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NATIONAL POLITICAL  
SCIENCE REVIEW

**VOLUME 19.2**

*Joie Moore-Harley*

**GENDERED BLACK POLITICS IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**

**JULIA JORDAN-ZACHERY**  
**SPECIAL ISSUE EDITOR**  
**WITH DUCHESS HARRIS**

**A PUBLICATION OF**  
**THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF BLACK POLITICAL SCIENTISTS**





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## THE NATIONAL POLITICAL SCIENCE REVIEW

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### Editor's Note

This special volume contains the most cutting edge gendered African Diasporic politics research with the widest possible interdisciplinary reach focused specifically on Black Girls. We couple up-to-the minute analyses of the genocide in Cameroon, anti-Blackness toward Italy's African migrants, the long political development of the U.S. presidency and its echoes globally, legislative behavior, decades of family separation for Central American migrants, and in a sumptuous foretaste of our own 50th Anniversary, a Pan African activist scholar traces the journey from South Africa to the annual meeting of the Association of Black Psychologists in Oakland, in order to give the #BlackGirlMagic concept and social praxis the gravity and seriousness that it must be granted by social scientists who wish to attend to the present and the vast political, social, cultural, and cosmological imaginary that sustains Black being. Book Reviews evidence our commitment to the widest possible mapping of the subfields of black politics with works on cinema; science fiction; Radical Dharma; law and Black girls identities from the Great Migration to post-war liberalism; sexuality and empire; micro-finance; Du Bois and Garvey and Rastafari; and South Side Chicago, Jamaica, Algeria, and Salvador da Bahia, Brazil and the whole bountiful leader-full Pan African World. In a year marked by the passing of Kofi Annan, Katie Cannon, Aretha Franklin, Samir Amin, Zondeni Veronica Sobukwe, Nomzamo Winnie Mandela, Yvonne Staples, Marielle Franco, Hugh Masakela, "Bra Willie" Keorapetse Kgositsile and so many others, may the ocean bear them home and send us strong warriors and artists for the present. For as long as we have existed as African people we have built and anchored the world—especially the world of thought; the evidence is everywhere. *The National Political Science Review* continues to pursue wisdom, robust inquiry, and ethical ways of being and doing, while we yet speak truthfully about how institutionalized power operates "in the wake" of what we face each and every day in our spirits, bodies, wombs, psyches, histories, memories, and hearts. This volume like the decades of ones that precede it affirms that we need and claim each other—with absolute deliberation—to survive. Nearly all of that courage begins within the inner life of Black children, Black girls, in particular.

*Tiffany Willoughby-Herard*  
*University of California, Irvine*





NATIONAL POLITICAL  
SCIENCE REVIEW

## **RESEARCH ARTICLES**

## Resistance and Redemption Narratives: Black Girl Magic and other forms of Black Girls and Women's Political Self-articulations

Julia S. Jordan-Zachery\*  
Providence College

*"When we talk about #BlackGirlsAreMagic, we mean that we take the ordinary and make it extraordinary. We take the common and make it unusual. We take the standard and set new standards."* - blogger/activist Feminista Jones

*"Not only will I stare. I want my look to change reality."* –bell hooks

On April 5, 2017 Pepsi unveiled a 2-plus minute long commercial. In a time of racial tension resulting from state sanctioned violence directed towards Blacks/African Americans the advertisement drew intense criticism. Some argued that the ad, which seemed to be based on the Black Lives Matter movement and protest actions made a mockery of and trivialized social movements for racial equality and justice. In fact, Bernice King, Martin Luther King, Jr's daughter tweeted "If only Daddy would have known about the power of #Pepsi." While many critiqued the ad for its trivialization of the struggles of marginalized individuals, as the ad was a collective of some "movement" which remained undefined, what some missed is how Black women disappeared as the ad progressed. Although #BlackGirlMagic originated prior to this ad, this is an example of the context that gave rise to this hashtag. Black Girl Magic is a way for Black girls and women to center themselves in the public market place of ideas and discourses. This special issue, *BlackGirlMagic: Gendered Black Politics in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, brings together a number of articles that explore the politics of Black girls and women's articulation of self and how they imagine a more democratic society. Black Girl Magic, in its various iterations and manifestations, embodies an epistemology of Black girls and women's resistance to totalized tropes and stereotypes that collude to render them invisible or hypervisible.

The Pepsi ad, starring Kendall Jenner, seems to treat Black women as a prop, a tool to be used by White women who have the power to change the world. This is particularly poignant as three Black women, two of whom are also queer, created #Blacklivesmatter in response to the murder of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin (see <http://blacklivesmatter.com/herstory/>). Black women, all but disappear in the ad except for that moment when Jenner transforms, in part, by taking off her wig and handing it to the Black woman to hold. This seems to be the extent of Black women's role in the liberation of the "world". Jenner then goes on to sashay her way through the crowd and approaches a police officer that is standing in line with other officers (a common image seen in the documentation of the most recent Black Lives Matter protest and reminiscent of the 1960s Black freedom movement) and offers him a can of Pepsi. He sips, eventually

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smiles, and nods at his fellow officers and then the crowd erupts in euphoria. According to Pepsi, “Pepsi was trying to project a global a message of unity, peace and understanding.” We wonder, why was the disappearing of Black women necessary to this mission? What about the Black women who have worked and who work tirelessly in Black freedom struggles? Are they simply there to hold what others discard—are we simply wig holders?

As Jordan-Zachery argues (2014) in “I ain’t your darn help”

Interestingly, while Skeeter (the White female protagonist) was the author of [a newspaper] column, Aibileen’s (the black female secondary protagonist) wisdom was used to respond to the readers’ letters. Skeeter benefited, in multiple forms, from Aibileen’s knowledge. Aibileen legitimized Skeeter as a writer. She claimed the notoriety and benefits while Aibileen went unacknowledged. The voice of this woman remained hidden behind the image of a White woman/persona. (23)

Like the novel *The Help*, Pepsi’s reliance on the fictitious Black woman shows how Black women in real life are forced to “exist in the place where she is simultaneously seen while remaining invisible.” As such, Black women become “shadow bodies” (Jordan-Zachery 2017). Shadow bodies is both an “analytical and conceptual framework” that speaks to the positionality of Black women who can “exist in space in-between—a space of both proximity and separation” (Jordan-Zachery 2017, 4). This is the omission project that Black women have challenged for centuries; Black women are there while not being there. It is this nebulous state that makes a critique of projects such as the Pepsi ad or even political campaigns such a challenge. And it is this omission project, undertaken by those in power to often silence and disappear Black women, that result in Black women’s resistance and redemptive narratives such as #BlackGirlMagic.

As part of their response to race-gender oppression, of which class and sexuality are intimately connected, Black women have sought to create space. This space is used to express their identity, their creativity, their visions of justice and freedom. By making space, Black women challenge liberal democratic capitalist ideologies by inserting themselves into the conversation as a form of critique and as a form of imagining a new democratic practice. In thinking through a meaning of #BlackGirlMagic, Jordan-Zachery and Harris (forthcoming) assert,

In speaking of magic and Black girlhood/womanhood, Black women... are not necessarily speaking of “hocus-pocus,” but instead are explaining an ideology/belief/practice that allows Black girls and women to exist within an oppressive structure. ... #BlackGirlMagic is a form of critical literacy used by Black girls and women as they work to invent and/or imagine themselves in a society that often renders them invisible or hypervisible and subjects them and their communities to illicit violence.

The various authors of this special issue show how Black girls and women represent their cultural, social, and political realities through radical forms of, primarily, digital curating. When we speak of the politics of space-making we are referring to Black women’s efforts to negotiate power dynamics, their work to traverse multiple and interlocking forms of oppression and their *labor* at resisting and dismantling race-gender domination. Combined, the articles explore the politics of Black women’s space-making across what Holt (1995) refers to as the “Black public sphere.” Holt (1885) suggest that

the contemporary Black public sphere is partly the creature of the political economy of a global, advanced capitalist order, but in the past it has offered— and may yet again offer—space for critique and transformation of that order. If not, then all this is only idle talk. (328)

But what does a gendered Diasporic Black public space look like? How do Black girls and women understand the political economy of their times? What types of critiques are they offering of the socio-cultural realm in which they exist? And more importantly, how are they engaging in a prefigurative politics configured around race-gender-sex-class based justice and equity?

A current example of space-making among Black women is captured in #BlackGirlMagic. The use of this hashtag, in conjunction with others such as #BlackGirlJoy, #CareFreeBlackGirl, and #BlackWomenAtWork, seem to embody Holt's understanding of the Black Public Sphere in general and the Black female public sphere specifically. The question that needs to be explored is whether these hashtags, many of which have translated into on the ground activism is "only idle talk"? This body of work addresses this larger question posed by Holt.

In 2013, CaShawn Thompson, who tweets at @thepbg used the hashtag #BlackGirlMagic in her words "because it's something that people don't always understand, ... Sometimes our accomplishments might seem to come out of thin air, because a lot of times, the only people supporting us are other black women" (Thomas, 2015). Since then Black women and girls, alike, have used the hashtag relatively widely on Twitter, Instagram and other social media platforms. As shown in this volume, #BlackGirlMagic is steeped in a history of Black women's self-articulations that have traveled through time and space. Originally, #BlackGirlsAreMagic, which eventually became #BlackGirlMagic, was used as a method of articulating resistance to the invisibility/hypervisibility dyad that many Black girls and women confront—it was part of their response to being in the shadows. However, political scientists have lagged behind in critically analyzing these articulations as sites of politics, broadly defined. As such, this special issue, explores this undertheorized and underexplored area of study, not only as a way of advancing Black girls and women's studies, but for the study of Black girls and women's politics specifically. The collected articles interrogate the reality of Black girls and women in everyday politics—how they are impacted by cultural-politics and politics specifically and how they respond and seek to shape their political realities.

This special issue represents, my commitment as a Black women, and immigrant Black woman who happens to be a political scientist, to understanding the varied and multidimensionality of Black girlhood and womanhood. It is these central elements that serve as the wellspring of this special issue of NPSR. The central goal is to advance feminist research across disciplines and to push the boundaries of Black feminist political thought. As such, each author, in their way, presents a critical articulation of Black girls and women subjectivity that works to bridge the public sphere and the academy. This introductory essay notes the conceptual and epistemological challenges and opportunities presented by the articulation of "Black Girl Magic" and what it means for Black girls and women's politics. We start with a brief exploration of the evolution of Black girls and women's self-articulation.

### **Black Girls and Women's Self-Articulation: A Brief Review**

Briana Nicole Barner (2016) in speaking of the politics of self-articulation by Black women and girls in digital space, says

A simple yet powerful phrase: #BlackGirlsAreMagic. It is a counter narrative to how the Black woman subject is presented in the media. Its power lies in a new naming, a new alternative for Black women and girls to express Black womanhood and girlhood. (3)

While Barner is correct in the sense that #BlackGirlsAreMagic is a reflection of Black girls/women choosing to name themselves, she is incorrect in suggesting that it is a “new naming”. The term might be new, but the concept of naming, that is engaging in a politics of naming, is not necessarily new. The history of Black women engaging in a politics of self-articulation is both long and deep. Consider that in 1832 Mariah Miller Stewart proclaimed, “Methinks I heard a spiritual interrogation—‘who shall go forward and take off the reproach that is cast upon the people of color? Shall it be a woman? And my heart made this reply—‘if it is thy will, be it even so, Lord Jesus!’” Stewart, like so many Black women and other women of color, are subverting notions of the proper place of the “woman”. She says that others will not work for her liberation and the liberation of her people and that she is more than willing to engage this battle on her behalf and on behalf of other oppressed people. Shirley Chisholm famously said, “I am, was, and always will be a catalyst for change.” Like Stewart, Chisholm uses this framing of herself as a change agent, a type of construction used primarily for men and by men. The various self-articulations, whether appearing in works such as *In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens* (Walker 1983), on the political stage, or on social media, suggest a Black girls and women’s belief that they have the right to define their own realities and identities. Black women and girls, regardless of the nomenclature, are expressing an imagination of themselves that is free of oppressive structures—in essence they are articulating a standpoint.

Black girls and women’s self-articulations are both private and public and political and non-political (if we think of politics in a traditional sense). At their core, these articulations seek to transform the micro into the macro thereby creating a form of group solidarity. Articulations such as #BlackGirlMagic provide an entry into public space(s) and make visible the Black girl and woman. It is not simply enough, as argued by Hammonds (1994), to seek to simply respond to silence.

...in overturning the “politics of silence” the goal cannot be merely to be seen: visibility in and of itself does not erase a history of silence nor does it challenge the structure of power and domination, symbolic and material, that determines what can and cannot be seen. The goal should be to develop a “politics of articulation.” This politics would build on the interrogation of what makes it possible for black women to speak and act (141).

Such self-articulations reflect what bell hooks refers to as the “oppositional gaze”. “By courageously looking,” according to hooks, “we defiantly declared: “Not only will I stare. I want my look to change reality.”” (1992, 116). This special issue explores how Black girls and women, through digital curating and other formats, create a public space that allows them to courageously look back at a society that tends to construct them in a manner that requires their invisibility/hypervisibility.

We extend hook’s theorizing of the oppositional gaze as a means of connecting the



various essays that make up this special issue on Black girls and women's political self-articulation across time and space. As shown throughout the articles, Black girls and women simultaneously articulate a discourse of opposition and a discourse of liberation. It is at the juncture of these discourses that we explore the oppositional gaze. These discourses exhibit and uncover Black girls and women's long-standing emotions but more importantly, they show how Black girls and women's understanding of self operates outside of the parameter of the state. Thus, Black girls and women's self-articulation allows them to move beyond state and quasi-state control and power.

hooks utilizes the oppositional gaze to engage in a cultural analysis of the visual representation of Black womanhood and how Black women engage such representations. However, we argue that this concept is apropos for analyzing on Black girls and women's political self-articulations. Similarly to how Black women watch and interpret films, Black girls and women's self-articulations involve subverting forced and often violent narratives used to control and limit their possibilities. Consider that

Spaces of agency exist for black people, wherein we can both interrogate the 'gaze' of the other but also look back, and at one another, naming what we see. The gaze has been and is a site of resistance for colonized black people globally. Subordinates in relations of power learn experientially that there is a critical gaze, one that "looks" in order to document, one that is oppositional. In resistance struggle, the power of the dominated to assert agency by claiming and cultivating 'awareness' politicizes 'looking' relations—one learns to look a certain way in order to resist (hooks 1992, 116).

