

Stop Lying on *Black Americans*

A Receipts-First Response to a Viral Lie

"If almost everyone in a group has never committed a crime, you cannot call the whole group criminals. That's just math."

Every figure in this paper comes from federal government data or peer-reviewed research. Full citations on the final page. July 2026.

Why This Paper Exists: The Demonization Machine

Something has changed in how the lie spreads. A generation ago, the "Black criminality" myth lived in pamphlets and fringe forums. Today it is an engagement strategy. Viral accounts on X, TikTok, YouTube, and Telegram have built massive followings by doing one thing on repeat: clipping isolated crime footage, stripping it of all context, captioning it with statistics they don't understand, and presenting it as proof of what an entire race of people *is*. "13/50" has gone from an obscure white-nationalist meme to a phrase teenagers encounter in mainstream comment sections before they've taken a single statistics class.

The mechanics matter. Recommendation algorithms reward outrage, and nothing generates outrage more reliably than fear of a demonized group. A single crime clip involving a Black suspect can be reposted thousands of times as "evidence," while the millions of uneventful days lived by 48 million Black Americans generate no content at all. This is a built-in statistical distortion: social media shows you the numerator and hides the denominator. Researchers have long documented the offline version of this, local TV news historically overrepresented Black suspects relative to actual arrest data, but the algorithmic version operates at a scale and speed television never could, with no editor, no correction desk, and a financial reward for whoever escalates furthest.

The consequences are not abstract. Perception surveys consistently show Americans wildly overestimate crime, majorities say crime is rising nationally even in years when it falls, and racialized crime content is a major driver of that gap. Distorted perception becomes policy: harsher sentencing, over-policing of Black neighborhoods, discrimination in hiring and housing, and, at the extreme end, radicalization. The gunmen in Charleston (2015) and Buffalo (2022) both cited racial crime statistics they encountered online as justification for mass murder. This is what makes the trope worth answering carefully rather than ignoring: it is not just an insult, it is an operating manual for harm.

So this paper is a letter to anyone scrolling past that content: the numbers being thrown at you are real, but the story attached to them is a lie, and it is a lie with a body count. What follows is the context the algorithm will never show you.

Plain and simple. If you only ever see videos of dogs biting people, you might start thinking all dogs bite. They don't. You're just being shown the bites. That's what your feed is doing with people.

Executive Summary

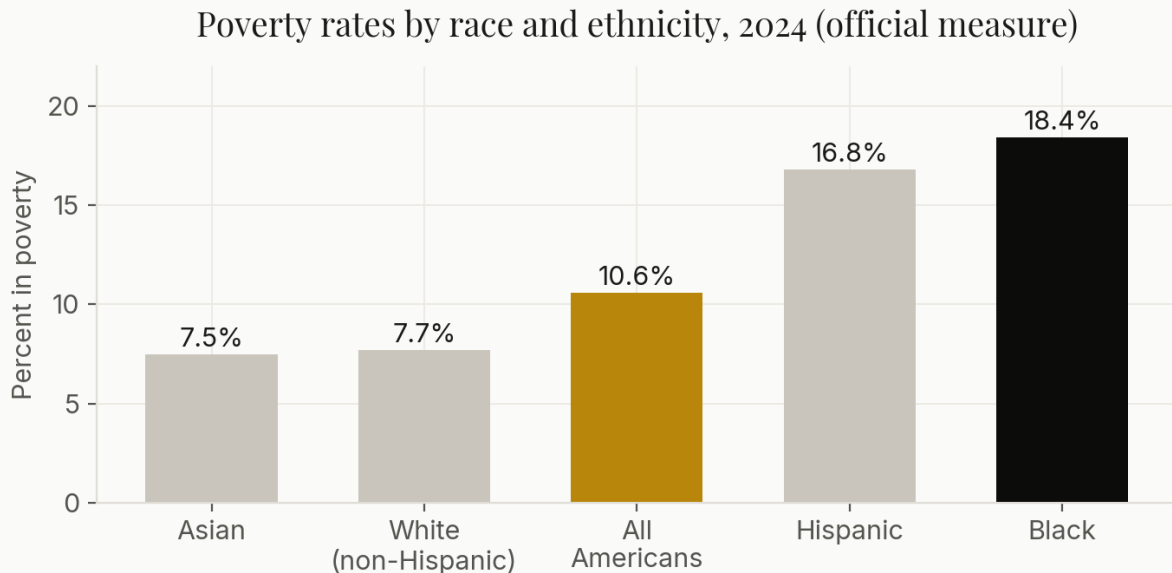
A persistent claim, often summarized as "13% of the population, 50% of the murders", is used to argue that Black Americans are inherently prone to crime. This paper does not deny the statistics. It shows why the racist *conclusion* drawn from them fails. Five findings:

