



CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF LAW AND SOCIETY
BERKELEY LAW

CSLS SPEAKER SERIES

Monday, March 20, 2017

ERIN KERRISON

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“Your Pants Won’t Save You’:

Why Black Youth Challenge Race-Based Police Surveillance and Thoughts on How Age Conditions the Presence of Legal Cynicism”

The politics of “Black Respectability” foreground Black citizens’ individual and collective responsibility to prioritize self-policing, polish, and propriety in all matters. Proponents believe that the steady performance of restraint and decorum is critical, and that any departure from that repertoire can result in deserved relegation. There appears to be a divide along generational lines, however, where the belief that racially minoritized youth must earn respect and autonomy, rather than see those rights protected as a standard afforded to all community members, is not widely held by younger Black people. This study makes use of in-depth interview data collected from approximately 70 Baltimore City residents who identified as Black or African American, and shared their perspectives on the political and social context that led to Freddie Gray’s death while in Baltimore City Police custody. In explaining law enforcement’s inclination to pursue and arrest citizens who match Freddie Gray’s outward appearance, older respondents were more likely to assign personal responsibility to those who look, dress, and consort with men like Freddie Gray. Younger respondents resisted the demands of respectability politics and instead, asserted their right to pass through their neighborhoods absent state-sanctioned harassment. This study features an exploration of how age and generational membership moderate legal socialization and cynicism, attitudes about personal responsibility for police profiling, and beliefs about the right to the same full spectrum of freedoms and protections enjoyed by White citizens. Implications for critical race theory, police legitimacy, and intergenerational coalition building are also discussed.

PLACE Selznick Seminar Room, 2240 Piedmont Ave.

TIME 12:45 – 2:00pm. Coffee and water provided. Bag lunches welcome.

INFO <https://www.law.berkeley.edu/centers/center-for-the-study-of-law-society/>

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