THE POLITICS
OF
BLACK SPACE

Cover Art: A derivation of "Veritas Black" by Chris Darby. See "You Can't be Neutral on a Moving Train" on p. 42 for the original image.

"Veritas Black" is a work that connects the horrors of chattel slavery to the prestige of Harvard University. The design was inspired by Reclaim Harvard Law's remix of the Harvard Law School logo, rendered by graphic designer Japheth Gonzalez, and cooked up by NMBG, an arts and education think-tank directed by Harvard Graduate School of Education master's student Chris Darby. Table tents with the image were installed throughout Gutman Library as part of the HGSE Black Student Union's programming for Black History Month, making Black consciousness visible in a space dominated by Whiteness. On the backside of the table tents were quotes selected from the website www.HarvardandSlavery.com, a project led by Harvard history professor Sven Beckert to expose and examine the many connections between Harvard and slavery.

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Editor's Note

black   */blak/*   *adjective*
of any human
group having
dark-colored skin

space   */spās/*   *noun*
the freedom and
scope to live, think
and develop in
a way that suits one

Established civilizations. Chattel slavery. Segregated districts. "Whites Only" entrances. Gerrymandered voting lines. Inner-city ghettos. Suburban cosmopolitans. West Wing offices. West side neighborhoods. Law school classrooms. Lunchroom seating. Voter identification laws. Tenured faculty. School endorsements. Donor profiles.

Guiding mantras. Divergent practices. Institutional hypocrisies.

The Politics of Black Space.

The 2016 edition of the *Harvard Journal of African American Public Policy (HJAAP)* features articles, commentaries, interviews, and creative works illuminating student movements to reaffirm identity in spaces where Black visibility and input is limited, if it exists at all. To date, student organizations across the nation have issued eighty-five demand letters to academic institutions. The letters demand to be visible and recognized. They unequivocally seek increases in Black/minority student enrollment and Black/minority faculty, as well as a contextualized curriculum that injects the objective realities of class, race, culture, discrimination, and intolerance into the bloodstream of educational institutions. After all, these are organizations that, through research and teaching, form the basis of much of the policy enacted and enforced by government; and these are the organizations producing theories of economic systems that thrive in perpetuity, yet fail to address extreme income disparity and social inequality. Academia and their institutions lie at the root of *institutional* racism—and students have shouted the call for change.

Through mobilized action, students and progressive faculty aim to hold institutions accountable for their roles in intersectional oppression and hypocritical claims that tout a public face of justice while actual practices stifle the same. Their advocacy emphasizes connections between public policies drawn and enforced devoid of inclusion, and the resulting permissions for bias afforded through government, business, and education—whether implicit or otherwise. While an Office of Diversity and Inclusion can help further define these issues and incubate their solutions, many student groups must first adamantly work to even secure widespread recognition, let alone support, of their concerns.

Changing culture is no small feat but educational environments provide fertile ground.

Our 2016 contributors have mobilized support from the margins, become leaders of movements, and interacted with peers, onlookers, and advocates to unpack the intricacies of aligning greater community concerns with institutional shortcomings. They have battled micro-aggressions in majority White environments and balanced various approaches to change in arenas of implicit bias and alleged colorblindness. Like their student-activist predecessors who demonstrated in support of civil rights, protested against the war in Vietnam, advocated to end apartheid through institutional divestment of South African holdings, and called for the initial establishment of African

American studies departments and curriculums in the 1970s and 1980s, their continued vigilance and navigation of intra- and extra-group politics helps to model effective strategies as progress is continually achieved.

Our contributors inform against the idea of a monolithic Black identity and the counter-intuitive notion of respectability politics; they discuss the process of reconciling curricula and pedagogy with new interpretations of historical biases and the context of today's social realities; they devise strategies for defining all manner of privilege; and they invoke the importance of Critical Race Theory in sustaining the mental health, well-being and success of Black students—and all students.

This is their story.

The 2014-15 edition of the *Harvard Journal of African American Public Policy* reflected salient issues of that year. The Black community was assailed by breaches of social justice at the hands of the police, leading to the formation of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement and a successful, aggressive agenda that brought global attention to race relations in America. Their work has compelled an evolution of justice inquiries and accountability measures for police and municipalities alike. It has compelled the recognition and value of Black lives. But the movement continues.

In 2016, the Journal finds the BLM movement's strong presence through the struggle for identity and recognition of diverse communities on institutional campuses. Students have found common ground in public and private institutional bias, and in this respect, the movements are interrelated. Black lives still and will always matter. Black future is dependent on how new public policy is formed and enforced as a result of their dual efforts for institutional reform.

As you may observe, the Journal has progressed from traditional policy analyses that may define, but not solve, problems. Instead, we expand conversations to include voices that speak truth to power and explain the intricacies of necessary actions. We are guided by a premise that righteous policy is made when both widely informed and understood. This perspective requires recognition and full acceptance of race, gender, and sexuality at the core basis of policy, not relegated to the margins and addressed only under protest.

As my four-year tenure comes to a close, I am immensely proud of our ability to reframe, analyze, and discuss topical material impacting our everyday lives. Our efforts have expanded the editorial board across Harvard institutions and racial/ethnic identities, increased the readership base for web and print publications, launched an online blog, and even paired musical selections with articles in order to expand content offerings. Overall, our work aims to share perspectives that do little justice if retained within the Ivory Tower.

As but a guide, the insular environment of campus life bridges to a world beyond academia. It is a world of which we all come and will re-enter in due time. In the words of Umi Selah, Organizer and Mission Director of the Dream Defenders: "You were not put on this earth with all of your genius to only help Black people on the weekends." If it is this change we want, we cannot only clock in part-time.

We are privileged to attend one of the country's leading institutions that educates our generation's legal and political leaders. Let us be challenged to use this privilege to the benefit of something much greater than ourselves. The choice is ours to make. The work is waiting to be done.

The 2015-16 edition of the *Harvard Journal of African American Public Policy* is deeply grateful to all contributors, both past and present, who have played a key role in the Journal's revival and future promise. I would like to give sincere thanks to the Journal staff, administrative support, faculty advisor and Professor Richard Parker, and past staff members who remain integral to our sustainability.

The Struggle Continues,

Deloris C. Wilson
Editor-in-Chief

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On Bombs, Bullets, and Belinda

By Derecka Purnell

Derecka Purnell is a community organizer from St. Louis, Missouri. Her research and organizing has primarily focused on achieving racial justice, improving access to quality education, and dismantling disparate impact discrimination against ex-offenders of color. She has engaged in civil rights work and activism across sectors for the last ten years, and has been featured in a number of publications and media, including the Harvard Journal for African American Public Policy, the Huffington Post, the Boston Globe, and the New York Times.

Purnell believes in holistically loving on oppressed people: identifying problems and working together to meet temporary needs, while fighting for systemic change. Her commitment to social justice stems from her personal experiences as a poor, Black girl living in an immigrant neighborhood in South St. Louis. She believes advocacy for similar groups through law, activism, and policy provides liberation, protection, and empowerment.

She is currently a student at Harvard Law School with her woes.

Belinda Hall is Black as hell. Not racially, but consciously it is Black. It's the only Black space on Harvard Law's campus, and like every other Black space in the world, it is under attack or on the threat of seizure.

West Philly is actually Black as hell. In the 1970s, John Africa founded MOVE, a revolutionary religious and environmental justice collective that protested against police brutality, technology, animal abuse, and pollution.[1] The organization took over abandoned buildings in Black, middle-class Philadelphia neighborhoods and lived communally on raw vegetable diets.[2] Often marginalized by moderate Blacks and targeted by the city, police abuse resulted in seventeen MOVE deaths, including one three-month-old baby and four miscarriages (the police brutally attacked four pregnant women).[3] The most famed encounter between the Philadelphia police department and MOVE occurred on 13 May 1986 when the department fired 10,000 bullets, in an hour and a half, at the collective's home—ultimately dropping a bomb in an attempt to force out members.[4] Two members survived, but eleven died, including five children and founder John Africa.[5] Sixty-five homes eventually caught fire due to their proximities to the burning building, leaving over two hundred people homeless. The police commissioner stopped fire fighters from saving houses and is famously quoted for yelling, "Let the fires burn!"[6]

The police bombed a Black neighborhood, and no city official faced any disciplinary action.

West St. Louis is hella Black, too. Page and Walton is an intersection in the Fountain Park neighborhood in West St. Louis City. In late August 2015, residents crowded the streets after learning about another police killing, following the commemorative events of Michael Brown's murder. The police claim Mansur Ball-Bey, eighteen, pointed a gun at two officers while running out of the back of a house during a police raid.[7] Police shot him in the back while he was still in the backyard, severing his spine and fatally piercing his heart.

However, his body was found two houses away and without a gun.[8]

Frustrated with shifting accounts of the story, many residents took to the streets to chant and stop traffic. The police department met the crowd with lines of riot officers and MRAPs (mine-resistant, ambush-protected trucks). The MRAPs deployed chemical agents that cause excessive sneezing, scratchy throats, and watery eyes. As the crowd frantically dispersed, the MRAP drove down Page to stop residents from running away and began shooting tear gas canisters at people and cars. Residents who lived on the blocks south of Page were on their porches. I watched families wait for their children to come home from school, unaware of the demonstrations taking place minutes away. School buses dropped off children in smoke-filled streets. MRAPs chased protestors block by block, firing tear gas onto porches of unsuspecting families. At one point, a MRAP drove through a park, still deploying chemical agents and tear gas at non-demonstrators.

> "I shared the stories about MOVE and Fountain Park for two reasons. First, people should know them, and second, to highlight how the legal system fails to protect Black space."

The police department tear-gassed an entire Black neighborhood, and no city official or officer faced any disciplinary action.

Belinda Hall is a claimed space inside of Wasserstein Hall (WCC) on Harvard Law School's campus. Belinda Sutton was an enslaved African woman who labored under the Royall family. She petitioned the Massachusetts legal system for a pension from the Royall family for her many years of work, winning an early reparations case in the US.[9] Students under the name "Reclaim HLS" occupied the space in early February 2016 to start a political education program and bring some of their own demands to life after bleak negotiations with school administration. They chose the name "Belinda" to honor the radical imagination of Sutton.

In Belinda, reading groups meet weekly to discuss texts on subjects as varied as Black radical tradition, labor movements, student protests, Black feminism, and Chicano uprisings. Different students organizations hold talks, lectures, movie screenings, and reading groups covering national security issues, Palestinian liberation, queer identity, sexual assault bystander training, and community organizing. Student organizers from Brandeis University, the University of Southern California, Occidental College, Harvard College, Yale Law School, Tufts University, and the University of Missouri share insights and reflections from their movements. Critical race theorists Mari Matsuda, Chuck Lawrence, Margaret Montoya, and Justin Hansford, and scholars Lani Guiner, Aziz Rana, Marshall Ganz, have conducted teach-ins in the space. Staff members meet to share concerns about being people of color in an institution that does not promote or retain them. Students from marginalized backgrounds are at peak visibility on campus, and are learning.

Belinda Hall is not under the threat of a bomb. Situated rather comfortably between two fireplaces in a Harvard lounge on campus, Belinda is safe from MRAPs and tear gas. Black Harvard Law School students are wrapped in a particular type of privilege I believe will shield them from the physically violent attacks experienced in poor, Black city centers.

I shared the stories about MOVE and Fountain Park for two reasons. First, people should know them, and second, to highlight how the legal system fails to protect Black space. Students and faculty who oppose Reclaim HLS and/or Belinda Hall seek to eliminate a platform for marginalized students to discuss these failures, and they have the power to set the terms for protest.

No racial justice movement has ever prevailed without dissent. Dismantling racial hierarchy, patriarchy, classism, LGBTphobia, xenophobia, and Islamophobia necessarily means people who benefit from those forms of oppression will be

made uncomfortable. At Harvard Law, this is no different. Belinda Hall is in one of many lounges in WCC, and WCC is one of nineteen buildings on campus. Fifty floors between all of the buildings is a conservative estimate, and Belinda takes up less than one-sixteenth of one floor. Yet, some students and faculty feel the occupied space is too much territory.

Students opposing Reclaim HLS have recorded and distributed footage of students of color without their consent, have shouted at least at one, and have written about why they do not believe they have to give up their White privilege to be an ally for racial justice. Anonymous websites have been launched to profile and harass student organizers, putting their future careers, and perhaps safety, at stake. At least one staff member resigned when his supervisor began treating him with hostility after being vocal about his experiences. In early spring 2016, a recording device was found underneath furniture in Belinda, while Velcro was found in multiple places, suggesting devices were moved around to capture different conversations. This matter is currently under investigation by the administration and Harvard University Police Department.

Belinda Hall's fate is closely tied to the MOVE and Fountain Park events: wherever Black people are, systemic injustice works to make sure they have little power. If law students do not understand the value of safe spaces for marginalized students on campus, will they graduate to make decisions that will threaten Black collectives, communities, and countries? Belinda Sutton's space, native Ghana, became "Black" through imperialism and the enslavement of human beings. West Philly's Blackness made it more bombable and worthy of destruction, and the school children in Fountain Park were Black enough to be tear-gassed while walking home from school. Students are in law school to become advocates, recognize injustice, and become guardians of the law. If law students do not want to entertain, learn, or even consider marginalization issues facing the peers they sit next to, how can society entrust them with a career of advocacy, problem-solving and client representation?

Perhaps Black space is not the political question or problem. MOVE members and Fountain Park residents were not bombed or tear-gassed "while Black," but the Philadelphia police were bombing and tear-gassing, respectively, while powerful. Students in Belinda Hall are not being recorded merely because of their marginal status, but because whomever plants devices, anonymously creates websites, or shows hostility toward staff of color is shielded from accountability due to a power imbalance. Thus, claiming and protecting Black space is ultimately about shifting power. #ReclaimHLS is about shifting power.

Endnotes

1   Gene Demby, "I'm From Philly. 30 Years Later, I'm Still Trying To Make Sense Of The MOVE Bombing," NPR, 13 May 2015.
2   Ibid.
3   "20 Years on the Move: John Africa's Revolution," MOVE, n.d.
4   "MOVE Bombing at 30: 'Barbaric' 1985 Philadelphia Police Attack Killed 11 & Burned a Neighborhood," Democracy Now, 13 May 2015.
5   Ibid.
6   Ibid.
7   Rebecca Rivas, "Mansur Ball-Bey Was Innocent Bystander in Police Raid, Family Attorneys Say," St. Louis American, 24 August 2014.
8   Ibid.
9   "Belinda Sutton and Her Petitions," Royall House and Slave Quarters, n.d.

The Internal Backlash of Contemporary Black Liberation

By A. Splawinski

A. Splawinski is a student of political science at the University of Toronto. She has worked in and around LGBTQ activist spaces in Toronto for over five years, mostly contributing to peer support initiatives. She has also worked as a freelance journalist for over two years, focusing on Canadian and American politics, public policy, and social movements. Currently, Splawinski's political science research focuses on the theories of democracy, public attitudes toward political institutions, and reform using the American Senate and the Seventeenth Amendment. Her future research endeavors include the criminalization of HIV, as well as the link between grassroots activism and public policy.

Overview

What few saw coming was the unraveling of internal movement politics that would fundamentally complicate both the structure of the movement and the movement itself.

When the #BlackLivesMatter movement mobilized in response to the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the death of seventeen-year-old Trayvon Martin, the movement was framed as another wave of civil rights demonstrations that would gain momentum through traditional tactics, such as the sit-ins of the 1960s.[1] Despite this Black liberation movement's progress and ability to consistently make headlines as it moves across the country, it is still perceived by some as an inconvenient presence in the public domain.[2]

What's inconvenient to some is perplexing to others: why are the same signs used in 2016 that protestors of the 1950s held amid firehouses, jailhouses, and ballot boxes? Why are the same demands being made as the movement works to end the disproportionate jailing of Black youth and police brutality?[3] Despite the ongoing media critique and public sentiments weighing the "appropriateness" of movement tactics, what's been far less discussed are the internal workings of such a movement and how these interactions can positively impact progress—or potentially threaten demise.[4] In this article, I discuss various intersections of activist politics that can impact movement growth and sustainability. I begin with a discussion of "internal backlash," representing the power dynamics operating in activist groups. I then dissect the activist industrial complex with respect to the #BlackLivesMatter movement, and outline why framing this new Black liberation movement as a "liberal distraction" is an attempt at dismissing the impact diverse tactics can have. Furthermore, I outline why the "problematic identity"—the identity often thrust upon those who deviate from particular direct-action tactics in favor of more traditional methods—hinders activism. In conclusion, I examine why Black political spaces cannot exist on a strict right-wrong dichotomy and why a multiplicity of means is necessary for Black liberation.

The Activist Industrial Complex and Radical/Moderate Dichotomy

Activist groups are plentiful and the propensity of internal backlash complicates the politics of the Black activist space. While external factors—judicial, legislative, media, or otherwise—are generally associated with counter-movements, the

fragmentation of Black political spaces can impact reactionary shifts within movements themselves, potentially causing activists to spurn against one another, contrary to the movement's overall goals.

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Political scientists Jane Mansbridge and Shauna L. Shames define "power" as the capacity to influence an outcome, or the ability to coerce, by means of force or threat, a particular outcome.[5] Even as individuals, every aspect of our lives operates within the confines of power. For example, most employers have hierarchical structures, whereby positive performance allows employees to move to a higher position over their peers—higher salary, more responsibility, and other preferred benefits. In a broader sense, queer theory and other schools of thought rooted in non-assimilationist politics that challenge dominant discourses, describe the world we live in as a series of multiple interacting power systems we must navigate. In some instances, one will have power, and therefore privilege, over others. Privilege may come in the form of economic security, the benefits of citizenship, or a variety of other advantages. Those without power often are left with two options: attempt to seize power or destabilize the system(s).

The power dynamics and competition latent in a capitalist society seep into the activist space, creating an activist industrial complex that can be understood several ways. One way is the activist who insists they are advocating on behalf of an entire oppressed group, yet leaves out groups such as trans people, other communities of color, disabled individuals, etc.; another is the prioritizing of intellect and ego over survival and opportunity. Typically, and most obviously, power interplays in

social movements through counter-movements, or "backlash." This backlash is a reactionary mobilization that ignites when a group feels its power is threatened. Within activist groups, as with any collective body, backlash can occur both in and outside of the activist space.

External backlash, or a counter-movement, comes in many forms. The 1925 case of *The State of Tennessee v. John Thomas Scopes*, or the "Scopes Monkey Trial," was a judicial reaction to teaching evolution in schools.[6] In the post-war era, the FBI employed a state-sanctioned backlash to thwart civil rights groups, with J. Edgar Hoover leading the charge to label the Black Panther Party and its supporters as "Black hate groups." Under Hoover's direction, the FBI established a counterintelligence program to "expose, disrupt, misdirect, discredit, destroy, or otherwise neutralize" the Black liberation movement.[7]

However, as external pressures complicate activist progression on the social scale, internal conflicts threaten collective identity and the ability to define, organize, and move towards a collective goal.

This can be internally demonstrated through the radical/moderate dichotomy, a distinction attempting to reconcile those activists who operate within, as opposed to outside, the traditional political system. However, this ignores the means, ability, and education people might have. Respecting diverse tactics used to reach a similar goal is not only ethical, but also strategic. Short-term goals amid long-term objectives leave room for old-school activists who contend we could live outside of the system we are in, as well as the novice who does not know another system is even a possibility.

Political scientist Janet Conway articulates that respecting how other activists engage with issues does not necessarily mean one would choose the same, or even agree with the usefulness or ethics of such an action; "rather, it holds that everyone has the right and the responsibility to identify their own thresholds of legitimate protest and to make their own political, strategical, and ethical choices, while also allowing others to do so free from public criticism or censure."[8] A different tactic does not necessarily make it wrong.

These internal activist-group interactions can be seen in the qualification of #BlackLivesMatter and other Black activists being cited as nothing more than a "liberal distraction" by other Black liberationists. The article "#BlackLivesMatter: Black Liberation or Black Liberal Distraction" by Halima Hatimy states that #BlackLivesMatter is composed of Western "Black petit bourgeoisie."[9] I agree that addressing global anti-Blackness is necessary, and that activists should be criticized for not addressing anti-Blackness in non-Western countries or not being proper allies to those in non-Western countries. However, the notion we can stretch criticism to a place where we can say all of this is in vain is unfair.

According to Hatimy, an honest effort on the part of the #BLM movement would call for the abolition of oppressive, racist, and capitalistic structures, and demand full social and economic equality, rather than state-implemented reforms and deliberate moves to work in the system. However, framing the movement this way ignores the justifications one may have for advocating for reform as opposed to abolition—one group sees abolition as a plan while the other sees it as a goal.

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Perhaps, as Judith Butler describes in *Critically Queer*, there is a kind of "necessary error" occurring here. Butler argues we cannot create the terms that represent our liberation from nothing, and we are responsible for the terms carrying the pain of social injury. "[Y]et, neither of those terms are as a result any less necessary to work and rework within political discourse."[10] Perhaps, even in its faults, there is something uniquely necessary about #BlackLivesMatter and similar Black activist groups, and the multiplicity of tactics used within and outside of these groups.

The #BlackLivesMatter movement does not state an end goal of police reformation. Instead, it defines one of its primary goals as "(re)building the Black liberation movement," explaining that Black poverty and the disproportionate number of Black individuals in prisons are manifestations of state violence.[11] Though it is misleading to articulate the movment's goals as otherwise, counter-movements constituently question the credibility of #BlackLivesMatter by doing so.

Ironically, it appears the radical and moderate activists often have the same goal—Black liberation—yet they've chosen to employ varied means to achieve that goal. Strategies of the #BlackLivesMatter movement are often critiqued, citing its discussions of privilege, reform of the prison industrial complex, reform of police practice, or meetings with politicians, as a sign of moderation.[12] Critics contend if activists were indeed radical, as Hatimy's article states, they would primarily call for abolition, not reform. However, this presupposes the activists are choosing reform as an end in itself, rather than a *means* to an end.

Unlearning a Eurocentric Worldview

Activists, like the general public, are inundated with regulations of Black bodies. This extends from the streets where victims of police brutality lifelessly lie, to the halls of the classroom where Black skin and Black hair are wholly unwelcome. Black girls have been kicked out of school for their natural hair, and dark-skinned women have been barred from entering spaces due to their complexion.[13] Further, dark-skinned individuals face a high risk of sometimes violent consequences due to their complexion. Some of these consequences include having lower chances of obtaining employment than their light-skinned counterparts, and even being sentenced to 12 percent more time behind bars for the same crime as compared to light-skinned individuals.[14] These legacies of colonialism, slavery, and Jim Crow compound alarming statistics that also

demonstrate an increased likelihood of Black Americans being unarmed when killed by the police.[15] The intersection of sexuality, race, and place—in addition to the historical contexts of slavery, colonialism, and systematic discrimination—impedes activists' ability to "unlearn," or envision ways of being that are outside of dominant or mainstream thinking. The process of unlearning requires activists to move away from the status quo, to see above the examples society presents them and apply a critical lens to their very being. Activists have to grapple with colorism's impact on the sociopolitical world, and/or why African American English vernacular is framed with negative connotation, similarly to the dichotomy between "good" and "bad" hair, for that which is more straight and silky vis-à-vis curly and coarse. In doing so, activists not only undergo a journey of self-acceptance, but also make political decisions in the process, which are political acts rooted in one's worth, rebuking Eurocentric consumerist ideals that dictate a "preferred" look, action, or being that confirms to the admissible politics of respectability.[16]

> **"The intersection of sexuality, race, and place—in addition to the historical contexts of slavery, colonialism, and systematic discrimination—impedes activists' ability to unlearn, or envision ways of being that are outside of dominant or mainstream thinking."**

Activists enter and progress through the unlearning process in different ways. At these varied *stages*, then, it is troublesome for groups to cast one another aside because of differing perspectives, particularly in terms of methodology. Being at different places in the unlearning process is the reality, and activist groups must accept that as fact.

The "Problematic" Identity

The radical/moderate divide illustrates a larger problem in activist spaces: activists imposing the all-encompassing "problematic" identity onto one another. The power-hungry and ego-latent activist industrial complex employs a problematic identity on dissenters, casting anyone in the group aside who says or does something not in perfect alignment with their arbitrarily set standard of "activism," or what may be deemed "appropriate" by the group.

Though many groups aim to create safe spaces in order to respect a diverse set of voices and experiences, these groups simultaneously conduct, create, and assert "problematic" identities, which essentially rebuke dissenting opinions and differing viewpoints from the group's intra-space. By silencing or discrediting dissent, the activity of activism is twisted into an unattainable mold an individual can perfect, rather than existing as a transformative activity that an individual *strives* to perfect. Through this frame, the internal backlasher's viewpoints, strategies, and opinions are right, while those of the "problematic" activist are wrong. While the "internal backlasher" may purport him or herself as being open to a variety of lived experiences, eventually the "problematic" activist will not be able to reconcile their feelings with this assumed standard, and may even be qualified as being in the "wrong" phase of unlearning.

While it seems contradictory for social movements to operate like quasi-political parties, employing a similar "agree-with-me-or-leave" rhetoric, this phenomenon may help explain why activists aligning with radical or moderate ideologies view their means (and only their means) as the best or safest way to proceed. Rather than critique an off-norm perspective for foundational validity, it is more productive for these groups to explore the rationale behind their choices and examine the reasoning of the dissent for both weaknesses and strengths. Labeling "problematic" that which is "different" dismisses the individual realities of each activist. Through this, the "internal backlashers" refuse to consider their collective goal could be achieved in a number of ways. Rather than assuming rigid value judgments, activists should acknowledge the comfort, safety, and value in the multiplicity of strategies as they may stimulate new ways to think about and exist in Black political spaces.

> **"By silencing or discrediting dissent, the activity of activism is twisted into an unattainable mold an individual can perfect, rather than existing as a transformative activity that an individual strives to perfect."**

The intellectual entrepreneurship in activist spaces is unlike any other. The need to harmonize ideas and reconcile lived experiences with the cause at hand can only occur when individuals feel safe to fully participate. However, there are scenarios wherein those who are labeled "problematic" face adverse consequences. In "Why This Radical Activist is Disillusioned by the Toxic Culture of the Left," author Bailey Lamon cites after being termed problematic, or being called out, some activists she knew allegedly lost jobs, relationships, and friends.[17] Some felt so alienated they avoid attending certain events or going to specific community spaces. The mental distress of the isolated individuals has even led to suicide. The fear and isolation produced in supposed "safe spaces" not only has adverse consequences, but also stunts the crux of activist activity—the process of unlearning. If not properly mitigated, this could ultimately stall the collective progress of the greater movement.

The Impact of Fear

There is a fear surrounding activist spaces that functions within the boundaries of the state. In The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness, lawyer and legal scholar Michelle Alexander carefully describes the waves of reform that did not end racism, but rather merely changed its form. From slavery, through the Jim Crow era, and into the war on drugs and mass incarceration, Alexander explains racism has never left us; it has only become subtler.[18]

The anxiety of operating within traditional boundaries of institutional politics stems from the idea that perhaps by using purely conventional means, racism will, once again, only change its form—not its quantity or impact. The historical trend of Black activist spaces operating within the confines of the state (either by choice or by force), positions the state as an indicator of morality and success. Yet, when we consider what it means to use the state as an indicator of success, we are reminded the state's supposed inclusiveness just slightly changes the color of the hierarchy—it does not necessarily reflect day-to-day occurrences on the ground.

Clarence Lusane's What Color is Hegemony? illustrates a version of this by dissecting the appointments of Condoleezza Rice as National Security Advisor and Colin Powell as Secretary of State during the second George W. Bush term. Their appointments raised questions about race relations and the state, as well as the active participation of Black Americans as "high-level functionaries operating within spheres in which they can agree but cannot fundamentally determine."[19] Being an active shareholder in the government's plan to use economic and military means to ensure a rival power never emerges is worrying, especially when economic and military policy often intertwines with racist and xenophobic ideals.

Operating within conventional activist tactics (such as voting) upholds state power, and calling for legislative reform may do the same. However, it is not fair to say these tactics must act in isolation, or that they will forever perpetuate the very systems against which Black activists are fighting. There are ways to simultaneously operate inside and outside of conventional means. For instance, despite being ridiculed as a "miscreant" and an example of "one of the sanctimonious and self-aggrandizing activists [that make] a career out of the Black Lives Matter protests,"[20] DeRay McKesson, once at the forefront of unconventional activism, is now running for mayor of Baltimore. When questioned about his intentions, McKesson has said he is not a politician and that a multi-faceted approach to activism is necessary: "It will always be important that people continue to push on the system from the outside. It will also be important that people make the changes that we know are necessary on the inside."[21] We could consider he might be wrong;

however, we must also consider he very well may be right. Perhaps a multi-pronged approach to Black activism won't always be necessary, perhaps it is not the way of the future. Nevertheless, perhaps it is necessary right now.

> ❝The anxiety of operating within traditional boundaries of institutional politics stems from the idea that perhaps by using purely conventional means, racism will, once again, only change its form—not its quantity or impact.❞

Conclusion

Though the use of the radical/moderate dichotomy is necessary to explain the varied tactics employed by activist groups, respecting diverse strategies is sometimes more than ethical—it can be tactical. Demanding perfection via censorship or the constant threat of isolation is not social justice. My argument is not that one should be forced to align with positions for which they fundamentally disagree. However, if the goal is Black liberation, a diverse set of strategies—dependent on varying levels of comfort, ability, knowledge, access, and belief—it should not define alienation. Rather, it should be holistically viewed, with due benefits incurred from each. We should analyze the pros and cons of all tactics, while also exploring the reasons why we choose to use them. Such internal critique is necessary for the future and progress of the Black activist space.

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Where Do Scalia's Come From?

By Tochi Onyebuchi

Tochi Onyebuchi is a writer and recent graduate of Columbia Law School. He currently serves as a Civil Rights Fellow and Volunteer Assistant Attorney General in the Civil Rights Bureau of the Office of the New York State Attorney General.

