘false information’ (766), because ‘Project Champion’ was a counter-terrorism operation. When a

local campaign against the scheme began to attract national media attention, local authorities decided to remove all cameras funded by Project Champion.

The campaign against Project Champion in Birmingham constitutes a good example of what Simone Browne (2015) calls ‘dark sousveillance.’ Drawing on Steve Mann’s concept of sousveillance as a type of surveillance from below, Browne conceptualises dark sousveillance as an ‘imaginative place from which to mobilize a critique of racializing surveillance’ (2015: 21). Racialising surveillance creates and reinforces racialised patterns of oppression by reifying ‘boundaries, borders, and bodies along racial lines’ (16). Dark sousveillance seeks to expose and challenge these practices and patterns. According to Browne, dark sousveillance can take many forms, including anti-surveillance and counter-surveillance. As we shall see, dark sousveillance is a response to practices of surveillance done by or carried out on behalf of ‘an entity in a position of power’ (18). But, it is not purely oppositional. Rather, it is driven by the hope that a different future is possible.

As this article shows, J4DJR offers a fascinating case study of dark sousveillance. Unlike the Project Champion initiative, the J4DJR campaign does not have the goal of removing CCTV cameras in public spaces. Rather, the activists involved in the campaign made the difficult decision to share CCTV footage of the attack on Dea-John to expose and challenge the white innocence (see Wekker 2016) of the jury through a critical Black gaze (see hooks 1992). And the campaign did not stop there. Driven by the critical hope for a more inclusive and diverse justice system, the JFDJR campaign is proposing concrete steps to improve how suspected racism cases are handled. The first section of this article gives a brief overview of the trial and shows how Dea-John’s family and friends tried to expose and challenge the white innocence of the jury in court. The second section focuses on the aftermath of the trial and analyses how

activists used JFDJR campaign rallies to re-examine key CCTV evidence and to re-turn the gaze. The third and last section focuses on the future aims of the JFDJR campaign, which are driven by critical hope for a more inclusive and diverse justice system.

## **The Trial**

The trial against the men and youths involved in the attack on Dea-John Reid began in February 2022 and ended in May 2022. On the fourth day of the murder trial against George Khan (age 39), Michael Shields (age 36) and three minors, graphic footage of Dea-John Reid's violent death was shown in court. According to an observer, some of the 'unnerving footage was replayed at different speeds several times, prompting two members of the victim's family to leave the court in tears' (Erdington Local 2022: n. p.). It was devastating for Dea-John Reid's family and friends to see repeatedly on screen how he was racially abused, chased, and brutally killed, but they took comfort in the fact that the footage provided clear evidence. In their eyes, the attack was a clear case of joint enterprise and racially aggravated murder. Because they are crucial to the case, both concepts shall be explained at least briefly.

In England and Wales, an offence is classified as racially aggravated if the offender demonstrates hostility towards the victim based on the victim's perceived racial background, or if the offence 'is motivated (wholly or partly) by hostility towards members of a racial or religious group based on their membership of that group' ('Crime and Disorder Act 1998', 1998). In the case of murder, this hostility needs to be paired with the intention to cause serious harm or take life and result in the unlawful killing of one or more people. If there is convincing evidence that individuals were not of sound mind when they caused someone's death or that they acted in self-defence, their actions will usually not be treated as murder. A murder

conviction requires a suspect to play a substantial role in the death of another human being. However, under UK law police authorities can prosecute individuals who are not directly involved in crimes under 'Joint Enterprise' and punish them as if they were principal offenders. This is possible only if a court decides that these individuals knew of the crime in advance and did nothing to stop it and/or were part of a situation enabling this crime.

An independent review published in 2017 found that people who identify as BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) were significantly overrepresented among those convicted under Joint Enterprise ('The Lammy Review' 2017: 19). A pilot study from 2023 concluded that Black men were almost 16 times more likely to be prosecuted under Joint Enterprise than white men (Hattenstone 2023). Previous research suggests that this could be linked this to the fact that Black men are more likely to be considered gang members. As Patrick Williams and Becky Clarke (2016: 16) have shown 'gang' discourse as a prosecution strategy is reliant upon a 'common-sense', racialised, and stereotypical discourse that links BAME men with an involvement with gangs, drugs, and violence. Of course, the impact of such racialised stereotypes is not limited to Black defendants. They are equally likely to shape the perception of Black victims.

