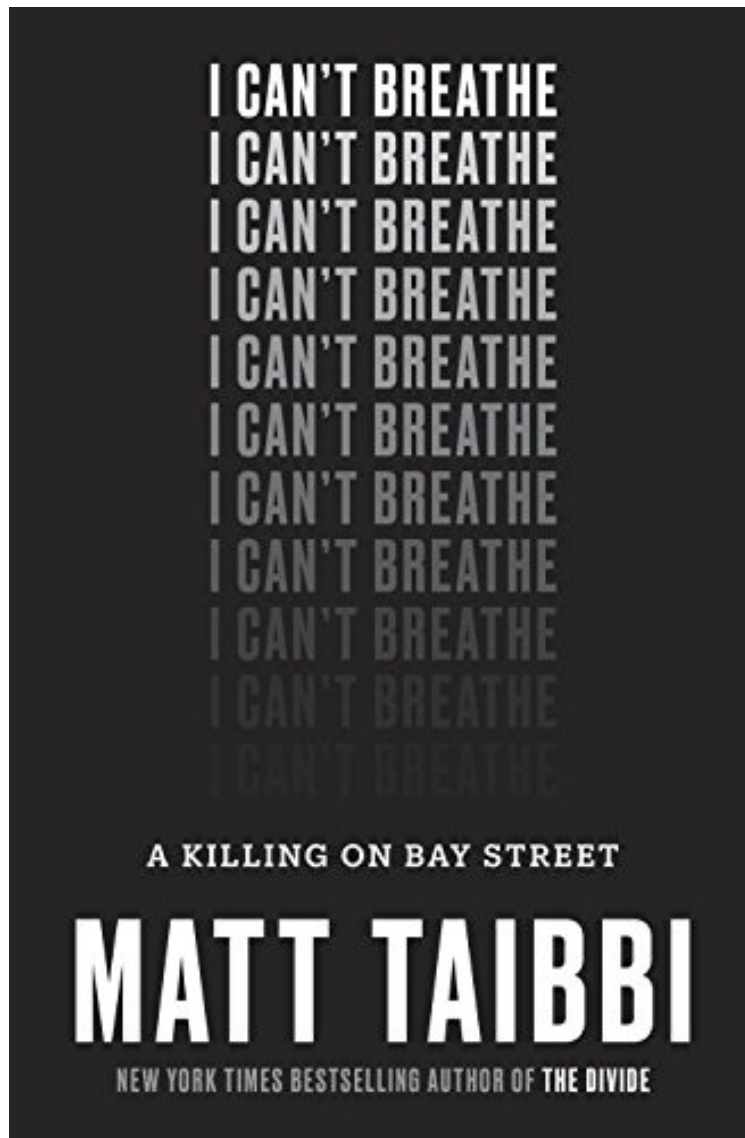


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I Can't Breathe: A Killing on Bay Street

Matt Taibbi

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Matt Taibbi : I Can't Breathe: A Killing on Bay Street before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised I Can't Breathe: A Killing on Bay Street:

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Profound Examination of Eric Garner's Life and Death at the hands of the NYPDBy g3 from the UPThis is a riveting, disturbing, heart-breaking work of non-fiction. Taibbi has dug deeply into the life and times of Eric Garner, who was famously killed by a police chokehold during an ostensible arrest for selling individual cigarettes on a street corner in Staten Island.Taibbi takes us through the evolution of stop