December 9: I thought the train ride from work would cool me down. I'd left work upset, yet arrived home incensed.

How do we get a Supreme Court Justice in 2015 tacitly recommending re-segregation? Where does that come from?

Scalia's conservative threat to dismantle affirmative action embodied much of what is wrong with legal education in this country, and how it fails both its students and the American public.

> "Scalia's conservative threat to dismantle affirmative action embodied much of what is wrong with legal education in this country, and how it fails both its students and the American public."

In its current incarnation, the Supreme Court (SCOTUS) has become the most predictable to staff of the three branches of government. All of the justices attended elite colleges. They all studied law at Harvard or Yale (or Columbia), became federal judges, circuit court judges, and then Supreme Court justices.

As a point of contrast, the Warren Court—which decided landmark cases like Brown v. Board of Education—had, at one point on the bench, an Army colonel, a justice who didn't even graduate from law school (Justice Stanley Forman Reed), assistant attorneys general, and a senator.

Now? You're rarely forced to consider what a police stop in Ferguson, Missouri, actually looks like. And while the face of the court has seen change under the past administration, the question Justice Clarence Thomas asked in Voisine v. United States, breaking his ten-year silence, signaled titanic ignorance of the lived reality of domestic abuse and gun violence. If you're the type of person who fits the elite law school student profile, your experience with the judicial system, whether through criminal justice or otherwise, is likely just as circumscribed.

The tragedy of law school is it's not challenging—it's reaffirming.

If you're prejudiced or ignorant on race when you get into law school, odds are no part of the curriculum will challenge you on that. If you're prejudiced or ignorant on gender when you get into law school, odds are no professor's going to call you on it. In fact, you learn the law, largely, as it's been used to reinforce institutional inequality. Sure, everyone will talk about how horrible Dred Scott or Korematsu were, but get enough folks talking about Lochner and someone's bound to pipe up about how the court was right in upholding the liberty to contract—meaning employers could force bakers in the late 1800s to work more than sixty hours a week in horribly ventilated conditions. This isn't to advocate prudentialism as a qualitatively superior method of constitutional interpretation than, say, "originalism."[1] It is only to state Supreme Court rulings are more than words written on paper or typed onto a screen. They are flesh-and-blood real-

> **The tragedy of law school is it's not challenging—it's reaffirming.**

ities. People live and die as a direct result. When a Supreme Court justice struggles to imagine a lived reality outside of his or her own—outside of one spent in privileged institutions among privileged students and colleagues—the result is a myopic decision eviscerating protections of certain rights. The result is thousands of voters who were turned away at the North Carolina polls for not having the proper identification under newly enacted voter ID laws.[2]

In law school, you are not directly taught how to be a lawyer. You aren't taught how to be a prosecutor. You damn sure aren't taught how to be a defense attorney. You are taught how to read and brief a case written in absurdly small type. You don't learn how to read a contract. And, unless you're in a clinic or externship, you spend almost no time in the same room as an actual practicing attorney.

> **And, if you happen to learn about those things, the message is: follow the rules, not how the color of your skin or the amount of money in your wallet often determines the contours of your experience as an American.**

In law school, you are taught the law. Which isn't even really true, because you aren't taught the law as it's practiced on the streets of Chicago. You aren't taught the law as it's been practiced by banks in collusion with housing authorities to deny loans to aspiring homeowners of color. You aren't taught why we have the carceral state we have. You are taught the law in all its sterility, so when you learn about Federal Rule of Civil Procedure Number 15, you can amend a pleading once if it's within twenty-one days of originally filing or within twenty-one days of a responsive pleading. You don't learn about the dude who got jacked up by police who refused to give their names when he asked and got his arm broken for it. You don't learn about the excessive force suit he tried to file against the police department. You don't

learn about how the suit failed because he didn't sue the officers by name and didn't learn their names until after the amendment deadline had passed. And, if you happen to learn about those things, the message is "follow the rules," not how the color of your skin or the amount of money in your wallet often determines the contours of your experience as an American. What you absolutely don't learn is how to do anything about it.

In my experience, the vast majority of law school students don't bother to see how that situation is screwed up. How many of their parents were denied homeowner loans or made to build their lives in a part of a city redlined by banks, realtors, and insurance companies? How many law student friends had their project homes demolished and were never helped with finding alternate housing? How many of them have friends or acquaintances, parents or brothers or sisters, who had to spend time in jail simply because, try as they might, they could not afford bail? How many of them were victims in any way, shape, or form, of being made to grab ankles and await trespass from any American institution, whether it be the justice system, the education system, or any other government service system?

When Fisher v. University of Texas was before the Supreme Court in 2013, Justice Thomas wrote in his concurrence that "there is no principled distinction between the University's assertion that diversity yields educational benefits and the segregationists' assertion that segregation yielded those same benefits."[3] Fidelity to restrictive interpretation of the Constitution establishes affirmative action as a set of policies with the amorphously defined "diversity" at its center. It is therefore heresy to consider affirmative action—as Thurgood Marshall did in his opinion in Bakke—as redress for previous wrongs, as something to be viewed in light of the nation's past inequities. As a limited attempt at balancing the scales, Marshall previously wrote, "I do not believe that anyone can truly look into America's past and still find that a remedy for the effects of that past is impermissible."[4] "Diversity" speaks to the benefit accorded to the white student, the cis student, the straight student, the male student; "remedy[ing] the effects of that past" speaks to the benefit accorded to everyone else.

> **"** How many people who would have made immense progress in the fight for civil rights or who, themselves, could eventually replace Roberts, or even Scalia's successor, on the Supreme Court bench, have been shut out of the institution of legal education? **"**

Law school is bursting with kids who scored highly on a standardized test. If, like me, you scored poorly on that test (both times), you don't belong in law school. If, like me, you were never taught as a kid how properly to take and understand standardized tests, you don't belong in law school.

How many people who would have made immense progress in the fight for civil rights or who, themselves, could eventually replace Roberts, or even Scalia's successor, on the Supreme Court bench, have been shut out of the institution of legal education? Law school's application fees, astronomical tuition, and authoritarian financial aid policies are an indictment of this continued failure.

> **"** We need new people in the pipeline. **"**

So, I can't hate on folks who glut the ranks of corporate law because you gotta get those stacks back. But, hey, say you want to do something other than that. Despite all financial prudence, you want to work in the public interest or do something a little non-traditional that scratches the activist itch. You may wind up working in the civil rights bureau of an attorney general's office on a "fellowship" of $30,000 that's supposed to last you a whole year in New York City, owing the Department of Education ten times your stipend for the year, hoping Congress reapproves the tenuous loan repayment system. If life, or even a stint at a corporate law firm, opens the door to economic and financial stability, it seems almost irresponsible for the millennial with six-figure debt to not walk through.

The Supreme Court lives on a mountaintop, and the law student lives in a bubble. Both are encased in sterile cocoons, and rarely is either population forced to truly and seriously contend with the unhygienic, fertile world around it.

This elite pipeline is how we get a Supreme Court justice who seems to believe centuries of racial inequity have mysteriously been fixed and affirmative action policies are unnecessary and unduly burdensome on whites.

It's also why if you're anyone from a non-traditional background, we need you to go to law school. We need people who, based on a standardized test score, wouldn't normally be here to go to law school. We need people who know what an EBT card is to go to law school. We need people who've been stopped by the police and know what a "bad apple" cop thinks of the Fourth Amendment to go to law school.

We need new people in the pipeline. Eventually, enough new people will get the pipeline to change. And then, we can maybe have more people on the bench who realize how ludicrous it is to say the right to vote is a "racial entitlement" or that, African Americans, rather than attend the University of Texas at Austin with their white peers, might be better served at "a slower-track school where they do well."

Endnotes

1   Prudentialism and originalism are methods of interpreting the Constitution in deciding cases before the Supreme Court. Crudely put, prudentialist reasoning occurs when the court introduces tangible and political realities into its decisional process. The Constitution is interpreted in light of the day's concrete realities. Originalism, on the other hand, tries to determine the intentions of the Framers and those affiliated with them in interpreting Constitutional provisions. Essentially turning justices into historians, its primary question is "What Would the Framers Do?"

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I CAN'T BREATHE

By Ree
Botts

I mean I physically cannot afford to breathe
In brown skin because it is inherently toxic
They say I'm worthless
Because brown skin is worthless
And I can't breathe

Because I'm choking on my melanin skin
I can't breathe
In all this melanin, American skin
Because I'm choking on your suspicious expectations
On your stereotypical degradation
Lingering colonization, internalized self-hatred
I can't breathe

In this air that was never made for me
You don't care because this air was never made for me
Can't you see, America, what you are doing to me?

Mentally, emotionally, and physically killing me
Cock, load, and shoot—choke, hold, and boot
You killing me

I CAN'T BREATHE

I guess we was never supposed to breathe here
'Cause this land wasn't never our birthplace to begin with in the first place
But it is the worst place and the best place for us to be
'Cause it ain't nowhere in the world for us to breathe

We been suffocating in this world since we crossed them seas
We come from a lineage of niggas who wasn't never supposed to breathe
Only supposed to breed young niggas who wouldn't breathe past age eighteen
And now them same young niggas killing them young niggas
Chasing the American dream

But they still can't breathe in this air that you claim is mine
They believing your lies and chasing the high
Until one day they lose their life and realize
They wasn't never even breathing in the first place

We wasn't never even breathing in the first place.

Can't breathe here
Can't breathe nowhere
Somebody tell me where am I supposed to go?
Somebody tell me, where is my home?

Why do y'all lie and tell me this, too, is my America if

I CAN'T BREATHE HERE?

I might as well just stop breathing.

I might as well take my own breath
Cause y'all gonna take that shit anyway
But dead or alive, I'm not breathing anyway . . .

Then I hear this voice inside of me, reminding me
That I gotta find breath in something
Gotta find life in something
In knowing that we don't belong here
But we belong together
And our lungs will learn to breathe together
Because if he can't breathe then I can't breathe
But we gotta breathe so we can be here
So we can reclaim our space and be free here
We deserve to breathe here

&WE WILL BREATHE HERE

WE WILL BREATHE HERE

WE WILL BREATHE HERE.

Transforming the Black Silent Majority into an Engaged Black Majority

By Demar
F. Lewis IV

Demar F. Lewis IV is currently a second-year MPP candidate at the Ford School of Public Policy, graduating in 2016. His research interests span issues of criminal justice policy, specifically the carceral state and prisoner reentry, stratification and inequality, race and ethnicity, and political sociology. Lewis IV serves as the Managing & Special Issues Editor for the *Michigan Journal of Public Affairs*, and is an executive board member of Students of Color in Rackham (SCOR) at the University of Michigan. Upon graduating, Lewis IV intends to pursue a PhD in sociology in order to continue exploring his research interests.

It feels like just yesterday Michael Brown, Aura Rosser, Tamir Rice, and Eric Garner were murdered by the police.[1] These were formative moments in my engagement in contemporary Black politics, as they occurred when I started graduate school at the University of Michigan. I was optimistic witnessing the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement emerge across the United States as a force with which to be reckoned. Using protests and social media to disrupt the American sociopolitical and economic systems, BLM has grown into one of the most powerful, organized movements for the Black community to mobilize in the last three decades. Considering this, the BLM movement is at a critical stage in its development; it must institutionalize its movement, while also garnering support from African Americans who are not fully aligned with the movement's cause. This must be done in order to ensure that Black Liberation is not compromised to neoliberal forces.

Heeding history, there are many parallels between the behaviors of the BLM movement in 2015 and the Black Panther Party (BPP) of the 1960s through the '80s. The BPP was comprised of progressively inclined people from all walks of life. They were articulate.[2] They were tactful. They were informed about global affairs and the intersectional relationship between domestic and global inequality.[3] Among other aims, the purpose of the BPP was to disrupt the unchecked power of the state, and to force the government to protect the Black community's constitutional rights.[4] Likewise, the BLM movement embodies similar attributes; members are progressively inclined, extremely intelligent, sophisticated, and linguistically brilliant, orators and strategists willing to challenge citizens and politicians alike in order addresses the unchecked power of the state.[5] Though the BLM movement has articulated a global agenda, most of its activism that has garnered attention has taken place in the US, with exception of the Toronto demonstrations in July 2015.[6] This is likely due to the BLM movement's evolving efforts to connect with global activists affiliated with progressive or socialist movements, a tactic the BPP frequently employed.[7]

Nonetheless, the BLM movements's agenda and its tactics should be understood as a positive extension of the Panther's work. Although the BLM movement and BPP would likely disagree on the necessity of bearing arms against police brutality—among other tactics or aims—this disagreement should be contextually interpreted. The BPP's use of violent tactics was necessary to combat overt police brutality and discrimination faced by communities across the US. Yet, the lack of institutional response to the rampant murders of unarmed Black people in 2015 have evidenced these atrocities occur covertly, too, in a "post-racial" America. While the death of Emmett Till is an example of overt violence, the failure of the US government to outlaw the Confederate

flag is evidence of covert, institutional violence.[8] Though the threats that the BLM movement and BPP have faced are remarkably similar, the historical contexts of each movement are distinct and noteworthy. Thus, it is not useful to rank the tactics of the BPP and BLM movement in their respective fights for Black Liberation.[9]

> " The Black community is not monolithic, so it is crucial to unveil the myriad political values that Black people hold in order to create an environment conducive to realizing Black Liberation and institutional transformation. "

As a young liberation movement, one reality that the BLM movement must reconcile with is its politics, agenda, and tactics are not fully celebrated by all members of the Black community. Despite the modern glorification of civil rights leaders of the 1950s through the '80s, many were labeled radicals in their respective time periods. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, Angela Davis, and others were iconoclasts—their ideologies defied the norm, so not everyone agreed with their politics, agenda, or tactics for achieving racial equality. While we see pictures and historical footage of Black people attending sermons and protests by the thousands, the reality is these people—though numerous—were not fully representative of the Black community or of all American citizens.

Michael J. Fortner's novel The Black Silent Majority offers a useful framework applicable to the BLM movement and the disaggregation of the Black community.[10] Fortner argues the adoption of increasingly punitive criminal justice policies in late 1970s and early '80s New York, and elsewhere in the US, resulted from the demands of engaged and concerned Black citizens in crime-ridden neighborhoods. While Fortner does acknowledge the role of institutional discrimination, racism, and police brutality in contributing to mass incarceration, he emphasizes many Black people supported the punitive criminal justice policies that are now being attacked by progressive and humanitarian civil rights movements.

The core of Fortner's argument rests on the premise that the "Black Silent Majority" was comprised of civically engaged, middle- and working-class African American democratic participants. They were business owners, doctors, attorneys, professors, janitors, teachers, preachers, and members of the working class or other professions who actively contributed to the American economy and society. The Black Silent Majority may not have always publicly voiced their political views, but have voiced them in forums of varying importance, such as during a church's congregational meetings.

Thinking about where we are as a Black community in 2016, it is important to illuminate and identify the characteristics, politics, and behavior of the modern Black Silent Majority. These may be Black people who disagree with the BLM movement. Some may agree with Supreme Court Justice Scalia's opinion that Black Americans should avoid attending America's elite educational institutions.[11] Others may agree with Stacey Dash that Black History Month is unnecessary.[12] The Black community is not monolithic, so it is crucial to unveil the myriad political values that Black people hold in order to create an environment conducive to realizing Black liberation and institutional transformation.

Let's be clear—we are living in an era of political neoliberalism in the US. At its core, neoliberalism prioritizes individual accumulation over collective welfare, thereby trapping us in the incessant pursuit of more: more education, more wealth, more power. Neoliberal forces have obscured the implicit "we" of the Black community, often referred to colloquially, as Black people are now stratified socioeconomically, geographically, and politically more than ever before. Thus, we should illuminate the Black Silent Majority so that BLM organizers—and other equity-oriented individuals or entities—may better target this constituency with political communications in 2016 and beyond.

Though the BLM movement has created a solid political platform, its future vitality rests on an ability to continue disrupting the political power of the neoliberal state, while simultaneously galvanizing the support of the civically engaged who are not currently at their table—transforming the Black Silent Majority into an Engaged Black Majority.

> ❝Among other aims, the purpose of the BPP was to disrupt the unchecked power of the state, and to force the government to protect the Black community's constitutional rights.[13] Likewise, the BLM movement embodies similar attributes; members are progressively inclined, extremely intelligent, sophisticated, and linguistically brilliant, orators and strategists willing to challenge citizens and politicians alike in order addresses the unchecked power of the state.[14]❞

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2   "Angela Davis, lecture at UCLA, 8 October 1969.

3   Peniel E. Joseph, "Ronald Reagan Meets Black Power: Stokley Carmichael, Civil Rights and the 1960s," Salon, 9 March 2014.

4   Nikhil Pal Singh, Black Is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy (Cambridge, Masschusetts: Harvard University Press, 2004): 205. "By refusing to acknowledge the status of policing as it operated within Black communities, the Panthers effectively nullified police power and substituted itself as its alternative. Policing the police, in other words, the Panthers signaled something far more dangerous than is generally acknowledged: the eruption of a non-state identity in the everyday life of the state."

5   Beth Walton, "Black Lives Matter Resonates in Asheville," Citizen-Times, 28 November 2015; "Black Lives Matter Refuses to Endorse Any 2016 Presidential Candidate," The Guardian, 19 September 2015; and Shannon Liubrand, "How a Death in Ferguson Started Movement in America," CBS News, 7 August 2015.

6   Miller, Adam, and Andrew Russell, "Black Lives Matter Protestors Shut Down Section of Allen Expressway," Global News, 27 July 2015.

7   Malcolm X, Malcolm X: The Last Speeches (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1965): 151-181. In "Not Just an American Problem but a World Problem," Malcolm X reflects on the importance of elevating African American consciousness to astutely assess the relationship between domestic and global affairs and struggles for freedom. As the BLM movment has not directly engaged in global activist demonstrations to the extent that Malcolm X and the Black Panther Party did in the 1960s through the '80s—likely because they are such a young movement, originating in 2012—it does not seem fair to compare the international politics of the BPP to the evolving political activities of the BLM movement. Additionally, heeding my comment about ordinally ranking activist tactics, I do not intend to engage in a comparative discourse of the BPP and BLM movement because it is counterproductive. I acknowledge that the BLM movement still has room for growth—such as engaging more directly in international demonstrations, for example—because the work of the organization is not complete. They will continue to fight for the cause of Black Liberation so long as Black people are denied the fundamental rights and humane treatment we deserve in society. The struggle for freedom is perpetual, so the BLM momement will have to frequently adapt or risk extinction, just as other social movements before them.

8   This is following the Charleston Massacre.

9   Scholars argue ranking social movements is useless because it distracts from the purpose of Black activism—the liberation of all Black people. See Spence, Lester, Knocking the Hustle: Against the Neoliberal Turn in Black Politics (Brooklyn, New York: Punctum, 2015): 128-140, and Taylor, Keeanga-Yamahtta, From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016): 2-4 for further discussion.

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On Movement Theory, Institutional Activism and Cultural Change

A Conversation between Professors Justin Hansford and Stefan Bradley

On behalf of HJAAP, Professors Justin Hansford and Stefan Bradley held a candid conversation to discuss their thoughts on student demands sweeping the nation. Though the two have organized together in the past as faculty members on the frontlines of Ferguson protests, this was their first conversation, together, on the issue.

Justin Hansford

As an assistant professor at Saint Louis University School of Law, Justin Hansford's research incorporates legal history, legal ethics, critical race theory, human rights, and the global justice movement in a broader attempt to interrogate injustice in society. He has a BA from Howard University and a JD from Georgetown University Law Center, where he was a founder of *The Georgetown Journal of Law and Modern Critical Race Perspectives*. He joined the law faculty after clerking for Judge Damon Keith on the United States Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit, and he has received a prestigious Fulbright award to study the legal career of Nelson Mandela in South Africa.

Living ten minutes from Ferguson, Hansford has been at the forefront of legal organiz-ing and advocacy in the aftermath of Mike Brown's murder. He co-authored the Ferguson to Geneva human rights shadow report *(http://fergusontogeneva.org/)*, and accompanied the Ferguson protesters and Mike Brown's family to Geneva, Switzerland, to testify before the United Nations. Hansford has served as a policy advisor for proposed post-Ferguson reforms at the local, state, and federal level, testifying before the Ferguson Commission, the Missouri Advisory Committee to the US Civil Rights Commission, and the President's Task Force on Twenty-First Century Policing.

As a result of his work in Ferguson, Hansford has been featured in *USA Today*, *The Washington Post*, *Time magazine*, *Ebony*, and *The Globe and Mail*, and he has appeared on CNN, MSNBC, PBS, NPR, among other national and local news outlets. He was honored by the National Bar Association as one of the Top 40 Lawyers Under 40, selected as an Aspen Ideas Festival scholar by the Aspen Institute, and recently was named by Revolt TV as one of the 25 New Leaders of Social Justice.

Stefan Bradley

As a professor at Saint Louis University's College of Arts and Sciences, Stefan Bradley's research primarily focuses on recent US history with an emphasis on the African American experience. He is interested in the role youth have played in shaping post-WWII American society. More specifically, he is fascinated with the efforts and abilities of Black college students to change not only their scholastic environments, but also the communities that have surrounded their institutions of higher learning. Amazingly, young people, by way of protests and demands, have been able to influence college curricula, as well as the policies of their schools. Bradley's interest in protest movements of young people has led him to study Black student activism at Ivy League universities, as well as author numerous publications including *Harlem vs. Columbia University: Black Student Power in the Late 1960s,* which discusses how Black students risked their educations (and potentially their lives) during the famous controversy that took place at Columbia University in 1968 and 1969. Bradley has also co-edited *Alpha Phi Alpha: A Legacy of Greatness, The Demands of Transcendence*, which covers the creation and evolution of the nation's first Black collegiate fraternity. Bradley is currently contracted with New York University Press to write a book potentially titled *Blackened Ivy: Civil Rights, Black Power, and Ivy League Universities in the Postwar Era.* Recently, his work on student and youth activism has been discussed in media outlets such as The Harvard Law Review, History News Network, NPR, C-Span2 BookTV, MSNBC, BBC, and BET. Research.

BRADLEY:Students calling for institutional change is a certain kind of privilege. I can appreciate it because stuff doesn't change without those privileged people acting. I might end up agreeing that some of the stuff students end up "turning up" about is not the most important thing in terms of freedom. I'll give you that. But, I think if you look in terms of history, things change because people take on these seemingly insignificant issues and push them toward righteousness, push them toward justice. If everything was done in order, nothing would ever get done. So the fact that these students are taking up their issues in South Africa about the costs of education, that's an important thing. It may not be what the masses of people need right now, but that is on the scale of Black freedom and can be "knocked off."

> **"** These students are trying to change culture. And that's the hardest thing to change. People think it's just about changing the name of building. They're saying we have to consider who these people were before we stamp a name on something and celebrate it.**"**

HJAAP, HANSFORD: *On the law side, as the law students started to protest, there was a debate between Jelani Cobb and Conor Friedersdorf of The Atlantic discussing the culture surrounding the protests—a culture where students shamed anyone who didn't agree with them. What do you think?*

BRADLEY: Well, you really hit on it—this idea that sure, there's this right to free speech, but we value some people's free speech more than others. I read a pretty sharp debate . . . someone was pretty critical of the students for turning up out of Yale for the housemaster issue, and was saying that the housemaster should be able to say whatever, within reason, without hurting anybody. One student made the point that this particular individual valued the way the housemate communicated; he didn't

value the way that the student communicated. The student felt this critic concentrated more on how the student communicated than the message that he was sending, which is that, "I'd like not to see people dressed as Black people, or native people, etc." So, in terms of free speech, it becomes sticky.

But, if these lost voices don't get forced to a place where we can hear them, then all operations are to remain at the status quo. With student activism, people are making their voices heard. Some issues will stick, others will not; but the underlying message of all of it is that there is an obligation for universities to address the concerns of students. There is an obligation to keep students safe. Comfortable? That's up for debate. I don't know if everyone should be "comfortable" at a university, as part of university life is courting discomfort and learning to deal with it. But, if it comes to a situation where people are feeling unsafe, then it's in the university's obligations to do something about that.

> ❝ I took what little piece of privilege I had and applied it to the movement. ❞

I don't know how it's fair that someone has to ask permission to say, "ouch." If someone is injured, they should be allowed to say, "I've been injured." And we shouldn't have to criticize them and make them feel small or spoiled for this.

A lot of this is caught in something I don't necessary ascribe to, the respectability politics of communication. It says, "Okay, we'll respect you as long as you say it in a nice way and don't offend my sensibilities. But, if you say it in a way that disrupts my life or causes me to feel uncomfortable, then I can't listen to you anymore." That only works in terms of the people with the most power, not those with the least power.

HJAAP, HANSFORD: *As a historian, can you think of this in context of what happened during the first wave of student activism in the 1960s and '70s? Are these repeat conversations? In my studies, there's been a pattern where students were generally*

allowed to protest, as long as they weren't disruptive. But if they damaged property or held sleep-ins, and in doing so interfered with the ability to egress to the classrooms, the institutions would bring forth charges. Derrick Bell called this the "lawful protestors dilemma:" if you don't disrupt, it's not going to make any difference. If you do disrupt, then you're going to get hammered. Considering your knowledge of the past, how does this debate play out now?

BRADLEY: What we saw in the 1960s and 1970s was really the second wave of student activism. In the 1920s, Black student activists protested against the authoritarian nature of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). A lot of these HBCUs weren't even run by Black people at the time and students rebelled against institutional paternalism. In the 1960s, you run across some issues that are more pertinent today. One, so many of these students were first-generation students and they understood quite clearly that in that particular space—a space where universities saw themselves as the stand-in parent—that if the students protested, they ran the risk of being expelled. Moreover, they ran the risk of becoming eligible for the draft, which is something different than what we see right now. Further, there were other things, though, that informed their way of thinking. Students were reading Frantz Fanon, seeing these decolonization movements happening around the world, on the continent of Africa and in Latin America, and they understood that if you were going to be a revolutionary there was a good chance you'd have to bleed for it.

The idea is that universities are supposed to be the most liberal spaces on the planet. Liberal and progressive, in the broadest sense of the words. If the idea of students forcing you to deal with issues that are highly controversial, yet pertinent to the rest of society—if that drives you so crazy you feel like you need to start arresting and that sort of thing, it's bad business all around. It's a bad look for the university and it makes potential students question, "Do I want to go to a university that regularly has students arrested?"

That might be something that we're not seeing as

much of today—the idea that when you disrupt, there are consequences for it. So, when you block entrances and exits or lock someone in someplace, there may be consequences for it. In the 1960s, these things were done and thankfully a lot of the places chose to drop charges, as there's nothing to gain from prosecuting your own students. Especially when the issues involve such topics as war, Black studies, Black admissions, etc. When it turns out the students were right, then the institution looks really, really terrible for indicting them for helping the institution to move along.

HJAAP, HANSFORD: *We're seeing the University of Missouri have a huge drop in applications, which is also interesting. Speaking to your point regarding the nature of the university, Robin D.G. Kelley, in a compilation of essays speaking on the Black student struggle, challenged the idea of the university as this liberal or progressive space. Rather, Kelley contends that this was never a space designed to be your "home," it was never designed to nurture you, or be a site of activism or transformation. He feels that it's somehow wrong-headed for these students to try to transform these spaces into something they were never designed to be. And as a result, he thinks that they should focus outward.*

Now, myself, from what I saw in South Africa, there was a different perspective on this issue of what should the university be. We've seen a push for access and decolonization in movements like "Rhodes Must Fall" and "Fees Must Fall." In South Africa, students lament it should be an African institution. Apartheid ended and the government has dragged its feet, only begrudgingly even allowing access. Now that the access is accomplished, the students' goal is to change the nature of the institution. So, there, we're in the second wave. Here, students advocate that it should be a cosmopolitan, not a White-centered institution you just happen to let Black students visit.

This raises the possibility that maybe Kelley is wrong. Maybe the university is an institution that should be used to transform into either these African spaces on the continent, or cosmopolitan spaces in the states. What is your position? Do you think the university is a space that should be transformed into

something different, or do you agree with Kelley that it's a lost cause?

BRADLEY: I'll begin this way. First of all, who am I to disagree with Robin Kelley (laughs). But, in the simplest terms possible, the university and concept of education at-large is for something. It serves a purpose in society. Education, in general, is for the purpose of nationalism: it serves a purpose for a nation to say it's "molding citizens." Which is a great idea for a nation. But as somebody who values this idea of critical thinking, being able to criticize large structures and institutions, that's a dangerous mold. Education should be for the widening of your mind, rather than serving purposes for the state. So, I believe in parts of what Kelley said—these institutions were created to create leaders of what we know now. So, we have these young people—often times privileged White people—that come to a university and learn to operate in a privileged, White structure and how to maintain and propagate that. So, in that way, I think he's correct.

Here's where I diverge: these universities do change and this is evidence by what we saw in the 1960s and 1970s. They change the focus to access early on. That was an important aspect of things students did themselves. In all of this, it wasn't liberal White leadership that pushed for these changes and envisioned them. These were young people, seventeen to nineteen-years-old, who changed the idea from bringing more students onto campus into actual practice. These students took their spring and winter breaks to recruit Black students. They're literally changing the face of their institution to the point where, by 1976, it wasn't necessarily the institutions that brought these Black students on, but [rather] the Black students who were already there. These young people were able to change the very stayed and traditional curriculum of the universities by including Black studies, women's studies, Chicano studies, and all of these different things were able to arise because students were able to make these kinds of changes.

And, I don't think it was because they thought that the university should be their "home." They

were fully aware they were transient. I think, and my research shows, these students knew what university was for. So if we we're going to put those leaders out into society, these Black students and progressive students understand if their peers aren't exposed to a de-centering of the Whiteness of civilization, or exposed to perspectives that are different from their prep schools, then nothing changes. I wouldn't say it's revolutionary, but it definitely changes and alters the status quo in a way that's necessary.