1. Crime is rare in every group. In any given year, roughly 97 out of 100 Black Americans are not arrested for anything, and violent-crime arrests involve a fraction of one percent.
2. Poverty concentration, not race, drives the disparity. When researchers compare Black and white neighborhoods with the same economic conditions, crime rates converge. Race stops predicting anything.
3. The numbers move, and they move a lot. The Black homicide rate fell by more than half between 1991 and 2014. Fixed "racial traits" cannot explain a curve that steep.
4. Arrest data measures policing as much as crime. Black and white Americans use drugs at nearly identical rates, but Black Americans are arrested for drugs at roughly 2.6 times the rate.
5. Ancestry doesn't predict crime, circumstances do. Black immigrants from Africa and the Caribbean have lower crime and incarceration rates than the U.S. average, despite the same ancestry the trope blames.

Plain and simple. Imagine a classroom of 100 kids. If 97 of them never break a single rule, would you call the whole class "bad kids"? Of course not. That's what this myth does to millions of people.

1. Start With the Basics: Poverty, Not Pathology

In 2024, 18.4% of Black Americans lived below the official poverty line. That is about 8.4 million people, roughly 2.4 times the rate for non-Hispanic white Americans (Census Bureau, P60-284). This gap is the direct descendant of measurable policies: redlining, segregation, exclusion from the GI Bill and FHA lending, and generations of blocked wealth-building. It matters for the crime debate because economic conditions, not skin color, are what criminologists consistently find driving neighborhood violence.



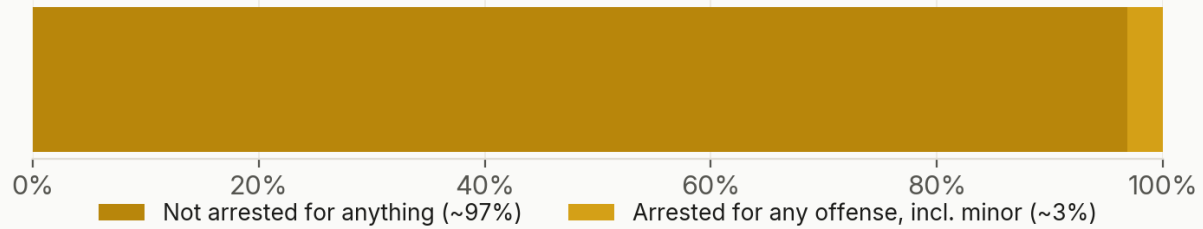
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Income and Poverty in the United States: 2024 (Current Population Survey, ASEC).

Plain and simple. Being poor is not a crime, and poor people are not criminals. Most poor people, of every color, never hurt anyone. In fact, poor people are the ones most likely to be *victims* of crime.

2. The Trope Fails Basic Arithmetic

FBI data covers arrests, and arrests for *all* offenses combined, including traffic-level and minor offenses, touch only about 3% of Black Americans in a year. Arrests for violent crime involve well under 1%. Homicide arrests involve a few *thousandths* of one percent. Generalizing from that sliver to 48 million people is a textbook composition fallacy: judging a whole group by its smallest fraction.

Of every 100 Black Americans, how many are arrested for anything in a year?