The CCTV footage played in court during the Dea-John Reid provided clear evidence that the defendants travelled to the crime site together. Some were masked and were carrying weapons. The video showed the group chase Dea-John. A doorbell camera recorded some of the threats and racist slurs that they hurled at the victim, and several eyewitnesses confirmed hearing the racist abuse. The cameras also captured the moment when a 14-year-old boy with a balaclava and gloves stabbed Dea-John with a large kitchen knife (that he had brought from home). In a victim impact statement on the last day of the trial, Joan Morris said: 'Having to sit through a



trial watching the last moment of my son's life on CCTV footage, the terror that he must have felt prior to being deliberately knifed to death.'<sup>4</sup>

Despite seeing on CCTV how Dea-John was chased and stabbed in the chest by the 14-year-old main defendant, a move which 'carried a high risk of death or really serious injury' (Johnson 2022), the jury found that the boy did not intend to cause serious bodily harm. As a result, the murder charges against all defendants were dropped. As the confidentiality of the jury room in Britain is sacrosanct, Dea-John's family and friends could neither find out *why* nor *how* the jury had reached this conclusion.<sup>5</sup> The main defendant claimed that he had been robbed by Dea-John Reid and his friends on the day of the attack and claimed that the stabbing was an act of self-defence. Dea-John Reid's status as a legitimate crime victim was questioned repeatedly during and after the trial. Some went as far as suggesting that Dea-John was to be blamed for his own death. One (anonymous) comment on a local news page illustrates this: 'he [Dea-John] was going around robbing children at knifepoint, that's what happens when you play with fire' (Erdington Local 2022: n. p.). While this is an extreme position, it illustrates how the so-called gang discourse can impact the perception of Black victims.

In the UK, knife crime has long been framed as a 'Black problem.' As the pioneering work of Stuart Hall and his colleagues at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies has shown, in 1970s Britain mugging became 'unambiguously assigned as black crime, located in and arising from the conditions of life in the black urban areas' (Hall et al. 2013: 322). A 2021 study found that knife crime is still strongly associated with 'the actions of a particular demographic; young, Black-inner city males' (Williams and Squires 2021: 52). When he was attacked, Dea-John was alone and unarmed – and yet, some saw him as a threat. In her victim statement towards the end of the trial, Joan Morris commented on this:

I have seen defence tactics which have placed slurs upon my son's memory, and I have really seen it, as though it was Dea-John my son, that were on trial. Many may be of the view that he was up to no good with his friends, however, he did not hurt anyone physically, he was also unarmed and he had not robbed anyone.

In contrast to Dea-John's family and friends, the jury did not consider the attack racist. In his concluding statement, the Judge mentioned race only once when he condemned the 'disgusting racist abuse' (Johnson 2022) hurled at Dea-John Reid. By limiting the racial dimension of the attack to the words that one member of the group shouted prior to the stabbing, the jury (which consisted of eleven white-British and one British-Asian member) made clear that they saw no evidence for racially aggravated murder. Their inability or unwillingness to imagine how Dea-John Reid's family and friends and Black communities across the country would interpret the same footage is symptomatic of white innocence (see Wekker 2016). The UK and other European Nations have a long history of racial exploitation, colonial expansion (Lehning 2013), and racial violence (Cunningham et al. 2021). For long periods in European history, violence against Black bodies was normalised and the experience and knowledge of a white enlightened subject was universalised. Gloria Wekker (2016: 2) rightly emphasises that in this context whiteness is 'so ordinary, so lacking in characteristics, so normal, so devoid of meaning,' that many white people do not even notice how it directs their gaze and how it shapes patterns of identification and differentiation.