The issues that they're focusing on today are sometimes the same issues focused on in the 1960s. The University of Missouri (Mizzou) is a prime example, where student activists reissued the 1969 demands with Concerned Student 1950. With that in mind, they're progressing the university. But no, I don't think universities were created with young Black people in mind. They still feel a sense of alienation, of otherness. To make those people in charge of the university confront that and make them be truthful about what they want to do with the university is admirable.

People criticized students at Princeton for protesting about having more Black students when people were literally in uprisings in Newark and Patterson: that's very "cute" of you to have your "little" protest on campus. I would almost follow that line if I didn't think of those students as being Black people also. As being in the same system as Black people, where at every level, [we] are exploited, abused, neglected. So, I like to widen my idea of the Black freedom movement to include what these students are doing on campus. And, one of these things [that] has largely been hidden is how much these young people focus on people other than themselves. Even the idea of getting Black studies, that goes on and it keeps giving. But then there were young people, and I don't know if you see it as much today, they were demonstrating against their universities' relationship to their neighborhoods. The Black people who could never go to the university were neighbors to the university and often times these Black people were taken advantage of, and students protested on their behalf. Or, [there is] the case of Princeton during the 1980s when students protest[ed] apartheid in

South Africa. They didn't know these people, but to protest and demonstrate on behalf of them says something to the larger idea of the Black struggle, freedom and justice for Black people.

And that can be done in a space that wasn't designed for Black people. The fact they would put things on a line in a capitalistic system that values things like, "I graduated from Georgetown University and I'm going to be OK because I went to Georgetown University"; to sacrifice that kind of almost assured middle class comfort, I think you have to give it up to the students.

HJAAP, HANSFORD: *That reminds me of my experience in South Africa where students' institutional demands also sought benefits for staff. There, most of the school's workers were older Black women and the protestors viewed them as their mothers. So, even when the students received the lower fees as requested, they still kept protesting until the institution also agreed to stop outsourcing and give their workers privileges and benefits. Is that something we've ever had here? Is it something that's likely to happen here? While we admire the students' sacrifices on behalf of communities, has there been some sort of barrier put between them and the working people on the campus (janitorial staff, etc.)?*

BRADLEY: Some of it,is kind of structurally designed that way. When you come to a university, the Black people you see are the Black people who are serving you. And that's not unusual. The people that do the yard work happen to be Hispanic or Latino, the people who are serving and cleaning up after you happen to be Black, the people that fix things happen to be White, largely. And so some of this stuff makes you think a certain way as you step onto the yard. It's subliminal in a way.

When you look at protests around the nation, not a lot of them have to do with the working class and poor. At St. Louis University, the fact that students were, in part, protesting to have things available to those from poverty-stricken circumstances is something generally beyond the scope of student protests. There was a time in the 1960s and in places like New York City, but working with those

service workers has been part of the history and I think this movement will be evolving that way.

Presently, things that are unique to this particular movement is this openness to rearranging cultural approaches to gender identity. That's new and a favor to society. It's difficult for older people to catch a hold to all of this but it's evolving our minds and making us think about things in ways that we've never thought about that before. And they're intersecting with race and class.

HJAAP, HANSFORD: *Do you see the influence of the Black Lives Matter movement (BLM) and what happened in Ferguson in this ideological expansion? How did Ferguson in particular interact with this movement? In a past conversation you've talked about how many of the same students who were in Ferguson protests around the country just went back to school and kept the momentum going.*

❝These young people have to be students and soldiers at the same time. Imagine if they could be just students.❞

BRADLEY: You can't shut the doors to social movements; you can't shut the doors to the ills of society. There's no wrought-iron fences that St. Louis University (SLU) or Harvard could put up to keep these social movements from creeping onto campus. When actions are popping up all over the city, it doesn't take a bunch of imagination to think about what's happening right where you are. These students on campus, like the Black Student Alliance, were already moving against issues like someone writing "nigger" on the board or threats of being lynched by a drunk[en] White fellow. These things had been building up on campus. But in the spirit of Ferguson and of young people taking the lead and getting to the vanguard of the movement, they're speaking for themselves. They can manage to say what it is they need. What happened here at SLU, at Mizzou, and all around the nation has a good deal to do with the fact that people in these cities, in these institutions, are fed up.

So, part of what's happening is these students drive all ten minutes to Ferguson, protest, and demonstrate on behalf of what they think is justice and it's just impossible to come back here, look around, and see things the way they were seen before. The students combined their ideas about the structural kind of violence with what was occurring in Ferguson (fines, curtailing people's freedom rights, etc.) and applied that lens to a place like St. Louis University. That's very mature. People don't necessarily see all of the links and it may not have been absolutely intentional, but for them to be aware that the university plays a part in how society runs is powerful.

Every once in a while, the most oppressed have to press back. That's just power dynamics. For people to think the most disenfranchised, the powerless, will always be that way¬—they may not get to vote in your little election, but they'll find some way to get back.

HJAAP, HANSFORD: *Umi Selah, mission director of the Dream Defenders, quoted a well-known song about how it's a great time to alive, to be active in this movement because maybe five years ago, people would not have been so upset about a swastika on the door—it may not have generated the mobilized response that we see today. Now, with everything that's been happening, the same action would get a hundred students out ready to protest. Today.*

BRADLEY: You're absolutely right. What we're talking about is time and space. That time and space makes all of the difference in the world. That Ferguson is going up. That Shaw is going up. Once students see it's possible, then they can bring it to their own spaces. But I'd argue even further that when you see the Arab Spring, young people out in the streets pushing for what they viewed as democracy, it's not so far out of the minds of young people, it just needed to be personal. And that's what we got here. So when they see racial epithets written on the board, after watching what happened to Sandra Bland, Eric Garner, Mike Brown, and all of these people, these are images you can't put out of your mind. So, yes, one has to do with the other.

And this makes all of the difference in the world. In my book about Columbia University, the fact

that this student protest kicks up three weeks after Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination makes a difference on Columbia's campus: when you see stuff [like] buildings burning down the street in the aftermath of this assassination, you're going to treat people a different way when they start to get loud or tell you to move to the side. You're willing to push envelopes in ways you never would have before. When we see this happening students don't feel bad about talking tersely to administrators on things that should have been happening a long time ago. You're [the institution] is the one that's been talking about diversity, now you need to prove it. So, before, when students asked for a meeting, there was no time for them or it was so delayed because of the need to coordinate schedules. Now, it's amazing how quickly meetings can happen.

HJAAP, HANSFORD: *It's amazing because as scholars we're always thinking about frameworks and how things come to be, but sometimes it's just that a few images spark up emotions—and those emotions can change the energy.*

> " I like to widen my idea of the Black Freedom Movement to include what these students are doing on campus. "

BRADLEY: And that's where technology is kind of the "untold activist" in all of this. These images, the control of these images, so that @Blackstarjus is tweeting while we're on the street so I can know what's going on without having to watch CBS or CNN. And I can understand what's going on from your perspective—that's tremendously helpful for young people. It's in their language; it's not filtered. And that moves things along. When I tweet my list of demands, people are like: "Yeah, that makes sense. Here's two more to add." As a result, you now have seventy to eighty universities with lists of demands.

HJAAP, HANSFORD: *What are your thoughts on the critiques that the removal of a seal or the call for more diversity in the classroom doesn't really translate into the things the broader community is asking for?*

BRADLEY: That's something we should contend with. Some of these things are insular to college life. Now, I'm not making a joke of these students, but it's a privilege to go to [a] university. So, the majority of Black people haven't even seen the blades of grass on these institutions. If you just look at the Pew reports you'll see the lack of wealth in the community, the extreme amount of interaction with the state in terms of the law, etc. It's really shameful in a lot of ways. So, when you hear students say, "I want to change the name of the building," in terms of the brother that's not eating or that's got to check a box, they are two different worlds. On the spectrum, this is all Black freedom. But getting these worlds together is the issue.

Now, the Black Lives Matter movement has done exceptionally well with bringing up intersectionality—particularly concerning the rights of the transgender and queer communities. But I'm not sure if that was at the forefront of their mind when protesting on the streets for Mike Brown. The movement has shifted to that direction, to the point where some people can't recognize the issues' relative importance, even though they are laudable goals and issues that we need to confront. But some want to know, "What will keep me from lying on the ground for another four-and-a-half hours?" [Or,] "Can I still drive my car through the county without worry about being pulled over?"

Maybe the Black Lives Matter movement is ahead of other people—I'm talking about the masses on the ground. Or, maybe, Black Lives Matter as to privilege the voices on the ground as much as they do the "ideals" of progress . . . I feel this view is probably going to get me in trouble.

HJAAP, HANSFORD: *Probably, but I agree with that. So, should the students mobilize to change the seal or should they mobilize in solidarity with victims of police brutality? I don't think it's an either/or question necessarily . . .*

BRADLEY: No, it's not. Really, that has to be a "both/and" kind of thing. Let's say I follow the trajectory of what education has been—to create leaders for this particular society. Now, insert

Black people. So, I want you to create leaders for the Black community. And if you don't want to create leaders for this community, fine. But you need to make leaders who can talk to leaders in the Black community. This means that students have to hone their skills on pushing back against things they find unjust. Whether it be a seal or otherwise, we're counting on the students who go to [a] university to be the most insightful. What that means is, you do have to bring these issues to bear in these privileged spaces. Yes, you have to take up police brutality. Why? Because the criminal justice department provides certifications for these police officers, the political science and public affairs departments creates senators and leaders of think tanks that create the ideas people use everyday. Bringing those issues that are off-campus onto campus is a must.

> " Every once in a while, the most oppressed have to press back. That's just power dynamics. For people to think that the most disenfranchised, the powerless, will always be that way? They may not get to vote in your little election, but they'll find some way to get back. "

These students are trying to change culture. And that's the hardest thing to change. People think it's just about changing the name of building. They're saying we have to consider who these people were before we stamp a name on something and celebrate it.

Culture is not static. Things evolve. Our views of history, heroes and sheroes, evolves. People didn't love Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968 like they do now—he was assassinated and now he is celebrated. Today, every university would be proud to have a Martin Luther King scholarship or dorm. That's how culture evolves, but it doesn't evolve on it's own. And that's the beauty of these young people pushing for small things: okay, fine, it may not be the most important thing in terms of human

existence, but as long as we're placing a value on culture, let's debate it.

HJAAP, HANSFORD: *But I've also heard the counter-argument that "maybe you want to keep these names and statutes there in order to remind them, so we won't forget."*

BRADLEY: That's interesting, but there's another thing to be concerned about—and this is for the next-level student movement—you have to worry about the university co-opting this cultural turn. So, out at Berkeley, after [an] avid push against the free speech movement and expulsion of students over that movement, the university now has a building name in its honor. Now, the university celebrates it as if they courted this.

HJAAP, HANSFORD: *You'll have students who will push for institutional recognition, but once that recognition happens, you realize that the only thing you are fighting for is your own co-optation.*

BRADLEY: This is true—and it's hard. It's hard telling young people to be careful. Even at SLU, it's been completely reframed, from Occupy SLU to the Clocktower Accords. Everybody evolves, not just students but also administrations. Now the president goes around lecturing about Occupy SLU to other universities, and I wonder what he's saying?

What was won with Occupy SLU can be thought of in two ways: one, students won a sense of what is possible on their campus in terms of disruption and mobilization. They realized they could be "scary" or a "threat" to the operation of the university. Second, we as students can influence the contours of conversations. The empire always has the ability to frame whatever arguments the way they want to: rather than this being about Black people, soon you'll start hearing this is about "diversity." Rather than this be about poor people, it will turn soon turn into something for veterans, too. Rather than this being about the institution needing to break off some of its billion-dollar endowment for the neighboring community, it'll turn into "we have one million service hours" outside of our gates.

HJAAP, HANSFORD: *This framing piece makes me r-consider the focus on things like seal, because it could potentially take your own history and reframe it as a shameful thing. Students have to create a counter-narrative to the stock narrative—the stock is going to make this about diversity. Maybe the use of those names and the seals is part of the process of differentiating the student's frame from the "diversity" frame, part of resisting that co-optation.*

BRADLEY: I think that's brilliant. I don't know if they always realize it, but it's very sharp. The things that we learned in the 1960s were that very specific goals with timelines and budgets— work. Also, that you need allies at the administration level and in the community [and] even the role as the professor as ally— which both you and I have experienced—on the streets, in meetings with the president of the university, etc.

This is the part that has helped to evolve my thinking and provide a certain amount of maturity for myself. I teach about the Black freedom movement and I thought I was jammin' for while, assigning the appropriate texts, having engaging lectures—and then when I see stuff burning in my own city, when I see young people and mothers suffering . . . I could very well stand by and talk about what people did in the past. Or, I could get involved. No one had to tell us to go out and share our talents with his movement, but we all felt like we had to be there. We all felt as if we weren't there; we felt guilty for not being a part of the movement.

HJAAP, HANSFORD: *I had the same conversation with a student who asked if I was afraid my involve-ment in the movement would impact my career. I couldn't imagine not going out to West Florissant Avenue because I was worried about what people at SLU would think of me. Not going wasn't even on the table—that would have been a complete loss of integrity for me, my spirit, and my soul.*

BRADLEY: I'm so glad you put it that way. You know, at the time, my daughter was just a few months old. When my daughter grows up and she asks, "Daddy, did you help make things better?", I couldn't answer her that I was back in

my office. And yeah, it became problematic that we were spending until 3 [or] 4 a.m. with organizing efforts, but we all came back and did our jobs, too. We'd come in smelling like tear gas, try not to fall asleep; we'd prep for class and continue.

Here's the guilt part: I felt like I'd be a selfish bastard if I took from the people in order to come to this university and I didn't apply this learning or move to share whatever talent I had with the movement. I would be sinning. In a spiritual way, I felt I would be sinning.

I'm a professor of history and Black studies—I don't have specific laws or ideas. But if I can help make clear there are ways to help win and lose this whole thing, I'll do that. The biggest part I ended up playing was using my role as a university professor to challenge the authentic messages of people on the streets. The news stations would want to talk to me because of my position, but I channeled the messages of those unable to get airtime.

We're in much more powerful positions than I think I let on. When you speak to young people everyday—and some of those protesting across Mizzou, across Ferguson, they come by the office first. This is a big gift.

The issue is this (and this is what I told my students and myself): when you go against the empire, against institutional racism, you can count on losing something. That's just going to be the way it is. For students, you may just lose your student status, you may just lose your scholarship. And you can't get mad at the empire for taking these things away from you. And at the same time, I can't be mad when I lose friends because I disagree with their messaging to students, telling them to "slow down" or to "say things more nicely." I've lost friends over this—I've lost favors. But I've also gained friends. I wasn't alone in this and knowing we were out there together was immensely important.

HJAAP, HANSFORD: *Exactly. And that makes such a big difference. Knowing that people have your back, knowing that there are people there with you—that adds confidence, it adds energy, enthusiasm. Yeah, we ran from tear gas, but we also*

had some laughs out there. It's hard to describe it to people, but there were good times, too.

Looking back, I now know there were windows being broken, but at the time you didn't know what was making the sound. We thought they could be explosions. And there are after effects of these experiences—dreams of people I knew being killed by the Ferguson police, dreams of being in jail, etc. We don't think about the long-term effects of these things on our subconscious but they're there.

BRADLEY: That's why you just have to bless these activists who came before us and issue some kind of grace to them, too. They sacrificed more than their potential middle class standing. Sometimes it's the sanity that you sac-rifice. Not only is the work important, but we also have to remember the fragility of our own mental states. This is a lot. These young people have to be students and soldiers at the same time. Imagine what they could be doing if they were just students. But they have to take these things on—and I'm not excluding faculty members, either. We've done a favor to these universities by taking care of these Black kids and making sure someone is listening to them, encouraging them to be their true, Black selves. That's a favor—no one did that for Black faculty members. There's a million different ways to support people, but I don't think Black faculty and staff get that kind of support.

HJAAP, HANSFORD: *I think about that often, es-pecially those students who then have to go and compete in class with other students, often White students, White students who have been carrying life as "normal." Institutions aren't forgiving for this discrepancy, though; that's not how the institution works.*

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From SNCC To BLM:

Lessons In Radicalism, Structure, and Respectability Politics

Titilayo Rasaki

Titilayo Rasaki is a rising 3L at Harvard Law School. She was born in Nigeria and grew up in Indianapolis. As a student organizer in the Reclaim Harvard Law movement, Rasaki has learned the importance of political education to ground movement politics and inform strategy. In this piece, she responds to Professor Randall Kennedy's critique of Black Lives Matter (BLM) organizers and highlights one of the most powerful aspects of the BLM movement—the organizers' ability to learn from their predecessors and refine their understanding of effective organizing in the struggle for Black liberation.

Abstract

In the 1960s, civil rights groups, with sometimes-conflicting ideologies, worked to secure civil and political rights for African Americans. It is undeniable these civil and political gains facilitated incredible racial progress; despite this, various factors colluded to prevent these groups from significant strides to change economic inequality. As a whole, the civil rights movement was unsuccessful in challenging both socioeconomic disparity and the anti-Black racism of which discrimination was only symptomatic.[1] America told itself a story of triumph over its racial caste system and purported to flourish into an era of colorblindness. However, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement has emerged to expose this lie.

In his article "Lifting as We Climb," Professor Randall Kennedy draws from several historic examples to make the case that respectability politics has been advantageous for the Black struggle, advocating for its continued use by modern activists.[2] This piece responds to some central arguments Kennedy and other proponents of respectability politics posit (presented as excerpts from Kennedy's piece) that are antithetical to the goals of the Black Lives Matter movement. It begins by outlining some of the organizational lessons the BLM movement has taken from the Southern Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), takeaways central to the BLM movement's guiding principles.[3] Next, it explores the most important lesson the BLM movement has drawn from SNCC—shunning the tactic of performing respectability politics to gain sympathy or perceptions of legitimacy by White people—an ideology that urges African Americans to display behavior that "Whites [deem] respectable, as necessary and sufficient condition of racial uplift."[4] By responding to Randal Kennedy's "Lifting as We Climb," I unpack the invalidities of this approach and assert that they are antithetical to BLM's overall goal.

Overview

The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement is a multiracial, multigenerational movement that asserts Black humanity through anti-racism organizing. The BLM movement forces the American public to reckon with its fiction of colorblindness by calling attention to the oppression, continued de facto segregation, and state violence African Americans face. Perhaps more importantly, the BLM movement demands America grapple with the very root of racism: how it values Black lives.

While the BLM movement formed out of a long legacy of Black liberation movements, it intentionally differentiated itself from the moderate civil rights organizations of the 1960s, such as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). Instead, the BLM movement seems to be modeled after the more radical Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). The SNCC grew out of the Black student sit-ins that swept the

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South in the 1960s and played a pivotal role in the freedom rides, Mississippi Freedom Summer, and the 1963 march on Washington. They were regarded as the "shock troops" of the Civil Rights Movement and paved the way for Black power and grassroots organizing. The SNCC provided an invaluable model for Black Radicalism, which the BLM movement has adopted and improved upon. From the way protesters dress to the subjects the movement chooses to rally around, the Black Lives Matter movement builds upon the SNCCs legacy of Black radicalism and revolutionizes the way America sees—and values—Black lives.

Lessons Drawn from the SNCC

The SNCC focused on grassroots organizing to build political and social capital. "By developing organizing techniques that made southern Blacks more confident of their capacity to overcome oppression, SNCC workers revived dormant traditions of racial militancy" and catalyzed mass protests.[5] The BLM movement employs the lessons of localized organizing and builds on it through social media connectivity. Like the SNCC, the BLM movement takes radical, non-violent actions meant to disrupt and elicit reactions from local authorities and apathetic neighbors and peers. Those disruptive actions—die-ins (an adaptation of sit-ins for the context of police brutality and vigilante violence), street marches, bridge and tunnel shutdowns, and

social media campaigns—force its issues onto the national agenda. The BLM movement also focuses on grassroots organizing at the local level through local chapters and partners with other indigenous and marginalized groups. Through its online forum, it "builds connections between Black people and [their] allies to fight anti-Black racism, to spark dialogue among Black people, and to facilitate the types of connections necessary to encourage social action and engagement."[6]

The BLM movement also learned from the SNCC's more inclusive, participatory, and egalitarian structure. Like the SNCC, the BLM movement rejects the charismatic leadership model "associated with Martin Luther King Jr. and the clergy-based, male-centered hierarchical structure of the organization he led, the SCLC."[7] Instead, it "affirms the lives of Black queer and trans folks, disabled folks, Black undocumented folks, folks with records, women and all Black lives along the gender spectrum. It centers those that have been marginalized within Black liberation movements. It is a tactic to (re)build the Black liberation movement."[8] Black Lives Matter activists "operate on the principle that no one person or group should speak for or make decisions on behalf of the movement." They believe that "strong people don't need strong leaders."[9] Instead, core BLM activists use a group-centered model rooted in participatory democracy. The BLM movement also recognizes that granting decision-making power to an individual or a group of individuals renders an organization vulnerable to co-option, targeted government repression, or the subjugation of the collective's goals for those of a few.[10]

Respectability Politics

Proponents of respectability politics see respect, or lack thereof, of African Americans as the root of discrimination and systemic oppression. For instance, many African Americans believed if they "changed their behavior, fashion, and even music, Whites would begin to respect them and therefore treat them as deserving of dignity."[11] Respectability politics emphasizes improving individual moral behavior, "attitudes and dress . . . as a strategy for reform of the entire structural system of American

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race relations."[12] The goal, therefore, is to distance oneself as much as possible from racist stereotypes, because an individual's behavior can confirm the stereotypical representations and discriminatory practices that are reflected on the whole race. Inherent in this argument is that individual behavior affects the collective fate of African Americans. By being ever cognizant of the White gaze, proponents of respectability politics believed performing respectability would remove any excuse for discriminatory policies.

"Any marginalized group should be attentive to how it is perceived . . ."[13]

Professor Evelyn Higginbotham coined the term "respectability politics" in order to label the philosophy employed by the Women's Convention of the National Baptist Convention (W.C.), which believed reforming individual behaviors and attitudes was a strategy to reform the entire system of American race relations.[14] Kennedy places a lot of value on the organizing of the W.C. around respectability politics, particularly in the early 1900s. Organizers in the post-reconstruction era used respectability politics as a "weapon against social Darwinist explanations of Blacks' biological inferiority to Whites" in order to undermine or remove the excuse for discrimination against and segregation of African Americans.[15] Their emphasis on respectability was meant to subvert the prevalent negative stereotypes that abounded: as Social Darwinist literature cast African Americans as inferior and immoral, the media, popular literature, and "legitimate" social sciences saturated stereotypical images of Blacks

as lazy, brutish, and sexually promiscuous.[16] For the W.C., respectability connoted racial pride and self-esteem in the face of crude stereotypes that denied their equal humanity. The W.C. asserted the need for "manners and morals" during protests, petitions, boycotts, and sit-ins, thereby rejecting social Darwinist assumptions and defining themselves contrary to the parameters of prevailing racist discourse.[17]

The W.C. condemned what they perceived to be negative practices and attitudes among Black people, insisting Blacks assimilate to conform to White society's ideals of manners and morals. The W.C. was enormously concerned with the White gaze and viewed White morals and culture as the normative or proper standard. In doing so, they unwittingly perpetuated and/or reinforced the very stereotypes they sought to subvert. "Through leaflets, newspaper columns, neighborhood campaigns, lectures, and door-to-door visits, an army of Black Baptist women waged war against gum chewing, loud talking, gaudy colors, the nickelodeon, jazz, littered yards, and a host of other perceived improprieties."[18] They relied heavily on tract material, such as "Ten Things the Negro Needs" and "Anti-Hanging Out Committee" to espouse behavioral advice in order to improve how Whites perceived Blacks. Groups like the W.C. also published weekly behavioral admonitions in newspapers. In her Huffington Post article, Myisha Cherry described one such admonition appearing in the 17 May 1919 issue of the Chicago Defender. This article admonished poor Blacks "against vulgar language and ragged clothes" in order to "disarm those who are endeavoring to discredit the race."[19]

Despite its good intentions, the rhetoric employed by the W.C. and other proponents of respectability politics is similar to the racist beliefs of which they strove to break free. They "equated nonconformity as the cause of racial inequality and injustice," presuming that Blacks with their "gaudy colors," gum chewing, or loud talking were indeed less worthy of respect; and those who did not conform to their standards of respectability were "otherize[d]."[20] In a 1904 speech to the membership body, the president of the W.C. noted, ". . . [u]nfortunately, the minority or bad negro have given the race a questionable reputation; these degenerates are

responsible for every discrimination we suffer."[21] This preoccupation with the White gaze reinforced stereotypes about Black people, blamed them for their own discrimination, and promoted the "distancing of the "negative Black other."[22] Their arguments of respectability presumed the legitimacy of viewpoints they hoped to counteract.

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Respectability politics is premised on the idea that the worthiness of Black life is contingent on proper behavior or its legitimization by White people. By focusing on the perception of Black conduct as perceived by the White gaze, proponents of respectability undermine and distract from actual progress toward Black liberation.

Yet, this kind of unacceptable "otherization" is alive and well today. In his article "Lifting as We Climb," Professor Randall Kennedy describes how he was taught to look down on "Blacks with poor diction and sloppy comportment," as "bad negroes" whose antics further burdened "good negroes." In this way, respectability politics weaponizes racial kinship; it espouses the notion that individual Black achievement advances the race, while individual failures hinder the race. Each African American must therefore be careful to positively contribute in the overall accounting of Black inferiority. There can be no laxity as far as cleanliness, sexual conduct, temperament, work ethic, and etiquette. There can be no transgression of societal norms.[23] There is no space for human fallibility. This thinking legitimizes those who ascribe pathological uniformity to Black

people and feeds into stereotypes that subjugate the Black race. Respectability politics has no place in the BLM movement because it is antithetical to its aims. The BLM movement proclaims Black humanity is sacred, regardless of any negative facts about the victim of state violence or the people the state is sworn to protect.

"Participants in the electrifying Freedom Rides and sit-ins of the early 1960s were given detailed instruction on what to wear and how to act . . . SNCC [packaged its campaign in ways designed to blunt the opposition of their enemies, to elicit solidarity from supporters and induce acceptance from the uncommitted"[24]

Professor Kennedy is correct that the performance of respectability was the hallmark of organizing for mainstream civil rights organizations. Marchers associated with mainstream civil rights groups like the SCLC were noticeably well-dressed and leaders emphasized activists should be modestly and neatly dressed in their "Sunday's best." "Movement leaders . . heralded the 'respectable' body as the most politically effective for a young activist to possess because this body was a direct affront to Jim Crow-era depictions" of Blackness.[25] Young Black women activists were taught to equate "feminine beauty with straight hair, light skin, and conservative fashion, considering these physical attributes signifiers of strong moral character."[26] "Respectable" women were supposed to have chemically relaxed and pressed hair, wear skirts and dresses, stockings, cardigans, and pearl necklaces.

The SNCC diverged from other civil rights groups on respectability, however. Though at its inception, SNCC was dominated by activists whose manners and clothing reflected the notions of respectability employed by other moderate civil rights groups of the time.[27] However, by the fall of 1961, SNCC's public image underwent noticeable change. This change occurred partially because it was impractical given the grueling toll that the performance of respectability took on women activists. In her article "SNCC Women, Denim and the Politics of Dress," Professor Tanisha Ford provides valuable insight into how SNCC manifested their radically different stance through their attire, contextualizing how Black

women activists employed dress as a cultural and political tool to challenge and redefine their role in the civil rights movement. At sit-ins, segregationists would assault the protestors, pummeling them with food and drinks. After these protests, women faced the daunting task of undergoing time-consuming and cost-prohibitive regimens in order to restore their hair back to its "respectable" state.[28] With every well-pressed dress, perfectly executed pin curl, and every trip to the hair salon, Black women were fighting to retain their dignity and political contribution to the movement.[29]

Aside from the practical considerations, SNCC's leaders began to question the political utility and middle class ideology behind respectability. When SNCC became more independent from the SCLC and other mainstream civil rights groups, its leaders began to "step outside previously defined methods of activism in order to achieve freedom for all African Americans, regardless of class."[30] SNCC's women abandoned the respectable "conservative" clothes and processed hairstyles, rather choosing to adopt denim clothes and natural (unprocessed) hair as a uniform of sorts. The women "used [this] uniform consciously to transgress a Black middle-class worldview that marginalized certain types of women and particular displays of Blackness and Black culture."[31]

Like SNCC, BLM protesters notably protest in casual clothes. BLM activists do not aim to garner sympathy by dressing like middle class or religious folks who "ought" to be valued in our society. Protesters faced with military tanks, tear gas, and militarized police are no less egregious when dressed casually than in their "Sunday's best." Where civil rights-era groups that practiced respectability politics dressed and behaved in certain ways in order to debunk the Darwinist stereotypes inflicted on them, the BLM movement challenges the White supremacist underpinnings of those "acceptable" characterizations of Blackness.

*"[**Proponents of respectability**] urge their activist colleagues to select as standard-bearers those who are free of seriously discrediting records . . . [and] suggest focusing more on those whose victimization is clearest and likeliest to elicit the greatest sympathy from the general public"*[32]

Professor Kennedy criticizes modern activists, namely those involved in the BLM movement, for rallying around imperfect victims of police brutality. He would prefer, for instance, their efforts focus on victims like Tamir Rice, who was shot and killed by police immediately upon their arrival due to his "perceived" dangerousness—he was playing with a toy gun in his neighborhood park.[33] The circumstances surrounding Rice's death would be preferred over Mike Brown's, whose case was not as clear cut.[34] In Brown's case, surveillance footage showed Brown had taken cigarillos from a convenience store earlier in the day. Protesters rallied around the Brown case, not because he was a saint, but because he was human. They took up the slogan "Hands Up, Don't Shoot" since witnesses described Brown as surrendering when he was killed—no matter what he did, he did not deserve capital punishment.

In a similar vain, the BLM movement has also forced the country to recognize and interrogate the racist "Black brute" caricatures of Black men, most notably used in Darren Wilson's testimony to justify his killing of Mike Brown.[35] The BLM movement does not sanitize its figures or its focus, thereby exposing the implicitly racist narratives used to justify state violence. By advocating protestors prioritize some lives over others, proponents of respectability politics legitimize those Darwinist stereotypes the notion tries—and fails—to subvert.