Similarly to the "look back" we imagine Black girls and women's self-articulations as a form of agency and resistance. They are not simply resisting dominant and oppressive narratives, Black girls and women are actually engaging in a prefigurative politics where they imagine a democratic society—one in which they are able to define their worth and substance; thereby creating space for more equitable and just policies and politics.

None of the essays speak to Black girls and women's direct engagement with the state in terms of running for elective office or voting for example; instead they explore and expand the understanding of politics in a global and inclusive way. It is in the performances of self-articulation that one sees political discourses that challenge, directly and indirectly state power and the construction of Black girls and women as "Other". Thus representing a dimension of Black girls and women's power. This is the oppositional gaze discussed by bell hooks. hooks argues that such a gaze offers those whose voices have been marginalized and/or silenced the opportunity to engage in a critical viewing which allows them to transform the absences/silence into presence/voice. The oppositional gaze is prefigurative in nature and meshes together the private and the public spheres of life. Such self-articulation embodies the traditions of protest among Black girls and women.

### **Exploring (Digital) Labor of Resistance and Redemption: Themes of the Essays**

Diasporic women who inform these analyses employ a "paradigm of growth" (Ryan 2005, 11), as their actions are focused on building and developing an agentive self by envisioning their own growth. In essence Diasporic Black women who inform the various studies are subverting silences (Hammonds 1994) and as such are consciously active in their own subjectivity. This

brings me back to Holt's suggestion that Black public space, and I add Black feminist public space, should first critique and then seek to transform otherwise the talk in these spaces is simply idle. The various themes of the essays show how Black women use their public spaces, digital and otherwise, to critique neoliberal, capitalist, heteronormative, patriarchal space. The act of looking back is how Black girls and women critique and transform (and sometimes simultaneously).

Using various case studies and qualitative methodologies, such as comparative historical approach, the authors explore the work that Black girls and women engage in to make themselves visible by critiquing oppressive structures and by offering different ways of being—that is practicing democracy. It is in these acts that #BlackGirlMagic and similar narratives allow Black girls and women to address trauma, love each other and organize for social justice. Included are two essays that focus primarily on Black girls (Wade and Adomako), one that brings together visibility politics, nostalgia and hip-hop feminism to offer an analysis of the acclaimed film “Straight Outta Compton” (Johnson), finally, another essay offers an analysis of Black women's (neo) abolitionism through an analysis of #IfIDieInPoliceCustody (Yarish). Below are some general themes that run throughout the essays that make up this special issue. While offered as general themes, it is worth recognizing that this is not an attempt to collapse these essays into an essential theory of how Black girls and women gaze back at oppressive structures. The reader is encouraged to use these themes (or not) as a way of reading the essays as individual pieces, but also a part of the larger knowledge production generated by and about Black girls and women.

The first theme connecting the essays is one that highlights Black girls and women's (re)claiming of identity. This process of the (re)claiming identity involves critical reflections on Black girls and women's understanding of the possibilities of socio-political change at the micro, meso, and macro levels. In her analysis of #1000Blackgirlbooks, a liberatory project organize by then 11 year old Marley Dias, Admako argues,

Black girls who engage in literature-centered hashtags do so as a reaction to their exclusion and demonization in both the publishing industry as well as mainstream media...#1000blackgirlbooks is a counter story that represents the theoretical, material and imaginative resources Black girls are given in order to transform hegemonic narratives of Black girlhood, become activists and participate in cultivating #blackgirlmagic.

Black women and girls have a long tradition of writing themselves whole via their interrogations of oppressive structures that function at the micro, meso and macro levels (see Hill Collins 2000; Walker 1983). To do this, the girls and women who inform these studies engage in shapeshifting to alter spaces (Cox 2015). Wade shows how Willow Smith's archival practice on Instagram serves to “push back against spatial limitations placed on Black girls (and women)” thereby creating “spaces(s) within and against social expectations that insist upon restricting, diminishing, and/or invisibilizing Black female bodies and experiences”. Smith, as argued by Wade, uses her body and its performance to engage in shapeshifting and often by intensely gazing back at a culture/politics that seeks to consume her.

This type of work was also done by the female artists who gazed back at the production of *Straight Outta Compton* (Johnson) and those that deployed #IfIDieInPoliceCustody (Yarish). Through her analysis of Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, Fanny Jackson Coppin, and Sandra

Bland, Yaris argues, “Black women are disarticulating the discourse of respectability long co-opted by institutions of state violence and fashioning anew a politics of respect.” Using a queer vision of democracy, Yarish speaks to respect as embodying Black women’s articulation of a politics that involves healing by “reorienting our own relationships to space and people.” In other words, Black women are claiming space to not only tell their own stories, but to heal by challenging unjust structures and processes. Black girls and women, through their self-articulations, for example via #BlackGirlsMagic, are talking back to oppressive structures and are offering their own reality. They are offering speculative visions of the world. A world that allows Black girls and women to define themselves and a world they imagine.

The process of self-articulation, as detailed in the essays, shows how Black girls and women are engaged in this process for themselves and not to be in service of others. In this sense, these forms of self-articulation can be viewed as an element of Black girls and women’s healing practices. This is a second theme that connects the articles of this special issue. Consider, according to Yarish, that #IfIDieInPoliceCustody “...serves as a discursive mechanism through which a shared performative practice calls a network into being that testifies to their mutual vulnerability and enacts a collective refusal of individualized marginalization.” Using digital spaces, such as Twitter, Black girls and women are telling their stories in service of themselves.

This was part of the efforts of Marley Dias as detailed by Adomako who says, “as an alternative site, social media platforms have provided a global space where Black girls can demand recognition for themselves and their stories.” We see this politics of making space for self in the actions and writings of the women who responded to their erasure in the film *Straight Outta Compton*, who in the words of Johnson, sought to be “agents of their complex lives” by inserting their stories into a conversation that needed them to exist, but simultaneously made them invisible. These women challenged the nostalgia of a particular era of hip-hop by saying we exist and we will exercise agency in how we want to be understood and remembered. This is part of the politics of healing—going from the micro to the macro.

Seeing possibilities is the final theme connecting these articles. In articulating an understanding of Black girl politics, Wade asserts “Black girls’ politics also involve movement: how they move in the world and what possibilities those movements create. These elements of Black girls’ politics work as an insurgent visibilization against erasure and silencing.” Marley Dias in her #1000Blackgirlbooks also asserts a politics of possibilities.

This politics of possibilities is articulated by Wade when she argues that “subjective fluidity has particular resonance for Black girls, like Smith, who occupy the liminal space between childhood and adulthood because it allows them to access the “liberatory potential that emerges [and create] new subjectivities that defy the “logic” of the unified subject”. Black girls and women use their experiences, which often occur on the margins, to “look beyond normative expressions” (Adomako). It is by gazing back and simultaneously looking beyond that we see the possibilities of freedom and justice that requires a “democratic accountability” (Yarish) that offers Black women the opportunity to engage in a “politics of respect” which is that space that allows Black women to be fully human.

### Conclusion

“Storytelling remains one of the most powerful language and literacy practices that Black women use to convey their special knowledge” (Richardson 2003, 82). The Black girls and women who inform the various studies show how these communities use experiences to craft

their stories in an attempt to achieve personhood, justice, and freedom. Through the process of self-articulation, as detailed in the articles, one sees how Black girls and women are engaged in this process for themselves and not to be in service of others—as a means of healing, but also as a political tool. The authors show how Black girls and women use experiences to create, both on and offline, a community of ideas and practices. Thus, creating and engaging a dialogic activity where they are gazing back at oppressive power structures, AND creating space for Black women to insert their experiences. The narratives told by these Black girls and women are both social and political acts. This shows how Black girls and women are questioning of power and authority (Hill Collins 2000; hooks 1989).

As suggested, the self-articulations are a hybrid between the past and current time with a recognition of the future. Although the authors all use different cases, combined, they highlight how Black girls and women co-construct narratives and knowledge. Rather through narratives such as #IfIDieInPoliceCustody or #1000Books, to the women who resisted oppression while in transit or those who clapped back against the movie, or challenge what it means to be a young woman by centering self in places such as Instagram, the Black women and girls advocate for social and political change within society.

This special issue is one focused on the notion of “#BlackGirlMagic” and the politics that emerges from this articulation. #BlackGirlMagic, in its various iterations, is but one alternative narrative used by Black girls and women to create their public spaces—spaces where they control how they are heard and seen. The articles offer one opening for us to critically analyze the work of Black girls and women, digitally and non, and the politics of such work. But it is only a start, if we are to continue expanding the fields of Black girls and women’s politics (being mindful not to collapse the two into one entity) there are a number of questions that are begging our attention. Some of these questions may include: Do these self-articulations pose a threat to existing power structures? How do self-articulations of Black girlhood and womanhood, such as #BlackGirlMagic, interrogate some potentially damaging constructions of Black girls and women while potentially reifying others? How might we understand and critique these various forms of self-articulations, of which empowerment narratives are a part, and their applicability to Black women and girls?

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## Reimagining Black Girlhood: Literary and Digital Self-Representation

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### Abstract

In 2016 #1000Blackgirlbooks was launched as part of Marley Dias' social action project where she set the goal of collecting 1,000 books that center Black girls. Marley created this space because the mainstream media and publishing industry does not highlight contemporary Black girls such as Marley. Her work exemplifies how social media and children's literature work together to empower Black girls and expand understandings of Black girlhood. Impacted by the rise of #blackgirlmagic, hashtags such as #1000blackgirlbooks showcase how Black girls are calling attention to the importance of literary traditions for Black girls. #1000blackgirlbooks is a counter narrative that allows us to explore the link between the digital and physical and represent what theoretical, material and imaginative resources we need in order to resist hegemonic narratives of Black girlhood. The social and political movement, such as #100blackgirlbooks, to celebrate and acknowledge Black girlhood can only continue as Black girls engage in practices to be named and to name their stories.

**Keywords:** Black Girlhood, Literature, Hashtags, Counter narrative, Social media

### Introduction

In 2016, eleven-year-old Marley Dias set off on a social justice mission. As a Black girl who loves to read, Marley quickly realized that the books that filled her elementary school classroom rarely ever featured Black girls like her. In response, Marley set a goal of collecting 1,000 books about Black girls by the beginning of February (Anderson 2016). #1000Blackgirlbooks was launched as a part of Marley's social action project. The initial goal of collecting 1,000 books was exceeded, with almost 9,000 books and counting. Through the use of her hashtag, #1000Blackgirlbooks, and social media she was able to catalog the books into a database and a resource for youth but also for parents, educators, schools, and libraries. The books were reviewed to, "ensure that they fit the criterion of having a Black girl as the main characters" (Dias 2015). Marley not only collected these books but found a way to distribute them when she traveled to St. Mary, Jamaica in 2016 to host a book festival and give the books she had acquired to schools and libraries in the area (Finley 2016).

Through her activism, Marley continuously mobilizes Black girlhood, particularly through children's literature, and has built a strong community with an even stronger online presence. While attention given to girlhood in popular culture has been on the rise, Black feminist scholars including Ruth Nicole Brown, LaKisha Simmons, and Oneka

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LaBennett among others have used this moment to theorize liberating projects for Black girls and Black girlhood, a site of both theoretical and practical analysis. As Black girlhood has been positioned as a necessary site of Black feminist inquiry, it is important to center the coming into knowing Black girls' experience and how representations of the lived experiences of Black girls combats society's dismissal of them. #1000blackgirlbooks highlights how literature representations that focus on Black girlhood make it possible for Black girls to not only see themselves, but to also claim their complexities. As an alternative site, social media platforms have provided a global space where Black girls can demand recognition for themselves and their stories. In recognizing that the hashtag has over a quarter of a million unique users and has been promoted by organizations such as The Black Youth Project and GrassROOTS, the reach of the hashtag offers a way to challenge static definitions of Black girlhood. We can use #1000blackgirlbooks as a starting point to understand Black girls who have been, and still are, communicating their responses to the social, political, and sexual conditions of their lives. Today there is limited information on how Black feminist digital spaces has reconfigured the way we think of Black girlhood. The use of digital spaces and other informal social networks constitutes an essential element of #blackgirlmagic that reaches different audiences and opens up new opportunities for Black girls. It represents networks that value open access and have operated in opposition to hierarchical forms of knowledge production. For scholars and activists thinking through the transformative potential of social media platforms an examination of #1000blackgirlbooks and its symbolic influence calls us to construct new modes of self-expression and participation for Black girls doing unpaid and often unacknowledged online labor.

Marley created a space for herself and others utilizing alternative sites and epistemologies to validate her own Black girlhood because mainstream media and the publishing industry does not allow for Black youth to define themselves and their own experiences. The multiplicative category of age erases and refuses fundamental elements of childhood innocence for Black children. Society has come to understand children as an essential category, where children are, "vulnerable and innocent, and thus in need of adult protection" (Buckingham 1994, 80). As a result, age and innocence are often conflated. Black children have never been afforded the same assumptions of innocence as their white counterparts, a particular detrimental consequence in matters of life and death (Bernstein 2011). Whereas white children can use the intersection of age and race to provide security for them when they make mistakes, Black children learn that their childhoods have very strict boundaries and any "mistake"—real or perceived could prove detrimental to their right to live. This includes cases like that of 7-year-old Aiyana Stanley-Jones who was killed by Detroit officers in her sleep. The perception of Stanley-Jones, a young Black girl, made her vulnerable to state sanctioned violence that ultimately caused her death.

Childhood is further complicated when Black children are subjected to gender and sexuality distinctions. Patricia Hill Collins theorizes the ways in which a majority of Black female experiences and subjugated knowledge are situated within multiple intersecting identities (i.e., race, class, gender, sexuality) that are "not additive but rather multiplicative" (Hill-Collins 2000, 18). She goes on to say that, "for African-American girls, age often offers little protection from assaults. Far too many young Black girls inhabit hazardous and hostile environments" (Hill-Collins 2000, 26). As a signifier, Black girlhood often connotes chaotic visual imageries in that they are often represented negatively in popular culture. Black girls do not live outside of stereotypes of hypersexualization and invisibility that plague Black women and they are



continuously interpellated by external systems of white domination.