In her book *White Innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race*, Wekker (2016: 170) describes a common phenomenon in the Netherlands: when confronted with narratives and/or images of slavery, white men, especially older ones, tend to identify with white men in the film or narrative. She argues that it is vital to challenge these 'worn-out patterns of identification' that tend to operate below the level of consciousness (170):

My points are precisely, first, that we cannot afford to leave those identifications below the level of consciousness and, second, that we need to change our understanding of the unconscious from the ‘privatized, individualized and claustrophobic Freudian conception’ to one that sees the unconscious as ‘the life of others and other things within us’ (Gordon 2008). One of the tasks ahead, if we want to move beyond the present stalemate, move beyond ‘aggressive ignorance’ (Mills 2007) and fearful avoidance, is to become conscious of those patterns and then to be able to choose whom we want to identify with.

Unconscious patterns of identification and racial bias can be difficult to expose and challenge. The JDFR campaign is an interesting case study. In a first step, the activists challenged the white innocence of the jury by publicly re-examining the CCTV evidence through a critical Black gaze. According to bell hooks (1992: 116), a critical Black gaze is ‘one that “looks” to document, one that is oppositional.’ In her victim statement, Joan Morris confronted the jury with her critical Black gaze and offered a different reading of the CCTV footage. She stressed that her son was a victim, not a perpetrator. She urged the court to consider that the defendants had acted like ‘a Lynch mob reminiscent of a scene from Mississippi Burning.’ Joan Morris’s victim statement situated the attack on her son in a global history of anti-Black racism and violence and shifted the focus from the alleged threat posed by a young Black man to the threat posed by the white ‘mob’ chasing him.<sup>6</sup>

### **Re-turning The Gaze**

In her discussion of dark sousveillance, Browne discusses a range of historical and contemporary forms of resistance against racialising surveillance. Thousands of Black slaves in the American South risked their lives to challenge and confront the extreme surveillance regimes of white plantation owners. Browne argues that the narratives of ex-slaves and other testimonies ‘recall the brutalities of slavery (instruments of punishment, plantation regulation, slave patrols)’ but they also illustrate how ‘black performative practices and creative acts

(fiddling, songs, and dancing) ... were employed by people as a way to escape and resist enslavement, and in so being were freedom acts' (2015: 22). Some of these practices enabled current or former slaves to evade surveillance, for example, by using an alias or by passing as white. Others constituted forms of counter-surveillance, for instance, watching the watchmen or using songs and other creative means to warn others of approaching slave patrols. According to Browne, these creative acts of resistance offer critical insights into 'how the contemporary surveillance of the racial body might be contended with' (24).

Knowing that 'there is power in looking' (hooks 1992: 115), Dea-John's family and friends decided to share and discuss the CCTV footage of the attack with a wider audience. At the request of Dea-John's family, police released some of the CCTV evidence used in the trial to the public. The campaign leads used interviews with local and national media and speeches during public gatherings in Birmingham to re-examine and re-narrate the video footage. I participated in several of these public gatherings. The analysis in this article reflects my partial and situated knowledge (Haraway 1988) as a fellow resident of Birmingham, a mother, and an academic with a research focus on violence and crime.

On 9 July 2022, more than one hundred people gathered at a busy road in Kingstanding, Birmingham. After leaving floral tributes at the spot where Dea-John Reid was killed, they began marching towards Perry Barr. Many people who marched through Birmingham with Dea-John's family and friends on that hot summer day carried placards and banners with slogans and images. The most common photograph on posters and T-shirts featured a handsome boy with a gentle smile and kind eyes: Dea-John Reid. On some placards, this image was juxtaposed with a photograph of the man who had racially assaulted Dea-John during the attack: George Khan. The same poster also featured an enlarged CCTV image taken seconds

before Dea-John was stabbed (see figure 1). In many ways, the blurry image spoke for itself: it shows Dea-John running for his life. He is clearly unarmed. Rather than looking forward, he is looking back at the white boy who is chasing him with a large knife in his hand. This boy is George Khan's son. Although the poster did not name the killer, it established a clear visual link between him and Khan by placing Khan's image directly above that of his son's. It states: 'George Khan: Guilty as Hell' (see close-up in figure 2).