Further, this "respectable" ideology misunderstands the fundamental point of the Black Lives Matter movement and campaign, that Black LIVES MATTER—all of them, not just the ones that fit neatly into White America's notion of the "respectable" or "good negro." To be a standard-bearer in the civil rights era was to be a saint, unsullied by human fallibility. In the Black Lives Matter movement, humanity is the standard, with all Black lives as inherently sacred—no matter dress or the alleged crime, no matter the background or the level of education. The Black Lives Matter movement claims that because Black humanity is not equally valued, economic and educational disparity persists; police violence persists with impunity and mass incarceration relegates Black people to an under-caste. From the premise that the dehumanization of

Black people is a result of state-empowered White supremacy, the BLM movement identifies the myriad of ways Black lives are deprived of [their] basic human rights and dignity as state violence.[36]

The Black Lives Matter movement is so powerful and revolutionary because it harnesses the sanctity of humanity in ways other movements have failed. The SNCC and the SCLC sought integration and political empowerment. Instead of targeting symptoms, the BLM movement attacks the root. Instead of seeking integration or acceptance from White America, the BLM movement de-centers Whiteness, patriarchy, and ableism. "It [unapologetically] centers those that have been marginalized within Black liberation movements" without regard to the White gaze.[37] The BLM movement understands that no matter how likely a victim is to garner sympathy, they will be placed on trial in the media. The Darwinist stereotypes will nonetheless be applied. No matter how much parents admonish their children that racism makes them more vulnerable to certain risks, they will be judged by less-forgiving standards.[38] Renisha McBride was shot while asking for help,[39] John Crawford was shopping at Walmart,[40] Travon Martin was walking with skittles and an Arizona iced tea,[41] Akai Gurley was going down the stairs,[42] Eric Garner was selling cigarettes,[43] Prince Jones was driving home.[44] And the list goes on.

"To be a standard bearer in the civil rights era was to be a saint, unsullied by human fallibility. In the Black Lives Matter movement, humanity is the standard. It is inherently sacred, no matter the alleged crime, no matter the dress, and no matter the amount of education."

"Protests have changed America, marked by legislation, and the exercise of power by Black s at the highest levels . . . The detractors of respectability politics, on the other hand, tend to eschew talk of progress and to dwell on the huge disadvantages that continue to burden African Americans. The politics of Black respectability has not banished anti-Black racism, but it has improved the racial situation dramatically and has kept alive some

Black people who might otherwise be dead."[45]

There certainly has been substantial progress as a result of the civil rights movement. Our predecessors litigated, protested, organized, endured violence, and died for the cultural, political, and civil rights we now enjoy. They changed the destinies of millions of African Americans, including my own. However, it would be an insult to their memories to be lulled into complacency because the present times are not as bad as they were before. Detractors of respectability politics do not eschew talk of progress by highlighting the Black struggle is far from over. Civil rights-era leaders understood this as well. While acknowledging their progress in both the political and social realms, activists turned their attention to economic rights.[46] SNCC established projects in Atlanta's poorest neighborhoods to encourage local people to demand economic justice.[47] After the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom and President Johnson's declaration of the War on Poverty, it was clear economic inequality was the next frontier of the civil rights movement. Yet, Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated just weeks before the launch of the Poor People's Campaign, which would have demanded Congress pass substantial anti-poverty legislation.[48] Even during the March on Washington, John Lewis (now congressman, Democrat for Georgia) stated that although they marched for jobs and freedom, they had nothing to be proud of because of the hundreds of thousands languished in poverty.[49] King recognized racial injustice could not be divorced from economic injustice. And since the civil rights movement could not make the economic gains it hoped to achieve, we continue to fight today.

The work is not done—and for many reasons, the situation is direr than ever. For example, mass incarceration has merged as "a tightly networked system of laws, policies, customs, and institutions that operate collectively" to continue where Jim Crow left off as a means of racialized social control.[50] The war on drugs decimated Black communities and fueled mass incarceration. It's inequitable policies have legally excluded a disproportionate number of African Americans from voting, juries, housing, education, and public benefits. African Americans are 13 percent of the US population,

but 37 percent of the prison population.[51] The Supreme Court gutted the Voting Rights Act and is poised to strike down affirmative action.[52] African American communities are hyper-policed and police violence usually goes unpunished.[53] Housing and public school segregation is as entrenched as it was in decades past.[54]

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I disagree vehemently with Kennedy's assertion that respectability makes more sense now more than ever. In fact, respectability is antithetical to the purpose of the Black Lives Matter movement. We live in an era of purported colorblindness. It is an era where Black people "exercise power in the levels of government."[55] The current system depends on Black exceptionalism in order to ignore the racial caste system. It shifts the burden for uplift on communities that have been systemically locked out of decent schools, economic opportunity, and promise, of which only some Black people have access.

It is this colorblindness, this sterilized racism, that forces the BLM movement to first make the case Black life is not valued in this country, that systemic racism is still alive and more insidious than ever. This sterilized brand on racism is so insidious that even some Black folks have to be reminded less overt racism is still racism. Simply because the systems of social control are more sterilized over racial rhetoric does not negate the structural violence that continues to be inflicted upon millions of Black people nationwide.

After emancipation, southern legislatures adopted Black codes: stringent police laws establishing systems of peonage resembling slavery meant to maintain control over recently freed men.[56] Arguably, these laws were not as bad as slavery, and Jim Crow "wasn't as bad" as Black codes. But simply because an earlier iteration of racism was explicitly harsher than the next does not negate the urgency and need of more progress. The validity of acknowledging the existence of racism today does not understate the progress made in years past.

Conclusion

Fighting racism is indeed hard work and Black activists have never shied away from that work. Well-meaning progressives may disagree about the best means of racial uplift, while moderate groups may criticize their radical counterparts for being too hard-lined or not "respectable" enough. However, groups like the SNCC and the BLM movement have risen out of frustration and necessity to fill voids where moderation has failed. By challenging the structures, tactics, and even decorum employed by more moderate predecessors, these activists advance the Black struggle for liberation in ways previous deficient.

As the BLM movement looks ahead, it must continue to reject respectability politics in order to effectively force Americans to reckon with anti-Black economic exclusion, educational segregation, and militarized state violence. Before the BLM movement, America's fiction of a colorblind society largely went unchallenged. Because of the Black Lives Matter movement, America has no choice but to recognize this narrative is an insidious iteration of racism we must fight by any means necessary.

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"*You can't be neutral on a moving train.*"—Howard Zinn

Harvard Medical School _____

Tamara Rodriguez Reichberg

'Veritas Black' is a work that connects the horrors of chattel slavery to the prestige of Harvard University. The design was inspired by Reclaim Harvard Law's remix of the Harvard Law School crest, rendered by graphic designer Japheth Gonzalez, and cooked up by NMBG – an arts and education think tank directed by Harvard Graduate School of Education (HGSE) master's student, Chris Darby

Dr. Alvin Pouissant (Faculty Associate Dean for Student Affairs, Director of the Office of Recruitment and Multicultural Affairs, and leader in the civil rights movement), left, and Dr. Nancy Oriol (HMS Dean of Students), right, participate alongside students in the "National White Coat-Die In" to protest systemic racism in the United States and particularly in the healthcare system.

Elorm Avakame, MD/MPP at Harvard Medical School and the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University commented, "donning our white coats, the emblems of our power and privilege, we laid prostrate in the Atrium of the Tosteson Medical Education Center for fifteen-and-a-half minutes silently: four-and-a-half minutes for the four-and-a-half hours Michael Brown's body lay on the Ferguson pavement after his killing, and eleven minutes for the eleven times Eric Garner warned NYPD officers that he couldn't breathe before his death."

Members of the Harvard Medical School/Harvard School of Dental Medicine stand in solidarity with the national "White Coats 4 Black Lives" student movement. Now formalized as an organized collective, the Racial Justice Coalition (RJC) is comprised of students from Harvard's medical and dental schools who are passionate about the pursuit of racial justice and health equity. The group has organized a photo campaign in solidarity with Concerned Student 1950 and students at the University of Missouri, in addition to a march and petition in support of a new dean that prioritizes student and faculty diversity and has a demonstrated commitment to racial justice in health care.

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School Of Design

Shani Carter

Located in the "trays," the five-story area within the Graduate School of Design where architects, landscape artists, planners and designers dedicate their work-space, the installation displayed a timeline of Black and Brown men and women killed by police during each month of 2014. Photos, names, dates of death and modes of death nestled between the tag, #BlackLivesMatter.

The Harvard School of Design's African American Student Union created an installation to acknowledge the lives lost at the hands of police brutality. In the wake of protests and the growth of the Black Lives Matter movement, the installation serves it's position by examining the role of designers in the American landscape of race relations. The project humanizes victims of systemic inequities - inequities that pervade across the country, disenfranchise entire populations, and directly results in the death of countless Black men and women.

Shani Carter

Andrea Alejandra Gordillo Marquina

Of the forty photos of playwrights, authors, and screenwriters in the Michael Childers exhibit on display at the Gutman Library at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, only four artists of color were represented on the walls. These four photographs were quite literally pushed into the margins of the exhibit. By curating an installation that celebrates artists, but mostly excludes artists of color, the idea artists are predominantly white—at least artists worth celebrating—was problematically reinforced. Five students from the Arts in Education cohort—Shanae Burch, Toni Morgan, Vaughan Bradley-Willemann, Andrea Gordillo, and Michael Lee—rejected this notion. The counter exhibit they installed was a re-imagining of what should be: a more inclusive, representative, and intricate collection of narratives and voices that engage the institution in a deeper, more meaningful conversation around equity in the arts.

The counter exhibit was on display during photographer Michael Childers' artist talk. The event was largely attended by the Arts in Education board of donors.


Vaughan Bradley-Willemann

Harvard
Law School _____

Tensions rose as students called to remove the coat-of-arms of Issac Royall Jr. from the Harvard Law School crest. As a notoriously brutal slave owner, Royall's "vast family wealth, accumulated by the broken, beaten, bruised and burned backs of Black laborers, provided the nest egg for the Law School."[1]

On a wall of portraits displaying the law school's tenured faculty, black tape was placed over each of the African American faculty members. Some suggest those against removal of the seal were allegedly responsible for the incident.

#ReclaimHarvardLaw
(Reclaimharvardlaw.wordpress.com)

#ReclaimHarvardLaw
(Reclaimharvardlaw.wordpress.com)
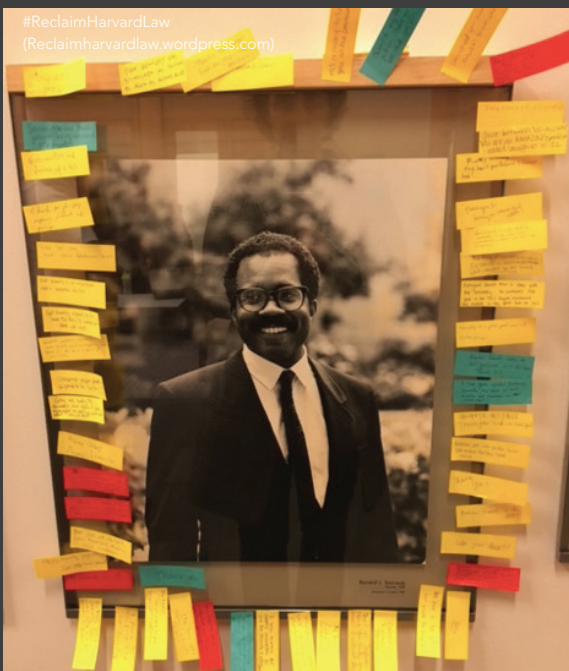
#ReclaimHarvardLaw
(Reclaimharvardlaw.wordpress.com)

Harvard Law students counteracted with statements of love, appreciation and solidarity in response to black tape placed over the portraits of African American tenured faculty.
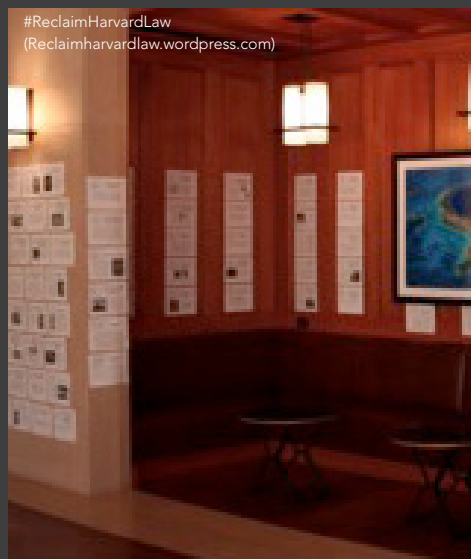
Students hold a Critical Race Theory teach-in at the office of Martha Minnow, Dean of Harvard Law School.

Students occupy the WCC fireside lounge, which Reclaim Harvard Law has renamed the "Belinda Memorial Lounge." In 1783, Belinda petitioned the Commonwealth of Massachusetts asserting her right to compensation for her years of enslavement. As of 8:00 p.m. on Monday, 15 February 2016, the space was reclaimed "for students of color who are marginalized by this institution. [They] now occupy that space in service to the advancement of justice in our community and invite all who are interested to join in actually fulfilling the mission of the school."

#ReclaimHarvardLaw
(Reclaimharvardlaw.wordpress.com)

Harvard Kennedy
School of Government

By Abdulaziz Said

Harvard Kennedy School students joined more than 1,700 students and community members to show solidarity with the #BlackLivesMatter movement on Harvard Yard.
Students have remained involved in initiatives across campus that call for institutional change and community support in the quest for justice and equality.

Table tents featuring the image were installed throughout Gutman Library as part of the HGSE Black Student Union's programming for Black History Month. Its intent was to make Black consciousness visible in a space dominated by Whiteness. On the back-side of the table tents were quotes examining the many connections between Harvard and slavery. These quotes were selected from a project led by Harvard History Professor, Sven Beckert, and available at HarvardandSlavery.com.
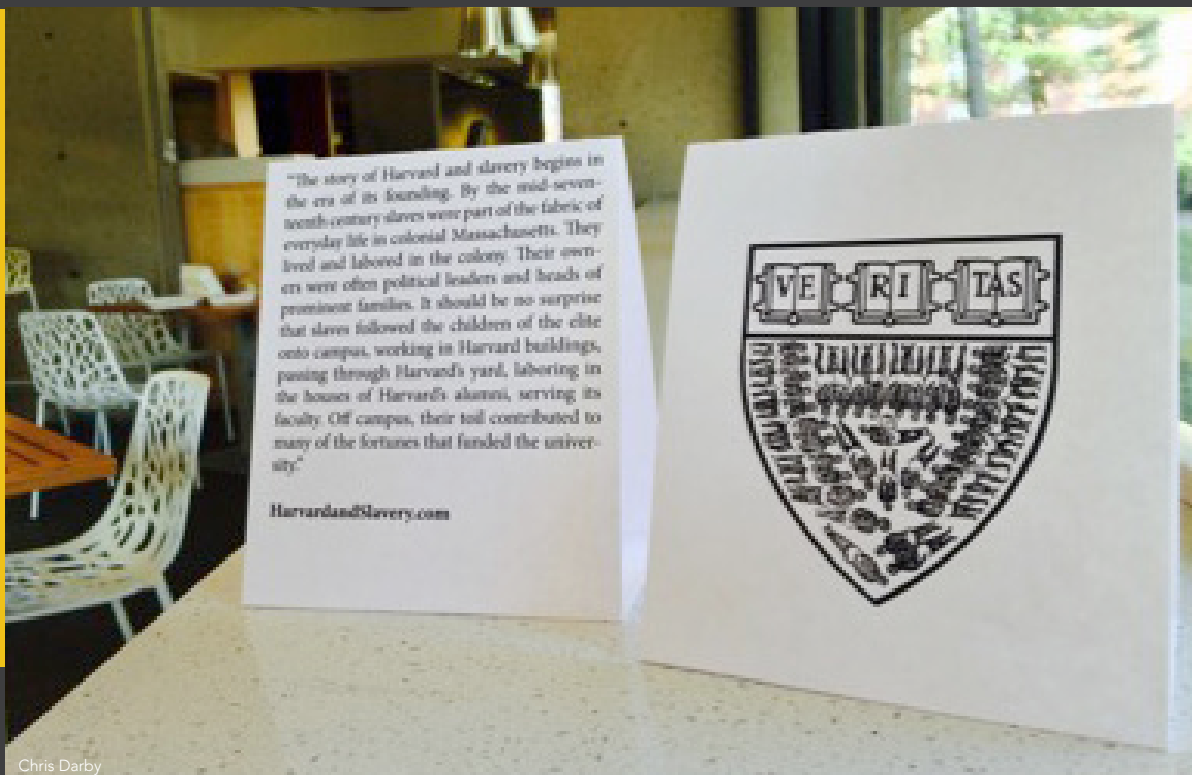
Chris Darby

Reimagining Critical Race Theory in Education:

Mental Health, Healing, and the Pathway to Liberatory Praxis

By Ebony
O. McGee
and David
Stovall

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David Stovall is associate professor of African American studies and educational policy studies in the department of educational policy studies at University of Illinois at Chicago, 1040 West Harrison Street, MC 147, Chicago, Illinois, 60607; e-mail: dostoval@uic.edu. His primary areas of scholarship are Critical Race Theory, the relationship of education to housing and law enforcement, and concepts of social justice in education.

Abstract

Long-standing theoretical education frameworks and methodologies have failed to provide space for the role mental health can play in mediating educational consequences. To illustrate the need for such space, Ebony McGee and David Stovall highlight the voices of Black undergraduates they have served in the capacities of teacher, researcher, and mentor. Building from the theoretical contributions of intellectual giants like Frantz Fanon and W. E. B. Du Bois, the authors attempt to connect oppressive social systems to the psyche of the oppressed in a way that is relevant to Black students. McGee and Stovall pose a challenge to the current research trend of attributing the survival of Black students at traditionally White institutions primarily to grit, perseverance, and mental toughness, noting research on the aforementioned qualities often fails to properly acknowledge multiple forms of suffering. Utilizing the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT), the authors also challenge the construct of grit to consider the extent to which the mental health concerns of Black students go undetected. Although critical race theorists have unmasked and attacked the racial trauma experienced at all levels of the educational system, the connection of CRT to mental health and wellness research is in its embryonic stages. For these reasons, McGee and Stovall argue CRT scholars need to incorporate praxis to address mental health and wellness in order to address a fuller spectrum of Black students' racialized worlds. Ultimately, they seek interdisciplinary perspectives that can help identify and foster strategies to support Black students in the project and process of healing from multiple forms of racialized trauma they experience within and beyond their educational encounters.

Introduction

"Weathering," a term put forth by Arline Geronimus and colleagues, is a phenomenon characterized by the long-term physical, mental, emotional, and psychological effects of racism and of living in a society characterized by White dominance and privilege.[1] Weathering severely challenges and threatens a person's health and ability to respond in a healthy manner to their environment. This can cause wear and tear, both corporeal and mental, and lead to a host of psychological and physical ailments, including heart disease, diabetes, and accelerated aging. These physiological manifestations of social inequality are not given sufficient attention, particularly in how they affect the academic outcomes and experiences of students and faculty of color. Long-standing theoretical education frameworks and methodologies have failed to provide space for the role mental health can play in mediating educational consequences. To illustrate the need for such space, we present the voices of Black undergraduates we have served in the capacities of teacher, researcher, and mentor. Although we are explicitly discussing Black college students in this conversation, we are by no means undervaluing the vital work being done on behalf of all students, teachers, administrators, and faculty within the African diaspora, and with other historically marginalized racial, gender, and socioeconomic groups. With this in mind, we are interested in the extent to which Black students are experiencing mental health concerns that go undetected. Even as we have showcased our research on the academic survival of Black students, we have grown accustomed to talking about grit, perseverance, and mental toughness, without properly acknowledging the multiple forms of suffering they have confronted (and still confront) as part of that story.

We contend that current research on "grit" and "resilience," at least as these concepts are sometimes defined and operationalized, does not account for the toll societal racism takes on students who may be viewed as successful. The majority of this research refers to static definitions of resilience, such as the innate ability to bounce back from obstacles, without properly acknowledging how structural racism breeds the racial practices, policies, and ideologies that force Black students to adopt a racial mental toughness in order to pursue traditional forms of educational advancement. This static definition often leaves it up to individuals to rise above their challenges and roadblocks without recognizing the stress and strain associated with surviving (and even thriving) academically, despite encounters with racism.

For the purpose of this account, we endorse more ecologically robust conceptions of resilience frameworks. For example, Margaret Beale Spencer's Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory of human development (PVEST) examines the interaction between environmental context and identity development, and starts with the assumption that an individual's perception of his or her environment and context is crucial to understanding his or her experiences and responses.[2] A PVEST-informed, vulnerability–resiliency perspective accounts for the *vulnerability* of people of color who are burdened by unique and often under-examined levels of risk, while also acknowledging potential sources of support.

> "
> Applying CRT in education makes it possible to analyze practices and ideologies through a race-conscious lens, which can help to frame critical questions addressing the traumas that directly affect communities of color.
> "

Recognizing the need for hard work and persistence has long been cited as a factor in academic perseverance.[3] In a series of longitudinal studies, researchers have asked whether grit, defined as perseverance and a passion for long-term goals, predicts a range of objective outcomes of success after accounting for individual differences in ability. Notably, grit has been shown to predict the grade point averages of undergraduates better than standardized test scores such as the SAT.[4]

"Gritty" individuals are described as tortoise-like and distinguished by their propensity to maintain their "effort and interest over years despite failure, adversity, and plateaus in progress."[5] Grit has been touted as the missing link for students trying to earn a degree in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), as this pursuit requires traditional measures of success (e.g., a high GPA), along with focused and sustained application over a long period of time. Angela Duckworth and Lauren Eskreis-Winkler frequently use the following quote to describe grit:

> The only thing that I see that is distinctly different about me is I'm not afraid to die on a treadmill. I will not be outworked, period. You might have more talent than me, you might be smarter than me, you might be sexier than me, you might be all of those things—you got it on me in nine categories. But if we get on the treadmill together, there's two things: you're getting off first, or I'm going to die. It's really that simple.
>
> *—Will Smith, Oscar-nominated actor and Grammy ward-winning musician and producer*[6]

While it is debatable whether or not pushing oneself to the limit to outwork the next person is an admirable quality, we have witnessed Black students work themselves to the point of extreme illness in attempting to escape the constant threat (treadmill) of perceived intellectual inferiority. However, what grit researchers do not adequately examine is the role race plays in producing anxiety, trauma, and general unpleasantness in students of color engaging in high-pressure academic work. The psychological and emotional energy required to manage stress in academic and social contexts, as well as systemic and everyday racism, can be overwhelming and taxing. We argue the current enthusiasm for teaching African American students with psychological traits like grit ignores the significant injustice of societal racism and the toll it takes, even on those students who appear to be the toughest and most successful.

The key theoretical constructs we use to frame the lives of our study participants include the tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT) as developed by Daniel Solórzano and Tara Yosso.[7] Their tenets are italicized in the list below, and each is followed by a brief description of how it informs our theoretical perspective.

- *The intercentricity of race and racism*: Race and racism are not monolithic concepts but, rather, complex, dynamic, and malleable social constructions endemic to life in the United States. Due to their shifting contexts, definitions of race can include and exclude particular groups, depending on the historical moment. For example, immigrant and native-born Latino/as in the United States were once categorized as "White"; they now are largely vilified for taking jobs from US citizens. By recognizing the historical and social evolution of race, CRT seeks to problematize the paradigm.

- The *challenge to dominant ideology*: The master narrative on African American and Latino/a students in public education is engulfed in deficit theories. CRT challenges the master narrative on the inability of students of color to excel in academic settings.

- *Commitment to social justice*: CRT offers itself as a theoretical and methodological paradigm aimed at the examination and elimination of race, class, and gender oppression.

- *Centrality of experiential knowledge*: The knowledge people of color acquire in the fight against hegemonic forces in education is legitimate, valid, and necessary for creating spaces where they can engage in justice work.

- *Transdisciplinary perspective*: CRT borrows from legal theory, ethnic studies, women's studies, sociology, history, philosophy, economics, and other fields to argue for a comprehensive analysis of the functions of race and racism in education.[8]

Applying CRT in education makes it possible to analyze practices and ideologies through a race-conscious lens, which can help to frame critical questions addressing the traumas that directly affect communities of color. As insurgent scholarship rooted in critique and action, CRT "seeks to inform theory, research, pedagogy, curricula and policy."[9] CRT in education should be viewed as making

a valuable contribution to praxis, as it supports reflection and action to promote psychological well-being, organize collective action, and develop a liberating education.[10] For the purposes of this article, we understand CRT as central to the larger political project and strategy that helps to frame our experiences as researchers concerned with the well-being of students of color in higher education.

Racialized survival strategies are an intricate set of actions developed to circumvent deeply embedded, persistent historical social problems. Thus, some Black students have developed a racial toolkit to help protect themselves from the damage that racial battle fatigue inflicts.[11] William Smith introduced the concept of racial battle fatigue to describe the stress associated with being Black in predominantly White educational environments.[12] Smith affirms that being marginalized at predominantly White universities creates racial tension for students of color that takes many different forms, including racial microaggressions and racial stereotyping, which are racial assaults on the character of students of color. However, even those educators and researchers whose central focus is race and racism in education have only rarely theorized the mental health outcomes associated with racial stress and racial battle fatigue. In these instances, the layered complexity of racism creates a context in which Black students may demonstrate resilience and grit, but the current framing of these concepts does not engage the nuanced realities encountered in higher education settings. Although toughness is an admirable quality, it cannot be the rationale used to dismiss long-term mental health outcomes. Consequently, the contributions of racial battle fatigue as an operative construct that outlines the role of racialized trauma in mental health outcomes has remained on the fringes of CRT.

The Mental Health of Black Bodies

Research on the mental health of Blacks in the United States reveals an enduringly troubled and disturbing history. Enslaved Africans were experimented on in horrific ways, such as being burned alive to study the effects of pain, and were doctored in ways intended to perpetuate psychological differences that "proved" Blacks' inferiority and offered a rationale for policies that reinforced their inequality, subjugation, and exploitation.[13]

In The Wretched of the Earth, Frantz Fanon painstakingly provides an intimate examination of the colonized psyche, which often suffers from mental disorders, and the links between mental pathology and the French colonization of Algeria starting in 1830.[14] Fanon has largely been characterized as a revolutionary anti-colonial activist and intellectual, while his role as a psychiatrist has been downplayed. Fanon spent a significant portion of his later years practicing psychiatry in North Africa, where he closely and critically observed the psychic violence and effective dimensions of colonization. Although Fanon was trained in France, he criticized French psychiatry for using the field to justify the horrors of colonialism by detailing the racist assaults, both physical and psychological, inflicted on Blacks in France and the United States. Additionally, he implicated these racist injuries in exacerbating and prolonging the suffering and anxiety of Black people: "Today, we know very well that it is not necessary to be wounded by a bullet in order to suffer from the fact of war in body as well as in mind."[15] His description of how Algerian people were stigmatized as slackers, liars, robbers, born criminals, and incapable of self-discipline is strikingly similar to the present-day racial stigma experienced by Blacks in America. Fanon details his own racial objectification by Whites in ways that called his very humanity into question: "I subjected myself to an objective examination, I discovered my Blackness, my ethnic characteristics; and I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects, slave-ships, and above all else, above all: 'Sho good eatin.'"[16] In a more recent article exploring the under-theorizing of race in research on the educational experiences and outcomes of Blacks, Carla O'Connor, Amanda Lewis, and Jennifer Mueller report that Blackness is still given value and defined through objectified competencies and practices rather than through meaning making and the heterogeneity of the Black experience.[17]

Fanon contends people in positions of power have also suffered, but from an illness of moral

consciousness. In addition, he discusses the anxiety experienced by the Black middle class. W. E. B. Du Bois referred to this phenomenon as the psychological wage associated with being Black—a sort of racial tax.[18] One manifestation is when some Black college students, while being socialized to work their way into the middle class by seeking White approval, concomitantly develop strategies to resist the internalization of inferiority.

> " In these instances, the layered complexity of racism creates a context in which Black students may demonstrate resilience and grit, but the current framing of these concepts does not engage the nuanced realities encountered in higher education settings. Although toughness is an admirable quality, it cannot be the rationale used to dismiss long-term mental health outcomes. "

In research conducted over a hundred years ago, Du Bois set forth the premise that African Americans' history of slavery, oppression, and deprivation produced a collective memory and frame of reference that has significantly influenced the development of their culture.[19] Du Bois also examined the identity confusion experienced by Blacks in America, which arose when racism, classism, sexism, and so on forced them to conform to a dominant American identity, sometimes at the expense of their ethnic identity. He highlighted the quandary some Blacks experienced when forced to sacrifice their ethnic identities in order to academically achieve and progress through the educational system. This process has been shown to be maladaptive and can lead to stress, isolation, and anxiety due to the constant pressure to choose between conforming to the dominant culture or remaining true to one's own ethnicity.[20] African American students who see a contradiction between their second-class status and their high academic achievement often suffer internal strife and may pay a high psychological price for their academic success. These students also may have

difficulty with the third aspect of the Du Boisian "veil," where they struggle with the consequences of seeing and situating themselves outside of what the dominant group describes, defines, and prescribes for them.[21]

Many mental health studies in the early twentieth century concluded Blacks had higher rates of mental illness than Whites, reporting the Black participants were considered severely mentally ill, while the White participants were described as exhibiting varying degrees of mental illness.[22] These biased conclusions have been discredited by large-scale studies such as the National Institute of Mental Health's National Comorbidity Study, the largest study of mental illness ever conducted in the US; however, none of this research has presented a holistic picture of African American mental health.[23] Nevertheless, these studies do address the fact that, although African Americans are disproportionately exposed to known risk factors for physical and mental illness, they do not have higher rates of suicide or mental illness than Whites. Still, it should be noted that among high-achieving, high–socioeconomic status Blacks, the stress and anxiety associated with racism routinely results in a high level of stress-related illnesses.[24]

Sherman James studied the coping strategies of African Americans with prolonged exposure to social stresses related to racism and discrimination, and he developed the construct of John Henryism to define their experiences.[25] John Henryism is a pattern of behavior named for the folklore character John Henry, who epitomized the brutal effects of hard labor. Henry, an African American laborer, was tasked with hammering a steel drill into rock in order to make holes for explosives; his prowess as a steel-driver was measured in a race against a mechanical steam drill. Henry won the contest, then immediately collapsed and died. Variously described as a disorder, disposition, personality trait, or perfectionism, John Henryism is a coping strategy often adopted by high-achieving African Americans, who may unconsciously (and increasingly consciously) sacrifice their personal relationships and health to pursue goals with a tenacity that can be medically and mentally deleterious.[26] In a recent study that followed 489 African American

young people living in rural Georgia for over fifteen years, Gene Brody and colleagues documented that a subgroup of children, despite being identified as resilient, suffered from tremendous internal pressure to succeed. For example, they felt pressure to be the first in their family to graduate from college or to be employed in a White-collar job).[27] They also endured daily blatant racism and discrimination. These pressures often caused the students to compromise on their sleep, exercise, and other aspects of self-care, which resulted in the wear and tear associated with disproportionately high rates of health problems, including obesity and high blood pressure. The high achievers also produced more stress hormones (including cortisol, adrenaline, and noradrenaline) than the study participants who were not identified as resilient.