These systems of oppression take place in both the literary and digital world. By erasing Black girls in these mediums, or representing them as static stereotypical figures, real world Black girls are also further marginalized within our society. In 2015 a fourteen-year-old Black girl was slammed to the ground by a police officer in McKinney, Texas. Four months later, in Columbia, South Carolina, a teacher requested an officer's assistance with a "disobedient" Black teenage girl. The student refused to leave class and the officer grabbed the quiet, but noncompliant, girl by her neck and proceeded to throw her on the floor and restrained her in handcuffs (Griffin 2016). In these instances, the media often portrays Black girls as aggressive and in need of this type of forceful policing. Deconstructing childhood, particularly girlhood, allows room to see how Black girls are written into preexisting narratives, such as being unruly and disruptive, before they are even born. Gholneshar Muhammad, a scholar of African American female literacies, writes, "currently, African American girls are being depicted as overly sexual, violent, or confrontational, are judged by physical features, or are invisible across mainstream media and within school classrooms" (Muhammad 2015, 1). Black girls do not remain safe in a realm outside of socio-political realities; rather their marginalized positions leave them more vulnerable to institutional violence.

Today, scholars combat the postfeminist idea that feminism is not relevant to young girls and it is imperative to recognize how Black girls are engaging with and participating in a Black feminist tradition (Gill 2007; McRobbie 2009; Negra 2009; Zaslow 2009). The use of digital platforms, such as social media, is a part of a longer legacy of Black feminist activism. While girls' activism can be "difficult to locate, because, in part, of the unique forms that it takes," social media as a platform offers a site in which Black girls can participate in feminist praxis (Keller 2016, 261). Hashtag activism, which refers to the online usage of hashtags to support a social justice cause, has been instrumental in raising awareness around important issues. Hashtag activism birthed movements like #BlackGirlMagic a hashtag used to celebrate the power, agency, resilience, and beauty of Black women and girls. Moya Bailey notes how social media has been used to build networks to redress the lack of care that Black women receive from society (Bailey 2015). These networks are spaces for creating, where Black girls can redefine themselves and build connections. Notable examples of the power of the hashtag include not only, #BlackGirlMagic but #bringbackourgirls, #sayhername and #blacklivesmatter. Through these hashtags Black girls are creating ways to center themselves and their experiences (Jones 2003, Sperling 2011, MacDonald 1995).

While it is beyond the scope of this article to have an in depth history of the scholarship on activism, dominant discourse around forms of activism primarily center the viewpoint of adults (Inglehart and Norris 2003). Jessica Taft argues, "girl activists' ideas, stories, and theoretical contributions thus remain largely hidden from view" (Taft 2011, 5). For Black girls who may not have access to traditional forms of activism, hashtags become a way to participate and engage in social justice projects. For example, #BlackGirlMagic emboldens Black girls to become activists and create other call to action hashtags such as #1000blackgirlbooks. Therefore in order to understand Black girls' political participation we must then look beyond normative expressions and interrogate the contemporary cultural practices of Black girls' hashtags. While Black girls experience intense marginalization they are seeking alternative forms and outlets to narrate their stories.

Marley's hashtag is representative of the way children's literature and social media

work together to empower Black girls and reframe Black girlhood.<sup>1</sup> Marley's project encourages us to examine more closely the role of social media, specifically Twitter, a platform that creates and narrates Black girls' experiences. Social media becomes an alternative space where Black girls, and Black women advocating on their behalf, can construct their own counter narratives. Critical race theory scholars define counter-storytelling as a way to "challenge the stereotypes often held by the dominant culture, give voice to marginalized youth, and present the complexity of racial and ethnic identity formation" (Hassell-Hughes 2013, 212). Black girls have created counter narratives through digital platforms in order to claim a level of agency, that does not always transfer into political power, but leaves Black girls voicing their own narratives while they remain on the outside of what Cathy Cohen terms, "state-sanctioned, normalized, White, middle- and upper-class, male heterosexuality" (Cohen 2004, 27). This participates in a digital labor where Black girls, "though the act of communicating with the public about racism, sexism, homophobia, and other social justice issues...adds traffic and value to these platforms by attracting readers and followers" (Nakamura 2015, 108).

Through an analysis of #1000blackgirlbooks, I argue that Black girls who engage in literature-centered hashtags do so as a reaction to their exclusion and demonization in both the publishing industry as well as mainstream media.<sup>2</sup> Black girls' experiences within this political project is an invisible component of digital labor. #1000blackgirlbooks is a counter story that represents the theoretical, material and imaginative resources Black girls are given in order to transform hegemonic narratives of Black girlhood, become activists and participate in cultivating #BlackGirlMagic.

### Politics of Children's Literature

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century the question of literature in the digital age always surfaces. A central question includes: Does literature still matter in this era of social media?<sup>3</sup> Katherine Hayles discusses how the digital and literary are connected, and how we can not discount narratives. As she notes, literature shapes our cultural imaginary (Hayles 2005). Literature is integral in the process of understanding one's own subjectivity, making the stakes extremely high.

Literary representation for Black children has continuously been a primary site of struggle.<sup>3</sup> Black children's literature is mobilized as a site of advocacy and empowerment primarily because it is often the first place of encounter for children through institutions such as schools. Franz Fanon actively engages literary representation and is concerned with the ways in which white storybooks, comics, and/or cartoon representations often represented Black people as villains. As a result of such representations, Black children saw Blackness associated with an impure otherness and thus literature inflicted educational violence on Black children (Fanon 1952, 127). Fanon describes violence as a form that, "does not only have for its aim the keeping of these enslaved at arm's length; it seeks to dehumanize them. Everything will be done to wipe out their traditions...to destroy their culture" (Fanon 1961, 16). It was not until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century that positive Black children's literature became more prominent. When W.E.B. Du Bois created *The Brownies' Book* in 1920 he aligned himself with a definition of Black children's literature that calls, "for Black children to recognize themselves as normal, to learn about Black history, and to recognize their own potential" (Bishop 2007, 23).

The political and ideological use of children's literature during times of protest and civil unrest is a legacy that has deep roots in global Black liberation efforts. Diana Selig explains how Black authors in the 1940s were, "drawn towards both radical politics and children's literature

as vehicles for their views” (Selig 2008, 209). Authors including Gwendolyn Brooks, Virginia Hamilton, and Langston Hughes were among some of the prominent Black children’s authors in the 1950s and 1960s (Sasser 2014, 362). In efforts to liberate Black children from the white gaze, factions such as the Black Arts Movement (BAM) sought to combat the brutality, inflicted on the psyche of Black youth, by white children’s literature.

Black girlhood literature was not immune from such dehumanization. The figure of the Black girl in Black literary traditions tends to invoke her trauma and the injustice of, “never having been a girl,” (Shange 1982, 1). Stephanie Rambo notes that the two main Black girl characters in canonical texts *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison (1970) and *Push* by Sapphire (1990), “spiral into self-hatred. These texts present how Black girls, like Black women, are subjected to multiple constructs and binaries that leave them typecasted” (Rambo 2015, 24). In a society that signifies whiteness as ultimately superior, the Black girls in these novels can only imagine themselves as inferior. However, these narratives bring about a necessary awareness to the violent and traumatic lived experiences that haunt Black girlhood. Through their literature, Black women writers such as Morrison and Sapphire make visible the too often erased complications of being a Black girl in a world defined by white girlhood. They represented the ways in which Black girls have had to navigate dominant discourses that rendered them both marginalized and trivialized.

Unfortunately, contemporary representations of Black girls in children’s literature remain as marginalized as real world Black girls today. Barnes and Noble referred to 2015 as “an epic year for young adult lit, in the midst of a Young Adult golden age” (Albert 2016, 1). However, on their list of the “Best of 2015”, not one book featured a Black female protagonist. The same is true for the *New York Times*’ list. This raises the real question: Where are all the Black girls in children’s literature? Literature regulates inclusion and visualization in the hegemonic social constructions of girlhood by primarily associating girlhood with whiteness. Black girls deserve to feel as though their culture and identity is affirmed within the literature they read; yet this is often not the case and instead they find themselves confronted with narrow representations of themselves.

As an extension of societal values, literature devalues Black girls not only by misrepresenting them but also by limiting their possibilities. In his *New York Times* article entitled “The Apartheid of Children’s Literature,” Christian Myers discusses the consequences of this when he explains, “children of color remain outside the boundaries of imagination” (Myers 2014, 1). Scholars such as Bishop, Menchaca, Hinton and Berry note how diverse literature plays an essential role in validating experiences and cultivating a strong sense of self. Culturally relevant literature allows young readers to establish personal connections with characters while creating an appreciation for forms of difference (Heflin and Barksdale-Ladd 2001, 818). The power of seeing oneself in literature leads to transformative experiences such as one described by KaaVonia Hinton where she says of discovering books with Black girls as protagonists, “for the first time in my life, I realized that I was not alone in the world. There were other black girls having experiences similar to mine, and some had grown up and written them down” (Hinton and Berry 2004, 285). Reading children’s literature alongside the digital space is necessary to understand how Black girls have been given a new way to re-imagine themselves.

### #Blackgirlsread: Digital Activism and Self-Narration

#1000blackgirlbooks displays the potential of Black girl protagonists and is demonstrative of how Black girls engage with Black girlhood literature and digital activism. By utilizing Twitter, a form of knowledge that subverts dominant groups, while also being aware of the discourse of erasure, Marley is able to reimagine what it means to be a Black girl and cultivate what has come to be known as Black Girl Magic.<sup>5</sup> Marley uses her “magic” as a teaching tool to deconstruct misunderstandings and misrepresentations of Black girls’ lives. Dr. Asia Leeds states that Black Girl Magic is a concept that identifies how Black women and girls “make space for themselves, celebrate themselves, and connect to each other...the various hashtags allow us to curate our magic and facilitate new connections and discoveries” (quoted in Thomas 2016, n.p.).

Marley emphasizes not only Black girls as a site of knowledge production, but also a transgressive Black girlhood that prioritizes Black girls as agents of change. Cohen discusses how marginalized groups “act with the limited agency afforded them to secure low levels of autonomy” (Cohen 2004, 27). Tweets and hashtags have become a part of what Cohen terms as oppositional practices and can be seen as quotidian acts of resistance (Cohen 2004). Marley’s mission to increase the visibility of Black girlhood and promote meaningful conversations with readers is done through her hashtag and her role as a writer. Her influence led to Scholastic, the global children’s publishing, education, and Media Company, acquiring rights to Marley’s book on activism and change, *Marley Dias Gets It Done -- And So Can You*. Dias states, “I’m working to create a space where it feels easy to include and imagine Black girls and make Black girls like me the main characters of our lives (quoted in McGrath 2017). For Black girls, being able to write is a way to not only confront the images of themselves that they see portrayed for mass consumption, but also to create their own images as, “writing becomes a key literacy practice for Black adolescent girls to make meaning of their identity” (Muhammad 2015, 226). Valuing the stories she creates as a child, Marley presents a Black girlhood that affords Black girls with the possibility to narrate themselves as leaders. With tweets from Marley that include, “you can be the hero in your own book” she is fighting against the white gaze that assumes the reader is white and traps Black girls in an image not of their own making (Dias 2017).

However, in order for social media to “have meaning and significance it must be located within an embodied human world” and take into account lived experiences (Hayles 2005, 19). Considering statistics that show that Black girls are suspended six times more often than white girls—we see the ways in which an embodied Black girlhood is at risk. Marley’s list of books directly confronts the data from the Cooperative Children’s Book center at the University of Wisconsin, Madison that notes that fewer than 10 percent of children’s books released in 2015 had a Black person as the main character, statistics Marley also comments on through her tweets (Anderson 2016). The publishing industry has begun to see incremental increases in text-based literary genres that center this population and “scholars such as Bishop chronicle the steady yet still growing publications of children’s and young adult texts that regularly feature Black girlhood” (Brooks et al 2010, 8). While this increase may not be able to be directly linked to the rise of these literature based hashtags, scholarship should continue to reflect upon the use of social media campaigns to advocate for Black girlhood. Therefore, in examining hashtags such as #1000blackgirlbooks we are witness to the possibilities of reimagining Black girlhood in a society that “lacks language that accurately describes Black girls in a way that is not about controlling their bodies and/or producing White, middle-class girl subjectivities” (Brown 2009, 2).

### **The Project of Self-Definition**

Social media and literature function as key activist sites that Black girls engage in through hashtags. In describing this approach, I argue that despite existing on the margins of society, Black girls like Marley are using these platforms to make themselves and their narratives visible on their own terms. Viral instances show how the bodies of Black girls are continuously brutalized and discarded, however, with movements such as #1000blackgirlbooks, inspired by #BlackGirlMagic, we are witnessing a reimagining of Black girlhood.

The multiple possibilities for new beginnings are the most significant sign of Black girlhood. To acknowledge Black Girl Magic is to refute worldly boundaries and binaries while destroying previous patterns of alienation. In dealing with such considerations, contemporary hashtags that center Black girls not only reflects the salience of the subjectivities of Black girls but also attempts to maneuver Black youth out of a dehumanized state and into one in which their girlhood does not rely on a white hegemonic default. One of the ways Black girls are able to participate and shape the meaning of their intersectional lives is by narrating their own girlhood through storytelling. Marley allows the public to witness her coming into being. Through her social media activism and Black Girl Magic, Marley tells her story and forces us all to listen. As a result, she is a living revision of a Black girl who is not only represented by voicelessness, distress, and trauma, although these realities are ever present.

Marley is a part of a larger network that center Black girls's narratives and positions them as agents of change who defy hierarchies of power by creating alternative worlds. Through raising critical consciousness and awareness Black girls use media to come into being and change the ways in which Black girls come to understand their Blackness and the multiple layers of Black girlhood. For example, 10 year old Kheris Rogers who, with the help of her older sister, turned her experience of bullying based on her skin color into a clothing line associated by #flexinmycomplexion. While not a project based on literature, Kheris also contributes to the digital labor that challenges the boxes Black girls are often assigned. If we can continue to use the influence of social media to forefront the narratives of Black girls' experiences, we can begin to truly activate the magic of Black girlhood. These hashtags are an extension of resistance traditions and are a reflection of the creative, and magical, possibilities Black girls have access to in this contemporary moment.

By using hashtags to revisit and rewrite the trope of the Black girl in books, social media platforms arm Black girls with strategies on how to construct selfhood and write themselves into history. The combination of these two forms of representations is a site for alternative Black girlhoods. These concepts are important in understanding how Black girls imagine themselves. Examining the historical injustice done by structures and institutions alongside contemporary forms of resistance allows researchers to ask new questions about the voices that narrate and define Black girls bodies and lives in a world that perpetuates the idea that the hegemonic gaze can only define Black girlhood, whether in the physical or digital world. While narratives that represent Black girls who are unable to live on their own terms persist, there are connected narratives that speak to the lived experiences of hopeful, imaginative, and magical Black girlhoods; ones that offer alternative endings for the plight of the Black girl. This social and political movement to celebrate and acknowledge Black girlhood can only continue as Black girls continue to be named and name their stories.