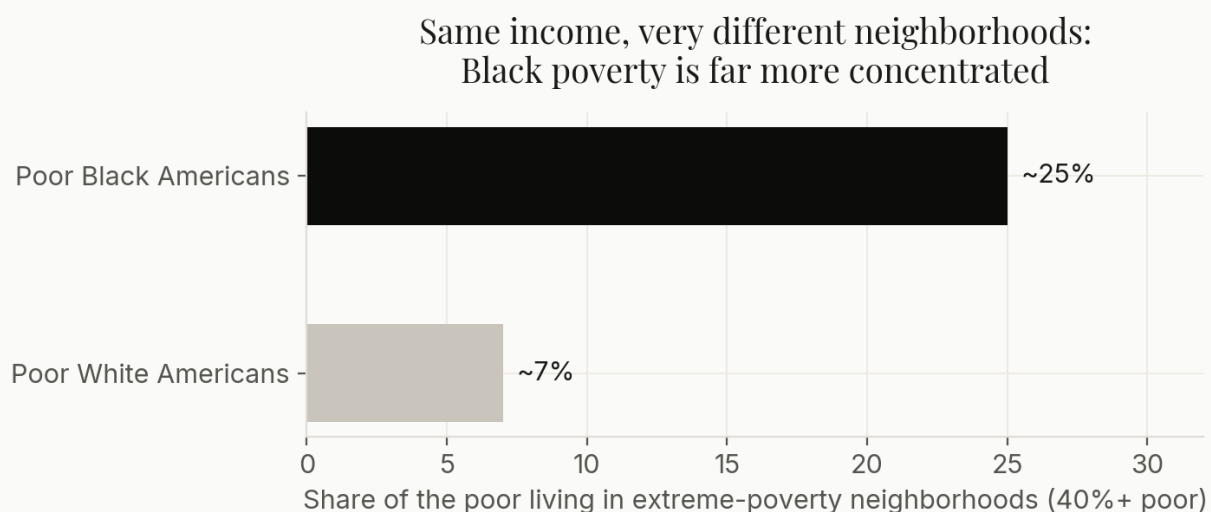


Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reporting / Crime Data Explorer arrest tables; U.S. Census population estimates.

Plain and simple. Out of every 100 Black Americans, about 97 are never arrested for anything all year. You can't describe a group by the 3. You have to look at the 97.

3. Same Conditions, Same Crime Rates: Race Isn't the Variable

The strongest evidence against the racial-trait theory comes from studies that hold economic conditions constant. Robert Sampson's decades-long Chicago research and Ruth Peterson & Lauren Krivo's national neighborhood study (*Divergent Social Worlds*, 2010) reach the same conclusion: violence tracks concentrated disadvantage (joblessness, family disruption, housing instability, weakened institutions) regardless of the race of the residents. White neighborhoods with those conditions have elevated violence too. The problem is that, because of segregation, very few white Americans ever live in such neighborhoods, while poor Black families are heavily clustered in them.



Source: Paul Jargowsky, Century Foundation, "Architecture of Segregation" (2015); estimates of the poor living in census tracts with 40%+ poverty.

This is why comparing "Black crime rates" to "white crime rates" without controlling for neighborhood conditions is statistically meaningless: it compares two populations living in structurally different environments and blames the difference on skin.

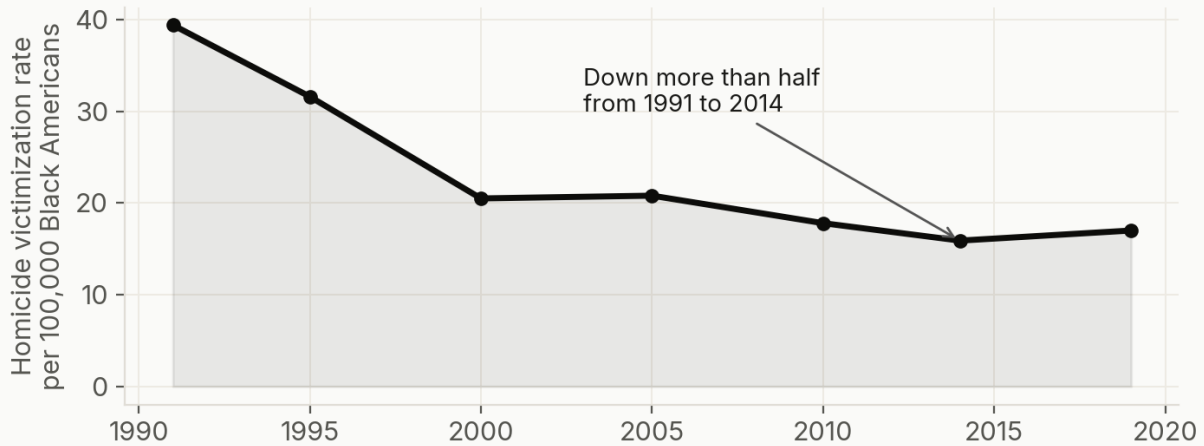
Plain and simple. If you plant two identical seeds, one in good soil and one in a parking lot, and only one grows, you don't blame the seed. You look at the soil.