and frisk, the Broken Windows theory of policing, the use of statistical modeling for fighting crime, the use of statistics for measuring "success", and how all of these factors have become bent and twisted resulting in the victimization of minority communities who are regularly terrorized by law enforcement officers. He also walks us through the lame institutional structures that are supposed to address the abuse of power by individual police officers, which rarely if ever hold officers accountable for the injuries they inflict on the public. The book reads easily and quickly, because the tale is so well told. Despite its comprehensive coverage of the history of modern policing tactics, this is no academic treatment, but rather a caring, feeling recap of what happened to Garner and the factors that led to the fatal convergence of Garner and the NYPD that fateful day. I am a retired career federal prosecutor, and am accustomed to viewing police behavior a bit more favorably than many do, but Taibbi's analysis of how things have morphed over the past two decades makes an airtight case for the need for major reform. So many well intentioned approaches to crime go awry when police discretion gets involved, quotas have to be met, and disparate impacts develop depending upon the demographics of the neighborhood involved. Attention must be paid and Changes must be made. For starters, arrests for blatantly unconstitutional crimes like "disorderly conduct" should be banned, and marijuana possession, if not sale, should be legalized. I underlined many passages in this book, and will keep it and refer back to it as I continue to follow these topics. The ubiquity of cell phones and video taping has undeniably changed things for the better, because there is more sunlight shining on police practices and permanent records are being made which errant cops can less easily deny. The police undoubtedly have a tough job to do, but the tactics that are the subject of this book are not helping in the fight against crime and are deepening the chasm between minority communities and majority culture. Kudos to Taibbi for writing this important contribution to the discussion.

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. The System Eventually Eats Its People By Kevin L. Nienstiel On July 17, 2014, plainclothes NYPD officer Daniel Pantaleo applied a banned chokehold to a fat, middle-aged, diabetic street hustler named Eric Garner. Bystander Ramsey Ortas cellphone video caught Garner wheezing out I cant breathe! eleven times before losing consciousness. These would be Garners last words. Garners unconscious body lay untended, possibly already dead, for eight minutes, while paramedics parked over a block away, and cameras kept rolling. Garners death electrified the nation. While more police killed more African-American men and youths, often with flimsier pretexts, like Michael Brown and Tamir Rice, Garners death had the distinction of being caught on camera with sound, from beginning to end to badly bungled aftermath. This couldve been the moment that changed American race relations forever but nothing happened. The reasons why not matter as much as the death itself. Rolling Stone contributor Matt Taibbi previously wrote *The Divide*, an investigation into who, post-Financial Services Collapse, actually goes to jail, and for what. His conclusions were stark. He takes a similar approach here to exactly one case, Eric Garners controversial death. He describes a Staten Island so economically and racially divided that residents do anything, however unlawful, to get paid and cops will do anything, however violent, to keep order. As Taibbi shows early, Garner was no angel. Hed previously done time for crack distribution, then got into untaxed cigarettes because he became to aged and infirm for the cocaine business. He established a remarkably sophisticated network of buyers nabbing cigarettes by the trunkful in Virginia, with Americas lowest tobacco tax. NYCs nicotine tax was so high, Gerner could charge a 100% markup and still clear a robust profit. New York had Americas highest cigarette tax, largely because mayor Michael Bloomberg made a campaign promise not to raise income taxes. But like all sales taxes, cigarette taxes hurt those most who can least afford the expense. Saying poor people should quit is unfair, not only because it implies poor people shouldnt have nice things, but because nicotine, with its soothing anti-anxiety properties, makes life tolerable for workers living precariously. So yes, Garner was a street-corner Escobar, breaking the law in broad daylight. But the NYPD targeted him disproportionate to the money he cost the city, or the disorder he actually caused. Garner got caught in a campaign to disproportionately target black and brown communities, assuming that darker-hued neighborhoods innately caused crime. This isnt hypothetical, either; internal NYPD whistleblowers caught commanders, on tape, ordering racially targeted sweeps. Taibbi goes into the history of Broken Windows policing, which arose from Sixties-era childrearing theories, before being adopted by Rudy Giuliani in the 1990s. Even the theorys originator admitted, before it became policy, that Broken Windows had the capacity for deep abuse. But he trusted elected officials to not break public trust and misuse their authority. In interviews with Taibbi, that originator now admits, he navelly trusted bad people. Police are hardly villains, though. Their harsh responses to penny-ante crime reflect top-down enforcement of technocratic rules. City managers demanded police keep crime down by making multiple arrests and completing laborious paperwork. Civilian complaints led to added layers of Big Data interference. Many cops get into law enforcement because they believe theyll make neighborhoods safer for families and children. But, conscripted into punitive bureaucracy, youthful ideals dwindle in a hurry. Taibbis first half focuses tightly on the friction between police, represented by Daniel Pantaleo, and communities, represented by Eric Garner. Following Garners death, Taibbis second half becomes more diffuse, reflecting the decentralized public response. This is further complicated by both local and national responses; and because Garners death coincided with Michael Browns in Ferguson, Missouri. Thanks to internet video, a local story became a national crisis. Newly minted mayor Bill DeBlasio campaigned by promising to reverse Broken Windows policing. But he appointed its chief architect as police chief. Protesters considered DeBlasio too cozy with police, while police thought