### Notes

1. I define Black girlhood in line with Ruth Nicole Brown who states that Black girlhood is, “the representations, memories, and lived experiences of being and becoming in a body marked as youthful, Black, and female” which provides a fruitful starting place to think through Black girlhood.
2. I define Black girlhood literature as children’s literature that centers Black girlhood and becomes a means for Black girls to discover their own cultural heritage and identity in communities that have yet to fully recover from the aftermath of slavery, colonialism, and cultural imperialism.
3. Also see Paul Socken’s *The Edge of the Precipice: Why Read Literature in the Digital Age* (2013) for a collection of essays that discuss the state of literature in the twenty-first century.
4. See Michelle H. Martin’s *Brown Gold* (2004) for a history of Black representations in children’s literature, specifically picture books.
5. Matt Richardson defines reimagination as, “the process of taking something that has already been conceived of and recreating it with new elements, thereby infusing the past with difference.”

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## Indigo Child Runnin' Wild: Willow Smith's Archive of Black Girl Magic

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### Abstract

One of the many uses of Black girl magic involves the creation of space(s) within and against social expectations that insist upon restricting, diminishing, and/or invisibilizing Black female bodies and experiences. This paper explores how Willow Smith uses visual content, namely Instagram, to demonstrate subjective complexity, challenge gendered understandings of “appropriate” behavior, and push back against the spatial limitations placed on Black girls (and women). Using what Jasmine Nichole Cobb describes as a “Black feminist approach to Black visuality,” I read and analyze Smith’s eclectic collection of photographs, drawings, and video clips in order to argue that Smith’s employment of visual media speaks to some of the possibilities presented by digital technologies in self-curation/self-archiving. Here, I discuss archiving not necessarily in terms of preserving or documenting “true” events or a “true” self but rather as a method of space-making, a process of transforming garrets (McKittrick), which constitutes a particularly important one for Black girls who constantly receive messages admonishing them to take up as little space as possible. Ultimately, I show how Smith’s self-curation through Instagram functions as a source to identify Black girls’ politics and (re) conceptualize frameworks for understanding how Black girls engage visuality and new media.

**Keywords:** Black girlhood, digital media, visuality, self-curation, and popular culture

### Introduction

Digital spaces have been integral to organizing and creating communities that center and support Black women and girls. When Cashawn Thompson first began using the hashtag #BlackGirlsAreMagic, she did so to show how she “is inspired by the Black women who persevere despite adversity” (D. Thomas 2015). According to Thompson, “Black Girl Magic tries to counteract the negativity that we sometimes hold within ourselves and is sometimes placed on us by the outside world” (BBC 2016). As the hashtag, which has since been more commonly shortened to #BlackGirlMagic, gains popularity, other Black women and girls echo Thompson’s sentiment of needing something that combats forces that denigrate Black girls and women. As Spelman professor Asia Leeds notes, #BlackGirlMagic “is important because it names and identifies the ways that Black women make space for themselves, celebrate themselves, and connect to each other” (J. Thomas 2016). Similarly, fifteen-year-old Tianna Sankey, creator of the Instagram account blkgirls, “curates content by using #blackgirlmagic” in order to “highlight the beauty of the black woman and promote self-love” (J. Thomas 2016).

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Through stories like these, we come to see Black girl magic as a technology of creation that defies hegemonic logic, perception, and reality through bringing the seemingly impossible into existence. Black girl magic (re)builds and celebrates what was meant to be destroyed. One of the many uses of Black girl magic involves the creation of space(s) within and against social expectations that insist upon restricting, diminishing, and/or invisibilizing Black female bodies and experiences. As mobile and Internet technologies become increasingly ubiquitous, our approaches to how Black bodies navigate space must take seriously the spatiality of the digital. Even though the virtual realm has not become the post-racial, posthuman utopia (Chun 2005; Daniels 2009; Nakamura & Chow-White 2012; Hobson 2012) many people (Haraway 1991; Turkle 1995; Kang 2000) thought it would (or could) be, digital spaces, especially in the era of cell phones, provide opportunities for Black girls to conjure up Black girl magic by blurring the lines between media consumer and media producer, thereby illuminating the flexibility of the border between digital and physical worlds (Catanese 2005; Hobson 2012). The growing availability of free photography and video applications (referred to as apps from this point forward) for cell phones expands the possibilities for Black girls to create and share expressive content. For example, Instagram, which has exploded in popularity since its launch in 2010, allows users to create, edit, and share visual content. Unlike other social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, Instagram, though it includes textual components, operates as a primarily visual platform. While it is difficult to draw a fine line between textual and visual regarding current social media apps, my argument here is based on how the creators of these social media platforms intended them to be used, which can be ascertained through their original functionality. For instance, as a microblogging site, Twitter's original settings were optimized for tweeting 140 *verbal* characters, not posting pictures. Instead of telling stories through status updates or tweets, Instagram users post photos, videos, and drawings.

In 2014, *The Rolling Stones* released an online article of the top 100 Instagram accounts to follow. Willow Smith, the (then) thirteen-year-old daughter of actors Jada Pinkett and Will Smith, appeared at number 63. As expected, individual celebrities generally dominated the list. While a few Black women—Rihanna, Beyoncé, Nicki Minaj, and Serena Williams—appeared on the list, Willow Smith was the only Black *girl* (where girl refers to someone under the age of 18) included. To be among such company, Smith must have been serving Black girl magic, right? This article explores how Willow Smith uses visual content on Instagram to push back against spatial limitations placed on Black girls (and women). Using what Jasmine Nichole Cobb (2015) describes as a Black feminist approach to Black visibility, I read Smith's eclectic collection of photographs, drawings, and video clips, analyzing what the images contain (i.e. what is in the image) and what the images do affectively. Using these analyses, I argue that Smith's employment of visual media speaks to the political potential presented by digital technologies in self-curation/self-archiving. Here, I discuss archiving not necessarily in terms of preserving or documenting "true" events or a "true" self but rather as a method of space-making—a process of transforming garrets (McKittrick 2006)—which constitutes a particularly important one for Black girls who constantly receive messages admonishing them to take up as little space as possible. Ultimately, I show how Smith's self-curation and archiving through Instagram function as a source to (re)conceptualize frameworks for understanding how Black girls engage visibility and new media. This exploration of Smith's self-articulation through visual digital media signals an important push for new and nuanced conversations that complicate the relationships between Black feminist theory (especially regarding visual representation) and Black girlhood studies.

### Black Girlhood Studies and the Politics of Self-Articulation

Exploring Willow Smith's Instagram archive contributes to the growing body of literature on Black girlhood(s), particularly at the intersection of media/technology studies. The expansion of Black girlhood studies as a field has brought about a shift from a primary focus on criminality and delinquency to uncovering Black girls' politics of self-articulation. This shift marks an important intervention in Black girlhood studies (and Black youth studies in general) because it works against the psychological and policy-based consequences (Crenshaw et al. 2014; Anderson 2016; Morris 2016) of continuously representing Black girls as troubled rather than identifying problems within the structures Black girls must navigate. Black girls' politics encompass all the tools that they use to negotiate the terms of their existence, which includes but is not limited to civic participation and how Black girls assert themselves and place demands upon various social actors, not just the State (Cohen 2004). Black girls' politics also involve movement: how they move in the world and what possibilities those movements create. These elements of Black girls' politics work as an insurgent visibilization against erasure and silencing.

Identifying and respecting Black girls' politics of self-articulation requires methodological and epistemological approaches that center Black girls' voices and experiences. In her foundational text, *The Games Black Girls Play*, Kyra Gaunt (2006) discusses the everyday musicality of Black girls' (hand) games in order to theorize Black girls' creativity. Gaunt argues that Black girls produce embodied knowledges regarding race and gender that have broader implications for African American music. Gaunt's work represents an impetus within the field of Black girlhood studies to take Black girls on their own terms by listening to and learning from them. Along a similar vein, Ruth Nicole Brown lays important groundwork for understanding Black girls' politics. In *Black Girlhood Celebration: Toward a Hip-Hop Feminist Pedagogy*, Brown (2009, 2), responding to mentorship models that seek to "save" Black girls, sets out to "start the dialogue of a way to be new about Black girlhood." In initiating this dialogue, Brown asks us to enact a praxis of Black girlhood studies that does not seek to discipline Black girls' bodies or behaviors. Like Gaunt, Brown focuses on "Black girls' expressive culture and agency" (15), noting the levels of "creativity and ingenuity" (15) that comprise Black girls' everyday lives and cultural productions. Aimee Cox (2015) builds on the premises set forth by both Gaunt and Brown in her text *Shapeshifters: Black Girls and the Choreography of Citizenship*. Cox makes clear her investment in understanding Black girls' politics of self-articulation, arguing that "Black girls should not be objects of critique and/or worry but should be seen as the vanguard of a political movement capable of building and creating what neoliberalism dehumanizes and destroys" (9). Cox focuses on Black girls' "place making" (41) as "self-making" (67) in order to show how "citizenship and everyday acts of political engagement undergird all aspects of Black girlhood" (19). Such theorizations of Black girlhood(s) reflect one of the key frameworks that shapes my discussion of Willow Smith: Black girls produce knowledge, and continued examination of Black girls' knowledge production is critical to the future of Black feminist epistemologies.

With widespread access to digital technologies, media production becomes an avenue through which Black girls develop and practice politics of self-articulation. While not focusing exclusively on Black girls, Mary Celeste Kearney (2006) discusses the dramatic changes that Internet technology has made in media production processes in *Girls Make Media*. Kearney presents girls' media production as linked to their subjective development and as a counter-discourse to problematic notions which imply that males and adults are the primary producers

of culture. Given these assertions, Kearney argues for increased investment in studying girls' media creations. Using a similar approach to girls as media-makers, Carla Stokes (2007) provides an analysis of Black girls' homepages in order to understand how they develop sexual scripts online, looking specifically at connections between hip-hop music consumption and the development of sexual scripts. Through a combination of textual analysis of homepage content and interviews with Black girls between the ages of 14 and 17, Stokes depicts digital space as experiential for Black girls (179) and highlights the need for more studies that explore how Black girls "interact with [and] produce media" (172). The analysis of Willow Smith's Instagram presented here advances these discussions of girl-produced media by outlining the specific functions, possibilities, and political significances of visibility within Black girls' media.

Theorizing how Black girls such as Willow Smith appropriate visual media toward their own political agendas requires revisiting key Black feminist debates concerning Black women's visual representation. Among "traditional" Black feminists, there is concern for how visual representation functions as a technology of othering that necessarily objectifies Black women and girls. In "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," Hortense Spillers (1987, 67) describes how "externally imposed meanings and uses" of the Black female body "translate into a potential for pornotroping," a term that Spillers uses to name the pleasure that comes from the spectacle of the objectified Black body. Pornotroping strips Black women of agency and power, thereby enabling the imposition of meaning onto Black women's bodies and diminishing Black women's opportunities for self-definition. Like Spillers, Patricia Hill Collins identifies the role of the visual in distorting Black women's realities and self-perceptions. According to Collins (2000), four controlling images—the mammy, the matriarch, the jezebel, and the sapphire—dominate visual representations of Black women. These controlling images not only reflect cultural meanings assigned to Black women's bodies but also shape how people see and treat Black women, which has material impact on Black women's lives. Both Spillers and Collins invoke processes of reclamation in order to combat the "misnaming" (Spillers 1987) of Black women (and girls) through visual representation. For Collins (2000, 83), reclamation of Black women's subjecthood necessarily happens *outside* of the visual field as she argues that literature "provides the most comprehensive view of Black women's struggles to form positive self-definitions in the face of denigrated images of Black womanhood." Spillers (1987, 79) also takes a linguistic approach, calling for a "a new *semantic* field/fold" to combat visual othering.

While Spillers and Collins present viable non-visual modes of countering objectification, the resistive strategies for girls differ from those of women, especially in our digital age. When it comes to "old" mainstream visual media such as television and film, elite white men still control these arenas for the most part, which means that despite the interventions of Black women writers and directors like Shonda Rhimes and Ava DuVernay, limited opportunities exist for Black girls to shape visual representation within these media forms. However, digital technologies available through the Internet and cell phone apps enable Black girls to create and define images. Black people have long been using digital spaces to counter mainstream exclusion and misrepresentation (Everett 2009). Scholars of digital blackness (Brock 2012; Clark 2014; Florini 2014; Johnson & Nunez 2015) highlight a range of examples of how Black digital media users (especially via Twitter and other social media platforms) produce culture in ways that disrupt notions of Black people as monolithic, passive consumers of media. As Meredith Clark (2014, 147) points out in her theory on Black Twitter, digital technologies allow "Black communicators to plead their own cause via digital media." This claim speaks to how



Black girls can employ visibility in digital spaces to assert themselves as “self” not “the Other.” Even though, “technological scripts [can re-objectify] marginalized bodies” (Hobson 2012, 94), the types of content produced through digital media apps constitute a different allowance for user participation than traditional television and film and therefore a different potential for Black girls to control their images.

These varying approaches to visual representation compel a deeper exploration of the distinctions between what feminist politics look like for Black women versus Black girls. For instance, Collins’ assertion of literature as a resistance to controlling images leaves little room for outlining resistive tools for Black girls because children do not often have the literary maturity of adults. However, exposure to digital tools has potential to make Black girls savvy when it comes to visibility and self-curation. In an age of digital (social) media, Black girls do not have to wait to be reflected in the dominant popular imaginary or unmirrored (O’Grady 1992) by a lack of (undistorted) representation. Instead, they can use visibility toward Black girl magic ends of creating. In this way, Black girls can both engage in and facilitate an oppositional gaze (hooks 1992) through digital media. Looking at how Black girls appropriate digital technologies forces us to grapple with how technological advancements and shifts in media access complicate theories that would automatically position Black girls as Other in visual representation, and the analysis of Willow Smith that follows pushes Black feminist visibility discourse in this direction.

### **Willow Smith’s Space-Making Practices**

Conversations of Black girlhood (and arguably Blackness in general) necessitate spatial analysis, and my approach to the spatial nature of Willow Smith’s employment of visibility draws heavily from the works of Katherine McKittrick and Ruth Nicole Brown. In *Demonic Grounds*, McKittrick (2006, 51) argues for the “alterability of space” and demonstrates the imbrication of processes of spatial production and identity construction. One of the key articulations of space that I apply to my reading of Willow Smith’s visual content comes from McKittrick’s concept of garreting, which she develops based on Hortense Spillers’ (1987) use of the term. McKittrick begins her theorization of garreting with Harriet Jacobs/Linda Brent’s description of the garret where she hid to escape her slave master, noting that Jacobs described the garret as both “a loophole of retreat” (37) and a place of confinement. These contradictions undergird McKittrick’s claim that “the garret can be conceptualized as usable paradoxical space” (42). While McKittrick cautions against displacing the material with the metaphorical, she expands the notion of garreting beyond a descriptor of Jacobs’ hiding place to include the restrictions that Black women face as a result of the very nature of their embodiment. Both Jacobs’ narrative and contemporary manifestations of garreting elucidate the ways in which Black women (and girls) exhibit transformative creativity in “the last place they thought of” (McKittrick 2006, 42).