4. Crime Rates Move. Genes Don't.

If crime were an inherent racial trait, rates would be stable. They are anything but. The Black homicide victimization rate fell by more than half from 1991 to 2014, one of the steepest declines in American criminal-justice history, during a period when poverty barely budged and no one's ancestry changed. Likewise, Black immigrants from Africa and the Caribbean, who share the

ancestry the trope blames, have *lower* crime and incarceration rates than the U.S. average. Circumstances explain what biology cannot.

If crime were a fixed racial trait, this line could not move.
But it fell by more than half.

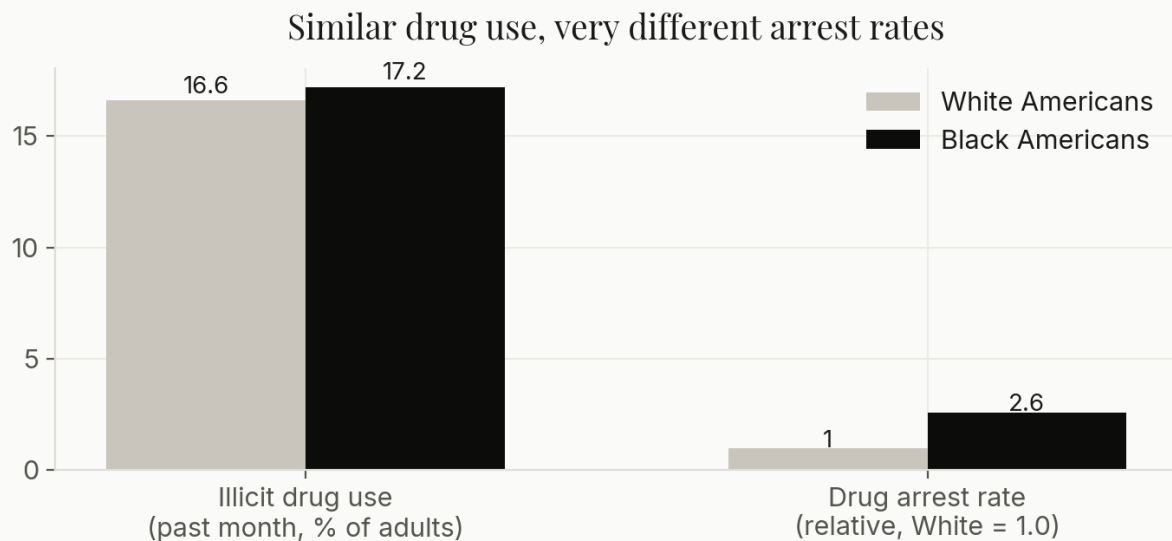


Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics / CDC homicide victimization series by race, 1991–2019.

Plain and simple. A born trait can't drop by half in twenty years. What changed wasn't people's blood. It was their world.

