

Unacknowledged Grief



The Aftermath, by Titus Kaphar. Used with permission.

This month's blog post comes from Cece Kins, who is a fierce survivor, a relentless fighter, and a radical abolitionist committed to dismantling the family policing system. A final year PhD candidate in Sociology at Lancaster University, her research weaves together storytelling, Black Feminism, Cultural Studies, and radical abolitionist theory, to explore new ways of being together and caring for one another in the world. Cece holds an BA in Social Care and Social Policy from the University of Central Lancashire, and a Research Masters in Gender Studies from Utrecht University, Netherlands.

On Mother's Day, millions come together to celebrate and honour the love, strength, and sacrifice of mothers everywhere. For many, it is a joyful occasion—filled with recognition and gratitude. But for others, it is a painful reminder of grief: grief that is too often ignored, too easily dismissed.

These are the mothers separated from their children by the family justice system—mothers who are mourning not because of neglect or harm they caused, but because of a system that claims to “protect” them and their children, but has failed them in every conceivable way. For these mothers, Mother's Day isn't about celebration. It's a reminder of the violence of state intervention, of how their pain has been made invisible and their grief dismissed as collateral damage of an unjust system.

It is this raw, unacknowledged grief that haunts me as I think about the case of Devica Rose.

Recently sentenced to 10 years in prison for the manslaughter of her two sets of twin boys, who tragically lost their lives in a house fire in December 2021, Devica's story is one of unbearable heartbreak. The tragedy stemmed from a single moment when Devica, a single

mother, left her children briefly at home to go to the supermarket—an action that ended in devastating loss.

But that moment cannot be seen in isolation. More tragic than one horrific decision is the long history of systemic neglect that led up to it—a life shaped by poverty, mental health struggles, and a system that consistently failed her.

Devica's Story: Failures of a Broken System

Devica was raising four children under the age of five on her own, carrying the crushing weight of single motherhood. But her challenges ran deeper than parenting: she was living with a depressive disorder, PTSD, and a personality disorder. By April 2021, her GP declared her unfit for work, recognising the toll her mental health had taken.

And yet, those who knew her—family, friends, teachers—described her as a devoted mother. Her children were her world, and she did everything she could to care for them, even as her own well-being deteriorated.

But the system that was supposed to help her utterly failed.

Social services were involved with Devica from 2018 to 2021. They were aware of her mental health challenges, unsafe housing conditions, and the overwhelming stress of raising four young children. Her home lacked working smoke detectors and carbon monoxide detectors, the kitchen was broken, and the bathroom had no functioning toilet or sink. Yet despite these clear hazards, no meaningful action was taken. There was no real support—only increased surveillance and judgment. The system intensified pressure on Devica, sending social workers to assess her parenting, but offering no substantive help to address the deeper issues placing her and her children at risk.

This isn't just negligence—it's an unforgivable failure. Devica wasn't the cause of her own suffering. She was a victim of a system that should have offered help but instead treated her as a risk to manage. The anger I feel toward this system is indescribable. A mother already fighting to stay afloat was left alone, with no support, no safety net—just scrutiny. She was treated not as a human being, in need of care and compassion, but as a problem to be controlled.

What We Know: A System that Harms

Research by the [Nuffield Foundation](#) reveals the overrepresentation of Black and Mixed race children in England's care system. Work from the [Centre for Child and Family Justice Research](#) shows the tragic cycle of repeat removals: one in four mothers are forced back into court as their children are taken again.

The link between poverty and care involvement is undeniable. Between 2015-2020, rising child poverty resulted in 10,000 more children entering care. [Children in the North](#) of England are far more likely to be removed than those in the South. And perhaps most

devastatingly, research by [John Devaney](#) found that mothers whose children are taken into care are 14 times more likely to die prematurely.

This system is killing us. We must act now.

Abolitionists Imaginings: Why Reforms Won't Work

We have to face the truth: the family justice system is broken. Cases like Devica's force us to ask whether it can ever be fixed—or if it's time to dismantle it entirely.

Abolitionists argue that these systems were never meant to serve marginalised communities—they were designed to surveil, control, and punish them. Since the pandemic and the murder of George Floyd, calls to abolish child welfare systems have grown louder. But in the UK, the conversation around abolition remains sluggish at best.

According to abolitionist organizer Mariame [Kaba](#), abolition is a “*political vision, a structural analysis of oppression, and a practical organizing strategy.*” It calls for the dismantling of systems of oppression – systems that surveil, control and punish families, especially those from marginalised communities. These systems are rooted in racial capitalism and slavery, and their harms continue to this day.

[Dorothy Roberts](#), a leading voice in abolitionist social work, identifies three key principles of abolition: first, that carcerality within child welfare is grounded in the legacies of slavery and racial capitalism; second, that this system disproportionately targets Black, Brown, and working-class families; and third, that true justice requires us to imagine and build a world based on care, compassion, and the fulfilment of human needs—rather than punishment, incarceration, and family separation.

As [Ruth Gilmore](#) reminds us: “*Abolition is not absence, it is presence.*” Abolition is not about chaos; it is about creating something new.

If the system had invested in Devica—mental health support, safe housing, childcare—the tragedy could have been prevented. But instead, it punished and abandoned her.

This is why reforms won't work. [Pendleton and Deltaff \(2023\)](#) argue reforms are just “tweaks” to a system beyond repair. There is no humane version of removing a child from their mother. There is no gentle way to enact that kind of violence. Reform cannot fix this—only abolition can.

Parenting at the Intersections: Im/possibilities

It is often said that every parent faces struggles at some point in their journey. But whether those struggles are manageable often comes down to factors like wealth, family support, and stability. When you add the intersecting pressures of race, class, gender, ability, and a lack of support, it becomes clear that for some, even the basics of parenting can become overwhelming. The things others may take for granted turn into insurmountable barriers.

These intersections shape a reality where what should be manageable becomes an impossible fight.

In an abolitionist world, Devica would have had what she needed—not just to survive, but to thrive. She would have had mental health care, housing support, community childcare, and solidarity. Instead, she was left alone until the unimaginable happened.

In an abolitionist world, [community-led organizations](#) would step in to provide real, material and financial support to single mothers – help with food, housework, childcare, and more. This kind of support would ensure that children grow up in safe, stable homes where their basic needs are met. These are the fundamentals every mother deserves, yet they remain out of reach for so many.

Why don't we have services that provide this kind of support? Unless, of course, you're wealthy? Is it really that radical to imagine a world where these essentials aren't treated as luxuries?

Family Futurity: A Call to Action

On Mother's Day, I want to ask: *What does it mean to do family justice work?*

Because what we have now is not justice—it's punishment. It's surveillance. It's harm. And reform will never be enough. We need to build something entirely new: a system rooted in care, support, compassion, and healing.

Are we truly ready to embrace humanising approaches to care that nurture the future of families? Are we ready to dismantle and abolish the system as we know it?

I know I am – are you?

Are you?

Cece Kins, March 2025