While McKittrick’s discussion of Black women’s geographies certainly has relevance for Black girls, I do not wish to conflate Black womanhood and Black girlhood by assuming Black girls’ experiences directly mirror those of Black women. For this reason, Ruth Nicole Brown’s *Hear Our Truths* offers a useful text to read alongside McKittrick for engagement with Black girlhood spatialities in particular. In this text, Brown (2013) presents her work with a group of Black girls and women called SOLHOT, which stands for Saving Our Lives Hear Our Truths. Describing the driving principles of SOLHOT, Brown articulates Black girlhood as a “spatial intervention,” a site for space-making that is “collective and creative”

where “uncertainty and complexity motivate, and revolutionary action is the goal” (1). Brown’s acknowledgement of the need for Black girl spaces combats the pressure that Black girls face to be quiet and polite (Fordham 1993), put the lives of Black boys before their own well-being (Cox 2015), and uphold the strictest standards of respectability when it comes to sexuality (Stokes 2007). Such restrictions stem from “the ways Black girls are constructed by the intersection of heteronormative, patriarchal, racist, and sexist oppressive conditions as already, and in all ways, a problem to be solved” (Brown 2013, 103). This perception of Black girls often means that among adults in their lives “attention is geared toward controlling their mobility in a way that reinforces racist, classist, sexist notions about how young girls are supposed to act, particularly in urban public spaces” (Brown 2013, 103-4). Therefore, Black girls’ age adds a layer of disciplinarity to their navigation of space, and as Willow Smith demonstrates, appropriating the digital as a public space can be a way to push back against such limiting and proscriptive forces.

Willow Smith engages in space-making at multiple levels and subverts expectations about how Black girls should (dis)appear in public. One immediately noticeable feature of Smith’s Instagram account is the sheer breadth of material. With a little over 2,600 posts at the time of writing, Smith’s account showcases a range of photos, videos, and drawings. She experiments with various photographic features including psychedelic colors, dizzying filters, and sharp color contrasts. The variety within Smith’s Instagram posts creates a resistance to categorization, which challenges racist and sexist expectations about how Black girls should (not) take up space. Additionally, this difficulty in categorizing Smith’s visual style not only speaks to her own complexity but the fluidity of Black girlhood in general. Subjective fluidity has particular resonance for Black girls, like Smith, who occupy the liminal space between childhood and adulthood because it allows them to access the “liberatory potential” that emerges “when the limen is understood as a social state, [containing] both the multiplicity of the self and the possibility of structural critique” (Lugones 1990, 506). Therefore, inhabiting liminal spaces positions Black girls to shift and dissolve boundaries through their movement “within and across” (Lugones 1990, 507) their subjective multiplicities. Such movement is political because it functions to define Black girls’ terms of existence, and it illustrates Black girl magic through the creation of new subjectivities that defy the “logic” of the unified subject.

Willow Smith leverages liminality through challenging gendered behavioral norms. For instance, Smith subverts the expectation of politeness through a refusal to portray herself as perpetually pleasant. Even though she does post pictures of herself smiling and laughing, in many of her most popular pictures (i.e. most favorited) she does not smile. One picture that stands out as a testament to Smith’s “anti-pleasant” demeanor comes from a post she made during a photoshoot for *Teen Vogue*. Smith, invoking a sense of confidence and unapologetic existence, stands in what appears to be a studio or dressing room holding one arm across her body and the other arm raised, but with her fingers curled slightly instead of sticking straight up in the air. She wears a white shirt that has “Never underestimate the power of a woman” written in Black letters along with a short strand of pearls that hug her neck tightly. She does not smile, and she looks straight into the camera with her head tilted to the side in a confrontational stare/stance. She wears heavy black eyeliner on her bottom lid as well as *above* the top lid right underneath the eyebrow, an atypical place to wear eyeliner. This toying with the eyeliner demonstrates how Smith is playing *with* instead of playing *by* the rules. She knows that her eye makeup is not conventional, and her stance dares viewers to critique it. The pearls, which tend to have a certain currency of respectability, represent another way in which Smith plays



with the rules by creating a contradiction between the “respectable” pearls and her gothic eyeshadow and septum piercing. Not only does Smith push boundaries of respectability in this photograph, but her entire collection calls into question expectations about how girls should present themselves. In general, Black girls face increased pressure to be “nice” to combat the very material consequences (i.e. suspension from school, incarceration, and/or murder) of being perceived as having a bad attitude (Crenshaw et al. 2014; Morris 2016). While some might argue that Smith’s status as a celebrity allows her to escape the consequences that “everyday” Black girls would face by choosing to transgress gender norms or take up too much space (Morris 2007; Blake et al. 2010), class privilege does not automatically serve as a shield from gendered violence. Furthermore, while Smith may not face the possibility of being suspended or expelled from school, her celebrity status and hyper-public presence, particularly in the digital realm where many people maintain anonymity, might increase her susceptibility to other forms of violence such as cyber-bullying, stalking, and harassment. Ultimately, the political implications of Smith’s refusal to smile extend beyond her own personal decisions by exposing unrealistic expectations placed on Black girls and demanding approaches to Black girlhood(s) that do not penalize Black girls who refuse to uphold these standards.

In addition to manipulation of gestures and facial expression, Smith uses assemblages of fashion to break gender rules. For instance, in one popular picture, Smith wears a formal gown with a crown on her head, symbolizing traditional understandings of femininity. Simultaneously visible in the photo are printed tube socks and sneakers, which work to undermine this restrictive femininity. In yet another photo, Smith wears a green blazer with a light blue shirt and pink tie. Her makeup is minimal except for the thick black eyeliner that covers the bottom of her eyes and the area above the eyelid—the same style as the *Teen Vogue* picture. She invokes gender ambiguity by combining what’s considered traditionally masculine clothing with feminine makeup. She has a smirky, sly look on her face as if enticing the viewer/audience to “Let me be your Tyler Durden,” as the picture’s caption reads. The caption speaks to the significance of Smith’s gender-bending in this picture because Tyler Durden is a male character from *Fight Club*. Here, Smith blurs gender boundaries by appropriating a male persona whose violence and mania in *Fight Club* connote hyper-masculinity. Tied to Smith’s critique of girlhood femininity is also a visual “commentary” on age appropriateness, as many of her gender-bending photos have what could be read as a sexual undertone. For instance, in one of Smith’s many photos taken at the beach, she poses with one hand on top of her head, grasping her hair and the other arm resting on her knee. She has her legs open, with knees bent and a ukulele sitting directly in between her legs pointing straight up toward her chin. One cannot help but notice the phallic symbolism of the ukulele, especially given its placement in the photo. This picture, along with many others, in their very invocation of sexuality, forces audiences to confront not only the sexualization of Black girls but also the reality of Black girls defining their own burgeoning sexualities. Smith’s photographs function as reminders that she ultimately defines her body instead of letting outsiders determine that her pictures (and the behaviors they reflect) are too sexy or “too grown”—a colloquialism that Black adults, especially women, often use to describe Black girls who have transgressed the boundaries of “appropriate” girlhood. Black girls defining their own bodies falls within the purview of subjective negotiation and therefore constitutes a vital component of their politics of self-articulation.

Alongside the affective impact of Smith’s fashion, the way she positions herself within the visual content of her Instagram page is another method of space-making. Smith often stages

her photographs in such a way that her body takes up maximum space. In drawings, many of which Smith receives from fans, Smith's face always appears at the center of the drawing. Likewise, in selfies, regardless of the surrounding environment, Smith appears at the center. Some audiences might misconstrue this manner of posing as arrogance. However, since "the black female body functions as a site of excess in dominant visual culture and the public sphere at large" (Fleetwood 2011, 109), Smith's centering herself constitutes a radical act of asserting Black female importance, oftentimes within spaces—in the mountains, in the ocean on surfboards, and at wildlife reserves with animals—where Black girls allegedly do not go based on dominant representations of "the great outdoors" (Finney 2014). Stereotypes and misconceptions about Black girls' (lack of) participation in outdoor cultures can be contextualized within a broader history of spatial access and denial along racial lines. As Marcia Chatelain (2015) points out, the emergence of organizations such as the Girl Scouts and Camp Fire Girls coincided with the development of notions that positioned camping as a socializing technology for girls. Given the supposed beneficial role of camping in cultivating productive, feminine values, camping became yet another frontier in the battle for Black girls' equal access to the privileges of citizenship. The existence of Black branches of Camp Fire Girls and Girl Scouts demonstrates Black girls' interest in outdoor activities. Thus, the assumption that Black girls do not participate in outdoor cultures is not only incorrect, but it also ignores racial and socioeconomic factors that prevented (and oftentimes still prevent) many Black girls from adventuring outdoors. Willow Smith's photographs contradict misrepresentations of Black girls' relationship to the outdoors. Smith's act of centering herself implies a sense of belonging even/especially within these "unlikely" Black girl spaces. When Smith appears at the center of a photograph taken on the beach or in the forest, she uses visuality to say, "I belong here. I belong everywhere, and you will see me." To return to McKittrick's "alterability of space," Willow Smith not only uses her presence and staging to manipulate landscape, but also to alter the soundscape (2006, 138). Along with photographs and drawings, Smith posts videos of her musical performances on Instagram. In one of these videos, Smith manipulates space through digital means because she literally multiplies herself by using four different frames of her image with each frame containing a different contribution to a four-part harmony. Therefore, Smith's image and voice produce space through their expansion and layering. These acts of spatial manipulation exemplify Black girls' politics in terms of grappling with issues of citizenship, not necessarily in the sense of State recognition, but in the sense of claiming space(s) to enact a sense of belonging (Cohen 2004).

Finally, Willow Smith's Instagram account reflects Black girl space-making through the act of archiving. Smith has 1.6 million Instagram followers, which means that her visual content shows up in the media feeds of all these people. Smith's use of a mainstream platform like Instagram means her photographic and musical creations do not exist on the margins (neither metaphorically nor materially). Instead, they are public and highly visible, demonstrating how "black women's [and girls'] lives are underwritten by ongoing and innovative spatial practices that have always occurred, not on the margins, but right in the middle of our historically present landscape" (McKittrick 2006, 60). In this way, Smith not only uses digital media to create her own space(s) but also as a mechanism of inserting herself in others' space, which represents a subversion to erasures of Black girls. Archives are fraught with power dynamics, including who has the power to build the archive and who determines what becomes stored in the archive. Therefore, the act of self-archiving, or "storying the self" (Cruz 2013, 453) in which Smith engages has political value because it fits within "the struggle against becoming absented" (Cruz 2013, 456) that Black girls face as a part of their everyday experiences.

### **The Black Girl Magic Potential of Self-Curation**

Willow Smith's self-curation and self-archiving through Instagram function as a source for (re)conceptualizing frameworks of understanding how Black girls engage visibility and new media. Teenage girls often face a great deal of scrutiny regarding what they post online (Banet-Weiser 2014), and the same sexist norms that shape girls' movement through physical spaces spill over into digital spaces causing moral panics regarding girls' online behavior (Thiel-Stern 2014). While concerns about the impact of seemingly constant interfacing with technology on girls' health may be justified, we need useful approaches for grappling with the nuances of Black girls' (digital) subjectivities, and Willow Smith's visual texts provide one potential starting point for doing this work. Smith's Instagram archive speaks to the potential of digital self-curation as an avenue for Black girls to express themselves because such platforms allow Black girls to use the digital sphere as a means of narrative production through visibility. Narrative comprises a key component of Black feminist epistemologies (Collins 2000), and Black girls making spaces through creative, narrative expressions "resonates with a rhetoric of black girl empowerment" (Lindsey 2013, 30). By using digital media towards a means of production, Black girls can carry out the legacy of early Black feminists who understood the significance of Black women and girls producing culture on their own terms (Guy-Sheftall 1995; Cobb 2015). Along these lines, the digital expands the capacity for Black girls' "actively constructing meaning together as a political activity" (Cruz 2013, 449) because it allows for interactions among a wider range of people. For instance, communicating through comments on Instagram photos can be a way for Black girls to both offer support to each other and produce discourse. Additionally, processes of self-curation allow for the conceptualization of digital space as an extension of/ connection to physical space because cell phones and other digital mobile technologies have become so imbricated with everyday life. The visual content shared in digital space has layers of materiality (Sharma 2013), which reflects "how people use the camera in conjunction with other technologies to construct a complex set of relations to their local, transnational, and diasporic communities" (Thompson 2015, 23). For Black girls, both the (cell phone) camera itself and the ability to place one's visual content into digital space subvert the social codes that insist upon Black girls' silence and disappearance in public spaces. Even though digital spaces are surveilled, they can serve as alternative spaces where Black girls can stretch out, so to speak, in ways that might not be possible in certain physical spaces such as schools, churches, after-school programs, and other institutions that seek to mold Black girls into very specific types of feminine entities. Finally, self-curation in digital space provides opportunities to nurture and develop what Sarah Projansky (2014) describes as "alternative girlhoods." Projansky theorizes alternative girlhoods in opposition to a "can-do/at-risk dichotomy" (13) which praises certain girls for their ability to uphold normative standards of girlhood while simultaneously marking other girls as imperiled and more susceptible to "deviant" behavior. In some ways, Black girlhood(s) already constitute alternative girlhoods among hegemonic conceptions of the white, middle-class girl figure, and the digital can function as one tool to visibilize Black girls *as* girls and demonstrate the complexities of Black girlhood(s).