These studies and others have found active ways of coping, such as confronting those who make racist remarks, alleviate the stress of racially motivated incidents more than being passive.[28] Other strategies include sharing experiences with same-race colleagues or friends, seeking community support, feeling a sense of responsibility to serve the community, adhering to a religious or spiritual practice or ideology, and having a critical understanding of how race and racism operate in American society, including in educational contexts.[29] Having a racial identity that strongly identifies with the collective Black experience has been shown to buffer the stress and anxiety associated with racial discrimination and to help prevent racial stereotyping that can bring about a negative self-concept or poor self-esteem.[30] The assessment of African Americans' mental health is often fueled by differential interpretations of symptoms arising from sociocultural factors such as prejudice and stereotyping.[31] Oseela Thomas and colleagues argue many studies on Black mental health do not emphasize the need to understand the cultural buffers and strengths African Americans develop to protect themselves from negative mental health outcomes.[32] Grit is presented as a racially neutral construct that does not impact all demographics equally. The emotional and psychological trauma African Americans experience in navigating White spaces and their structural foundations is under-acknowledged in grit research. There is little attribution of "grit" as an impact on structures that foster persistent insecurity and a sense of unworthiness in racialized bodies. Moreover, grit framings have yet to respond to racial stereotypes, insults, and assaults that are commonplace in this racially stratified society, which can hamper Black students' options for working strenuously toward challenges and maintaining effort despite adversity. However, CRT takes into account the nuances of racism and racialized experiences through its educational tenet that calls for "a commitment to social justice." Although this idea is underdeveloped in current CRT research, the navigation of White spaces includes another component, one that calls for developing a space that directly addresses the healing of those who have experienced trauma. Because the commitment to justice must extend beyond the immediate trauma, a holistic account of the justice condition must include a commitment to healing those who have experienced the infraction. CRT, while getting us closer to these conditions, in theory, must still push itself to develop a grounded analysis of what this healing looks like.

Contemporary Research on the Mental Health of African Americans

Critical race theorists recognize that racism and discrimination adversely affect the mental health of Black students and faculty by diminishing their academic self-concept, confidence, and mental efficacy. Brought to the forefront by William Smith and his colleagues, this line of research introduces the concept of racial battle fatigue as a theoretical framework for examining the response to trauma and the experience of stress symptoms often manifested as anger, escapism, withdrawal, frustration, and avoidance.[33] These stressors can occur at the macro level (society, institution, neighborhood) and on an interpersonal level (with an individual, in a classroom). The concept of racial battle fatigue maintains that race-related stressors, such as exposure to racism and discrimination on campuses, and the time and energy African American students expend to battle these stereotypes, can lead to detrimental psychological and physiological stress.[34]

Recent work in sociology and public health has sparked a growing interest in the distinct role racism plays in Black people's mental health.[35] Public health researchers have concluded racial and ethnic discrimination is a psychosocial stressor can adversely affect mental health.[36] Thus, we agree with Tony Brown that the consequences of racial discrimination cannot be fully mitigated by well-established coping strategies, and only the eradication of racism will alleviate race-related stress for African Americans and other historically racialized populations.[37]

Since racially discriminatory experiences are multidimensional in nature, CRT's multidimensional framework can help in identifying and highlighting the relationship between race and mental health. For example, the impact racial stratification has on health outcomes could be further elucidated by using the select concepts and transdisciplinary methodologies provided by CRT.[38] Some in the public health community have adopted the concepts of CRT to investigate structural racism in health care with the goal of using their findings to develop a health care praxis that expands community-based participatory research and thus results in the development of practices that benefit communities.[39] The work of these scholars has influenced our call to use CRT to address the mental and psychological stress and dysfunction racism exacerbates in African American college students when they experience heightened levels of racial stereotyping, discrimination, and other forms of bias.[40]

New Beginnings: CRT's Investigation of Mental and Physical Health

Many critical race scholars acknowledge that African Americans and other historically marginalized students endure often subtle, but constant forms of discrimination and bias.[41] Counter-narratives of everyday experiences at traditionally White institutions often expose these institutions' denial that covert bias exists on their campuses. Marginalized students endure a plethora of racial assaults, which contribute to mental fatigue and psychological distress. While CRT has made a formidable effort

to address racial battle fatigue in the racialized experiences of African American faculty and students, there is a desperate need for critical race scholars to include mental health when examining the life experiences and academic and social outcomes of Black students, as well as those from other marginalized groups. The survivors of racial battle fatigue tell their stories, detailing the stress and strain they have experienced, and explain how they have often assumed resilience, perseverance, and grit are the most tangible solutions.

Just as Fanon argued more than fifty years ago, recent research challenges the premises and assumptions of Western psychology, situating it as an outgrowth of a cultural pathology reflecting White supremacy.[42] Derek Summerfield, a prominent psychiatrist who works with victims of torture, has powerfully cautioned against perpetuating colonial behaviors and ideologies as pathways for curing and healing the non-Western mind, claiming to do so would have pathological effects on the identities of both the colonized and the colonizer.[43] The notion that Black people have a "natural" resistance to pain and an "inherent" mental toughness has antecedents deeply rooted in racist colonial slave ideology. This interpretation of Blackness defines and confines it in a way that imposes the oppression and values of brutality and inhumanity that upheld slavery. Slave owners (both historically, and today in the form of correctional facilities) and doctors often withhold pain medications or medical care due to the fallacy Blacks are mentally and physically hardy.[44] As educational researchers embrace identities that encompass resilience, grit, and perseverance, we should ask others and ourselves to what degree are these traits actually healthy and nurturing. This inquiry should continue with the following questions: Should we ask historically marginalized students to become grittier and more resilient? Or, should our fight be directed toward achieving greater racial justice so Black students do not have to compromise their mental and physical well-being by being resilient, where the cumulative burden of lifetime adversities actually predicts mental health symptoms?[45]

In his thought-provoking article "The Case for Reparations," Ta-Nehisi Coates argues some mem-

> **Thus, we agree with Tony Brown that the consequences of racial discrimination cannot be fully mitigated by well-established coping strategies, and only the eradication of racism will alleviate race-related stress for African Americans and other historically racialized populations.**

bers of the African American community believe these same cultural pathologies explain the poverty and disadvantage plaguing so many Black lives, but also ardently believe these outcomes can be altered through "individual grit and exceptionally good behavior." He argues further that this strategy is not only wrong, but it is dangerous: "The kind of trenchant racism to which Black people have persistently been subjected can never be defeated by making its victims more respectable. The essence of American racism is disrespect. And in the wake of the grim numbers, we see the grim inheritance."[46] Coates claims grit ignores the brutality White slaveholders and politicians (often synonymous) inflicted on Black individuals and families, and further states the devastation surely did not end with the end of slavery.

Our students agree with Coates that relying on grit is a problematic solution. For example, in answering the question of why so few Black males matriculated through college, one high-achieving Black male college student responded, painfully,

> We are tough! We are hard, or whatever! But how tough do we have to be just to be seen as human? Kunta Kinte [the Gambian-born American slave in Alex Haley's novel *Roots*] was strong, the strongest man on the plantation but he [the slave master] beat him down to submission. This is what happens to us [Black men] all the time. Now they call us failures, but we were once Kunta Kintes and this society just broke us down.

The student admitted that he, too, has been broken down and was self-medicating with his roommate's prescription antidepressants. As victims of verbal abuse, physical assaults by police officers, and racial hate crimes, this racialized and gendered group is especially vulnerable to mental health issues. Coupled with traditional notions of Black masculinity that subscribe to "cool pose," verbal or physical aggression, and risky pleasures, this student's response indicates how close he is to being marginalized.[47] While his attributes can be considered negative, they do not necessarily represent the underlying problem, which is the negative impact on Black male college students of being stereotyped and judged only in terms of negative attributes.

Counter-narratives in Action: The Reality of Black College Students and Their Mental Health Needs

Our motivation to understand mental health more fully from a CRT perspective is ironically inspired in part by the narratives of high-achieving Black college students in the STEM fields. Through the following two counter-narratives, we provide a window into the detrimental psychosocial effects of racism in two contexts. One occurs as part of a research project, while the other centers on an experience at an academic conference for people of color and women in the biomedical sciences.

Counter-narrative I by Ebony McGee

While investigating Black students' experiences via the intersections of their racial and STEM identities, I have discovered they manage various forms of racial abuse in ways that do not appear to interfere with high academic achievement and traditional forms of academic success. Throughout the course of my research, I have developed various interview protocols to use with high-achieving Black students from as young as fourteen to those in their early forties. While conducting interviews earlier in my career, the answer to a particular question would occasionally expose a student's fragile state of mental health, revealing the devastation and even despair they felt as a result of being berated, negatively stereotyped, ridiculed, and racially assaulted by a peer, teacher, employer, stranger,

or police officer, and by the rules of a society that often strangles the academic and life opportunities of young Blacks.

During one particular interview, I realized many of these high-achieving, seemingly resilient Black students were suffering from chronic or acute forms of stress, most often due to structural and everyday racism.[48] This revelation came in the spring of 2010, when I interviewed Janet, an attractive, high-achieving biochemistry junior, who at the time of the interview was attending a historically Black college—not your typical setting for unearthing racial and gender discrimination.[49] Janet was describing a summer engineering internship where she had felt trapped in a pool of covertly sanitized, but nevertheless nasty, racialized and sexist practices. For example, she said a principal investigator (PI) frequently patted her on the head when she made a "minor accomplishment," that she was the designated person to make coffee runs, and that she was always assigned the lab cleanup and other menial tasks. After two weeks of bearing this behavior and hoping it would change, Janet asked the lab manager for more substantive duties. He replied, "Well, coming from a third-tier college, and a Black one for that matter, we realize you are woefully unprepared. However, being the first Black girl in the lab should be seen as a major accomplishment." The PI negatively defined and stereotyped Janet's race and gender. Almost forty years ago, Shirley Malcom, Paula Hall, and Janet Brown called for a change of academic culture regarding gender and race and noted the "double bind" of sexism and racism for women of color (students and faculty) in STEM fields.50 Issues related to intersectionality have often led to STEM attrition at all levels of the pipeline, and these issues further explain the exponential increase in discrimination experienced by persons fighting minority status in more than one area of their lives.

After this incident, Janet contacted the only person she believed understood how to contest racism and sexism—her advisor, a Black female engineering professor—to explain the situation and ask for guidance. She recalled her professor's response word for word:

I don't care if they ask you to act like a monkey or bark like a dog. [The company where Janet had the internship] is the best biomedical company in [the area]. I wrote a letter of recommendation on your behalf and my reputation is on the line, so you are going to just grin and bear it. Try to learn something that could help you in your future. Or, use this experience as a resume builder, but don't you dare do anything to rock the boat.

So, for the next six weeks, Janet suffered relentless forms of discrimination, bias, and racism. The closer she got to the office each day, the more her hands would tremble, impairing her driving. Janet concluded her trembling was a physical symptom of the stress she was anticipating. I witnessed Janet's emotion and pain as she relived this horrid experience. And alas, when I asked, "How did this entire experience make you feel and how did you cope with this ordeal?" Janet replied, "I actually considered killing myself." Then she went on to describe in great detail how she contemplated hanging herself in a bathroom shower. Only a real fear of not properly executing her suicide and thoughts of her mother's anguish kept her from attempting to kill herself.

A flurry of questions and emotions rushed through my mind, with one insistent question coming to the forefront: *Why do I feel so unprepared to help this young woman?* From a CRT perspective, as well as my own personal experience, I was well aware racism can harm someone's mental health; however, I felt incapable of handling Janet's trauma. Previous students I interviewed had displayed strong emotions as they discussed their experiences—some cried, shouted, shivered, and even curled up in pain when telling their stories. Might they also have contemplated suicide? Was the pain and suffering they were still experiencing a result of racial battle fatigue? If so, could additional processes be at play? Black feminism, which unpacks the societal position (that is, the ways in which people are categorized in a Western hierarchical society) of African American women, unhesitatingly portrays Black women as self-defined, self-reliant individuals.[51] But what happens when these self-defined, self-reliant Black women either ignore or are complicit in the marginalization of

other (read: more subordinate) Black women? While considering these questions, I walked my fragile young participant over to the counseling center, canceled the rest of my interviews for that day, and stayed with her late into the evening. Janet told me her friends or teachers would never have understood the agony she suffered. As a result of living with untreated depression (verified later by medical professionals), she had developed a public mask that protected her true feelings and emotions. Janet also explained that "No one ever asked about my feelings, so there was no cause for me to express them." That day Janet had the privilege of talking with an African American male psychologist who understood high-achieving Black college students can feel incredible pressure to succeed.[52] He also recognized those who are racially marginalized have additional stress caused by their deficit position in society. Janet was in awe of her advisor, a Black female professor in the biomedical field, who ultimately was insensitive to Janet's racially oppressive summer internship environment and continued to send her messages of the need for toughness and grit. Since that interview, Janet has learned healthy strategies for coping and managing her feelings.

Counter-narrative 2 by David Stovall

My experience took place in a starkly different context from the traditional research environment—it was at a conference for people of color and women in the biomedical sciences. In a field that still leans toward "objective" science, I was kind of a fish out of water as a keynote presenter on race and the biomedical sciences. The full lecture hall was primarily occupied by people of color, largely African American, Latino/a, and Southeast Asian students. Many of the conference participants were at different stages of their graduate studies.

Interestingly, my talk on the resurgence of biological race in the pharmaceutical industry was greeted with nods of approval. Even the discussion of Henrietta Lacks was well received by the audience, as some were already familiar with her story, while others were flabbergasted Lacks' family never received any compensation for her foundational contribution to cancer research. Lacks, an African American female whose cervical cancer led to her death in 1951, is arguably one of the most important persons in medical and scientific research. During radium treatments Lacks received for her cancer, doctors took samples of the healthy portion of her cervix, as well as the cancerous portion, without her permission. Amazingly, Lacks's cancer cells survived and replicated themselves every twenty-four hours. These cells, which became famously known as HeLa cells, have aided research on cures and treatments for such diseases as polio, acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS), and some forms of cancer. Unfortunately, Lacks still has not received the proper acknowledgment for her contribution to medical research. Her descendants have never received any compensation or royalties and did not even know the cells existed until decades after her death.[53]

The talk ended with strategies faculty members can use to survive racial oppression in higher education. I couched this discussion in the concept of the "only," as people of color are often the only persons of their race/ethnicity in their classes as graduate students or in their departments when they join a faculty. My comments got a good laugh, but I also reminded the group how important it is to find like-minded people in your particular discipline. As a professor once reminded me, "You will need those like you to affirm your sanity." The majority of the audience seemed to agree.

Directly after the talk, a group of students approached me and thanked me for the frank discussion of the ways race permeates their current university environments and may permeate their soon-to-be professional lives. They expressed the desire to keep in touch and asked for names of other people they could contact for more information. The last conversation I had with a student has stayed with me, as it revealed the need to pay attention to mental health concerns.

This last student, an African American female, thanked me for the presentation and then shared her story of extreme isolation. She began to talk about her experience being the "only" for the majority of her time in her program. As we spoke,

she kept repeating, "It doesn't matter what you do. It doesn't matter, they just keep on doing it." When I asked her if anybody at her school had offered her support for her work, she returned a blank stare. I also tried to talk about the importance of creating community as a person of color in a hostile environment, but she shook her head, smiled, and said, "No. It doesn't matter, it doesn't matter." Although I did not probe more deeply into the issues she was facing, her stark response remained with me as one example of a common experience rarely brought to the fore.

> **"When trying to convince policymakers and educators of the need to fully understand the mental health issues these students face, we have encountered a general lack of empathy, and they often shift blame to the students and their families."**

The young woman's response hit me even harder when the students decided to schedule a discussion on creating community after my keynote address. I agreed to attend, as I hoped to interact with the woman in question, but she unfortunately decided not to come. Her response to my suggestions and other comments have remained with me ever since.

This is by no means an attempt to psychoanalyze or pathologize the woman with which I was talking, but it did make me wonder how many people have similar experiences that go unnoticed. I remain concerned for the young woman's mental, physical, and spiritual well-being, and about those who share her feelings.

A Call for Using CRT in Studying the Mental Health of Black College Students

This article, particularly our use of Black college students' narratives, represents our pragmatic call for the importance of tending to the mental health needs of students of color. Because these students are victims of stereotyping, racism, traumatizing practices, and discriminatory policies and ideologies, their mental health needs should be of the utmost importance to scholars who study the systemic functions and consequences of racism and White supremacy at the individual and collective level. Those who are struggling with the multiple burdens associated with being a Black student must be protected against daily discrimination. As there is increased awareness racial insults, assaults, and discrimination can lead to or complicate mental suffering and humiliation, we aim to move beyond that acknowledgment to devise and execute a plan of action. In contrast to research that concludes with messages of the need for grit and a tougher mental attitude, a more holistic perspective focuses on gaining a thorough understanding of the psychological, emotional, and mental harm these students endure.

We argue against the idea that those who have been historically marginalized merely need to get tough and endure the oppression and subordination. We believe CRT provides an opportunity to understand and implement racially appropriate healing systems for Black college students and other groups that are chronically underserved and understudied (for example, historically marginalized racial groups, international students of color, LGBTQ students, first-generation students, returning military students, and second-career students). In our exploration of the clinically and racially relevant factors that affect Black college students' mental health outcomes, we have addressed some questions that could be explored when CRT is applied to postcolonial theory, public health, the sociology of race, psychology, and philosophy. One key question is this: What collaborative and multidisciplinary perspectives on Black college students' mental health can we gain by blending theories across various disciplines in order to help fashion higher education institutions that have a deep and meaningful sense of community? Furthermore, what current examples of social and mental health support show concrete results for Black students? Despite state and federal governments' disinvestment in historically Black colleges and universities over the last twenty years, these institutions should be given further consideration

as a potential model for student support, as many of them have recognized students' mental and social health is key to their ability to graduate and live a productive life beyond the university.

An examination of treatment modalities using CRT, including group treatment practices, may help provide more holistic solutions to pervasive problems in Black college student communities. CRT leads investigations into certain moderators for increased mental health, including the role of social support, strong ethnic identity, and personality variables. For example, Krysia Mossakowski found that among people confronted with discrimination, those with a higher level of ethnic or racial identification experienced lower levels of depression.[54] Borrowing from the work of Amanda Lewis and Antwi Akom, we argue for the need to understand the experiences of Black and Brown students who navigate, negotiate, resist, accommodate, and transform themselves as racial beings, and the impact this transformation has on their mental health.[55] The different ways Black female and male college students cope with, adapt to, and heal from race-related stress deserve additional research attention.

Further exploration is also needed on ecological factors such as the racial environment and lack of resources associated with demanding coping responses that result in racial battle fatigue. The research suggestions we offer here represent a minute sampling of the questions that could be developed by CRT scholars. We suggest the construction of research questions that are substantively richer, more nuanced, and better contextualized to center on race, so CRT will be positioned to make meaningful contributions to mental health research and praxis.

However, when trying to convince policymakers and educators of the need to fully understand the mental health issues these students face, we have encountered a general lack of empathy, and they often shift blame to the students and their families.[56] Thus, the life experiences of African American college students are often marginalized, minimized, or ignored. We argue researchers who study race

and racism—CRT scholars, in particular—should also address mental health and wellness as they fight for political, economic, educational, and social change. In light of these realities, we call on universities to create mechanisms that will allow Black students to temporarily remove their racial battle armor and, further, to pledge to provide protected spaces where these students can engage in collective and individual healing.

Conclusion: Beyond Coping . . . the Need for Healing

Constructs like grit and perseverance demonstrate how students of color often cope with marginalization. The ability to embrace these concepts can allow students to academically function in a sea of racist practices, policies, and ideologies, but not without psychological turmoil. Thus, we are encouraged by Shawn Ginwright's work in this arena, which presents healing as the goal for optimal well-being.[57]

Ginwright argues for radical healing, or healing as a process for restoring the health and well-being of students who have been exposed to chronic poverty, racism, and violence. His definition of healing includes developing a critical consciousness of social oppression, which gives one the ability to counter hopelessness and nihilism and to aid in the preparation required for confronting racism and similar forms of oppression.[58] We believe Ginwright's concept of radical healing should be at the center of critical race theorists' investigations of Black college students' mental health issues in order to help protect their self-concept and healthy development. The radical healing process should also include community organizations, which provide important opportunities for college students to connect with surrounding neighborhoods and engage in civic activities that address community problems.[59] Being connected to the larger community can give students a greater sense of purpose, provide them with opportunities to forge important relationships, and help them develop the skills needed to bring about social change. Radical healing could give Black college students better control over the mental health

challenges that result from racial oppression by fostering hope and a greater sense of purpose and agency, which are essential traits required for building and protecting mental health. Lastly, the process of healing requires an authentic, tactile connection to these students' lives, as well as a better understanding of the practices of healing, if it is to improve the praxis of teaching and learning.

The concepts proposed in this article should only be considered a precursor to future research and praxis. Due to the trauma many Black college students experience, our foray into this realm of study should include (but not be limited to) the practices used by mental health professionals, community organizers, and holistic health centers. The process of healing from racial battle fatigue and institutional racism requires significant internal commitment and external support. Instead of relying on traditional notions of human will and resilience, our work needs to be centered on strategies that prevent burnout and reject the adoption of traditional ways of coping. Both authors of this article are familiar with teacher burnout, and we contend more attention should be given to the burnout problem among individuals currently working in student support services and academic advising.

An approach similar to Kerry Ann Rockquemore's faculty diversity program could be implemented with students, faculty, and staff on college campuses in order to address the intersectionality of race and mental fatigue.[60] Her program, which seeks to assist faculty with the process of attaining tenure without compromising their integrity, could serve as a model for collective efforts to engage in radical healing. Through its inclusion of circles led by a trained facilitator, Rockquemore's approach allows participants to share their struggles and thus acknowledges their experiences are not isolated incidents. This approach could be adjusted to meet the needs specific to college students; for example, small groups of students could meet to engage in practices that, although they may appear mundane, are actually critical to long-term health. The social nature of these gatherings could help group members open up, as they would offer a less stressful environment in which to discuss

specific concerns. Beyond assigning mentors to facilitate their academic productivity, a holistic approach would include practices that support faculty well-being. Those in oppressive situations should seek such support aggressively.

Stating the educational system in the United States is rooted in a history of racial bias and racialized practices is nothing new. However, it is important to remember racial inequities are structured to restrict Black students' academic opportunities and continue to devalue their intellect. And, most important, pursuing higher education should not make Black college students sick. Although this article showcases the negative impact racism has on Black college students' mental health, we consider our contribution only as an entry point for further investigation of these issues through the lens of CRT. Black college students are brilliant, talented, and creative, and they dream as big as other students. The complicated path these students must travel to achieve their dreams is centrally challenged by bias and racism. The fact that African American college students are done immeasurable harm by being perceived as less capable than Whites, and by striving to achieve while being assaulted by stereotypes of intellectual and social inferiority, makes their mental health one of the most urgent concerns in education today.

Endnotes

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W.A.I.T. (Why Am I Talking?):

A Dialogue on Solidarity, Allyship, and Supporting the Struggle for Racial Justice Without Reproducing White Supremacy

By Geoffrey Leonard and Laura Misumi

Geoffrey Leonard *(a thirty-one-year-old White, middle class, cat-loving native New Yorker pursuing a dual JD/MPP at Georgetown University)* and **Laura Misumi** *(a twenty-eight-year-old, middle class, Japanese American from the suburbs of Boston, and law fellow at the Service Employees International Union, or SEIU) have a sprawling conversation on the role of allies in multi-racial organizing spaces, and the role of lawyers (both White and people of color) in organizing space;, multi-racial organizing in general; the failures of allies; and the importance of cultural competency—all from a wildly personal (and mostly anecdotal) place. Their perspectives represent their own experiences, and not the view of the National Lawyers Guild (NLG), any of its chapters, or any other organization.*

Laura Misumi graduated with high distinction from the University of Michigan in 2009, double majoring in political science and Latin American and Caribbean studies, with a minor in Asian/Pacific Islander American studies. As co-chair of the flagship Asian American student organization at the University of Michigan, Misumi worked with fellow students on Asian American issues and how they connect to multiracial issues of immigration and workers' rights.

Upon graduation, Misumi worked on the "Clean and Safe Ports" campaign with Puget Sound Sage in Seattle through the Center for Third World Organizing's Movement Activist Apprenticeship Program, and served as an AmeriCorps volunteer Youth Civic Engagement Specialist at the United Teen Equality Center in Lowell, Massachusetts. Before law school, she served as a National Teaching Fellow and Family and Student Engagement Lead at Van Buren Middle School in Albuquerque, New Mexico, through Citizen Schools. Misumi was a public interest law scholar at Northeastern University School of Law, a member of the National Lawyers Guild, co-chair of Harvard Law School Asian Pacific Law Students Association, representative on the Committee Against Institutional Racism, and vice-chair of communications for the Student Bar Association. She is currently the Home Care Law Fellow at the SEIU. She loves food.

Geoffrey Leonard is a native New Yorker. He studied anthropology and English at Goucher College, where he earned a BA in 2008. From 2008 until 2010, he did Hurricane Katrina recovery work, serving as an AmeriCorps VISTA, community outreach officer, and case manager with Rebuilding Together New Orleans, and a housing tester with the Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Center. Between 2010 and 2012, Leonard worked as a legal advocate at the Urban Justice Center's Homeless Outreach and Prevention Project, where he represented welfare and food stamp recipients at admin-

istrative hearings to contest illegal denials or withdraws of benefits. He also helped organize the Urban Justice Center's staff union under UAW NOLSW Local 2320, and served on the unit's first bargaining committee.

He is currently pursuing a dual degree in law and public policy at the Georgetown University Law Center and the McCourt School of Public Policy. As a student, Leonard has been an active member of the Georgetown Law chapter of the National Lawyers Guild, serving at various times as their treasurer, communications officer, and member of the steering committee. During school, he was a Peggy Browning Fellow at the DC Employment Justice Center, interned at Make the Road NY, and clerked with the SEIU. After graduation, he will be replacing Misumi as the Gleichman Fellow for Home Care at the SEIU. He loves cats.

On the Role of Allies in Organizing Against White Supremacy

LEONARD: In thinking through the role of allies, two things. First, I think that anti-racist and anti-oppression work should be led by the folks who bear the brunt of racism/oppression. So when it comes to amplifying Black voices in the struggle against anti-Black racism, I think White folks and all non-Black people doing ally/solidarity work should be playing a supporting role, not trying to lead.[1] Which is hard for us as White people, because we've been told our whole lives that our opinion and sense of self is central.

So, stepping back, shutting up, and realizing that you're there if you're useful and that's about it, is really challenging.

Second, I think that there is room for White people to lead anti-racist work in the White community and I think that's really important. I think of the Stokely Carmichael critique of White liberals hiding out in the Black community because the White community is, say, hostile to their ideas of racial justice and it's just like, "that's cute," but it's super counterproductive.[1] There's another Stokely Carmichael quote about White folks needing to organize their own community.[2] The major force driving anti-Black racism and White supremacy is the extent to which White people have gained material and psychological benefits from White supremacy and then denied its existence through the entire ideology of White supremacy.

> White people committed to Black liberation have an obligation to push the White community and its institutions to just do better—to be less racist, to confront the history of their privilege, and to understand how it is pervasive and inescapable through mere personal atonement and hand-wringing, but requires both not constantly reproducing White supremacy in everything we do, and challenging White supremacist institutions.

While perhaps too much of an aside, and somewhat difficult to even imagine, I think this ultimately requires people of all races working to both end Whiteness as an identity, and end capitalism as a system of allocating resources. They are mutually reinforcing systems that justify and perpetuate the denial of full equality to all but those who own the means of production, but especially people of color and Black people. Derrick Bell's Faces at the Bottom of the Well and Karen and Barbara Fields's Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life are good starting places for understanding the relationship between White supremacy and capitalism.

MISUMI: Yes, to one. Also, I feel like a key component is a healthy dose of humility and the ability to take it when folks call you out. Some White folks have done more work than others, but at the end

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[1] **MISUMI**: To add a shade of nuance, while anti-Black racism and the legacy of slavery is in many ways much worse than how White supremacy affects other people of color, I'm hesitant to describe it in such a way as to make a hierarchy of oppression. It's too easy for those who do not have such a nuanced view of White supremacy and American history to then say things along the lines of, we'll get to your [other non-Black POCs, including indigenous folks] issues later, because this is the most pressing and the worst. It manifests in different ways for sure, but there will be no dismantling of White supremacy without a full and comprehensive understanding of ALL the ways in which it operates and manifests itself, INCLUDING internalized White Supremacy that conveys some benefits at great cost.

of the day, no matter what amount of work you've done (as a White person), it is still not the same as experiencing [the effects of] White supremacy as a person of color (POC). Sometimes you will be called out in ways that are hurtful. Sometimes you will be called out when you think you already know. And, in those moments, you have to swallow your pride and take it, because it's important to recognize that we as people of color have to fucking swallow our pride and take microaggressions and the weight of White supremacy every day and get on with our lives without blowing up and getting defensive every time.