**Figure 1 [2022]. 'Protest March in Kingstanding, Birmingham.'** (Photograph by author)



Figure 2 [2022]. ‘Close up of “Guilty as Hell” poster.’ (Photograph by author)

On their march through the streets of Birmingham, the movements of the protesters were captured by the same CCTV cameras that had documented Dea-John’s death. Unlike the protest against Project Champion discussed in the introduction, the JFDJR initiative is no anti-surveillance campaign. The participants in the march on 9 July 2022 did not avoid the gaze of the ubiquitous cameras (hidden and open) in public spaces. Nevertheless, their embodied presence, chants, speeches and placards can be understood as a form of dark sousveillance. By re-turning the gaze of the cameras, by showing, naming and shaming perpetrators of racist violence, and by challenging the white innocence of the jury, they showed that the gaze can be ‘a site of resistance for colonized black people’ (hooks 1992: 116).

According to bell hooks, the critical Black gaze has the potential to change reality. She notes that even ‘in the worst circumstances of domination, the ability to manipulate one’s gaze in the face of structures of domination that would contain it, opens up the possibility of agency’ (hooks 1992: 116). Of course, it is equally important to add that this ‘answering back to the necropolitical command to cease to be’ (Perera and Pugliese 2011: 2) is a dangerous move that

is often met with extreme hostility and violence. The experience of some of the activists involved in the JFDJR campaign clearly confirms this. When attending a rally in the city centre, I witnessed an assault on a speaker. The situation did not escalate because the crowd remained calm and protected the speaker from further attacks. The threatening behaviour was not limited to public rallies. One activist told me that he had received death threats. Such attempts to intimidate and silence activists did not stop the campaign. Rather, they confirmed the activists' view that broader social, political, and cultural transformations were needed to get justice for Dea-John and other Black victims of crime.

### **Re-imagining Justice**

The young man who stabbed Dea-John was given a six-and-a-half-year prison sentence for manslaughter. Dea-John's family and friends were shocked by this decision. They felt that the jury had identified with the perpetrators of the crime and had failed to see the attack through the eyes of the victim and the Black communities across the country. Joan Morris's victim statement at the end of the trial began with a passionate defence of her child. She said: 'He was not a Nigga, he was not a black bastard, he wasn't someone to be banged out; he was my son, a brother, an uncle and a nephew, a cousin, and a friend'. This was not only a powerful response to the man who used these very words to intimidate and threaten Dea-John but also a clear message to the court and the public. Dea-John Reid's family and friends firmly rejected the court's attempt to limit the racist dimension of this attack to a few "disgusting" words used by one individual prior to (and separately from) the stabbing.

The 2021 census officially confirmed that Birmingham is one of the UK's first super-diverse cities, where citizens from so-called ethnic minorities now make up more than half of the population. The capital of the Midlands has a long history of migration, and of racism and anti-

racist campaigning. After a massive recruitment drive on behalf of the British government in the post-WWII (world war) years, two million immigrants – ‘predominantly from India, Pakistan and the West Indies ... had settled in the industrial centres around London and the West Midlands’ (Schofield 2013: 210-11). In the 1960s, Conservative politicians in the West Midlands used openly racist tactics to attract Labour voters (Hayter 2004: 49-50). The Conservative Peter Griffiths controversially won a seat in the House of Commons by telling residents in the Midlands: ‘If you want a n\*\*\*\*\* for your neighbour, vote Labour’ (BBC 2015: n. p.).

On 20 April 1968, the Conservative MP Enoch Powell ‘became both hero and villain to the nation overnight’ with his infamous Rivers of Blood speech given in Birmingham against Commonwealth immigration to Britain (Whipple 2009: 717). Powell (1968: n. p.) warned that it would only be a question of time until ‘the black man will have the whip hand over the white man’ in Great Britain. Although Powell was ostracised in his own party after his Birmingham speech, he received more than 100,000 letters of support and was seen by many as the voice of the ‘silent majority’ in Britain (Whipple 2009: 717–18).