The digital is not without limitations. Surveillance remains one of the greatest concerns among social media users, and the potential consequences of this surveillance become intensified when thinking about minors (particularly Black girls) who already have vulnerable positionalities within most social situations they encounter. So-called privacy settings offer one

way to minimize surveillance, but these settings do not protect people from State operators (i.e. police and government agencies). However, the act of curation itself can undermine surveillance to a certain degree because curation involves choosing what one wants others to see. Therefore, despite the surveillance that occurs in digital spaces, “it is difficult not to be optimistic about the myriad ways youths of color today successfully appropriate digital media tools to...retrofit... ‘the digital public sphere’ to suit their own generational concerns and agendas” (Everett 2012, 148). While it is worth noting that Willow Smith’s parents are wealthy, which might have a great impact on the environments in which she stages her photographs, the fact that she uses Instagram, a free social media app, to share her visual expressions reiterates the fact that cell phone apps provide wide access to media-making technologies. Even though Smith’s class status does give her access to better technology and likely an assistant to manage her account, her manipulation of digital space could be imitated by anyone with a cell phone. Therefore, we should resist the temptation to panic when Black girls engage the digital because this space allows them to use visuality as a “site for imagining, re-imagining, and organiz[ing] new ways of existing” (Cobb 2015, 6) within increasingly violent, anti-Black spaces. While traditional Black feminist theories of visual representation lay important groundwork for naming and mitigating the impact of images that function to objectify Black women and girls, future research at the intersection of Black girlhood and visuality must push beyond consumptive frameworks of representation since digital technologies also enable Black girls to *produce* media. The interpretive approach to Black girls visuality presented here offers one method for engaging Black girls as media producers, but we need more research in which Black girls express their own perspectives on their visual creations and how (or whether) they perceive their cultural productions as intervening in dominant representations of Black girls.

### **Conclusion: Black Girl Magic Possibilities**

As digital technologies persist and evolve, we must continue exploring their impact on our lives. Willow Smith’s Instagram archive allows us to understand the materiality of digital space through making connections between Black girls’ subjectivities and their self-curation through digital apps. To return to Aimee Cox’s *Shapeshifters*, “Black girls’ presence changes the possibilities for what can occur in public and private spaces while also requiring us to see and understand these spaces differently” (2015, 26). Smith’s Instagram account demonstrates what it means to embody the hybrid identity of being a “prosumer” (coined by Alvin Toffler to combine producer and consumer), an identity that has become more relevant with the advent of free social media technologies. Digital spaces already blur the lines between public and private, and exploring digital archives like those curated by Black girls on Instagram helps to destabilize the (false) dichotomy between digital and physical as well as public and private because the archive becomes the material manifestation of digital space. Exposing the porosity of digital/physical borders operates as a generative force toward the development and articulation of Black girls’ politics. Using the digital to alter spaces creates one path toward Black girls living their girlhood(s) more expansively. My analysis of Willow Smith’s Instagram account demonstrates the importance of methodologies and pedagogies that account for the intricacies of Black girlhood(s). With a growing number of scholars, organizations, and research initiatives devoted to Black girlhood(s), we must design projects and curricula that approach Black girls as complex people equipped with knowledge(s) instead of viewing Black girls through a “civilizing mission” lens. By reading Willow Smith’s work as media production that simultaneously emerges from

and critiques popular culture, I present one example of a research methodology that uncovers, presents, and engages Black girls' self-articulation through accepting the value of Black girls' cultural production. Overall, Willow Smith's Instagram archive illustrates what might be possible when we move away from phobic approaches to digital technologies and explore Black girls' engagement with media from perspectives that seek to understand how the digital can be leveraged for Black girls' political participation and how Black girls conduct Black Girl Magic through using the digital to create and share knowledge.

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## **Straight Outta Erasure: Black Girl Magic Claps Back to the Hyperinvisibility of Black Women in *Straight Outta Compton***

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### **Abstract**

*Straight Outta Compton* stirred national and international interest as a biopic of one of hip-hop's most influential rap groups, NWA. While some joked that NWA stood for No Women Allowed, there is much truth to be seen in the incarnation of a grand narrative detailing the creation and eventual fame of the rap group without highlighting the women germane to the group's success. Using visibility politics and the rhetorical power of nostalgia as theoretical frameworks, the author coded the film for visibility, violence, and Black womanhood. Their results indicate that nostalgia serves as a conveyor belt for erasing Black women's narratives by replacing them with service positions that cater to male dominance, resulting in a cycle of hyperinvisibility. The author then used hip-hop feminism as a lens to analyze counter narratives told by women of color via social media like Twitter, blogs, and even a full length feature film by Michel'le. These Black Girl Magic clap backs are alternate truths situated within lived experience that paint a fuller nostalgic gesture towards misogynoir and intersectional power. The author concludes that without the performative possibility of social media's rhetorical power, audiences would not be as privy to counter narratives.

**Keywords:** *Straight Outta Compton*, erasure, hyperinvisibility, hip hop feminism, nostalgia

### **Introduction**

When the beat drops, you feel the twitch in those thigh muscles. The beginnings of a heel or toe tap trap you into the rhythm. Eventually the head starts bobbing and you are in a trance. Snapped back into the days of your youth, or your children's youth, or the memory of a time before you were birthed, but you wished you could have experienced.

The year is 1987. I am 6 years old. KDAY, a new radio station, emerges and my mom, because she is cool, tunes in every time we hop in the bright red, 1986 Nissan Sentra station wagon. The sound of the music is foreign yet familiar to my tiny ears. I am witnessing the birth of gangsta rap.

Gangsta rap was the backdrop of my childhood. I tried my hardest to understand the lyrical content, but without historical, social, and personal context,

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which I should not have in adolescence, I absorbed the rhythms. My brother and I would get lost in the idea of rap music. It made us feel tough, cool, connected, and powerful. So imagine my giddy excitement when I heard the news that a biopic would be released for the big screen. Nostalgia flooded my memory. I could feel the touch of my mother's skin on my tiny hands. I could see my brother's big smile and his LA Dodgers snapback hanging low over his eyes. I was transported to the backseat of that red station wagon, cruising up Crenshaw, taking a right on Imperial and finding our way home on 118<sup>th</sup> and Yukon. I saw myself walking to the corner store for Now & Laters, hot pickles, Frito pies, and bomb pops. I was right back in Inglewood, CA, riding my purple and white bike with sparkly tassels hanging from the handle bars over ramps carved in concrete sidewalks by the roots of overgrown trees trying to beat the street lights. Nostalgia, it is a helluva drug.

*Straight Outta Compton* was released in August of 2015 amid controversy. The people had questions, naturally, because we are stakeholders in the nostalgia of gangsta rap. The music was the soundtrack to many of our lives. We wondered: how would director F. Gary Gray balance the legacy of NWA as the creators of gangsta rap, alongside the historical and intersectional powers of politics, sexism, and representation? Would the film be an accurate depiction of the complexity of racism and sexism peppering the 80s and 90s? Would it engage in a dialogue alongside community criticisms of misogyny in hip-hop? Or would it succumb to nostalgic storytelling and paint NWA as heroes, while erasing the messiness of the times?

The purpose of this analysis is three-fold: 1) analyze the film for marked moments of visibility, invisibility and hyperinvisibility, 2) draw connections between visibility politics and nostalgia's rhetorical power in an effort to contextualize why and how erasure occurs in this specific context, and 3) locate how Black women used their own brand of Black Girl Magic in the form of mediated clap backs to address the invisibility of women in and beyond hip hop. Clapback is defined as a tactical and hostile response to a situation, entity, or comment that is meant to end a dispute with one fatal statement (Harge 2015; Edwards and Madison 2015). While its origins rest in hip hop and reference responding to a diss track or, more specifically, firing a gun back at an attacker, more recently, clapback has been used to reference a person responding to Internet trolling or ill-informed comments. While clap backs aren't specific to Black women, Black women have perfected the art of the clapback in digital and physical spaces. For examples, turn to Nicki Minaj's response to Miley Cyrus, The Daily Show's Jessica Williams, Rihanna's twitter feed, the beautifully provocative writings of the Crunk Feminist Collective, Sojourner Truth's famous question, "Aint I a woman?" or the many women of Black Twitter who dish out hilarious one-liners that shut everything down. Famous or not, Black women have used words to conquer rhetorical enemies and impending threats for centuries, channeling the everyday expression of Black girl magic in lived experiences.

In this three-fold analysis, each section builds on the previous section; thus, three theoretical frameworks organize this essay. In the first section, I use hyperinvisibility as a theoretical frame and qualitative content analysis to locate the specific moments of erasure in the film. In the second section, I use nostalgia to contextualize the historical and cultural structures that birthed the environment that perpetuates erasure within and beyond hip-hop. In the third section, I use hip-hop feminism and qualitative content analysis to illuminate the complex and nuanced ways Black women clapback at hip-hop specifically and societal structures generally.

Qualitative content analysis is the process through which researchers collect textual data in order to focus on issues of relevance to a particular social phenomenon, and yield

interpretations associated with each unit of analysis (Krippendorff 2004; Cooke-Jackson et al 2014). Qualitative content analysis serves as an ideal tool to explore the texts included in this study and their relevance to existing social structures like Black women's visibility in popular culture, Black women's use of social media to re-imagine their own narratives, and the nuanced ways in which nostalgia can be used to generate more complex narratives that do not result in erasure, but rather ideas for coping, surviving, and ultimately thriving.

### Visibility Politics

To render something visible is to give our sense of sight an experience (Brighenti 2010). But seeing is only a part of the equation, for how we see, what we see, and the frequency with which we see something matters. It is hard to imagine a time when we had to share space to see others, or "see the other," (Thompson 2005). We live in a world of mediated seeing, (Thompson 2005) where historical, cultural, political, and personal assumptions chaperone how we understand texts, people, and context. Who we see, how we see them, and how we often we see them guide what we decode when we experience an artifact, leading to invisibility, visibility, and hyperinvisibility. Invisibility occurs when there is a lack of mediated representation. Bodies are missing from narratives en masse, or represented in singular ways that deny human complexity (Johnson and Boylorn 2015). Visibility occurs when bodies are represented in media in ways that lead to a fuller understanding of the human experience (Johnson and Boylorn 2015). Representation occurs with a high frequency and complexity, resulting in the less likelihood that narratives lead to stereotypes.

Hyperinvisibility starts with hypervisibility, or stereotyping the body so much that the stereotypes become more visible, and thus believable (Petermon 2014; Johnson and Boylorn 2015). When a mediated image becomes hypervisible, that image begins to represent an entire group of people in mediated space or large forms where people do not have time to interact with others at the personal level. However, when we do interact with different others at the personal level, we can forgo these mass mediated images and see them for the complex individuals that they are. This is not the case for those who buy into hypervisible images at the interpersonal level. Bodies that are different become invisible in interpersonal interactions too, resulting in hyperinvisibility.

After 9/11, stereotypes of Muslims became so hypervisible, that Americans began treating Muslims, Arabs, or people who could potentially be identified as Muslims in discriminatory ways (Yomtoob 2013). Some failed to see Muslims as anything other than terrorists, resulting in systemic oppression, dehumanization, and exclusion. Another example exists in the folds of the Ferguson uprising. Much like Darren Wilson seeing only a superhuman, dangerous "thug". Michael Brown's body was both present (in the flesh) and absent, due to mediated representations of black masculinity, resulting in Wilson only seeing the stereotype (Johnson 2017). Instead of a human with complex emotions, behaviors, needs, and desires within a system of power, Michael Brown became hyperinvisible and Darren Wilson felt justified in shooting a perceived villainous monster. When bodies are marked absent and present simultaneously, it results in hyperinvisibility, or a space where bodies are marked generic and non-human (Johnson 2017).

When the single story renders bodies both hypervisible (we see the body all the time in its stereotyped form) and invisible (we fail to see the complex human standing before us), it creates a space of hyper-invisibility where the stereotyped body is so visible that we fail to see complexity. The real is replaced with fiction, and the fiction is so powerful it does not allow the

real to exist. Hyperinvisibility can explain the skewed representations of hyper-sexualized or angry Black women's bodies in media, as well as overly aggressive, toxic images of Black men that result in police brutality and murder. Once bodies are marked hyper-invisible, consumers tend to see those identities as not only true, but normal, viable, and expected, resulting in violent mediated and interpersonal interactions. Using these understandings, I coded *Straight Outta Compton* for moments of visibility, invisibility, hypervisibility, and hyperinvisibility for Black women characters.

### Visibility

Characters with visibility were complex women, were named in the film and had a purpose beyond being a tool for the male characters in the film. While no women in the film had a purpose that did not revolve around the main male characters, there were seven partially visible characters—characters who enact agency but only in ways connected to the male characters in the film—that take up less than 10 minutes of total screen time.

Dre's mother is partially visible. Her name is never spoken in the film; she is referred to as "Mom". She confronts Dre about failing to appear for a job interview, and comforts him at the funeral for her youngest son. LaVetta, Dre's girlfriend, is partially visible in the beginning of the film. She enacts agency when she arrives at the studio to break up with Dre and leave with their daughter. Ice Cube's mother is partially visible when she confronts the police about the mishandling her child during an altercation. We do not know her name either. Nicole, Dre's girlfriend, is partially visible when she turns down Dre for a sexual encounter, and forces him to recognize the potential in their courting by denying sex. Tomica, Easy-E's wife, is partially visible. She straightens Easy's accounts and contracts, locates the problematic account transactions, and consoles him on his deathbed. We see her grieve and flaunt her intelligence. Kim, Ice Cube's girlfriend and eventual wife, is also partially visible. She joins him when he negotiates with the record label, and offers support when Ice Cube chooses to leave the group and create his own act and label. Finally, the reporters in the press conference who ask questions are partially visible. They have careers as journalists and enact agency by asking tough questions. All of these women are partially visible because their roles revolve around the male characters in the film.

Who we see, how often we see them, and how we see them matter. The partially visible women in the film are all performing in service to the men in the film. They are never seen representing themselves or their own desires, feelings, or abilities. Instead, they comfort the men at a funeral, help them with their contracts, serve as "accounts", and raise their babies. There are three scenes in which women exercise agency, albeit still with respect to the men in their lives—when LaVetta decides to leave Dre on the side of the street with their daughter, when Dre's mother decides to kick Dre out of the house for not going to the interview she set up for him, and when Nicole chooses not to invite Dre up for a sexual encounter after their first date. The first two are very stereotypical encounters. Angry Black women forsaking their Black men as a result of being tired and fed up with toxic masculinity. The third scene is a nod to respectability politics and what it means to be a "good" woman, worthy of a husband, or the "queen/ho" dichotomy that requires women hang up their sexual desires for respect (Reid-Brinkley 2008). The countless other women in the film do not have names, unless they are punch lines, for instance the scene with Felicia and the infamous "Bye Felicia," or if the name is used for force, as in the scene with Tasha, when she is commanded to get Easy a beer in the very

beginning, and is also charged with hiding the drugs in the ceiling before she is plummeted to death by a tank. However, there are literally hundreds of other women in the film. Most notably dancing at a house party, a club, or a concert, this is hypervisibility.