5. Arrest Statistics Measure Policing, Not Just Crime

The figures white nationalists cite are almost always *arrest* figures. Arrests reflect where police patrol, whom they stop, and which crimes get investigated. The clearest natural experiment is drugs: federal health surveys (SAMHSA's National Survey on Drug Use and Health) consistently show Black and white Americans use illicit drugs at nearly identical rates. Yet Black Americans are arrested for drug offenses at roughly 2.6 times the rate of white Americans. The behavior is the same; the enforcement is not. Victimization surveys (NCVS), which ask crime victims directly and bypass police records, show real but consistently smaller racial gaps than arrest data. And roughly half of U.S. murders now go unsolved, so "share of murder arrests" is not a census of murderers.



Sources: SAMHSA NSDUH annual tables; FBI UCR drug-abuse arrest data; Human Rights Watch / ACLU analyses of racial disparity in drug arrests.

Plain and simple. If two kids pass notes in class but the teacher only ever watches one of them, only one gets caught. The detention list tells you who got watched, not who passed notes.

6. Answering "13/50" Directly

Don't deny the number. Dismantle the inference. The honest chain of reasoning:

THEIR CLAIM

THE FACTUAL ANSWER

"13% of the population commits 50% of murders."	It's 50% of <i>arrests in cleared cases</i> , in a system where half of murders go unsolved and clearance varies by neighborhood. And it describes a few thousandths of 1% of Black Americans, not "13% of the population."
"The disparity proves race causes crime."	Men commit ~90% of murders; nobody calls maleness a genetic crime trait. Disparities demand causal analysis. Under economic controls, the racial gap collapses, which is impossible if race were the cause.
"Poverty can't explain it; poor whites commit less crime."	Individual poverty isn't the mechanism; <i>concentrated</i> neighborhood poverty is, and segregation means poor whites rarely live in such neighborhoods. Comparable neighborhoods show comparable rates (Peterson & Krivo 2010; Sampson 2012).
"It's in their nature."	Rates fell by half in two decades; Black immigrants of the same ancestry have below-average crime rates; middle-class Black Americans have low rates comparable to middle-class whites. "Nature" explains none of this.

Plain and simple. A number can be true and the story told about it can still be false. "Most car accidents happen close to home" doesn't mean your driveway is dangerous. It means that's where people drive the most.

7. The Consistency Test: We Already Know How to Think About This

Here is the tell that exposes the trope. Not a counter-statistic, but a question: do you apply the same logic to every group, or only one? Because when offenders are white, everyone, including the people spreading "13/50", instinctively reasons correctly. Consider:

School shootings. The majority of school shooters in U.S. history have been white males. Yet no one concludes that whiteness causes school shootings. Instead, the public conversation correctly turns to mental health, social isolation, bullying, gun access, and online radicalization. Conditions and circumstances, not skin.

Child sexual abuse. The offenders exposed in the Catholic Church scandals, USA Gymnastics, the Boy Scouts, and Penn State were overwhelmingly white men. Yet no one proposes that white men as a group are predators. Instead, correctly, the focus goes to institutional cover-ups, unsupervised access to children, and individual pathology.

Financial crime. Securities fraud, embezzlement, and large-scale tax evasion, offenses that drain vastly more money from victims than all street crime combined, are committed disproportionately by affluent, majority-white offenders. Yet no one attributes fraud to white DNA. Instead, correctly, we talk about opportunity, weak oversight, and greed.

Opioid deaths and DUI. The opioid epidemic hit white communities hardest, and the public response, correctly, was framed as a public-health crisis driven by overprescription, economic despair, and pharmaceutical marketing. Compare that to how crack cocaine in Black communities was framed in the 1980s: as moral failure demanding mass incarceration. Same behavior, different story.

In every one of these cases, the instinct is right: a small number of offenders says nothing about the group, and the explanation lives in circumstances, institutions, and access, never in ancestry. This paper asks for nothing more radical than that same, ordinary, correct reasoning be applied to Black Americans. The moment someone applies "conditions explain it" to white offenders and "nature explains it" to Black offenders, they have revealed that their conclusion came first and the statistics were recruited afterward. That is not analysis. That is prejudice with a spreadsheet.

Plain and simple. When a kid from your own team breaks a rule, you say "he made a bad choice." When a kid from the other team does the exact same thing, do you say "that whole team is bad"? If the rule only works one way, it was never a rule. It was just picking on someone.