Powell’s fears for the future of white Britain were as much about cultural dominance and political power as about demographics. Powell’s whip reference evoked the violent history of slavery whilst carefully avoiding any acknowledgement of the pain and suffering that this history has inflicted on Black bodies. Instead, Powell focused on the white man’s fear of a potential role reversal. Slavery, notes Eddie Chambers (2013: 295) ‘is remembered by White-British people in ways that are markedly different to its memory amongst Black-British people.’ What makes language and violence racist is thus not only a question of legal definitions but also one of historical perspective and lived experience. While the population of Birmingham



and other cities in the UK are now officially categorised as superdiverse, many juries do not reflect this diversity. This is not the result of an explicitly racist policy. Rather, it is because the random selection of jury members is based solely on the electoral register, even if it is well-established that young people and ethnic minorities are significantly underrepresented on the electoral register (see Merrick 2019). Dea-John's family and friends are convinced that the jury's lack of consideration for the racist nature of the violent attack which culminated in his killing was a direct result of the lack of diversity of the jury and the prevalence of white innocence.

Subsequent studies have stressed the importance of ethnically diverse jury panels in racism cases. As early as 1993, the Royal Commission on Criminal Justice called for 'a specific procedure to be available where the case is believed to have a racial dimension' (1993: 133). They argued that in such cases it should be possible for the prosecution or defence to request the selection of a 'jury containing up to three people from ethnic minority communities' (133). The Auld review from 2001 made a similar case. It highlighted that racial bias in juries can impact the fairness of trials and concluded that 'widening the range of backgrounds and experience on the jury ... could be a positive aid to over-all fairness in cases of particular ethnic sensitivity' (Auld 2001: 158).

A study by Cheryl Thomas (2010), by contrast, found that the ethnic composition of juries has no significant impact on their decisions. In a subsequent study, the same author (Thomas 2017: 876) went as far as to claim that 'unlike all other stages in the criminal justice process in England and Wales, the one stage where members of BAME [Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic] groups appear not to be treated disproportionately is when a jury, made up of members of the public, reaches a verdict by deliberation.' This research has been used by the Ministry of

Justice (MoJ) to reject Joan Morris's claim that the jury might have reached a different conclusion in a case involving a white victim and Black perpetrator. In a statement, the MoJ declared: 'Successive academic studies have shown [juries] deliver fair and impartial results, regardless of their ethnic make-up or the ethnicity of the defendant' (Mackie 2022: n. p.).

The jury in the Dea-John Reid case did not have a single Black member. Even if this fact had no impact on the jury's decision, it has clearly undermined trust in the jury process and the justice system as a whole. The victim's family and his friends left the court feeling that 'if the roles had been reversed and Dea-John had attacked one of the white boys, the outcome would have been different' (Mackie 2022: n. p.). According to Dea-John's mother, her son 'was twice a victim – once when he was killed and again because of the justice system' (n. p.). The posters and speeches at the JFDJR rallies showed that many people felt similarly about the trial. Many placards featured the slogan 'Killed by Racists – Sentenced by Racism'.

Dea-John Reid's family and friends believe that a jury with members from different ethnic background and with different lived experiences would have responded differently to the CCTV evidence shown in court. A lack of research on the use of video evidence in racism-related cases in the UK makes it difficult to verify this assumption. However, there is no reason to assume that juries are exempt from the unconscious patterns of identification analysed by Wekker, hooks, and other critical Black thinkers. In *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, bell hooks (1992) rightly stressed that who we identify with (or not) is not necessarily a conscious decision and is influenced by a range of factors including gender, race, social background, and lived experience.

The JFDJR campaign is driven by critical hope for a less violent and racist world. Building on Paulo Freire's work on hope, Ronald David Glass (2014: 102) argues that 'critical hope identifies possible actions that embed strategic political force despite situational limits; it recognizes that justice lies beyond each new horizon and requires ongoing work and struggle.' In sharp contrast to Powell's claims, the Black activists leading the JFDJR campaign do not want to get the 'whip hand over the white man.' Rather, they fight for racial justice and a justice system that works for all. As Browne (2015: 21) highlights, dark sousveillance 'plots imaginaries that are oppositional and that are hopeful for another way of being.' The JFDJR campaign is calling for two concrete changes to the jury process ('Dea-John's Law'): 1) juries should be recruited from a bigger and more diverse pool of potential jurors; 2) in cases which are believed to have a racial dimension, victims and defendants need to be able to challenge all white juries. While more ethnic diversity on juries does not guarantee justice for Black victims and defendants, it increases the chance that different life experiences and perspectives are considered in the decision-making process and that positions of white innocence are challenged.