### **Hypervisibility**

The audience witnesses 15 moments of hypervisibility throughout the entire film. Women populate spaces that are stereotypically over-sexualized and under-valued. Sexing, dancing, getting spanked, sitting in the background as background noise in the studio or at the club, performing the role of assistant or secretary without agency, performing those roles without a single speaking line or voice, inhabiting a scene without a purpose beyond serving the men in the scene. There are 15 scenes in the movie that feature this type of hypervisibility. While this is not exclusive to *Straight Outta Compton*, it does speak to the ways in which women are treated in interpersonal interactions within the film, which can be seen as hyperinvisibility, or the idea that is acceptable to treat the women in our interpersonal lives as stereotypes because the mediated stereotypes are so pervasive.

### **Invisibility**

There are nine key narratives missing from the story that mark a stream of invisibility. Dee Barnes' interaction with Dre, which ended in extreme physical violence in a public place. Michele Yo Yo, JJ Fad, Lady of Rage, Jewell and Tarrie B are not included in the film despite paying vital roles in NWA's history. JJ Fad were the first artists produced on Ruthless Records and produced two major hits. They generated the revenue that would legitimize NWA as a group and allow them to create more music that would eventually gain notoriety. Michelle' dated Dre for five years, they have a son together, and she produced three major hits, "Something in my Heart," "Turn off the Lights," and "No More Lies," which, if you listen to the lyrics paint a picture of a woman with agency who was done with Dre's mistreatment. Jewell is the voice of most of NWA and all of Dre's subsequent hits. You know her voice from "Woman to Woman," "Murder was the Case," "Thug Passion," and many more. She is not included in the film as a single on any of the tracks. Tarrie B was the label's first white female rapper, and arguably one of the first white female rappers in American history. She refused to work with Dre in 1990, so he physically assaulted her. Yoyo was one of Ice Cube's artists in the 1990s. She produced 15 singles, five albums of music, and was featured on 20 singles. She appeared in television shows and made major appearances. Yo Yo was the truth for a lot of women growing up listening to hip-hop, and her truth was absent. Lady of Rage needs no introduction. She was a one of the greatest female lyricists of the West Coast despite only producing one album and one mixtape. She managed to win the hearts and minds of many hip-hop heads, but not the producers, directors, and writers of *Straight Outta Compton*.

### **Hyperinvisibility**

Hyperinvisibility represents the realm of physical violence, discursive violence, and name calling as a result of extreme stereotyping. Women may or may not be physically present in the scene, but the language, actions, and interpersonal reactions render the women hyperinvisible. There are 11 moments of name calling, or speaking of women or the feminine form in foul ways using words like Bitches, Pussy, Ho, Faggot, etc. There are 18 moments in the film of hyperinvisibility, or using physical and discursive violence in interactions. For instance,



when Ice Cube throws the naked girl off of him to go fight, various song lyrics, conversations between people about forcing women to engage in sexual activity, the battering ram impaling Tasha's body, the ways in which the group deal with Felicia who we witness her sucking Easy E's penis in the bathroom before being forced out of the hotel in only underwear and left to deal with her extremely upset boyfriend while the words "Bye Felicia" garner a huge laugh from the audience. These moments capture the visceral effects of stereotyping Black women's bodies in ways that limit their purpose and function to servicing men and comedic punch lines.

In sum, this section points to the mass invisibility, hypervisibility, and hyperinvisibility in *Straight Outta Compton*. There are seven partially visible women, but they work in relationship to the men that star in the film. There are 15 scenes that stereotype women, rendering them hypervisible. There are nine women completely absent from the film as if their encounters do not matter, or, as director F Gary Gray says, are merely side stories despite their close connections to NWA's success. Twenty-nine scenes or mentions of women, that render them hyperinvisible, result in the idea that women are not only at your service, but at your leisure to fuck, kill, beat, or discursively assault. The next section examines the nuances of witnessing these moments of discursive and physical violence within the rhetorical power of nostalgia, and the societal pressures beyond hip-hop that create space for these narratives to exist.

### Nostalgia & Rhetorical Power

Nostalgia is culturally defined as a sentimental longing or wistful affection for the past, typically for a period or place with happy personal associations. While positive associations may ring true for some, nostalgia is a complex notion that exists within three dialectical tensions. Jennifer Delisle (2006) focuses on the tensions between experiential nostalgia and cultural nostalgia. Experiential nostalgia encompasses one's personal memories and experiences. Cultural nostalgia comprises collective memories and cultural myths. The tensions erupt when cultural narratives erase or misalign with personal experience. This occurs in particularly traumatic histories where collectives, institutions, and communities try to protect their legacies through creating positive nostalgic narratives that purport a particular image to save face, or rewrite history by writing out trauma.

Svetlana Boym (2002) focuses on the tension between restorative and reflective functions of nostalgia. Restorative nostalgia focuses on the past, whereas reflective nostalgia focuses on the lost, or an inability to recover the past. "Restorative nostalgia puts emphasis on *nostos* and proposes to rebuild the lost home and patch up the memory gaps. Reflective nostalgia dwells in *algia*, in longing and loss, the imperfect process of remembrance" (Boym 2002, 41). Boym argues that restorative nostalgics do not refer to their work as nostalgia, but as a project of truth. We witness these "truths" of restorative nostalgia in the total reconstruction of monuments, whereas one might witness reflective nostalgia in "ruins, the patina of time and history, in the dreams of another place or another time" (Boym 2002, 41).

A final tension focuses on survival of the past versus coping with the present. Jennifer Delisle (2006, 394) contends that, "nostalgia is not only a means of affirming survival of a past trauma, it can also be a means of coping with a present trauma." Past trauma can destroy our ability view ourselves positively or extract meaning from our current experiences; however, "by privileging the positive aspects of post-traumatic memory, the nostalgic refuses to be a victim" (Delisle 2006, 393). Nostalgia can create space for us to engage with trauma in order to heal, be a source of relief, or defy time to conflate the present with the past, which allows us to address

the needs of the present with a past where those needs may have been met (Delisle 2006).

These three tensions exist in remembering what is lost, what is past, what is personal, what is cultural, what was traumatic then, and what is traumatic now. While we may think of nostalgia as a positive feeling associated with a memory of past time, nostalgia is not always positive or affirming, and must find balance between and beyond these tensions.

Nostalgia and traumatic memory are not mutually exclusive; to argue that nostalgia and positive memory have an essential role in community-building is not to say that trauma should not also be remembered. Rather, nostalgia is a means of *completing* memory...Both the positive and negative elements of memory must be balanced so that the individual does not become lost in national narrative. (Delisle 2006, 399)

To create cultural products based in the past is to wield the rhetorical power of nostalgia, or the re-writing of personal and cultural memories that orient audiences to old and/or new perceptions (Shackel 2001). *Straight Outta Compton* garners potential in the retelling of a narrative closely connected to an overwhelming large population of people that can trace the origins and creation of hip hop and gangsta rap deep within their souls. Nostalgia creates the potential to allow people to “celebrate their love, dreams, and innocence as a means of subverting pervasive violence. It can enable audiences to deal with trauma, but refuses to let trauma define their lives. Nostalgia can allow them to give voice to their identities as individuals, as a part of a community with hope for a diverse but cohesive future” (Delisle 2006, 401). Released at the height of the Movement for Black Lives, *Straight Outta Compton*’s release was met with much anticipation and hope for a narrative that delivered the positive image of pop-culture resistance, while also engaging the nuances of patriarchy and sexuality. The rhetorical power of *Straight Outta Compton* rested in the possibility of drafting narratives that allow the simultaneous reinvention of a racist and resistant past, a sexist and agentic past, and a deeply personal and deeply cultural past. *Straight Outta Compton* failed.

*Straight Outta Compton* failed to wield the rhetorical power of nostalgia because it lacked definitive balance. It failed to wrestle with the three tensions in productive ways that allowed for narratives to generate a sense of nostalgia that offered agency to the bodies present and the bodies witnessing the production. *Straight Outta Compton* relied on cultural and restorative nostalgia associated with the survival of a past full of resistance to systemic racism. We can see this play out beyond the theatre when the hashtag #OscarsSoWhite trended on Twitter. The hashtag was created by April Reign during the Oscar nominee announcements when she noted the lack of diversity. With a single tweet that read, “#OscarsSoWhite they asked to touch my hair,” she forged a path for twitter users to question Hollywood’s long history of erasure (Reign 2015). A year later, when *Straight Outta Compton* was in the running for a Academy Award, people immediately took notice of the irony that a movie illuminating the racial tensions, censorship, and erasure that NWA so beautifully challenged was once again erased from the master narratives. Black music, Black bodies, and Black stories were just as absent from historical representations as they are now with current representation. Tweets reflected on the lack of diversity in the Oscars, asking “Usual racial questions will arise: #StraightOuttaCompton in screenplay but not best picture; lack of diversity in acting nominees” (Heldenfels 2015). Jayda Pinkett Smith offered her responses when she tweets,

“At the Oscars...people of color are always welcomed to give out awards...even entertain, but we are rarely recognized for our artistic accomplishments. Should people of color refrain from participating all together? People can only treat us in the way in which we allow. With much respect in the midst of deep disappointment. J” (Pinkett Smith 2015).

Smith’s sentiments are echoed in the comment from another Twitter user who writes, “They put a scene from #StraightOuttaCompton on the #Oscars promotion commercial. That’s a start!” (J.X. 2015). The irony in our ability to entertain but not be acknowledged for accomplishing artistic feats is not lost here.

Despite igniting a nostalgic conversation about systemic racism and police brutality at the height of the Movement for Black Lives where police brutality ends all too often in murder, *Straight Outta Compton* failed to ease the tensions between the dialectics. It failed to include the personal histories of nostalgia where women can be agents of their complex lives, including sexual agency. It failed to offer a space for reflective nostalgia where women could mourn the loss of their narratives within the cultural discourse because the discourse centers the narratives of men. *Straight Outta Compton* failed to offer women’s counter narratives that attest to their rightful place in hip-hop’s history amongst the boys as resisters of sexism and misogyny in addition to systemic racism. Furthermore, *Straight Outta Compton* failed to create a narrative where women could use their personal and reflective elements to not only look back on a traumatic past filled with sexism and misogyny, but also cope with the present trauma of being a Black woman in America standing at the intersections of systemic racism, sexism, and sexual repression.

When the desire for a positive nostalgic experience supersedes a proclivity for truth, social change, or the willingness to forgo self-serving bias, we are met with erasure. But there is irony in the use of music to re-create the nostalgic moment. As Lucia (2002) notes, nostalgia and memory work together to re-create an imaginary time and place. “Music resuscitates a whole climate of memory...[and] memories are embedded in music as it was rather than is” (Lucia 2002, 128). The music re-ignites the memories, both personal and cultural, that illuminate the past in ways that force us to see a more complex truth. What is erased deliberately from the film and noted as a “side story” (Kennedy 2015), is alive and well in the music. The voices, bodies, and lyrical content allow us to sit with a different story. “Music’s agency, through the uses of memory, [is to] both reflect and construct a temporary collective identity in the past” (Lucia 2002, 140). The nostalgic elements in *Straight Outta Compton* rely on music to recreate the kinesthetic presence of a time and place full of triumph, success, and goodness. Unfortunately, the music, the scenes, and the narratives explicitly erased women and their complex connections to hip hop from the story. However, where *Straight Outta Compton* failed, hip-hop feminism and Black Girl Magic thrived in the superb use of film and social media to rewrite the narratives erased from the film.

### **Hip Hop Feminism**

A hip-hop feminist is more than just someone who likes to listen to rap music and feels conflicted about it. A hip-hop feminist is someone who is immersed in hip-hop culture and experiences hip hop as a way of life. Hip-hop as a culture, in turn, influences her worldview or approach to life (Pough 2007, 82).

An extension of Black feminism, but rooted in the political and cultural sensibilities of hip-hop, hip-hop feminism is grounded in the lived experiences of women who can use their hip-hop sensibilities to offer a more nuanced and complex reading of cultural phenomena. As Robin Roberts (1994, 256) contends, it is worth studying women's voices in hip-hop because "it raises (without resolving) issues of gender and race, and it refutes the prevailing notions of certain popular culture forms as inherently misogynistic and racist."

Shifting away from binary narratives that paint hip-hop as the sole creator and contributor of misogynistic narratives, hip hop feminists tell their truths as best as possible from their vantage points and spectrums (Pough 2007).

What [hip-hop] highlights to me is a real need for hip-hop feminism to be engaged with *all* aspects of black girls' lives—we don't want to be accused of being irrelevant to young black women in the ways that some of us have categorized academic black feminism. It makes no sense to pick and choose images and the artists who create the images and lyrics by deeming some negative and some positive, all the while creating false dichotomies (Pough 2007, 94).

Recognizing that we cannot tell a single story of every Black girl, Joan Morgan reminds us that our truth lives in our cumulative voices when we "fill in the breaks, provide the remixes, and rework the choruses" (1999, 26). It takes all of us to build the narrative with the complexity that it deserves. What this analysis does is create space to view how Black women have used their voices, digital platforms, and resources to fill in the blanks created by the film's erasure as a direct response to hyperinvisibility. These women responded to *Straight Outta Compton's* cultural nostalgia with a reflective nostalgia that asks us to be honest about survival and coping within and beyond hip hop.

Pough (2007) argues that a hip hop feminist literacy would allow us to offer more nuanced critiques of sexism and misogyny without simply blaming hip hop but locating the larger social culture within which it is embedded. It is not only about calling out misogyny in hip hop, it is about using hip hop feminism as a theoretical lens to locate where, how, and why misogyny, and specifically misogynoir, exists before hip hop became a striking reflection of it. As Bettina Love brilliantly states, Black feminism provides the tools to critique hip-hop's patriarchal power; hip-hop feminism creates room to find the pleasure beyond and within that critique. Shania Jamila (2012, 392) echoes this sentiment when she says, "As women of the hip-hop generation we need a feminist consciousness that allows us to examine how representations and images can be simultaneously empowering and problematic." This essay attempts to do just that by centering the voices of those erased from the film, but who are still very present in hip-hop, still very relevant to the story, and capable of embracing the problematic along with the possible. As Pough (2007) contends, the goals are to both situate hip-hop within particular contexts as we call out misogyny while simultaneously embracing the nuances of our own participation and embodiment.

Embracing the nuances of our own participation and embodiment can be evidenced in queer Black feminism. As Clay (2008, 158) suggests, "queer women of color construct new meanings of text and become active consumers who change the context of sexuality and masculinity." Much like my responses to Jay-Z and Pharell's "I Just Wanna Love you," my body could navigate multiple spaces of pleasure, power, desire, and agency simultaneously.