Conclusion

The "Black criminality" trope survives by doing three dishonest things at once: it swaps arrests for offenses, it strips away every economic and historical variable, and it generalizes from a tiny fraction to an entire people. Restore any one of those (measure actual offending, control for concentrated disadvantage, or simply do the arithmetic) and the trope collapses. And notice: nobody needs to be taught this reasoning. Everyone already uses it, flawlessly, whenever the offenders look like them. What remains is what the data has shown for decades: crime follows conditions, conditions follow policy, and policy can change. That is not a comfortable conclusion for those who need the problem to be permanent and inborn. It happens to be the true one.

"Judge the soil, not the seed. Fix the soil, and watch what grows."

Sources & Further Reading

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The Algorithm Doesn't *Know My Son*

A story. Companion to "Stop Lying on Black Americans."

*"You memorize the drill.
But you do not ever memorize the lie."*

Marcus Bell found the video on a Tuesday, the way you find a splinter: not by looking, but by the sudden small pain of it.

He was scrolling in bed, half asleep, thumb moving on its own, when the clip surfaced. Grainy gas station footage. A fight, somewhere far away, in a city he'd never been to, between people he'd never met. The caption underneath had four hundred thousand likes. It said: *Every. Single. Time.* And below that, a string of numbers he'd started seeing everywhere lately, posted like scripture: 13/50.

He knew what it meant. Everyone knew what it meant by now.

Marcus put the phone face down on the nightstand and lay in the dark listening to his wife Renee breathe beside him and, down the hall, the small mechanical hum of his son's fish tank. Jordan was eleven. He still slept with the closet light on. He still said "excuse me" to the dog when he stepped over her.

And somewhere out there, an algorithm was teaching the world what to see when it looked at him.

The Bells lived on Cascade Road in southwest Atlanta, in a brick house Renee's grandmother had bought in 1974 with money she saved cleaning other people's houses. There was a magnolia in the front yard older than the neighborhood itself. Renee taught eighth grade math. Marcus did logistics for a shipping company, fifteen years, employee of the quarter twice. Their daughter Imani was sixteen, ran the 400 meters, and wanted to study epidemiology because, she said, "diseases don't care about your excuses, and I respect that."

They were, by any measure anyone had ever invented, a family doing everything right.

That was the part that kept Marcus up. It didn't matter. The video didn't know about the magnolia tree or the honor roll certificates on the refrigerator or the fact that Jordan cried at the end of *Charlotte's Web*. The video only knew what performed. And what performed, what fed the machine, what strangers in comment sections consumed like popcorn, was a version of his children that did not exist.

Imani saw it first, of course. Kids always do.

She came into the kitchen one evening while Renee was grading quizzes and stood by the counter too long, the way she did when something was sitting on her.

"Mom. Tre sent me this account today." Tre was her boyfriend, a gentle beanpole of a boy who played trombone. "It's got like two million followers. It's just crime videos. All day. Only ever us."

She paused. "The comments, Mom."

Renee set down her red pen. "Don't read the comments, baby."

"I know. But they read them." Imani's voice cracked just slightly, then steadied itself, because she was sixteen and had already learned to steady it. "The kids at the meet last weekend. The ones from the county schools. They've read them. You can tell. It's in how they look at us before we even run."

Renee had spent nineteen years teaching children that numbers tell the truth. Now she sat at her own kitchen table trying to find the words to explain to her daughter that a number can be true and still be a lie, that a statistic without its context is just a costume a prejudice wears.

"Sit down," she said. "Let me show you something about denominators."

She pulled a napkin over and drew a hundred small circles. She colored in three of them.

"In any year," she said, "this is about how many of us get arrested for anything at all. Anything. A taillight. Everything." She tapped the ninety-seven empty circles. "These are the people the videos will never show. These are the people the account has no use for. Two million followers, and not one of them will ever see a clip of your daddy leaving for work at 5:40 in the morning, because nobody films that, because nothing happens. Our whole lives are the part of the math they delete."

Imani stared at the napkin. "So it's a numerator with no denominator."