him too conciliatory with protesters. Massive, leaderless demonstrations gained national support, then lost it overnight when one march turned into an attack on police. Frictions only became worse, the adversarial relationship between police and city more ingrained. Taibbi paints a heartbreaking picture. Though his sympathy, measured in column inches, clearly lies with community members, the police he interviews appear dedicated, misunderstood, and yoked to an administration that treats them badly. Protesters demanded change, but discovered that the system only exists to protect itself, as it always has. This isn't easy reading. But in today's divided society, it's very much necessary.³ of 3 people found the following review helpful. StunningBy Julesinrose You don't need another synopsis of this book. The publisher's blurb does it well enough. Other reviewers have, too. All I can do is add my name to the (now) small chorus of praise for this achievement of a book. The research that went into this is thorough. The writing is clear, engaging, and in spite of the subject matter, has a heart without wearing it on the proverbial sleeve. Matt Taibbi kept his reputation as Hunter S. Thompson's heir in check, and to good effect. This book is something of a masterpiece. Only someone who presupposes that there is bias here will see it. I am reviewing a pre-release copy, and sadly, I feel sure that upon the release date, when there is a "Look Inside" feature here on , there will be many who won't read it, or else will read these early reviews, and be up in arms. Yes, this book is a scathing indictment of the New York Police Department, for one thing. This is not Mr. Taibbi's opinion piece, however. The facts are laid out. They are shocking to those who did not know, shocking still to those who had an inkling, probably not shocking to anyone working inside the judicial system in New York and clearly not a shock to those living in neighborhoods that have been subjected to "Broken Windows" policing. Throughout my reading, I kept stopping and thinking, "If only everyone would read this book." But sadly, that will not be the case. I am sure that a good segment of the population could not read this without retreating into a knee-jerk response in spite of the almost-quiet laying out of the facts. As we've learned, there seem to be no more facts in America. I am extremely pessimistic about this country coming to terms with its racism, both past and present. My biggest takeaway from this book is that we are beyond the point where it is imperative to do so. My heart begs for everyone to read this so we can start talking honestly and start effecting change. In my pessimism, I sincerely doubt that will happen, but some books are important and I'm grateful to Matt Taibbi for writing this. At least, I can hope that it offers the Garner family some comfort in knowing that at least one human being cared enough to dig deeply and then tell the truth. Cold comfort, I'm sure.