> ❝This also crystallized the importance of something that I think a lot of White folks, including myself, struggle with: noticing when space is all or majority White, and that that, itself, is White supremacy.❞

We have to pick and choose our battles because, as you said, White supremacy is everywhere. A real important step is to recognize that the calling out, the anger, it's not necessarily personal, often what's being called out is one example and is but emblematic of larger issues. We all slip up, but when White folks slip up in being anti-racist, the default, then, is being racist. This is a process. It's fine to make mistakes—most people don't want to be racist—but we live in a White supremacist, capitalist, cisheteropatriarchy. And when we're not actively fighting against it, the status quo persists as it's meant to.

LEONARD: Right. For example, with the student chapter of the National Lawyers Guild (NLG) at Georgetown.[3] When I joined, at least, and the year the NLG got involved in the struggle for racial justice on campus and became more active in off-campus activism, it was essentially a de facto White, middle class, liberal/progressive/"radical" space. This has changed over time, with more people of color joining and taking on leadership roles in the NLG—our current president is Black—so much of this is from the perspective I had when we were a White-led, majority-White

organization. However, the organization continues to have a number of White members, so we have continued to be careful around the role we play both as an organization, and how White members are specifically involved. It has been crucial that all of the campus activism we have been involved in around racial justice has been in partnership with Black students and students of color, not nominally, but robustly, through building institutional relationships with affinity groups and students of color that are organizing and offering resources and support from NLG when desired and useful.[2] It's also meant deferring to the leadership of Black and POC members of the NLG. For example, we've participated in die-ins that centered Black students (they spoke, they "died," they directed the messaging on signs); we've helped edit letters, reserved rooms, or used our budget to provide food for meetings. We've also gone to meetings with White faculty/administrators to support voices of Black students.

However, we've made mistakes. For example, White NLG students, when the organization was White-led, did initiate a protest on campus, where we stood outside of the cafeteria on campus holding signs about structural racism in the legal system. This was interesting because there were so few students of color and Black students who participated. It was the NLG's day of action around police violence and the murder of Black men and women by police. We organized at the last minute and reached out too late to the groups - specifically the Black Law Students Association (BLSA) and the Coalition—even though we had been supporting and working in solidarity with these groups at earlier actions.[4] We tried to remedy this mistake by centering students of color and Black students at the action. I think, initially, a POC member of the NLG noticed how few folks of color were at the protest, which speaks to the frustrating and perpetual role POCs are forced to play in holding White folks accountable. In that moment we handled it well, not by getting defensive, but by taking some time to reach out

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[2]   **MISUMI**: Though, as this is all part of an ongoing process, let's recognize that you contrast "all" with a story of NLG organizing a protest that had few POCs, so in an exercise of humility, the "all" is something y'all are still working towards.

to students of color who had expressed interest, see if they were available, and centering POC and Black students who participated. This also crystallized the importance of something that I think a lot of White folks, including myself, struggle with: noticing when space is all or majority White, and that that, itself, is White supremacy.

> ❝This is another crucial component of what it means to be an ally, to really think about what it means to give up something and to have an idea of how much of yourself and how much of what you've earned and built for yourself is dependent upon a system—a system that, if pulled from beneath you, would cause you to personally lose power, social standing, and actual things.❞

There's also another side to this. Georgetown University Law Center (GULC) is a White institution, so directly confronting GULC requires organizing against both interpersonal and institutional racism. So at times, I think it has been appropriate and even necessary for White students and non-Black POCs in the NLG, or wherever, to take on more robust roles in challenging and pushing the institution. For example, when Darren Wilson and Daniel Pantaleo were not indicted, myself and another White student put flyers on every seat in every classroom, which acknowledged the non-indictment and stated, "As law students, we are training for a legal system that does not value Black life. What is your role?" While we collaborated with Black students on the language and the decision to flyer, this felt appropriate as an action for White people to take, in part because it did not center White students, but mostly because it was an attempt to confront our community with its role in structural and systemic racism and White supremacy. Likewise, another White NLG member organized a White privilege study group that, though not exclusively White, it often ended up being a space largely for teaching White people about White supremacy.

But more generally, this kind of White-facing work, on a personal level, can be tedious and hard. It requires not severing ties with racist White people in your life, but instead actually talking to them about race. And I still struggle with this. For example, I have many friends who are "apolitical" in that they feel they are not affirmatively saying bigoted shit, but are certainly not doing anything to advance racial justice, and are also passively sexist and racist all the time. And it may be "boring" to bring it up all the time but they are my community, that's how that works—and White people should absolutely be out in front on in their own community. That being said, I feel like White-facing work can risk becoming very self-indulgent and ineffectively penitent, especially if it becomes about just excising the racism inside of us without acknowledging that personal racism is only a part of a much broader system or White supremacy and oppression, and without organizing against that system, from the criminal justice system, to property ownership, to capitalism itself, you can't end White supremacy. Additionally, in doing that work it's important to do your due diligence around knowing history and, where possible, have people of color in your life and organizations that you can be accountable to.

Yet, even with all these potential pitfalls, there's just so much really easy individual-level work that even if done in a ham-handed way is still usually a step in the right direction. For example, I've had some real success with my parents, just by sending them articles about White supremacy. Or, by asking my parents—and now my brother—to donate money to Black Youth Project 100 for my birthday and holidays. That's just better than being totally silent about it or not doing anything. In that sense, everyone doesn't have to be—nor should they be—at the forefront of the movement, but everyone should be accountable to our collective progress.

MISUMI: Right. Which makes me think of this comparison between the language of the New Left versus the post-New Left specifically around the shift from the term "solidarity" to "allyship."[5] And I think allyship is a way less useful term. First, allyship is passive; it's an inert state, and therefore

does not explicitly require action. On the other hand, you can't passively be in solidarity, you have to actually take actions against White supremacy to be in solidarity with someone, and you're only in solidarity to the extent you are doing something. Second, solidarity makes clear that even for White people, ending White supremacy—and capitalism and patriarchy—is necessary for their liberation, too, and that freeing themselves from participation in oppression of people of color is ultimately in their best interest. I don't think "ally" really conveys that.

On the Failure of Allies

MISUMI: So, where do allies fail? I definitely feel that as a non-Black person of color, if I'm trying to do organizing around Black Lives Matter, I want to stand in solidarity and take direction from Black folks that are organizing. Being an ally is much more passive, like, "I theoretically support your movement and so I will say I stand with you," as opposed to me actively standing with you and being more proactive around what I can do within my own community, or me showing up and articulating what I can bring while respecting the space I've entered into. That requires a lot of introspection and in-group conversation—what does it mean to be in solidarity?

I think the biggest failure of allies is when they value their self-identity of being an "ally" over doing any actual "ally" shit, since this rarely is used through a designation that some panel of POCs has bestowed upon the folks that assume it's most often an accolade one gives themselves. To be an "ally" without actually doing anything perpetuates White supremacy because, again, we have to remember that without active resistance, the default of White supremacy continues as it's meant to.

Additionally, allies fail in being able to truly understand White supremacy because it is so utterly all encompassing that it's really hard to replicate a comparable scenario of which they can relate. Pick a time when you were incredibly uncomfortable in your social surroundings. What about it made it

really uncomfortable for you? Imagine that being your default situation and then counterbalance it with the different coping mechanisms you've developed, or that you've been taught by your family to navigate those spaces to make it less oppressive. How much of your behavior has changed because of that and how much of yourself have you lost every day living that way? I don't know if you've ever seen "The Color of Fear."[6] It's amazing, a documentary by Lee Mun Wah, and involves a group of men of different races in a room talking about race. It's incredible, though clearly limited in scope but helpful nonetheless.

> " There was a lot of deliberate thinking about who would speak at the action and what the signs would say. Ultimately, the majority of participants in the action were Black students, so there was limited risk of centering White students—even by accident. I believe that's how our thinking should be guided moving forward: reaching out to Black students organizing on campus and offering our resources and support. "

One line that really stood out is when the darker-skinned Black man, who works in corporate America, said "I just can't wait to go home at the end of the day so I can be Black again." For those of us non-Black people of color who have been positioned more able to assimilate as White, it's not entirely the same. For me, being fourth generation, I didn't feel the same kind of cultural disconnect coming home. But it's so pervasive in every aspect of yourself that it's difficult to unpack and to be able to describe the most egregious aspects of it is only the tip of the iceberg, you know?

LEONARD: Yeah. I mean, I think growing up in New York I got really lucky or unlucky in a lot of ways in that I never got to not be White. Just like growing up in a city where at least fifty percent of my friend group was people of color, meant that fifty percent of my friend group was also White, I didn't get to be raceless. I didn't get the invisibility of it, and that had effects in other stupid ways. I definitely thought that reverse racism was a thing for a while because I was made fun of for being White and just did not appreciate the power dynamic. Like, the idea that for White people, you have to take whatever sort of discomfort you have around race, and multiply that by the constant threat of lethal violence. I feel like I've had that conversation with a couple White folks and that has been somewhat helpful in getting the wheels turning . . .

MISUMI: But it's so interesting because it's a constant process and has to be ongoing and that's what's difficult. I feel like I have talked to White friends about this a lot and they just don't want to engage. But this is what it means: it's your responsibility as an "ally" to at least try because that's our day-to-day all the time, and it should not be on people of color to teach White people both about White supremacy and how to dismantle it.

LEONARD: And who cares if they're not going to change necessarily; this isn't necessarily about changing minds, this is also about . . .

MISUMI: Doing work . . .

LEONARD: Yeah, but also, by not calling it out as unacceptable, you allow it to be acceptable. And I think that calling out White racism by another White person is helpful if it's done in a way that, even if not effective at changing minds, is effective at changing what is an acceptable way to be, to act. It's a step in the right direction.

MISUMI: But it's not always as effective for a person of color to say that because it may only feed into it. They may be admonished for being over sensitive, and maybe even be retaliated against. That's even worse. Then you have someone doubling down on their racism.

On Lawyering to Dismantle the White Supremacist Capitalist Cisheteropatriarchy

LEONARD: Another huge mistake for solidarity work is thinking of yourself as a savior or lone change-maker. This is especially a problem for lawyers. The story that a lot of us have been told—specifically White lawyers interested in social justice—is that you're going to be in the trenches with folks, which literally means, having worked in legal services for two years, doing nothing to empower people to deal with their problems on their own, but certainly constantly getting to feel like a hero . . .

MISUMI: Though not not necessary work . . .

LEONARD: No, no, no, you're absolutely right. It's still very necessary work. I think the organization, Make the Road, really gets it right in calling it "survival services." It's about people in the community making it, not to the rally, but to the next day. But also I think you should do legal services in a way that empowers people. Like in almost every poor people's court, pro se defendants represent themselves and could be trained by lawyers to do so and to even represent others.7 Also combining legal services with organizing, like the anti-displacement program used by Legal Services of New York, or Make the Road, which works with organizers to conduct building-wide representation and to set up tenants' associations.

Then I think the flip side is the civil rights lawyer who imagines bringing a case that changes the law and the world. That's how I thought the law worked when I came to law school. I was inspired by cases like Goldberg v. Kelley that looked like proof that we can change the world through smart litigation. But I soon realized that this was really just about who was on the Supreme Court at the time . . . and they're not on the court anymore. And when that happened, smart litigation became something of a dead end on a lot of issues, especially racial and economic justice.

MISUMI: The idea of it—lawyers as the gatekeepers of justice—is inherently disempowering. The

whole purpose of being an attorney as defined by the Model Rules of Professional Responsibility dictates what decisions a client can make, and what decisions a lawyer can make, and whether or not you even have an obligation to tell your client about certain things. It seems a little at odds to anyone's idea of social justice in terms of empowering people to be able to actualize, and do and be and achieve what they want in their lives.

> ❝So, my approach is similar, but employs more intention on working across racial lines within POC-only spaces, [and] requires a huge amount of humility and acknowledgment of difference. The power dynamics are different.❞

Law school, these rules, the profession, they fail to acknowledge the inherently disempowering relationship between an attorney and a client. Like the whole purpose of law school, the Bar Exam, and the system of licensure is to prevent just anyone from doing it. This whole ridiculous pedagogy of case law, briefing of going through a faux-intellectual (horrible) experience is to create separation; the system tries to weed people out and make people fail. To make people leave they're so discouraged because it doesn't make any sense—when you take a step back and look at the actual practice, you're not writing anything new; it's not a new theory, it's all the recycling arguments that you've done before. Everything comes from what has already come. Everything is based in precedent. You can try and wiggle, and you can try and distinguish, but it's distinguishing on the premise that your scenario is novel, but is it really?

LEONARD: Yeah, we've definitely tried—and though sometimes failed—to push at GULC this idea that lawyering is not the centerpiece of social justice or social movements, and have tried to make the NLG a space people can go for reframing legal work with that in mind. Which is largely about understanding the history of the NLG. For instance, we did a talk with Anthony Cook, a professor at Georgetown Law, who studies social movements and their impact on the law, about the history of

the NLG as distinct from other groups involved in the civil rights movement. The idea being that the NLG, at the time, was a group that showed up subordinated themselves to [the] SNCC and other groups that were doing mass-movement work, as opposed to co-opting it and doing strategic litigation and then just leaving. Despite their legal expertise and even long-standing history, they respected the role of organizers and organized people and mass movements, and the power that they held as the real force for social change.

On Organizing in Law School

LEONARD: Well, you know the rules of organizing are one, you pick the campaign yourself, independent of the people it affects, and two, you start in the place that is as far from where oppressed people confront the power that oppresses them: the voting booth.

Oh wait, no. Those are both the things not to do.

MISUMI: I received organizing training at the Center for Third World Organizing's Movement Activist Apprenticeship Program, and most of my organizing was done as a college student with the United Asian American Organizations at the University of Michigan, through AmeriCorps as a Youth Organizer in Lowell, Masschusetts, and as a teaching fellow in Albuquerque, New Mexico through Citizen Schools.8 These contexts are so different from the law school environment—so much so that I think of them as experiences and methodologies utterly distinct.

The NLG at Northeastern University School of Law was a catchall progressive space—if you have any left-leaning politics and/or are in an affinity group (since most law school affinity groups have professional ties and can't necessarily take the most radical stances), you come to NLG and we can take action on some of those things. Since Northeastern's NLG runs by "consensus," it quickly became clear that without any structure, the ones with the loudest voices, the most time, the most will to take initiative, and the most patience for bullshit, for example, would be the de facto

leadership of the organization, even if they think they are just serving the broad consensus.

At some point it no longer becomes a space that is actively participating in breaking down systems of White supremacy, or even acknowledging that they exist. Instead, and I'm speaking generally, it becomes a space where a bunch of White anarchists talk about all the things they want to do and email their only Black friend to send something "to their networks," when what they really mean is BLSA listserv. It shouldn't just be you reaching out to the person of color you know, you should reach out to the appropriate person in the organization you are trying to work with, the person in that organization's leadership you should be working with already.

> **"Through racial-justice organizing in law school, my idea of community has crystallized a bit: my community is affluent liberals who fully participate in, and arguably, perpetuate White supremacy more than some dated redneck with a confederate flag."**

This is an excellent—horrible?—example of what not to do when White folks are organizing themselves. I've talked about this before but it bears repeating: this work CANNOT be a White folks' circle jerk of sadness and impotence—real critical steps need to be taken and conversations need to be had that result in White folks who want to be in solidarity with Black liberation struggles and with other non-Black POCs attempting to fully understand their power and privilege and at least have a working understanding of what White supremacy is on multiple levels—even if it doesn't come from a place of real empathy.

LEONARD: Yeah, as a comparison, I feel something White students in the GULC NLG—and the GULC NLG as a multi-racial but majority White organization—have tried with varying successes is to actively cultivate relationships between our leadership and the leadership of organizations representing and led by students of color that are also organizing around racial justice. During my 2L year, when our NLG was largely White and White-led, we were approached by students of color who wanted to organize an action in the months following Mike Brown's killing. We showed up to the planning meeting and took direction from the Black students, their decision, and their vision on what they wanted to do. We discussed and we participated. There was a lot of deliberate thinking about who would speak at the action and what the signs would say. Ultimately, the majority of participants in the action were Black students, so there was limited risk of centering White students—even by accident. I believe that's how our thinking should be guided moving forward: reaching out to Black students organizing on campus and offering our resources and support. When the Coalition at Georgetown issued a letter of demands for addressing racial justice on campus, the Coalition reached out to the NLG to send a letter of support.[9] In part, this was because Coalition members were also NLG members, but also because the Coalition knew that Georgetown is a White [supremacist] institution and having as many voices, including White voices, calling for racial justice, would amplify the call.

However, despite increasing the number of students of color members of NLG and reaching out to spread awareness of what our organization represents, at some point, and sometimes it feels inescapable, that the NLG just is a predominately White organization at least at GULC.

MISUMI: Why?

LEONARD: I don't know why entirely. I think some of it has to do with predominantly White leadership in past years. But, I also think it attracts a crowd that generically identify as "activists," and those who identify as "activists" in law school often are White, relatively privileged, and have sought out social justice struggle as a form of identity, for reasons you talk about. But, I also think we're also sort of a small, obscure organization—though less so than we used to be—so given how segregated social networks often are, if you bring in somebody to the organization and you are White, odds are

you're inviting another White person. With this in mind, we've made conscious efforts to explicitly reach out to students of color to join the NLG and do work that is led by members of color. But all encompassing is the fact that, at GULC, any space that is not explicitly reserved for students of color just gets taken over by White people. We tend to be really entitled, so unless we are explicitly excluded, we become a majority when we already make-up 85-90 percent of an institution.

MISUMI: I think it's interesting that you raised it in terms getting more people of color into the NLG, because I think from my perspective, the NLG has some internal work to do before I would want to subject more people of color to it. I'd be interested to hear how GULC NLG students of color feel about the internal work you all have done. And I think that obviously it's hard to have a perspective on race when you grow up White and are surrounded by White people. How can you empathize with something you've never seen, experienced, or had any contact with? What does institutional racism feel like on a personal level? It's very difficult to describe.

I've experienced this on several different occasions when I'm in a completely White space and have mentioned that I was the only person of color in that room. They've said something along the lines of, "Oh really? I didn't notice." They weren't able to register that experience as a feeling—like, unable to understand what it means to be completely alienated. And yeah, they can travel the world and be the only White person in a space and have a novel experience, but they then can just leave and return to a world in which they feel completely normal. You are everywhere, things are made for you, and the world feels right because the world is comfortable. In that space, there are a lot of things that you no longer have to think about. It's easy to take for granted.

That's my hesitation when people say, like, reaching out to people and trying to build relationships with POCs. It needs to be organic; you also have to put in fucking work to know that just because you're friends with a POC, that doesn't mean you use that person as your POC connection for all

things POC. As a non-Black POC, when I walk into a room, I'm always thinking about what those dynamics are, what is the program, who is here, who is leading this meeting? Who is talking already? And, if it's an open Q and A, I'm not ever going to be the first person to raise my hand if I'm not leading the meeting or if it's not a meeting for me. I'm going to see who's raising their hand first because that's always telling—it shows whether or not the ground rules have been laid and if people are aware of those dynamics.

I remember being at a report back from Ferguson that was led by Black folks and moderated by another person of color, and the first two people to raise their hands were White men. I was just like, come on, you're in a mixed group talking about serious issues of race in this country—be aware of yourself. This is a level of entitlement that is innate and so subconscious for most White people: it's important for me, as a White person, to voice my opinion because we have earned our place to be here. And therefore, important for you, person of color, to hear my thoughts because I am truly an individual and my opinion is unique.

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Had this not happened to my people, I don't know if they [or I] would have looked to other diasporas and other communities to find commonalities and ways to build power together. ❞

Which is seductive. People put work in all the time, so it's easy to believe you've earned the right to have an opinion. Like, you've done the work and you've done the reading and it's really hard to separate that from knowing whether your opinion or your regurgitation of that article you read is really what's necessary at this moment, or whether it's a time for people to have a space to reflect personally on how they felt about that situation. So especially as lawyers, we've been trained to think that the only things that matter

are objective and subjective intent, and that the law is written in an objective way and that context doesn't matter. So, it's hard not to replicate that limited frame in activist spaces in law school. I think that especially with NLG, there are a lot of lawyers who wish they were organizers and don't understand that there is a very specific time and place for legal skills and that legal frame, and it's really narrow.

So what role do we have as non-Black POCs organizing in solidarity with Black liberation? I think that being Asian American and being involved in Asian American activist spaces in Boston, it is really important for us to be really cognizant of what it means to be in solidarity and have a full understanding of the breadth and the diversity of experience of who constitutes "Asian American." This perspective is really important. A lot of Asian American organizing starts with the premise of the model minority, which is really trite as it arose post-World War II and reflects a very particular part of our history.[10] It's really important to think about what it means to identify as a POC and locate your type of Asian identity within the spectrum of Asian American history overall, from the 1740s to the present, and then locate what that means to be your kind of Asian as related to other POCs. For example, I believe affirmative action is a fake controversial issue in the Asian American community. But, when it comes up and when people don't know the history of these policies, the outcome is again dependent upon this issue of context, whose story, and what space.

The Asian American organizations I know that work on issues of racial justice, like CAAAV (Committee Against Anti-Asian Violence) in New York, CPA (Chinese Progressive Association) in Boston and San Francisco, NAPAWF (National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum), Khmer Girls in Action, spend a lot of time talking about this, about what it means that you come standing on the shoulders of others. What does it mean, that you were shipped in after successive waves of other immigrants and other people of color and slavery, to do labor in this country? How do you locate yourself and your family, and what does it mean to still be here? What does it mean to not

only stand on civil rights successes, and all of the racial justice work that has come before by other POCs and also Asian Americans themselves, and to have your immigrant experience be utterly divorced from that? It's really complicated.

LEONARD: In thinking about organizing White folks, I struggled with a somewhat similar thing. I remember hearing "go organize your own community" and feeling like, well okay, I guess I'm moving to suburban Connecticut or rural St. Bernard Parish since I'm White. But that's not my community, either. Through racial-justice organizing in law school, my idea of community has crystallized a bit: my community is affluent liberals who fully participate in, and arguably, perpetuate White supremacy more than some dated redneck with a confederate flag.

Using Georgetown's resources to fix White people has been a consistent refrain throughout a lot of this organizing. I think about 1Ls coming in and the opportunity to confront their racism. And, of course, this has come with confrontation. While we call for race-centered courses, an increase in student and faculty diversity, and/or mandatory implicit bias training, White students have articulated that they don't need these things, that they're outside of the "race equation," that race affects only a small segment of the population, and the rest of us live in a race-neutral world. Breanne Palmer, a founding member of the Coalition, suggested a goal be that we "stop graduating racists." That's a tall order, but focusing on that has felt more like organizing my own community than any sort of White liberal fantasy about organizing poor White communities. So, we try to figure out ways to make Georgetown better and use its resources to fundamentally change how White people view themselves and the world.

In doing so, historical context is extremely important. Realizing that the suburb you grew up in was made—and entirely relied upon—the exclusion of Black people in order to maintain its wealth, and that the entire system of property ownership in this country was predicated on wealth accumulated by White people—and European and other immigrants who adopted anti-Black

racism to earn a White identity or proximity to Whiteness. Or, that the only way to fix this is by redistributing that property. There is no racial justice mechanism through which White people don't lose property and power.

MISUMI: Yes, exactly. This is another crucial component of what it means to be an ally, to really think about what it means to give up something and to have an idea of how much of yourself and how much of what you've earned and built for yourself is dependent upon a system—a system that, if pulled from beneath you, would cause you to personally lose power, social standing, and actual things. Most people probably have not actually thought about that, so when you're in mixed spaces and you're talking about these things, it can make folks really uncomfortable really quickly. But even White allies can say, "Of course it's not a meritocracy, it's all built upon X-Y-Z, but my opinion is still important and my experience is still something that is important to share with this group at this particular time."

On the Importance of Personal Connections to Struggles for Racial Justice

LEONARD: I think if you cannot understand it in the abstract, you need some personal connection or experience with things against the "norm," and a capacity for empathy. It's hard for me to say how I developed this connection, though. I'm relatively privileged, but I've also been through a lot.

As a teenager dealing with mental health issues, I was twice the victim of minor, but incredibly scary, police violence. I had a really awful home environment that invited me to reject "the dream" of White supremacist material security on an abstract level. I grew up in a largely integrated environment. I spent two years in reform school, from fifteen to seventeen. I also had the intellectual and personal frame from having lefty parents. So, my younger years were spent trying to learn an accurate history of oppression in America—in part because I felt frustrated and dislocated by the status quo, despite being privileged by it in a lot of ways.

I did a lot of anti-poverty work in college, which allowed me to have direct contact with folks dealing with some incredibly severe, and obviously structural, personal trauma, and PTSD after Hurricane Katrina. But even still, I was egotistical in a lot of ways, since for a lot of my youth, I definitely didn't understand my own role or ways I reproduced White supremacy. I think that's maybe the key. I was a shitty ally then, but I had the motivation to try and the willingness to learn. Maybe my own bullshit growing up gave me the willingness to listen and just suck it up when I messed up—to admit my faults and come back if it was helpful to have me there.

MISUMI: I think an emotion and personal connection—beyond the abstract—is absolutely a prerequisite, but it doesn't necessarily have to be direct. I derive my politics and views from a very personal place, knowing the history of my family in this country and how White supremacy has completely changed the trajectory of my community, my family, and myself. Had we not been "evacuated" and "interned" during World War II, there's a really good chance that my grandparents on both sides would still have met, gotten married, and remained within San Francisco's Japantown and been a part of a thriving JA community in the Bay Area.

Perhaps those communities would still be there and thriving, rather than suffering the consequence of racist "redevelopment" policies in the '60s and '80s, and gentrification today. While my grandparents on my dad's side ended up back in San Francisco, my mom's parents were able to get out of the camps early to finish their education outside of California. After my maternal grandmother graduated from BU, they settled in Connecticut as the only JA family in their town. But none of my grandparents ever talked about the camps.

So, many Sansei, like my parents, (third-generation Japanese Americans, the generation most likely born after the camps) didn't learn about the camps until college. They came of age during the fight for ethnic studies and the growth of the Black power movement. They cut their teeth on anti-war

organizing and fighting for third-world liberation and anti-colonialist struggles abroad. My parents actually met while organizing with the Committee Against Nihonmachi (Japantown) Eviction, a fight against the second round of redevelopment/erasure efforts in San Francisco to destroy Japantown after the war, and to further separate the Black and Japanese American communities. They joined the League of Revolutionary Struggle, an organization whose purpose was to unite different third-world communist organizations to organize collectively against the White supremacist, imperialist, and capitalist patriarchy at home, while also supporting independence struggles abroad.[11]

> "Cultural competency/anti-oppression trainings can be crucial for one, providing basic knowledge about oppression and cultural difference, two, pushing people to think about how their own perspectives and behaviors can reproduce oppression and are entirely informed by oppressive systems rather than objectivity, and three, providing people the tools to have these conversations with others—so we all can learn how to keep ourselves in check. But unless there are tools for enforcement, or the training is tied into a larger institutional values, then it can easily just lead to our outcome at Georgetown: 'that was too hard on White people.'"

Eventually they worked with the National Co-alition for Redress and Reparations, organizing their Nisei and Issei elders to present testimony before the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians in support of the redress and reparations struggle. They did so with a particular lens, one that stood in solidarity with other POCs seeking reparations/redress of some kind—including indigenous sovereignty and reparations for slavery.

They gave me my politics and the lens through which I see the world. They worked directly, and in solidarity with, other POC organizations carrying a strong Asian American identity. And through all of this, it all comes back to the personal. Had this not happened to my people, I don't know if my parents would have felt so strongly about rebuilding connections between Japanese Americans and Japantown. Had this not happened to my people, I don't know if they [or I] would have looked to other diasporas and other communities to find commonalities and ways to build power together.

On Cultural Competency and Cultural Competency Training

LEONARD: The first formal anti-racist training I ever took part in was the pilot "subversive" cultural competency training organized by the NLG and the Coalition at Georgetown Law. Recently, I took part in another one in Baltimore, one that focused on how to be a White person supporting Black Lives Matter at Law for Black Lives. Though I enjoyed both and definitely got a lot out of them regarding thinking about privilege, I also felt like I already understood to a degree. And this understanding was through trial-by-fire, real-life cultural competency "trainings" through working in organizations where women and people of color had power over me. Where I was actually confronted with my bullshit, and I could witness how my actions made other people uncomfortable. And even through having friends of color who would actually call me out when my privilege needed to be checked.

Cultural competency/anti-oppression trainings can be crucial for one, providing basic knowledge about oppression and cultural difference, two, pushing people to think about how their own perspectives and behaviors can reproduce oppression and are entirely informed by oppressive systems rather than objectivity, and three, providing people the tools to have these conversations with others—so we all can learn how to keep ourselves in check. But unless there are tools for enforcement, or the training is

tied into a larger institutional values, then it can easily just lead to our outcome at Georgetown: "that was too hard on White people." Perhaps had this not been an extracurricular activity, but actually a required part of new student orientation, I think the outcome would have been different. I think it would have helped set the tone and legitimize the administration's alleged attempts and commitment to push back against student racism, sexism, etcetera.

MISUMI: I think as a person of color growing up in a White town, I learned many aspects of cultural competency by virtue of survival and osmosis. I learned how to be Japanese American at home and I learned really quick how different the White world is and how to navigate it, because I had to. I already look different. I already eat different things, and have different cultural traditions. So, I had to develop a strategy early to deal with the ignorant comments.