"That's exactly what it is."

"That's the whole trick?"

"That's the whole trick. It's an old trick. It used to travel by pamphlet. Now it travels by feed, and the feed gets paid every time somebody's scared."

Imani was quiet for a moment. Then she folded the napkin carefully, like evidence, and put it in her pocket.

Jordan's turn came in the spring, and it came the way it always comes for boys like him: early, and over nothing.

A new family had moved in three streets over, into the big house with the camera doorbell. Jordan and his friend Dre were cutting through the neighborhood the way eleven-year-olds have cut through neighborhoods since neighborhoods began, arguing about a video game, when the neighborhood app lit up.

Two suspicious males near Lennox Ct. Anyone know them?

A photo, taken from the doorbell. Two skinny children in backpacks. One of them mid-laugh.

Marcus saw the post an hour later, forwarded by a neighbor who was furious on his behalf. He sat in his truck in the driveway for a long time before he went inside. He was not thinking about the woman who posted it, not really. He was thinking about the pipeline. She had watched something, and the something had told her what an eleven-year-old with his son's face is, and she had believed the something instead of her own eyes, and she had reached for the word *males* to describe a child who still slept with the closet light on.

That night, Marcus and Renee had The Conversation with Jordan. Every Black family knows the one. Keep your hands visible. Don't run, even when running is the sanest thing a scared child can do. Don't reach. Say sir.

Jordan listened the way he listened to fire drill instructions, seriously, nodding, and then he asked the question that broke his father's heart cleanly in two:

"But what did I do?"

"Nothing," Marcus said. "You did nothing. That's what I need you to understand, son. This is not about anything you did. Some people have been lied to about you before they ever met you. The lie got to them first. That is their sickness, not your crime. But I can't let their sickness put its hands on you, so I'm teaching you the drill anyway. Do you hear the difference? You memorize the drill. But you do not ever, ever memorize the lie."

Jordan nodded slowly. "The lie is that I'm bad."

"The lie is that you're bad because of what you are. And baby, nobody on this earth is bad because of what they are. People are only ever bad because of what they choose. And look at me. Look at your mama. Look at your sister. Look at what this family chooses, every single day."

Here is what the algorithm never learned about the Bell family, because the algorithm has no category for it:

It never learned that Imani won the 400 at regionals in May, and that when she crossed the line, the girls from the county schools, the ones with the wary eyes, were the first to hug her, because children unlearn lies faster than adults when you give them a denominator, and a season of shared bus rides is a denominator.

It never learned that Renee started teaching a unit she called "How to Read a Scary Number," and that a white father came to conferences in October and stood awkwardly by the door and

finally said, "My son showed me that napkin thing you do. The circles. I, uh." He looked at his shoes. "I follow some accounts I'm going to stop following. That's all I wanted to say."

It never learned that Marcus printed a stack of papers, a real document with real charts and citations, and left copies at the barbershop and the church and, after thinking about it for a week, in the community mailbox kiosk on Lennox Court, with a sticky note that said *Before you post, read page 3*.

It never learned that Jordan, at twelve now, keeps a folded napkin with a hundred circles on it taped inside his school binder, and that when a kid at lunch parroted the numbers he'd absorbed from somewhere, Jordan didn't fight and didn't fold. He pulled out the napkin. "Ninety-seven of these are me," he said. "Which videos have you seen of the ninety-seven?"

The kid didn't have an answer. There isn't one.

The lie is still out there. It will be out there tomorrow, refreshed, reposted, monetized, wearing new captions. No single family defeats an algorithm.

But the Bells sleep at night knowing something the machine will never compute: that a lie needs your silence to raise your children for you. And in that brick house on Cascade Road, under the old magnolia, silence lost.

The fish tank hums. The closet light stays on a little longer. And in the morning, at 5:40, a man leaves for work, unfilmed, unremarkable, and utterly unashamed, one of the ninety-seven, which is to say: the truth.

The statistics referenced in this story are documented in the companion paper, "Stop Lying on Black Americans: A Receipts-First Response to a Viral Lie."