## **Conclusion**

On 31 May 2021, 14-year-old Dea-John Reid was racially abused, chased through the street by a white mob, and fatally stabbed. Dea-John was the fourth young Black man to be killed in Birmingham within five months. The names of the other victims killed in spring 2021 are Delarno Samuels (age 17), Keon Lincoln (age 15), and Kimani Martin (age 18). A few days after Dea-John Reid's death, his mother Joan Morris made an emotional appeal. She praised her talented, caring son and cried: 'How many more mothers will have to mourn for their sons for this to stop?'

Dea-John's family and friends had the hope that the trial in 2022 would result in a racially aggravated murder conviction. However, the jury acquitted most of the defendants and convicted the main suspect of manslaughter. As this article shows, the JFDJR campaign challenged the jury's decision by publicly re-examining and re-narrating key CCTV evidence used in the trial through a critical Black gaze. The jury in this case consisted of 11 white British citizens and one British Asian member. Dea-John's family and friends left the court feeling that the jury's unwillingness or inability to see Dea-John as a victim of a racist crime was the result of racial bias. I argue that the creative tactics that JFDJR activists employed to expose the white innocence of the jury can be understood as a form of dark sousveillance (Browne 2015).

As this article illustrates, the somatechnics of violence shape corporealities through a range of practices and technologies, including discursive re-iterations of racist language and stereotypes, surveillance and monitoring practices, hidden and open forms of physical violence, as well as laws and legal proceedings. The JFDJR campaign illustrates that answering back 'is at once a practice of resistance and a mobilisation of life-forces in order to enact political, economic and cultural transformation' (Perera and Pugliese 2011: 2). Driven by a critical hope for racial justice, the campaign calls for concrete measures to make juries more diverse. As this article has shown, calls for more ethnically diverse juries are by no means new, but against the background of Britain's quickly changing demographics they are now more important than ever. Critical hope cannot undo the pain and suffering that Dea-John and many other victims of racist violence had to endure, but it is vital in the struggle for a better future.

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## Notes

1. This article is dedicated to Dea-John Reid, who should be doing the exams for his GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education) this year. The author would like to thank his mother Joan Morris, his brother Kirk and Bishop Dr Desmond Yaddoo MBE for everything they do to make the world a better place.
2. The 'Justice 4 Dea-John Reid' is led by Bishop Dr Desmond Yaddoo and Dea-John's family. It is an independent grassroots campaign that mobilises supporters through public gatherings and social media. It has a Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/Justice4DeaJohnReid/>) and is funded by donations (<https://justgiving.com/crowdfunding/dea-johnreid>).
3. This figure and claim should be treated with caution because they are based on data collected on behalf of the International Fire and Security Exhibition and Conference (Region Security 2022). There can be no doubt, however, that there has been a sharp increase in the use of CCTV by private households in Birmingham (e.g., in the form of doorbells with cameras and other security cameras) in recent years.
4. Victim impact statement by Joan Morris read in court by Bishop Dr Desmond Yaddoo on the last day of the trial. Private copy shared with author.
5. Section 8 of the Contempt of Court Act 1981 makes it a criminal offence to 'obtain, disclose or solicit any particulars of statements made, opinions expressed, arguments advanced, or votes cast by members of a jury in the course of their deliberations'.

6. A mob is generally understood as ‘a crowd acting under strong emotional conditions that often lead to violence or illegal acts’ (Staub and Rosenthal 2010: 377). Inspired by real events, the film *Mississippi Burning* from 1988 includes graphic descriptions of mob violence against Black victims. The film has been widely criticised for cinematic amnesia (see Hoerl 2009) and for portraying African Americans in Mississippi as passive victims of racist violence. Joan Morris used it effectively to underline the threatening nature of a white mob.

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