So, my approach is similar, but employs more intention on working across racial lines within POC-only spaces, [and] requires a huge amount of humility and acknowledgment of difference. The power dynamics are different. I recognize the impact of the middleman theory and the damage the model minority myth has done both internally and across racial lines for how AAPIs relate to, and work in solidarity with, other POCs.[12] It is important to constantly do work to understand this and to organize with my fellow AAPIs to come to multi-racial spaces with the right intentions, the right humility. We're not here to tell you our struggle is the same as yours, or that the oppression we face is worse; we're here to stand beside you. And I'm a big proponent of using food to bring people together across cultural lines. The Feast of Resistance is a great way to begin a dialogue on history, both intragroup and intergroup, and is an especially good tool for multi-racial organizing in a POC-only space.[13] I've even done it with ethnic White folks and that's pretty cool, too.

I also truly believe in the crucial importance of ethnic studies in developing radical pedagogy that is both culturally competent and consciousness-raising. This gives space to question and critique the

historiographical approach that's taught as the only proper way to learn about history and people, and it goes beyond a pure historical materialism approach to recognize the importance of culture, folklore, tradition, beliefs, faith, stories, and how people create identity for themselves and give value to it. We need not learn about our people as comparative to Western civilization. To learn about our people, we don't need to give credit only to the sources we've read in $500 textbooks. We can follow the principle of "each one, teach one," where the community is both a source of knowledge and an active participant in learning. This had such a huge influence on me as an organizer and later as an educator. How do we value the stories our people tell us and treat their narrative as important as the objective, logical, rational cause and effect of policy?

Conclusion

MISUMI: I think a lot of what I've experienced in multi-racial organizing is about learning to listen, to be open, patient, and try to find where people are at and where they are in terms of being able to hear certain things. We've got to understand what it means to be held accountable and how to hold oneself accountable. How to recognize a teachable moment and how to pass on a shitty opportunity for a better one, and trust that the relationships we build with each other, will result in more, and better, opportunities.

LEONARD: It's still super difficult to get called out and be held accountable. But, it's a privilege to even have people who are willing to put in that time, so squandering that by being defensive or not doing constant work to hold myself accountable is so much worse. Sometimes that means just saying some dumb shit, couched in terms of, "but, okay, I feel this way, but ultimately I know you're right." And it's definitely gotten easier to deal with, and maybe more importantly, I think I have gotten much better at not outwardly expressing any number of discomforts that would make it harder for folks to hold me accountable. Though, I will leave that for people of color in my life to speak to.

Endnotes

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Spiritually Rooted:
Yehudah Webster on Faith, Race, and Activism

By Eli Plenk

Eli Plenk has spent a decade working at the intersection of racial and economic justice, with a particular emphasis on youth organizing. He recently completed a stint teaching English in New York state prisons, and over the years has organized with young people, immigrants, prisoners, and housing activists. A graduate of Hampshire College and a senior fellow at Humanity in Action, Plenk is the co-founder of *Momentum* magazine, a transatlantic human rights journal that will begin publication in the summer of 2016. He splits his time between Boston and New York.

Community organizer and political activist, **Yehudah Webster**, works to inspire and empower the Jewish community to join the modern-day fight for civil rights. As a volunteer organizer for Jews for Racial & Economic Justice, Webster supports the police accountability and Black Lives Matter campaigns through organizing meaningful actions and lobbying for legislative reform. He is a resident of Moishe House in Park Slope, Brooklyn, organizing seven events per month for Jews in their 20s and 30s. Webster primarily works as director of the B'nai Mitzvah Campaign, an innovative bar/bar mitzvah tutoring company that provides meaningful learning experience to students on their journey to Jewish adulthood.

Yehudah Webster is a man of true faith. It is not that he does or says all the right things, nor is he an angel with some special long-distance calling code to heaven. Neither a naïve child nor a crazy grown man, Webster is simply a man who believes.

The child of a Black American father and Guyanese mother, Webster was born "Wesley Webster" on 30 October 30 1992 in suburban New Jersey. His father was a Seventh-Day Adventist pastor, and Webster's early life was filled with dreams of one day leading a church just like his dad. However, when Webster was four-years-old, the family's religious life began to change. "The whole thing started when my father decided he needed to read the Old Testament in it's original language," Webster said nonchalantly, as if this was a thought that goes through everyone's head. "That's when we began learning Hebrew. We were living in North Carolina at the time and got all the pronunciation wrong, but we did our best teaching ourselves."

Soon enough, Webster's parents were on what he refers to as "a fast track to Jewish self-discovery." Beyond simply learning biblical language, they were reading Jewish history and trying to understand "where Africans fit into the Jewish narrative" through their travel to Africa and the Middle East. By the late '90s, the family had left the church Webster's father once helped lead and moved to a farm in Guyana with neither running water nor electricity. Webster identifies that as the moment when "we really did away with Jesus and started identifying as Jewish." Rural Guyana is an unusual place to become Jewish, but given the family's unique trajectory, it is perhaps a natural one.

Webster has been profoundly shaped by this early search for religious meaning. His parents were looking for what he calls "the good news,"

no matter the sacrifice, and that has given him a sense there is no distance too vast to travel in pursuit of spiritual guidance if enlightenment lies on the other side.

> ❝ I just thought, how can I ever be a leader in a community that looks completely different from me? Webster said, noting that although his background should not disqualify him from serving as a rabbi, it often seems to do just that. ❞

Jews of color like Webster make up a sizable portion of the Semitic world. Because simplistic definitions of race are increasingly fraught, accurate statistics are hard to come by. Nonetheless, Be'chol Lashon and the Institute for Jewish Community Research (two organizations that analyze Jewish diversity) estimate that between 10 and 20 percent of American Jews are people of color.1 Yet, black and brown Jews are often overlooked when Americans of all races and political affiliations engage with Jewish people. Jews and Gentiles alike still tend to conjure up lazy stereotypes when they think about Jews and race, images that probably look more like Nazi propaganda than anything else. In reality, Jews are a fairly diverse group and Webster is not as much of an outlier as most would assume.

Nonetheless, suspicion of Webster's religious authenticity has come into play throughout his life. On birthright, he felt he had to lie about his identity to be allowed entrance to Jerusalem's Western Wall, one of Judaism's most sacred sites. On that same trip, an Orthodox shop owner admonished him for donning tefillin, pulling the black leather straps often worn by religious Jewish men from Webster's arms and chasing him out of the store. "No one else would ever face these circumstances," Webster said when describing his time in Israel. "If I was White, it would be assumed that I was a Jew by birth; the underlying factor here is that I'm a Jew of color."

Over the course of our conversation, Webster recalled other moments of outright racism: the time a coworker at a Jewish summer camp asked, "Where's the nigger?" before realizing that Webster was in fact right there; the many moments when friends asked him about "fried chicken and purple drank"; or the day a random woman walked up to him on the street and asked if he was a real life "BJ," or Black Jew. At conventions, Jewish youth would spend hours staring, shaking his hand, and yelling, "there's a Black kid here!" with giddiness and fascination. "People have said to me, 'You're the first person of color I've ever met,'" Webster noted, adding that the pressure to represent millions of Black people was a burden as a teenager.

Webster's faith is inevitably influenced by his experiences as a Black man—both in this country and within the Jewish religion. A devoted student of the Torah, Webster thought he would one day lead a synagogue. In many ways, he's a natural: gifted in his ability to dispense wisdom and advice without judgment, exceptional in his capacity to relate ancient texts to modern life, all atop stellar academic credentials. A graduate of a dual program at Columbia University and Jewish Theological Seminary, he double-majored in modern Jewish studies and anthropology. However, by the time he finished his undergraduate education, rabbinical school seemed less desirable. "I just thought, how can I ever be a leader in a community that looks completely different from me?" Webster said, noting that although his background should not disqualify him from serving as a rabbi, it often seems to do just that. Orthodox Jews look at Webster with suspicion because of his conversion, which many Orthodox scholars do not believe is valid. "If I was a rabbi, I'd want to be in on all of the conversations, but coming from a conversion background, I just couldn't do that," he said, noting he converted Conservative rather than Orthodox. This difference seriously limits Webster's gravitas in some of the religious spaces that feel most significant to him. Webster could re-convert, this time in keeping with Orthodox practices, but his reverence for the conversion process has dissuaded him from pursuing this option. "If I was to convert again my conversion would be insincere," he said. "I

wouldn't change any of my practices or observances. It would just be for legitimacy, not for myself."

Rabbis lead congregations of vastly varying traditions, and their identities and beliefs do not hew to any one ideology. Rather, like their Christian counterparts, Jewish religious leaders run the gamut from socialist queer feminists to iron-fisted patriarchs. While there are certainly Jewish spaces where Webster would be welcomed as a rabbi, Orthodox Judaism is not one of them. As it stands, Webster would, at best, be ignored as a rabbi within Orthodox religious settings. "There's no point in trying to be a religious leader if people don't accept what you're saying," he concluded. Webster insists it is his conversion background and not the color of his skin that limits him, but I cannot help but wonder if a White convert would receive the same treatment.

> ❝ If I was White, it would be assumed that I was a Jew by birth; the underlying factor here is that I'm a Jew of color. ❞

Given Webster's unique religious trajectory, it is perhaps unsurprising his path to seminary began far from New York and far from the American Jewish world. In high school, he returned to the Caribbean to study abroad in Suriname, and at the time, his relationship to Judaism was tumultuous. "Growing up in New Jersey, it really felt like we were the only Jewish family of color, and this experience was inevitably alienating," Webster said. Suriname, however, presented a radically different version of Jewish life. As a part of the Jewish community there, Webster was "welcomed and not seen as different in any way because of the diversity of that community; because there were so many Jews of color in Suriname." He added, "You'd ask someone 'what are you?' and they'd say, 'I'm twelve percent this and thirty percent that.' They'd go through everything! In my mind you had to choose one; you're either Black or White or whatever, you can't claim every little piece. Race in America is such a binary, but in Suriname it's just not like that."

Far removed from major Jewish communities

in Latin America and the Caribbean, the one synagogue in Suriname's sleepy capital is the oldest temple in the New World. When Webster arrived, no one had read the Torah in seven years, and soon, he was asked to lead prayers. Of his first day Webster said, "When I finished, I looked up and saw that some of the folks in the congregation were crying." Webster's semester in Suriname was the first time his identities were neither celebrated nor denigrated, but more or less ignored. He was not seen as suspicious or special because of his skin color, but rather as one of many Jews of varying shades and ethnic backgrounds. "It was powerful for me to see that the global Jewish community is very diverse, even if the American-Jewish community isn't . . . and that made me feel like I had something to offer."

This seems to me like a vast understatement. As a theologian, Webster certainly has a great deal to offer, yet he is quick to note that "you can't get lost in the mysticism" because Jews have a responsibility to enact change in this world, regardless of what may come next. "It's a commandment that you must help your community," he said, vigorously arguing Judaism and social action are seamlessly connected. This balance between textual analysis and thoughtful activism defines Webster. His life as a Caribbean-American Jew, combined with these roots in Jewish theology, situate him well to battle White supremacy in the Jewish world. Unlike many radicals who seem to have given up any hope that the American Jewish community could again function as a progressive force in this country, Webster is not willing to cede Judaism to racism. There are a variety of opinions on whether or not Judaism has always been racist, but for Webster, bigotry is a perversion of Jewish values. For him, Judaism in its purest form is a religion committed to fighting intolerance.

Like many activists of his generation, Webster's formal introduction to the Left came in college when the Occupy movement somewhat suddenly became a powerful global force. Though clearly significant to his growth as a progressive activist, that series of protests in opposition to dire economic inequality was not his first encounter with organizing. "From a young age, I was just

always organizing one thing or another, whether it was in Jewish youth groups or boy scouts or the church my father led. I loved bringing people together," he said.

> " His life as a Caribbean-American Jew, combined with these roots in Jewish theology, situate him well to battle White supremacy in the Jewish world. "

Webster is quick to note he was in no way a leader of Occupy. Nonetheless, I suspect the leadership skills he picked up as a boy scout, pastor's son, and youth group member easily transferred to more radical social action during and after the Occupy movement. That work, paired with his ongoing political activities in the Jewish world and his increasing sense of self in relation to social justice, brought him to Jews for Racial and Economic Justice (JFREJ), an unapologetically radical organization committed to intersectional organizing within the Jewish community and beyond. There, Webster recently completed a stint as a Grace Paley Organizing Fellow. Unlike many Jewish organizations, JFREJ is specifically focused on lifting up the voices of Jews of color. Though this has meant many different things over the organization's twenty-five year history, the organization has recently committed to ensuring half of their fellows are Jews of color, working class Jews, or others marginalized in Jewish spaces. JFREJ also maintains a Jews of Color Caucus (which Webster helps lead) and works against racism in city and state government. For Webster this meant serving as the liaison to the Coalition for Police Reform (CPR), a collaborative effort of over eighty organizations working to reform policing in New York. More than simply a locus of political action, JFREJ is something of a home for Webster, as it is for many of its members: a community that allows people to be Jewish without asking them to give up their other identities. This is certainly not the only place Webster feels at ease in the Jewish world. Over the course of our conversation, we discussed the progressive nondenominational temple in

Brooklyn he attends on occasion, and the Jewish intentional community in which he lives.

In December 2014, Webster delivered a speech at the United Synagogue Youth's annual conference entitled, "This Is Your Battle Too." Designed as a wake-up call for religious Jews, the speech argued that an injury to one is an injury to all; Jews should not see police brutality as something affecting some far-off Black community, but rather as an issue that affects Black and brown Jews every day. "We're brothers in this Jewish community," Webster sayid, paraphrasing his argument from that speech. "Because of that, it's your responsibility to have my back and the backs of other people of color in this community, and by extension, their brothers who are outside of the Jewish community. Leaving aside the commandment to be involved in making the world a better place, when you see your brother getting choked and knocked down, you gotta be there to fight back with him. That's what it means to be a part of this community."

Many of the activists I know are, at best, skeptical of religion, but for Webster social justice and faith are "integrally intertwined." The devout and the activistic share a belief in the future, he explains to me. Each, in his own way, must trust what comes next will be better than what exists now; each must believe in something, whether it's God or human progress. Religious Jews believe in a higher being despite a lack of hard evidence, in much the same way activists believe that seemingly intractable social ills like racism and homophobia can eventually be defeated. There is no evidence to suggest we can ever eradicate bigotry, but people like Webster wake up every day and try to do just that. "Oppression is an elephant," he explained. "And how do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time, maintaining that hope that it will eventually be digested." For Webster, faith is not about rituals or texts, but about hope and action.

At times I have wondered why Webster has stuck with Judaism. He would likely find this question offensive since for him there is no other option. Judaism is at the core of who he is. Still, the community has not always been kind to him, yet he has always been kind in return. Perhaps

> **"Religious Jews believe in a higher being despite a lack of hard evidence, in much the same way activists believe that seemingly intractable social ills like racism and homophobia can eventually be defeated."**

socially imposed or perceived. Further, the lack of attention paid to non-White Jews is coupled with statistical complexities that attempt to categorize individuals whose identities often defy narrow categorization.

Webster is just a deeply compassionate human who has given up on hate and anger. Given how unfailingly friendly and optimistic he is, that might be true. But clearly, Judaism has also given him a lot. Webster's story is partially about racism and difference, but his life thus far has also been about searching for deeper meaning. He has found that in Judaism he is determined to not let bigotry get in the way of his rightful place within that community. Though Jews have at times been hostile toward him, the community is a place for him to come and feel at home, as it is for many people. Through Judaism, Webster has found a sense of self, rooted in collective undertaking and often in collective struggle. Indeed, I suspect Webster would argue that you cannot have religion or community without a trenchant commitment to justice. "I once wrote this paper about the significance of trees in the Torah," he said toward the end of our interview. Confused, I nodded as he continued. "Trees are always reaching up to the sky with their branches, and I think that symbolizes that we should always be reaching up to the heavens. But trees are also deeply rooted in the ground, and so should we be deeply rooted in work here on Earth. Most importantly, trees are one of the few organisms that are always giving and almost never taking. We should aspire to be creatures that give and hardly take. For me, that's what it's all about."

Endnotes

1   "Counting Jews of Color in the United States," *Be'chol Lashon*, n.d.; "Projects: Ethnic and Racial Diversity: The Be'chol Lashon Initiative," *Jewish and Community Research*, n.d. Note: This is "deeply imperfect data" due to the lack of clearly defined racial/ethnic categories, as well as the differences between individual racial/ethnic associations vis-à-vis those

Dimensions of Love

By Aida
Mariam

Aida Mariam is a long-time community and labor organizer. Aida is the Director of Organizing for Youth Uprising, an organization dedicated to community transformation through leadership development. She believes in dismantling all systems of oppression, prison abolition, and in the relentless pursuit of self-determination. Mariam received her BA in political science and African studies from the University of California, Berkeley and a Master's in public policy from the University of Southern California. She currently resides in Oakland, California.

This poem speaks explicitly about location and transportation. It speaks to how Black women perform radical love in several micro-locales, and also how the affect of a Black woman's love transports the beloved from one state to another.

Dimensions of Love

To love is a radical act.

Black women act not only on stage, but
behind the desk.
in the bedroom.
on the street.
at the altar.
in the kitchen.
behind bars.

We transform,
social relationships in ways that seek justice and freedom.
We emancipate,
our minds and bodies.
We commit,
to love deeply, radically, unconditionally, and with belonging.

We, mothers and sisters of liberation,
do this as an act of inheritance.

You know,
pressure produces the most precious diamonds.
Like diamonds,
Black women shine with the most dimension,
even when we are cut, we still shine.

Black women's offering is unapologetic love.

One of love's greatest dimension is—
Action.

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Love ACTS in Black Student-Organizing Spaces

By Aman
Williams
and
Kamilah
Moore

Aman Williams is a junior majoring in African American studies at the University of California-Los Angeles (UCLA). The Oakland, California, native is also a student organizer, affiliated with a nationwide network of students called the Black Liberation Collective (BLC) and UCLA's historic Afrikan Student Union (ASU), where he currently sits on both the hair's and ASU Demands Committee. Additionally, in the spirit of study and struggle, Williams is an undergraduate research fellow interested in the criminalization of Black girls through gendered forms of policing and punishment Yet, he is most proud of being a loving big brother and supportive son.

Kamilah Moore is an aspiring human rights lawyer who currently works as a substitute elementary teacher for Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) and as a special projects intern for ArtAIDSArt, a transnational non-profit organization that promotes education and economic development and HIV/AIDS awareness through the arts in impoverished South African townships. She is also a US prison reform strategist, a member of Wisdom From the Field, a black youth organization based in south Los Angeles, and speaks at various community gatherings to connect with others in an effort to promote social justice in society. Moore is a graduate of Pasadena High School and UCLA; she will attend Columbia Law School in fall 2016.

In the spring of 2015, a student speaker at Peralta Community College District's Black Graduation gave a parting exhortation to the audience, stating, "We must remember to keep love at the forefront of all we endeavor to do." A year after the extrajudicial execution of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, and amid brewing tensions of racial unrest which would peak on college campuses the coming fall, perhaps the speaker did not realize just how radical a politic he called for us to adopt. The clearly radical nature of his call to action could not be more apparent than it is today. A year later, this nation, and the world, finds itself in a ubiquitous crisis—a precipitous peril, endemic of the imperialist, White-supremacist, capitalist, cis-heteronormative patriarchal structures, which push humanity further and further away from love.

For the purposes of this article and the context of revolution, consider "love" as genuine acts—varied actions; love as the language of resistance and the catalyst for both individual and collective radical transformations. Love is the constant reviewing and renewing of the mind, heart, and soul of any body. It is a power made legible through our personal, interpersonal, intra- and inter-communal relationships. Love is a political labor. It is the work we must write back into our agendas for freedom and priorities. As Kevin Quashie, author of *The Sovereignty of Quiet* notes, Blackness, or at least Black culture (if the distinction can be made), is inherently resistant to structural violence within the public sphere, while also encompassing protests of a more intimate, interior nature. Whether loud or quiet, visible or invisible, viral or lesser known, acts of love happen. Black student-organizing spaces—and Black organizing spaces more broadly—should serve as sites for radical transformation through emphatic acts of love. Moreover, decolonization cannot, and will

not, be achieved without them. Our movements are of no consequence to neoliberalism—in the university or otherwise—if we are not intentional about the way we engage the labor of love—through action—in all its formations.

> ❝Love is the constant reviewing and renewing of the mind, heart, and soul of any body. It is a power made legible through our personal, interpersonal, intra- and inter-communal relationships. Love is a political labor. It is the work we must write back into our agendas for freedom and priorities.❞

Certain aspects of Black student-organizing spaces today often reflect the structures of Black organizations active prior to, during, and after the civil rights movement. There is much to embrace from organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC); there is also much to critique—brilliant women such as Dorothy Height and Ella Baker have all discussed the critical, behind-the-scenes, and group-centered work necessary to achieve liberation for Black people, while simultaneously being silenced by cis-Black male counterparts during strategic decision-making or public protest.[1] Moreover—save the Black Panther Party, the Combahee River Collective, and the Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR)—many organizations rooted in Black liberation did not actively uplift or amplify the voices of radical, queer, transgender, gender non-conforming, and cis-heterosexual Black women.[2]

So, what have Black activists today learned from our activist predecessors? What have we learned about inclusion and expressions of love in our organizing spaces? What have we learned about the fundamental power in promoting the empowerment of the most marginalized people in the Black community? Have most of the Black activist/ organizing spaces actively worked to discuss these fundamental guiding questions?

Student movements frequently use the phrase "reclaim the space" to reference the activity of reclaiming spaces within systems that perpetuate hetero-patriarchy, neo-liberalism, and White supremacy. While we should continue to disrupt these systems of oppression by any means necessary, it is absolutely imperative for us, as Black student activists and organizers, to also reflect on how we enact forms of violence in our own precious spaces—violence that we have become socialized to enact as survivors of said systems, and violence that is counterintuitive to our movement's overall objectives. A scene from the 12th Annual Afrikan Black Coalition (ABC) Conference, held at the University of California-Santa Barbara in 2016, helps illustrate this point:

> 600 Black students from across the University of California, Cal State University, and community college system attended the 12th Annual Afrikan Black Coalition (ABC) conference. Some of the goals of the conference are to unite Black students in California, provide cultural and political education, and encourage community collaboration. At a conference intended to be inclusive, one of the invited speakers, in particular, was flagrantly insolent by contradicting fundamental ideals of Black organizing spaces, which includes actively promoting equality and respect. Imagine the speaker, a celebrity of sorts, using the platform to speak directly to women, referring to them as "hun" and "baby." Imagine the speaker coming to greet women in the audience, kissing their cheeks, and other parts of their bodies without consent. Imagine the speaker returning to the stage then addressing women in the front row stating, "Ladies, I love legs but you're going to have to move those lovely legs because I will be walking through as I present." It goes on. Imagine their embarrassment, and warranted outrage. Imagine their impromptu protest, loud and public, because they had enough. Imagine women's right to personal and physical autonomy, and thus the defense of women's collective humanity against violation as an act of love. Imagine, therefore, this protest as an act of love, for the self and for community. But

for a moment, imagine the audience's response: some stand in solidarity, some others yell in disagreement and beckon for the speaker to finish, and some—particularly cis heterosexual men, immediately charge and surround the women so as to "calm them down." Imagine a circus.[3]

This type of instance is what the Black women of the Combahee River Collective draw our attention to when they write, "we realize that the only people who care enough about us to work consistently for our liberation are us. Our politics evolve from a healthy love for ourselves, our sisters and our community which allows us to continue our struggle and work."[4] As a community, we failed the women of the Combahee River Collective, whose words we did not hearken unto, and as a result, the women who were violated that day at the ABC Conference. We did not all act in love. We were not protective, compassionate, or defenders of women's humanity. We did not honor a relentless commitment to loving women as Black liberation work. But, why? Why didn't the audience as a whole enact the love those women needed?

"While we should continue to disrupt these systems of oppression by any means necessary, it is absolutely imperative for us, as Black student activists and organizers, to also reflect on how we enact forms of violence in our own precious spaces—violence that we have become socialized to enact as survivors of said systems, and violence that is counterintuitive to our movement's overall objectives."

Love, as a technology of resistance, may prove beneficial in the struggle against neoliberalism—and the larger struggle for freedom. If everyone has the capacity to love, can we all access the same apparatuses to act in love? Which of us need which acts of love? Love is a resource. So, we might consider acts of love as the kinds of resources, which, when distributed widely, help to further mobilize our efforts for Black liberation. By no means is

this requiring the abused to love their abusers. Although, there still stands to question whether or not there is an abuser in us all. However, what might we gain in expanding access to love as a resource by increasing the frequency of love acts? We may, in fact, gain more than we already have.

Perhaps the tensions that create crisis and chaos in Black student-organizing spaces is the result of failing to make varied acts of love a priority. Historian and celebrated scholar Robin D.G. Kelley recently stated:

> . . . Black study and resistance must begin with love. James Baldwin understood love-as-agency probably better than anyone. For him, it meant to love ourselves as Black people; it meant making love the motivation for making revolution; it meant envisioning a society where everyone is embraced, where there is no oppression, where every life is valued—even those who may once have been our oppressors.[5]

There is something beyond the surface of this understanding that we underestimate. We underestimate the power of love as a technology for liberation with innumerable tools—resources, even, to realize freedom. After all, why are we fighting? More importantly, what are we fighting for? Let us not assuage our pain with dishonesty. If freedom from the neoliberal university—if freedom from all forms of oppression—does not sound like love materialized, then nothing does. Since love is what we are trying to get more of, we should move love acts, as the most radically revolutionary praxis we teach, from margin to center. We create revolution, we create community, we create institutions—all for love, the most powerful driving force we have. So, where can we to go see love, to feel it, hear it, smell it, taste it? We must be able to go to each other.

While the ABC has been successful in its efforts to get educational institutions to divest from private prisons, the organization must always be open, more broadly, to constructive and politically sound criticism, as long as it clarifies rather than mystifies events and relations of power impacting

Black spaces. The following recommendations are rooted in love and are intended to include fundamental, long-lasting, and guiding principles.

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Loving Recommendations for the Afrikan/Black Coalition

Love Looks Like STRUCTURE

At present, most decisions are made by a few members of the ABC executive staff, and/or by the chairs/president of each Afrikan/Black student union. This organizational structure hinders efforts to make the ABC as transparent, inclusive, and engaging as possible. The ABC should champion consensus, and a group-centered leadership model, which, in effect, will center Black folks on the historical margins throughout key decision-making processes.

Love Looks Like STUDY

As a coalition comprised of Black student organizers from the community college, Cal State, and the University of California system, it is imperative we create spaces to learn more about the history of Black organizing, while also engaging radical processes of inclusion. The ABC should collectively institute a political education program, comprised of, but not limited to, the incorporation of literature, multimedia presentations, and guided discussions that center marginalized voices, so all members can become more politically conscious; augment fellowship among Black student organizers and the community; and participate in the development/expansion of practices that defend all Black humanity.

Love Looks Like CARE

As a Black student-organizing community, it is essential we care for ourselves and for one another. If we expect to build sustainable movements and institutions, we must center a radical love for humanity. We must truly embrace people for who they are. We should check in and show genuine consideration for people's well-being, independent of the work. We should ask what is needed, as much as what can be given, and seek ways to support each other's needs. We must listen as much as we speak. We must recognize each other's worth as human beings, irrespective of the roles we fill in this movement.

Endnotes

1   "Dorothy Height and the Sexism of the Civil Rights Movement," The Root, 12 May 2010.
2   "Black Women Reclaim the Conversation on Racism Worldwide," The Feminist Wire, February 2016.
3   "ABC Conference," Afrikan Black Coalition, n.d.
4   Combahee River Collective and Combahee River Collective, The Combahee River Collective Statement: Black Feminist Organizing in the Seventies and Eighties (Albany, New York: Women of Color Press, 1986): 212.
5   Robin D.G. Kelley, "Black Study, Black Struggle," Boston Review, 7 March 2016.
6   Ibid.

She Could Have Been Me:

A Tribute to Renisha McBride

By Erin Keith

Erin Keith is a third-year student at Georgetown University Law Center and an alumna of Howard University. She credits her upbringing in Detroit, Michigan, for igniting her passion for service and social activism. Erin was featured on the NBC/TV One student-voter roundtable during the 2012 presidential election. She has also been highlighted on ABC/WXYZ Detroit and featured in the *Detroit News* and the *Washington Post* for her commitment to service as a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority. In her Washington, DC, community, Keith has continued her dedication to giving back by mentoring middle school girls, teaching a human rights course once a week at a local public high school, and representing youth as a student attorney through the Georgetown Juvenile Justice Clinic. Upon graduation in May 2016, Keith hopes to combat the cradle-to-prison pipeline by pursuing a career in criminal law and criminal justice policy reform. In addition to making a difference in the courtroom, one of Keith's aspirations is to speak out for the disenfranchised as a writer and legal analyst.

Abstract

By examining circumstances surrounding Renisha McBride's death, this personal essay first aims to heighten awareness of the Black female victims of senseless, cross-racial violence whose names are too often and too quickly forgotten. Second, it explores the stereotypes at play in cross-racial tragedies of Black victims. Third, it explores the unique circumstances that potentially contributed to the perpetrator's ultimate guilty verdict. Finally, and most importantly, it serves as my tribute to McBride, an examination of aspects of her case for others to read so we won't forget what happened one early November morning.

Introduction

"I could have been her."

This was the first thought to enter my mind as I heard the news about Renisha McBride. Renisha was an unarmed, Black Detroit teenager who had been shot in the face by a homeowner with a shotgun while she knocked on the door, seeking help after a car accident.[1] As a then twenty-two-year-old Black woman who had grown up in Detroit, I felt a certain connection to nineteen-year-old Renisha, and saw a bit of myself and my best girlfriends in her tragic story.