A work of riveting literary journalism that explores the roots and repercussions of the infamous killing of Eric Garner by the New York City police from the bestselling author of *The Divide* [A] searing expos . . . What emerges from the author's superb reporting and vivid writing is a tragically revealing look at a broken criminal justice system geared to serve white citizens while often overlooking or ignoring the rights of others. Kirkus Reviews (starred review) On July 17, 2014, a forty-three-year-old black man named Eric Garner died on a Staten Island sidewalk after a police officer put him in what has been described as an illegal chokehold during an arrest for selling bootleg cigarettes. The final moments of Garner's life were captured on video and seen by millions. His agonized last words, *I can't breathe*, became a rallying cry for the nascent Black Lives Matter protest movement. A grand jury ultimately declined to indict the officer who wrestled Garner to the pavement. Matt Taibbi's deeply reported retelling of these events liberates Eric Garner from the abstractions of newspaper accounts and lets us see the man in full with all his flaws and contradictions intact. A husband and father with a complicated personal history, Garner was neither villain nor victim, but a fiercely proud individual determined to do the best he could for his family, bedeviled by bad luck, and ultimately subdued by forces beyond his control. In America, no miscarriage of justice exists in isolation, of course, and in *I Can't Breathe* Taibbi also examines the conditions that made this tragedy possible. Featuring vivid vignettes of life on the street and inside our Kafkaesque court system, Taibbi's kaleidoscopic account illuminates issues around policing, mass incarceration, the underground economy, and racial disparity in law enforcement. No one emerges unsullied, from the conservative district attorney who half-heartedly prosecutes the case to the progressive mayor caught between the demands of outraged activists and the foot-dragging of recalcitrant police officials. A masterly narrative of urban America and a scathing indictment of the perverse incentives built into our penal system, *I Can't Breathe* drills down into the particulars of one case to confront us with the human cost of our broken approach to dispensing criminal justice. Richly reported and evocative . . . a vivid folk history that should prove useful to anyone who seeks to understand the world Eric Garner inhabited, not just progressives. Jill Leovy, bestselling author of *Ghettoside*

Advance praise for *I Can't Breathe* A complex and textured examination of the complicated personalities, flawed legal system, and politics revolving around the police killing of forty-three-year-old Eric Garner, whose final words became a rallying cry for the Black Lives Matter movement. Boston Globe, Must Read Books for the Fall [A] brilliant work of narrative nonfiction . . . [Matt] Taibbi is unsparing in his excoriation of the system, police, and courts that led to the fatal choke hold and worked to blur the abuse afterward. . . . This is a necessary and riveting work. Booklist, starred review [A] searing expos . . . After deeply exploring Garner's life from a variety of perspectives, Taibbi offers detailed reporting about the out-of-control Staten Island police officers present at the death scene . . . [and] the futile efforts of the Garner family to achieve posthumous justice. . . . What emerges from the author's superb reporting and vivid

writing is a tragically revealing look at a broken criminal justice system geared to serve white citizens while often overlooking or ignoring the rights of others. Kirkus (starred review) Richly reported and evocative. Although Taibbi is not shy about his point of view, he keeps the narrative nuanced and realistic. He is unafraid of the less charitable aspects of Garner, and he's diligent and agnostic when it comes to detailing his world. Taibbi is the rare partisan who understands that, even as he makes his case, he need not pretend that the world is a simple place, and that the best way to grapple with its complexities is to let facts speak for themselves. The result here is a vivid folk history that should prove useful to anyone who seeks to understand the world Eric Garner inhabited, not just progressives. Jill Leovy, bestselling author of *Ghettoside* Matt Taibbi's *I Can't Breathe* marries the best instincts of explanatory narrative journalism with uncompromising moral clarity. The result is a riveting walk through decades of policing policy and big city politics that culminated, seemingly inevitably, in Eric Garner's killing by the New York Police Department. While he may have set out to document a fatal injustice, the tale Taibbi tells is not one of a death, but one of a life. In capturing the fullness of Garner's imperfect humanity, *I Can't Breathe* adds a vital account of police violence and a vivid exploration of its lingering costs. Taibbi, through thorough reporting and captivating writing, captures the totality of an American tragedy. Wesley Lowery, Pulitzer Prizewinning national correspondent for *The Washington Post* and author of the *New York Times* bestselling *They Can't Kill Us All: Ferguson, Baltimore and a New Era in America's Racial Justice Movement* About the Author Matt Taibbi has been a contributing editor for *Rolling Stone* and the author of five previous books, including the *New York Times* bestsellers *The Great Derangement*, *Griftopia*, and *The Divide*. He lives in New Jersey.