

“What Happened at the Capitol Could Not Happen Unless Police Allowed It to Happen”

CounterSpin interview with Mara Verheyden-Hilliard on police responsibility

By [Mara Verheyden-Hilliard](#) and [Janine Jackson](#)

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*Janine Jackson interviewed the Partnership for Civil Justice Fund's Mara Verheyden-Hilliard on police responsibility for the January 6 insurrection for the [January 8, 2021, episode](#) of **CounterSpin**. This is a lightly edited transcript.*

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Janine Jackson: We [spoke](#) with our next guest in January of 2017, in the wake of the mass arrest of protesters and journalists at Donald Trump's inauguration, and the decision to bring felony riot charges against them. What accounts for how differently DC law enforcement behaved yesterday?

Mara Verheyden-Hilliard is an activist and attorney. She's co-founder and executive director of the [Partnership for Civil Justice Fund](#). She joins us now by phone from Washington, DC. Welcome back to **CounterSpin**, Mara Verheyden-Hilliard.

Mara Verheyden-Hilliard: Glad to be with you.

JJ: So I just have one big question, really, which is, “What the hell?” And why is the Partnership for Civil Justice Fund, along with the [Center for Protest Law and Litigation](#), [calling](#) for public investigations here?

MVH: I think what we witnessed yesterday, in addition to being an extraordinary event in US history and our lifetimes, is fully defining of what has been told to us over and over again is the neutral application of law enforcement, and law and order. Any of us who have ever demonstrated in Washington, DC, or been in Washington, DC, know full well the capacity of the police agencies here to shut down and repress completely peaceful protest. Our clients and we have been subject to [kettling](#), to mass arrest, to projectile weapons, to being soaked in chemical weapons, to tear gas, and there's been no hesitation to use this. The police have [all the materiel](#), the riot gear, the personnel, the weapons, the tactics at their disposal.

So that can lead us only to the most obvious conclusion, which is, what happened yesterday at the nation's capital could not happen unless the police allowed it to happen. And they did

in fact allow it to happen.

So we are demanding an investigation, because there has to be exposure and accountability for every single officer, for every single command official, for everyone who was involved in allowing, facilitating, this white supremacist mob violence.

Our point here is not calling for police repression; our goal is not to increase police repression. What we need to do and must do here is expose the nature of police repression, and that is so evident here today. We know perfectly well that if there had been a peaceful demonstration that had come en masse to the Capitol and had tried to enter through the front doors, we would have seen a massacre, I mean, a massacre.

And here is a white supremacist group that had been [publicly bragging](#) that they were coming to Washington, DC, that they were trying to smuggle illegal weapons in here. And the idea that the Capitol Police were caught off guard, or were somehow outmaneuvered, is completely false. Over 20 years of litigation in the District of Columbia, in constitutional rights cases, we have seen, over and over again, the very sophisticated operation that exists here in planning for major events in the District, and for demonstrations and for rallies and for everything. And they have very effective and significant coordinated interagency communications, operation manuals, tabletop exercises, planning, mutual aid agreements.

It's simply not possible, particularly in the post-9/11 world at the Capitol, that they lacked preparedness, or that they lacked knowledge for what was going to happen.

Janine Jackson: We've been speaking with Mara Verheyden-Hilliard of the [Partnership for Civil Justice Fund](#). You can follow their work online at [JusticeOnline.org](#). We will be following this investigation. Thank you so much, Mara Verheyden-Hilliard, for joining us today on **CounterSpin**.

MVH: I'm glad to be with you.

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Janine Jackson is FAIR's program director and producer/host of FAIR's syndicated weekly radio show CounterSpin. Her articles have appeared in various publications, including In These Times and the UAW's Solidarity, and in books including Civil Rights Since 1787 (New York University Press) and Stop the Next War Now: Effective Responses to Violence and Terrorism (New World Library). Jackson is a graduate of Sarah Lawrence College and has an M.A. in sociology from the New School for Social Research.

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