There was no doubt in my mind Renisha had been unlawfully killed, but after the acquittal of Trayvon Martin's killer, George Zimmerman, an event that left me teary-eyed and in shock, I knew there could, and likely would, be a doubt in the jurors' minds.[2]

I figured Theodore Wafer, the fifty-four-year-old Caucasian shooter, would somehow contend his shooting of Renisha through his locked screen door was justified. Just as I predicted, Wafer initially told police the gun went off by accident, conveniently switching to a self-defense claim when the investigation made it clear an accidental discharge of his shotgun was unlikely.[3]

"I could have been her," I thought aloud, weeks later, while reading the many articles online, as the facts of the case began to publicly unfold.

> ❝Weeks and months later, I could not get the picture of Renisha's face out of my head. The thought of her grieving family lingered daily in my mind, accompanied by the anxiety about whether justice would be served. It wasn't until writing this piece that I realized the sadder truth. Yes, I could have been her. You, your daughter, and your sister could have been her. But the most tragic part of Renisha's story is that she could have been me, she could have been us; she could have still been alive.❞

On 2 November 2013, Renisha and her friend Amber took shots of alcohol while chatting and playing a drinking game at the McBride residence.[4] Renisha's mother was away at work.[5] After Amber left, Renisha's mother returned home and found her daughter charging her phone at the kitchen table, while dirty dishes sat in the sink.[6] A typical mother-daughter fussing match between Mrs. McBride and teenage Renisha about undone chores led to the intoxicated teen's abrupt exit from her home.[7] Her unsuspecting mother, who had gone upstairs to change her clothes, returned downstairs to an empty room.[8] In her frustration and confusion, Mrs. McBride could not have anticipated this would be the last time she would see her daughter alive.

At some point on her drive to her friend's home, Renisha swerved and hit a parked car, sustaining severe head injuries that left her dazed and confused.[9] The disoriented teen wandered from the accident scene, returning at some point to be met by a resident of the neighborhood whose parked car she had struck.[10] Noticing Renisha was discombobulated, unable to state her phone number, and holding her head with blood on her hands, the resident told Renisha to wait while she

hurried inside to call EMS.[11] However, when responders arrived, the injured teen had again vanished from the scene.[12]

Where Renisha wandered during the subsequent three hours that passed remains unknown.[13] However, what is known is the injured teen somehow ventured on foot from Detroit's city limits to Dearborn Heights, a predominately White suburb.[14] It was here, at around 4:40 a.m., she happened to bang for help on the windows and doors of Theodore Wafer's home.[15] Wafer, who was reportedly startled awake by Renisha's banging, chose to grab his shotgun, unlock and open his front door, and fire a fatal shot at Renisha's face through the screen door, which remained locked.[16] He was ultimately convicted of second-degree murder, manslaughter, and use of a firearm in commission of a felony.[17]

Weeks and months later, I could not get the picture of Renisha's face out of my head. The thought of her grieving family lingered daily in my mind, accompanied by the anxiety about whether justice would be served. It wasn't until writing this piece that I realized the sadder truth. Yes, I could have been her. You, your daughter, and your sister could have been her. But the most tragic part of Renisha's story is that she could have been me, she could have been us; she could have still been alive.

Who Was Renisha McBride?: A Typical Teen Behind the Tragedy

Typical teen. The word "typical," although simple, holds much power. In the context of criminal tragedies, the murder of the typical teen is the one that receives the community's outrage, society's empathy, and the media's attention. Who one considers to be the typical teen depends subjectively upon their class, socioeconomic background, culture, and race.

However, as an avid observer of mainstream American media, it seems in the wake of most criminal tragedies, the media chooses to portray the White victim as an angelic, dream child who never made any mistakes or experimented with drugs and alcohol. It is this skewed depiction the

media hails as the epitome of the typical teen. This depiction of the typical teen is tainted, unrealistic, and damaging, as it seemingly requires a victim to be worthy of sainthood in order for his or her life to be of value.

If anything was typical about the Wafer case, it was the criminalization of the victim by the defense and media. Renisha's murder was preceded and succeeded by a host of other tragedies, involving White shooters whose Black victims' status as less-than-model citizens seemed to revoke their typical teen club membership in order to somewhat validate their execution. In these cases, it is the victim who is seemingly presumed delinquent until proven human. Writer Syreeta McFadden summarizes this trend of racial victim-blaming:

> " If anything was typical about the Wafer case, it was the criminalization of the victim by the defense and media. "

McBride's death was preceded by that of a Florida A&M football player, Jonathan Ferrell, who was shot and killed by North Carolina patrolmen after a car accident. Before that, Jordan Davis, a sixteen-year-old African-American teenager, was shot outside of a Florida gas station by a White man who claimed to be distressed by the teen's loud music. And just prior to that, in . . . Milwaukee, a thirteen-year-old African American boy, Darius Simmons, was shot and killed in front of his mother by a White neighbor, John Spooner, who said that he believed that the child had stolen items from his home. That death was preceded by the shooting death of a sixteen-year-old African-American boy in Florida, Trayvon Martin, by a self-appointed neighborhood watchmen, George—who whined about those "fucking punks" to a 911 operator before shooting the unarmed boy. The loud music trial. The hoodie trial. The porch shooting trial. In all of them, a familiar narrative surfaces. The accused killers are White, and insist that they feared for their lives; the dead are Black, and were all unarmed. The killing of a Black teen is justified first, and only questioned after.[18]

Another way to explore the phenomenon of criminalizing and dehumanizing the minority victim is through the lens of two of the most prominent theories of victimization: (1) victim precipitation theory and (2) lifestyle theory. Victimization theories emerged as scholars realized the victim is not always a passive target in crime, but rather one whose conduct and choices can influence his or her own fate.[19] While victimization theories can be used more generally by criminologists to analyze why people become victims of crimes, a dangerous extension of these principles can occur when scholars attempt to split the culpability or blame for the crime between the victim and the offender.[20]

Victim precipitation theory asserts that "some people may actually initiate the confrontation that eventually leads to their injury or death."[21] Victim precipitation can be active or passive. Active precipitation involves a victim "act[ing] provocatively, us[ing] threats or fighting words, or even attack[ing] first."[22] Passive precipitation happens when a victim "exhibits some personal characteristic that unknowingly either threatens or encourages the attacker."[23] In some cases, "the victim may never have met the attacker or even know of his or her existence, the attacker feels menaced and acts accordingly."[24] In the Wafer case, victim precipitation theory could be used to suggest that Renisha *actively* initiated the criminal act of Wafer's shot, one that ultimately led to her death because she came to his property, banged on his door, and allegedly frightened him awake. Similarly, victim precipitation theory could be use to suggest Renisha *passively* caused Wafer to target her simply by being a Black stranger in his predominantly White community.[25]

Lifestyle theory asserts that "crime is not a random occurrence, but rather a function of the victim's lifestyle."[26] Under this theory of victimization, criminologists argue people who have high-risk lifestyles [such as] drinking, taking drugs, [and] getting involved in crime maintain a much greater chance of victimization.[27] Lifestyle theory could be used to assert Renisha posed a higher chance of being victimized because she engaged in a "high-risk" lifestyle, as underage drinking, smoking

marijuana, and driving under the influence. This theory could also be used to shift the blame away from Wafer and back to Renisha, even though Wafer ultimately pulled the trigger. Essentially, under lifestyle theory one could argue that but for Renisha's lifestyle of drinking, smoking, and drunk driving, she would not have ended up on Wafer's front porch needing help and would not have been in a position to get shot that morning.

Analyzing the facts of Renisha's death through the aforementioned theories could be used to assert Renisha played a part in her own victimization, was somewhat culpable for her own death, and therefore, less deserving of justice. As the facts of Renisha's murder began to unfold, the normal media discourse emerged about whether she fit neatly enough into the typical teen category to be considered a victim.[28] For some, the answer was a blaring no. The luxury of the angelic child narrative—not often extended to Black and Brown victims when the shooter is not Black or Brown— would not be extended to Renisha. Headlines such as "Renisha McBride Was a Not-So-Innocent Teen, Suspect's Attorney Claims" were printed.[29] Articles beginning with first sentences like "[o]n the night before she was killed, Renisha McBride was drinking shots of vodka," were published.[30] It certainly enforced the notion she was far from innocent. From the media's coverage, one could have easily forgotten it was Wafer, and not Renisha, who was accused of murder.[31]

It seems as though some people only feel empathy and outrage if a victim conforms to a certain image of typicality. In determining whether or not Renisha was actually a typical teen—her death worthy of empathy and outrage in the stereotypical views of some mainstream Americans—one must consider a few statistics. According to a July 2013 publication from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), "by age fifteen, more than 50 percent of teens have had at least one drink . . . [and] by age eighteen, more than 70 percent of teens have had at least one drink."[32] Similarly, a 2014 survey of drug use and attitudes among high school students showed that "close to six percent of 12th graders [students only one year younger than Renisha] report[ed] daily use of marijuana, and

81 percent of them said the drug is easy to get."[33] Thus, it becomes clear some people's images of typicality do not conform to facts about what is actually typical.

So who was Renisha McBride, without the rose colored glasses? Yes, she was a rebellious adolescent, who like many others, sometimes smoked weed and drank vodka socially, even though she wasn't of age and recreational use of marijuana is illegal. But she was also the child of Monica McBride and Walter Ray Simmons, with a bubbly personality, who loved her family and loved to spend time with them.[34] She was also a former cheerleader and a 2012 graduate of Southfield High School.[35] She was also a teenage girl who loved shopping and cars.[36] She was also a maturing young adult who had been hired at Ford Motor Company, and who was just beginning to understand the responsibilities that came with adulthood.[37] She was also a young woman with goals and dreams of going back to college to become a nurse, or possibly pursuing a career in the automotive field.[38] When one confronts the reality of the times in which we live and looks at the facts, Renisha was more of a typical teen than the media would have liked to admit. But with or without the title of "typical teen," Renisha was a victim who took a bullet to the face with a shotgun. For that reason alone, she was also deserving of justice.

The Man in the Murderer: What if He Wasn't a Racist?

Prior to the shooting, Theodore Wafer, a fifty-four-year-old airport maintenance man resided alone in his Dearborn Heights home.[39] From my observation, the defense seemingly prepared to paint Wafer as a meek and humble man, whose quiet, middle-class lifestyle somehow made him less of a villain and more of the relatable neighbor next door. But I find it particularly ironic Wafer has a short criminal record, with a twenty-year-old pair of DUI offenses.[40] Lucky for Wafer, the penalty for his drunk driving was not a bullet to the face.

In the wake of Renisha's death, some civil rights figureheads emerged from their ever-ready thrones

of activism to publicly call for justice.[41] They immediately painted the crime as a racially motivated shooting. I, along with many other Black Detroiters, was of the opinion this case was a dreaded sequel to the Trayvon Martin horror movie we all viewed the in 2012.[42] In my mind, it was easy to seriously doubt Wafer would have fired his weapon if he detected Renisha was a blonde, freckled Emily or Katie when he opened his front door and prepared to shoot. However, the more I learned about the facts of this case, the more I came to realize something important: establishing whether or not Wafer was a racist was not necessary to prove he committed a rash and heinous murder.

As potential case preparations became public, counsel for both sides asserted this case was not about race. For defense attorney Cheryl Carpenter, this strategy was certainly logical; it's much easier to defend a person who might have made a bad choice and have a few character flaws, if being a racist is not one of them. For prosecutor Danielle Hagaman-Clark, the decision stemmed from the belief she didn't need to bring in race because the facts alone were strong enough to get a conviction.[43] Furthermore, there were no facts that explicitly tied Wafer's decision to shoot to the race of his victim.[44] "I think he was going to shoot whoever it was that night. It had nothing to do with race," Hagaman-Clark noted. "If it would have been a Black, White, Hispanic, female or male . . . this is the guy who didn't want anyone on his lawn type . . . like a crabby old man. This case spoke for itself."[45]

Even Renisha's parents publicly advocated for the case to be presented as one of "human profiling," rather than racial profiling. They wanted "the public to imagine that McBride could have been anyone's loved one, not a woman who was shot for being Black."[46] As her father stated at a press conference shortly after her death, "This was human profiling. You have to value human life . . . Renisha was a valuable person. She should be with us today,"[47]

Yet, questions about race still lingered in my mind as the trial ensued. Did the tactical decision to keep race out of the trial truly mean race wasn't a factor for Mr. Wafer's decision? Was it believable that a man who could have easily looked out of the peephole—the first thing one would probably do when they heard knocking at the door—never noticed Renisha's race?

Moreover, if the defense, prosecution, and the family had to fight so hard and so publicly to convince citizens this case was not about race, what volumes did that speak about the current state of race relations in our country? Was the racial aspect truly irrelevant, or was the deflection more likely to ease the discomfort of White jurors in the courtroom and White people in the community? Was the racial undertone ignored to avoid "playing the race card" or losing the sympathy of conservatives who seemingly close their eyes and ears to the killing of Black victims once the word race is uttered? Was race truly a non-factor or was this just an attempt to quell any potential rioting throughout Detroit neighborhoods?

While some of my counterparts refused to consider any notion Wafer wasn't a racist, who shot Renisha out of hatred, I ultimately came to view him as a man with implicit biases that could have corrupted his judgment, triggering the irrational and unreasonable fear that prompted him to murder Renisha.[48]

One can possess and act on unconscious biases, even if he or she is not a racist. In 1997, social psychologists Anthony Greenwald and Mahzarin Banaji developed the Implicit Association Test (IAT), a computerized test that measures people's unconscious attitudes, which has been shown to be "both reliable and valid at detecting an individual's level of implicit bias" in the decades since its creation.[49] Since 1998, over 4.5 million people have taken the (IAT) online, with outcome data strongly suggesting "that many people hold implicit biases towards members of particular groups."[50] For example, "about 75 percent of Whites and Asians demonstrated an implicit bias in favor of Whites compared to Blacks."[51]

In addition, "studies have found that people tend to automatically associate African Americans and crime, sometimes to dire consequences."[52] Research has also shown that "when implicit racial stereotypes are activated, the human mind is capable of major feats, such as turning an innocent hand into one

reaching for a gun."[53] A word commonly associated with implicit biases analysis is "priming," a "term imported from cognitive psychology that describes a stimulus that has an effect on an unrelated task."[54] Put more simply, "priming studies show how causing someone to think about a particular domain can trigger associative networks related to that domain."[55]

> ❝Being a racist is not a requisite for being a White murderer of a Black teen and holding biases is not a defense.❞

Expanding this priming principle, perhaps Wafer heard someone knocking on his door and unreasonably perceived their "banging" to be an attempted break-in. Perhaps his unreasonable perception of the potential criminal, regardless of whether or not he perceived the assailant's race, triggered associative networks related to his stereotypical view of criminals. Wafer's mere observation of the "criminal" he unreasonably perceived to be a home invader could have prompted him to act if he had an implicit bias the criminal was necessarily likely to be Black and that this Black criminal was likely to be violent with the ability to cause him serious bodily harm.

A person needn't be deemed a racist to be pronounced a murderer of a Black child in a cross-racial crime. Even if Wafer wasn't a racist, his potential possession of implicit biases could similarly contextualize his assertion of fear and his unreasonable actions. However, escaping the label of racist does *not* mean Wafer was somehow innocent or justified. Being a racist is not a requisite for being a White murderer of a Black teen and holding biases is not a defense.

Understanding Wafer's Self-Defense Claim

Wafer was eventually charged with second degree murder, statutory manslaughter, and felony use of a firearm.[56] The prosecution's theory was that Wafer "created a situation in which death or great bodily harm was likely to occur," and was thus guilty of second degree

murder.[57] As expected, Wafer pled not guilty to all charges.[58] In a case like Renisha's, where the dispute was not really about whether the defendant killed the victim, but only whether his killing of the victim was justified or excused, the defendant will commonly assert an affirmative defense, such as self-defense.[59] In Michigan, "[t]he defendant does not have to prove that [he or she] acted in self-defense."[60] Instead, it is "the prosecutor [who] must prove beyond a reasonable doubt that the defendant did not act in self-defense."[61]

For Wafer's self-defense claim to be unsuccessful, the prosecution needed to show he did not possess an honest and reasonable belief that Renisha was "imminently" going to kill him or cause him great bodily harm. In order to determine whether the defendant's belief was honest and reasonable, the jury had to "consider all the circumstances as they appeared to the defendant at the time."[62] It was not sufficient that Wafer, through his anger or implicit biases or fear, honestly believed Renisha was coming to harm him; this belief had to be reasonable for a person in Wafer's circumstance.

My hope was the jury would think, just as I had, that while Wafer's fear may or may not have been honest, it was just as unreasonable as his actions. If a person was truly afraid for his or her life, in my view, the last thing he or she would do is open the front door and put him or herself at a greater risk of being attacked by a potentially armed criminal. A person with a reasonable fear might have cowered or hid in a closet. A person with a reasonable fear might have sat waiting inside the locked home with a shotgun just in case potential intruders broke the door down. A person with a reasonable fear would have searched and searched until they found their cell phone and then called the police. But in my opinion, a person with a reasonable fear would not run toward danger and open the door. It just didn't make sense. I hoped the jurors would see that, too.

Wafer's trial began on 23 July 23 2014 in front of Judge Dana Hathaway. After days of witness testimony, on Wednesday, 7 August 7 2014, the jury began deliberations.[63] The following morning, the jury found Wafer guilty of second degree mur-

der.[64] At sentencing, Judge Hathaway announced, "I would call this the worse mistake of your life, but I don't know if you can ever use the word 'mistake' to describe a murder and a person was murdered."[65] Renisha's family wept as Hathaway made her decision.[66]

Hathaway sentenced Wafer to fifteen to thirty years for the second degree murder offense and seven to fifteen for the manslaughter conviction, which will run concurrently.[67] Wafer received an additional two years for the felony firearms conviction, which will run consecutively.[68] This means Wafer must serve at least seventeen years in state prison before becoming eligible for parole.[69] The verdict was followed by a $10 million wrongful death lawsuit filed by the McBride family against Wafer.[70] A settlement for an undisclosed dollar amount was reached in the civil lawsuit in 2015.[71] Wafer ultimately appealed his criminal conviction, which was later upheld.[72] However, he will be granted a new sentencing hearing, at which time his sentence may be shortened or remain exactly the same.[73]

What Went Right? Why Renisha Got Justice

"I don't think those in the Black community celebrate it enough."

I overheard this comment from one of my White classmates following the Baltimore riots in protest of the death of Freddie Gray.[74] After days of both peaceful and violent protests, Prosecutor Marilyn Mosby charged six officers with various offenses.[75] The idea Blacks were continuing to protest in Baltimore, even after the wheels of justice had arguably begun to turn, was astounding to many of my White peers. A part of me sought to explore their statement—something I hadn't contemplated before. Why don't we celebrate more when justice is served?

It's true. The joyous social media reactions after an indictment is handed down or a favorable verdict is reached in high-profile cases often pale in comparison to the explosion of outrage on social media when a tragedy first happens, or when justice isn't served

through a non-indictment or a not-guilty verdict. Perhaps we don't celebrate because we shouldn't have to. It shouldn't be a national Black holiday when a White person who commits the murder of an unarmed Black person is sent to prison—it should be the norm. The justice system should always hold those accountable who unjustifiably take the life of another, regardless of race or professional status. Perhaps we don't celebrate because we don't know how to, because it seems so rare a White person is held accountable when their victim is Black it doesn't feel real. The celebration doesn't feel natural and it certainly doesn't feel practiced. Or, maybe we don't celebrate because no matter the outcome of the trial, a life was still lost through a senseless act and celebration won't provide resuscitation.

While I can't celebrate the verdict of the Wafer case for these reasons, I do think the answers to some other questions are worth exploring. What went right? What made the outcome of Renisha's story different from so many others tragic cases with tragic legal endings at the hands of the *in*justice system?

First, an interesting factor in this case is that Wafer was a civilian. Conversely, in both the Michael Brown and the Eric Garner tragedies, the assailants were police officers.[76] Particularly when the victim is Black, whether the White shooter in a case is a civilian or an officer can affect if charges are filed.[77] An analysis by the *Washington Post* and researchers at Bowling Green Sate University found that while thousands of officers shot and have killed someone over the last decade, only fifty-five of them have faced criminal charges. This report showed that "[m]ost of the officers who were charged and had their cases resolved were acquitted or had the charges dropped; the officers who [we]re convicted or [who] plead guilty average[d] four years behind bars, while some serve[d] just a number of weeks."[78]

The civilian-shooter factor could coincide with a second factor—the absence of a grand jury. According to Hagaman-Clark, unlike in other cities, which might rely more heavily on grand jury to secure an indictment in high-profile cases, Wayne County utilizes a preliminary examination or "an information" to indict a defendant in roughly 95-99

percent of cases.[79] In Wafer's case, the fact there was no grand jury involved might have increased the overall likelihood charges would even be brought. One could also explore this factor in relation to the George Zimmerman case, another tragedy with a civilian shooter, where the prosecutor alone determined the merits of the case, allowing it to at least get past the indictment stage.[80] Conversely, one of the many things the Mike Brown and Eric Garner situations had in common was the fate of the indictments of the shooter cops was left in the hands of the grand jury, resulting in a non-indictment in both cases.[81][82] In my opinion, this seems to be a popular choice made by prosecutors who don't really want to prosecute the assailant. However, there are exceptions, as some cases have successfully used a grand jury to indict White civilians who killed Black victims (e.g. the Jordan Davis case).[83]

> ❝ Why don't we celebrate more when justice is served? ❞

A third factor that could have influenced whether charges were brought in the Wafer case is the elected Wayne County prosecutor is Kym Worthy, a Black woman. As Hagaman-Clark explained, Worthy approves the ultimate decision of whether to prosecute someone, what charges will be brought, and which attorney in the office will handle the case, particularly in high-profile cases.[84] Worthy has a reputation of seeking justice, no matter who has broken the law and she does not shy away from the controversial-case boxing ring.[85] Only a year after I was born, in 1992, "Malice Green, a Black steel worker, died [of a blunt trauma to his head] after he allegedly refused to submit to questioning by police."[86] Worthy was one of the prosecutors who ultimately secured a conviction of the two White police officers, simultaneously securing her place in the spotlight as a force with which to be reckoned.[87] Thus, based on Worthy's personality and reputation, she was likely to approve any legitimate efforts to seek justice for Renisha where the facts of the case permitted.

It is also worth noting—but unclear of the actual impact—of the dominant female presence throughout Wafer's trial. The victim Renisha McBride, the trial judge Dana Hathaway, Prosecutor Danielle Hagaman-Clark, and Defense Attorney Cheryl Carpenter are all women. Having women involved in every facet of the case could have stirred the conscience of the jurors in a unique way, evoking their own emotions and causing the jurors to reason using emotions to reach their final verdict.

A fourth factor I believe was critical in Wafer's case was Hagaman-Clark's ability to keep Renisha's personal cell phone photos out of the trial.[88] In a world where Black victims seemingly face a "trial by social media," as evidenced by the need for and ability to create an #IfTheyGunnedMeDown campaign, keeping photos and social media out of the case was a crucial win for the prosecution.[89] The defense sought to use the photos to show Renisha was not the meek victim the prosecution depicted. The photos allegedly depicted Renisha throwing up what the defense deemed "gang signs."[90] In actuality, Renisha was not using gang signs but was throwing up the "West Side" hand symbol.[91] This is a popular trend among teenagers in pictures when they are "repping" which side of town they are from, something my friends and I also did occasionally as teens. Hagaman-Clark noted that if Wafer had known or somehow interacted with Renisha before the evening of the shooting, some of the photos might have been relevant as to whether or not it was reasonable for him to fear for his life.[92] However, in this case, where Wafer had never met Renisha or seen any of these photos prior to the shooting, he could not say his state of mind was impacted by her cellphone photos.[93] This allowed the prosecution to paint the picture of Renisha as they saw fit, without any bias the pictures could have caused.

Fifth, the presence of Black people on the jury could have diversified the discourse in the deliberation room and impacted outcome of the case. The jury for Wafer's trial was comprised of seven men and five women, eight Whites and four Blacks.[94] Similarly, in Michael Dunn's second trial, the twelve-person jury contained two Black people, which might have impacted deliberation discourse, resulting in Dunn's conviction of first degree murder.[95] Conversely, there was not a single Black person on the jury for George Zimmerman's trial, a factor that arguably contributed to his ultimate acquittal.[96] However, this observation should not be considered

dispositive; all Black jurors may not share the same views and may not automatically lean in favor of a conviction simply because the victim is Black and the defendant is White.

Finally, timing is everything. The Renisha McBride tragedy came at a time just close enough to Trayvon Martin's death for people to remember the horror they felt when justice wasn't served and Trayvon's killer, George Zimmerman, walked free back into society. Wafer's case, and others like it, was affected by what Cheryl Carpenter has termed, "The Ghost of Trayvon Martin," which she claims was in the courtroom throughout the trial.[97] Essentially, this phrase means the remnants of the guilt some citizens felt after Trayvon's death and Zimmerman's non-conviction compelled them to ensure such an injustice didn't take place in their own community. I could fathom that, for some, there was guilt from knowing Zimmerman should have been convicted, because he stalked Trayvon Martin under his self-proclaimed authority as neighborhood watchman and picked a fight, resulting in Trayvon's death. While Carpenter impliedly viewed the ghost as a negative outside influence that led to an unjust conviction of Wafer, I viewed it as a factor that could have given the jurors an extra push to reach a just verdict otherwise supported by the evidence.

Conclusion

Although I never knew her, I think about Renisha a lot. This case has had a profound impact on my life and my dreams of fighting for justice and advocating for my community.

At the end of my first-year courses, I wasn't sure law school was for me. Learning about the double standards along racial lines in the context of the criminal justice system left me frustrated. Being the token "Black spokesperson" in most of my classes left me drained. Talking about ways the law legalizes things that are morally and ethically unjust left me outraged. My peers' intentional ignorance and outright denial of the existence of systemic oppression left me hopeless. It was painful to learn some people, even some of the most otherwise brilliant minds, simply didn't (and

still don't) care.

Renisha's tragedy helped me refocus, reminding me why I came to law school in the first place, and gave me a reason to stay. I like to think of this as Renisha's gift to me, a gift for which I am exceedingly grateful. While this case has deepened my desire to pursue a career in criminal justice reform and policy, it also has a factor that perplexes me. How does one ultimately work to revamp of our current *in*justice system—a system that is arguably working as its designers intended? A system that is quick to convict and incarcerate Black and Brown bodies, but that too often excuses or justifies clear-cut criminality when the defendant is White. As a now twenty-four-year-old, soon-to-be lawyer, I still cannot answer this question, but I am determined to try.

While I am not exactly sure what the future holds, I am sure about my desire to become a change agent, an attorney who seeks social justice at any cost and does not fear being ostracized or deemed socially unacceptable, an attorney who speaks out for the youth and the disenfranchised and aims to create a better society. Renisha could have been me; she could have lived to pursue her ambitions and leave her own far less tragic mark on society. But since she won't ever have the opportunity to make her dreams come true, I'll carry her with me as I pursue mine.
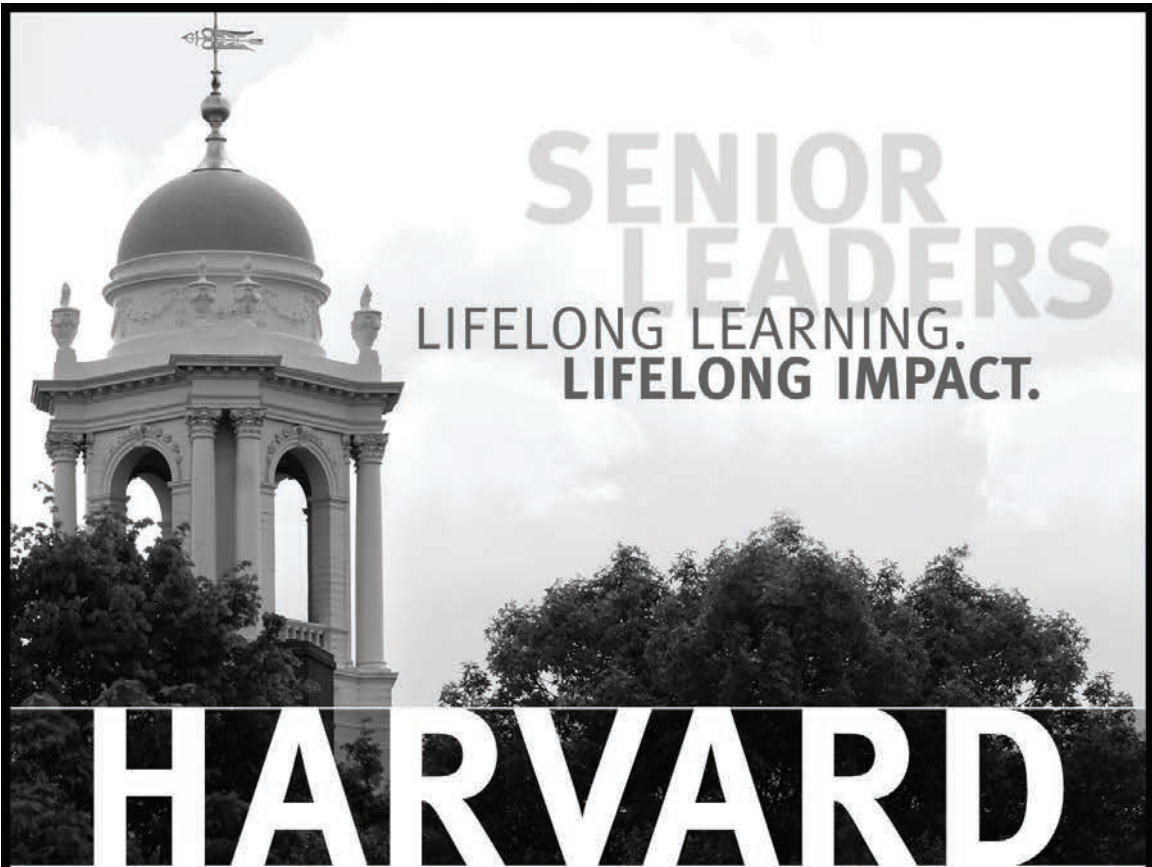
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