Women are not just passive consumers of media; sometimes we use and exploit men and other women in the same fashion that hip-hop exploits us. By exposing the intersections of critical consumption, we bring to the light the dynamic ways our intersectional identities interact with media (Johnson 2014, 9).

Hip-hop feminism and queer Black feminism fully engage the body as a site of resistance and pleasure, simultaneously.

Simply defined, hip hop feminism seeks to examine rap music and culture through a Black feminist lens that questions the misogyny and sexism within the art form but recognizes the sexual agency of women who utilize the culture to express themselves and their sexual desires (Love 2012, 23).

Just because patriarchy gave Black men the freedom to mark hip-hop as a patriarchal space designated for their bodies and issues, does not mean Black queer, trans\* and nontrans women cannot reclaim their pleasure principles as sites of resistance within and outside of the movement.

To fully re-imagine what it means to embrace our complex participation in hip-hop as we analyze it, we must be acutely aware of radical inclusion, especially around issues of objectification and representation. “The questions surrounding objectification have become complicated in important ways. No longer can we make claims about what is happening to the women in the videos without complicating the discussion by adding *their* voices” (Pough 2007, 83). One of the more popular aspects of the conversation is how executives choose to objectify and represent women’s bodies, which is entirely different from how women choose to represent themselves fully and sexually (Pough 2007). Previously drawn lines between objectification and representation do not take into consideration the grey areas of desire, pleasure, and power. Instead, we dismiss women as agents and allow mediated representations to speak on women’s behalf. As if that is not dire enough, “hip-hop video becomes more than just a music video. The impact of these videos on women of color is vast. Hip-hop music videos are spreading representations of U.S. women of color around the globe” (Pough 2007, 83). And while these videos are not the total sum of hip-hop, they exist and we must interrogate them (Pough 2007). “And when we do, we need to add to the mix the voices, stories, and reasons these women give for participating in the objectification” (Pough 2007, 85).

Garner (2012) suggests that there needs to be a bidirectional relationship between hip-hop and Black girls. “The ways in which black girls are excluded from the conversation regarding hip-hop would suggest that there is only a top-down relationship, where Hip Hop only (negatively) influences black girls” (Garner 2012, 232). Women in hip-hop are as complex as the beats, lyrics, and hooks we find our heads bobbing to. Just like a perfectly sampled musical pastiche, there are layers upon layers of participation and performance. Women in hip-hop are complex (Johnson 2014; Garner 2012; Brown 2008; Morgan 1999). What is problematic about hegemonic portrayals of nostalgic hip-hop is how it erases the ease with which hip-hop feminists can love, jam, fuck, clap back, embrace, and shame all in one bar. What is ultimately erased is not our respectability—it is our complexity. In this reading of *Straight Outta Compton*, I dare not argue that the film should take away our sexuality, that is another form of assault on our bodies. Instead, it should think more complexly about what a nostalgic hip-hop moment



for women might look like, or better yet, just ask us to show you and watch us werk. A hip-hop feminist reading of *Straight Outta Compton* locates the voices and bodies that watch, respond, and engage. It listens to the nuances laced in a clean clap back.

### **Hip-Hop Feminists Speak/Tweet/Remix**

While *Straight Outta Compton* regulated Black women to service roles and as the recipients of physical and discursive violence, Black women clapped back! In their Black girl magical brilliance, Black women used social media to disrupt narratives that assume that they are passive consumers of stories told by them but about us. Black women showed that complexity looks like the support *and* criticism of *Straight Outta Compton* while using their own lived experiences to offer evidence of critical and complex participation. The complexity of objectification and representation has already been brilliantly explored by Black feminist and hip-hop feminist scholars and point to the grey boundary beyond objectification that blends into agency, self-representation, pleasure, complicit engagement with purpose, and power. For examples, see the work of Margaret Hunter (2011), Murali Balaji (2010), Jasmine Ross and Nicole Coleman (2011), Roni Armstead (2007), Dionne Stephens and Layli Phillips (2003), and Aisha Durham, Brittney Cooper, and Susana Morris (2013). Instead of focusing on the fact that women may have explicitly enjoyed playing the roles they played in the making of *Straight Outta Compton*, I focus on two specific Black Girl Magic clap backs courtesy of Dee Barnes and Michel'le.

Black Girl Magic is the digital and real representation of Black women who are unapologetic in their blackness and womanhood. It is the encompassing act of publicly loving yourself in world that does not create space for your love to exist. If loving yourself in a world that does not love you is a political act of defiance, then Black girl magic is the public display of political disruption and resistance. It is a political act of continual clapping back in an environment that chooses to erase and dehumanize Black women's bodies. Dee Barnes and Michel'le chose to use their bodies, words, resources, and aesthetic sensibilities to intentionally respond in unique, artistic ways, to the erasure, mistruths, and revisions created by *Straight Outta Compton*. They both saw an opportunity to insert their own clap backs in the form of a blog, feature film, and interview while holding the film producers accountable, questioning master narratives around domestic abuse, and exercising agency over the way their stories were packaged and produced. These acts were radical acts of self-love broadcasted as self-protection and self-advocacy. I now turn to these clapbacks.

### **Dee Barnes**

Following a private pre-screening of *Strait Outta Compton*, Dee Barnes chose to reinsert her body and the bodies of several other women into the narrative in an exclusive blog she published on *Gawker* (Barnes 2015). She did so by positioning herself as a survivor with agency, and paying careful attention to both the moments of erasure as well as the motivations pushing those moments. She begins detailing her own experiences with law enforcement and police brutality, connecting the nostalgia for NWA's passion against racism and policing to her own experiences. She then goes on to push back against the many voices who were upset regarding her missing narrative in the film. She states that she was happy the movie excluded an explicit scene of Dr. Dre physically abusing her in a club along with the other women he abused for various reasons when she writes, "That event isn't depicted in *Straight Outta Compton*, but



I don't think it should have been, either. The truth is too ugly for a general audience. I didn't want to see a depiction of me getting beat up, just like I didn't want to see a depiction of Dre beating up Michel'le, his one-time girlfriend who recently summed up their relationship this way: 'I was just a quiet girlfriend who got beat on and told to sit down and shut up'" (Barnes 2015). She goes on to say "But what should have been addressed is that it occurred... Like many of the women that knew and worked with N.W.A., I found myself a casualty of *Straight Outta Compton's* revisionist history" (Barnes 2015). What Barnes enacts in this passage is a form of agency that complicates what it means to balance telling a story and memorializing an event in a film alongside the need to avoid erasure through a revision of history.

It is this revisionist history that stands out to both Barnes and I. NWA, or namely Dre and F Gary Gray were more invested in telling a story that would allow them to be "hard" and "good" guys simultaneously. The story primarily erased most of Dre's past wrong doings, but Dre is the producer. It only makes sense that he would choose to tell a story that supported his perception of his legacy. And for him, the legacy of being hard and good could not emerge from a narrative of physically abusing women. So instead, Gray and Dre erased those narratives. However, Dee Barnes creates space to wrestle with misogyny, hip-hop, revisionist histories, erasure, and storytelling by responding to the call and publishing a blog that garnered 2.36 million viewers. There is power in the narrative. There is power in forgetting. There is power in choosing to tell your own stories the way you see fit. And although Dee Barnes might have the most painful memory attached to the nostalgia of gangsta rap in the form of migraines (Barnes 2015), her story matters. And she chose to tell it in a way that complicates what it means to be hard, visible, and authentic in gangsta rap. As she writes,

In rap, authenticity matters, and gangsta rap has always pushed boundaries beyond what's comfortable with hardcore rhymes that are supposed to present accounts of the street's harsh realities (though N.W.A. shared plenty of fantasies, as well). The biggest problem with *Straight Outta Compton* is that it ignores several of N.W.A.'s own harsh realities. That's not gangsta, it's not personal, it's just business (Barnes 2015, n.p.).

"Cube always said it: You can make five different N.W.A. movies. We made the one we wanted to make" (Kennedy 2015).

### **Michel'le**

After watching her own story ignored in *Straight Outta Compton*, Michel'le chose to reinsert her body and voice into the narrative in the form of a Lifetime biopic called *Surviving Compton: Dre, Suge and Michel'le*. Much like Ice Cube, she made the movie she wanted to make, and centered her body (Surviving Compton 2016). In *Surviving Compton*, Michel'le narrates her own story on camera, with re-enactment scenes to fill in details and bring her experiences to life. Michel'le acting as the sole narrator enacts a particular kind of agency that lends credibility to the story. She is not just a side actor or behind the scenes person. She *is* the voice of the movie and her truth, which is illustrated beautifully in the very beginning as she pulls the parental advisory sticker from her mouth as a visual representation of unleashing what is hidden in *Straight Outta Compton*. Michel'le chose to tell a story that was much more complex than the other women in *Straight Outta Compton*, focusing on her life before N.W.A., the cognitive dissonance she experiences while acclimating to their lifestyle, her reliance on

drugs and alcohol to numb the pain, and the complexity of staying in an abusive relationship. The movie acts as a performative iteration of hip-hop feminism that centers the complex lives of women in hip-hop.

In an interview with Wendy Williams, Michel'le performed her own brand of Black Girl Magic with brilliant clap backs, poignant questions, and thoughtful responses that mimic the complexity of women in hip-hop. She disclosed her motivation for producing *Surviving Compton* by including the countless women who pointed to the possibility of visibility when she states, "I didn't want to do this movie. I think when I was absent from their movie, the people started talking, and they made the opportunity visible." When Wendy Williams asks her why she chose to stay and didn't leave Dr. Dre and the abusive relationship, Michel'le beautifully clapsback when she retorts, "Why didn't Dre leave too. Before he hit me. Why didn't he leave? Why do you think men don't just walk away?" Williams could not answer that question and the audience could not respond. This is an extremely important question that not only shifts the onus onto the abuser, but also magnifies how sexist language works to erase abuser accountability. When Wendy Williams asks about the lack of evidence because Michel'le chose not to call the police, she responds that there are testimonies. That people can use the power of their voice and bear witness to what happened. Williams goes on to ask about her current relationship with Dr. Dre and Suge Knight. Michel'le responds, "We have the best relationship; we don't have one." When asked about the kind of music she is doing now, she responded, "HAPPY MUSIC!"

While the interview and the movie disclose a more complex narrative of women in hip-hop, it is not a perfect representation. It is a counter narrative that revolves around what was missing from *Straight Outta Compton*. What movie does Michel'le produce when she chooses to create a film based on her own life, not the life that revolves around NWA, responding to NWA, or writing the wrongs that *Straight Outta Compton* created by telling a skewed narrative?

### Discussion

While *Straight Outta Compton* rendered the bodies and narratives of Black women invisible or stereotypical, and overly relied on cultural and reflective nostalgia to represent a biased version of history, Black women clapped back and inserted their own narratives via social media and film. Hip-Hop feminism focuses on examining the complexity of Black women and girls across nostalgic tensions. Hip-Hop feminists focus on the experiential and cultural in that it privileges personal experiences alongside narratives of larger cultural systems. Hip-Hop feminists reflect and restore, carefully balancing the complexity of truth telling. Hip-Hop feminists also focus on survival and coping, paving a way for a future of Black Girl Magic that celebrates survival as a means of teaching us to cope in the now. As Ruth Nicole Brown and Chamara Jewel Kwakye eloquently write,

Our use of hip-hop feminism is less waxing nostalgic of a "Hip Hop golden era" where women were included and lyrics were less derogatory, or about how traditional modes of feminisms consistently forget about race, class, and sexuality as inextricably linked to feminism. Our use of hip hop feminist pedagogy is more about hearing us and seeing us simultaneously; seeing us as human beings ever complex and listening to the embodied knowledge from which we make ourselves known, the two things that rarely happen in traditional conversations and discourse on hip hop, feminism, and education (2012, 5).

As we continue creating and interacting with hip-hop's past, present and future, this essay asks

us to engage in revision that holds true to restorative power and reflection, to surviving and coping with past and current trauma, and to the personal and the cultural. We have to create characters that are complex and tell more than the single story. We have to insert our voices over and over and over again so that we may begin to imagine a world where black women and girls matter.

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## #IfIDieInPoliceCustody: Neo-Abolitionism, New Social Media, and Queering the Politics of Respectability

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### Abstract

An exploration of the connections between nineteenth-century post-emancipation Black women's activism and their twenty-first-century counterparts in the Movement for Black Lives, this paper insists on the centrality of abolitionism to both. The politics of respectability that emerged as a strategy for the first iteration of abolitionism evolved during the women's and civil rights movements of the twentieth century. Given its genealogy relies upon predetermined assumptions regarding gender and sexuality, respectability remains a hurdle for twenty-first-century abolitionist projects namely because it tends to render invisible the political contributions of Black women and girls to the ongoing transformation away from *herrenvolk* to abolition democracy. Borrowing from political theorist Cristina Beltrán, I reflect on these neo-abolitionist Black women's contributions to a "queer vision of democracy." Black women in their political struggle for self-expression develop new tools for exposing assumed social divisions that exploit differences and shore up interpersonal and structural forms of racism and sexism. The new social media intervention of hash-tagging is one such tool. Paying specific attention to the hashtag #IfIDieInPoliceCustody, Black women challenge the assumptions of respectability. Drawing together their politics of self-expression and "a queer vision of democracy," Black women's political thought and practice extends the necessary project of dismantling whiteness for the American democratic imaginary.

**Keywords:** abolition democracy, neoliberalism, iterability, Black women's political activism, Black Counterpublic

### Introduction

On July 10, 2015, Sandra Bland was arrested in Waller County, Texas while en route to a new job at her alma mater, Prairie View A&M University. A police officer pulled her over for failing to signal a lane change. After issuing the ticket, which typically indicates the conclusion of such a traffic stop, he asked her to put out a cigarette. When voicing suspicion over the legality of the request, the officer ordered Bland out of her personal vehicle. Again, refusing to comply, the officer pointed a Taser at Bland and threatened her with "I will light you up!" Thrown to the ground, handcuffed, and detained, the Department of Public Safety (DPS) charged Bland with assaulting a public servant. Three days later she was found dead in her jail cell.

Officially ruled a suicide by hanging, family and friends raised questions as to why a mere traffic violation would result in a multi-day jail captivity and death. With suspicion over the integrity of the initially released dash-cam footage of Bland's arrest, users took to various platforms to protest the treatment Bland received.

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Erupting on social media, the hashtag #IfIDieInPoliceCustody began to trend. The *LA Times* described it as a “somber collection of last words” by those who may likely be found dead under similar circumstances (Thomas 2015a); however, its significance extends beyond a mere archival function towards a radical political agenda. Attentive to the historical iconography that aligns Bland’s disruptive demeanor with her predecessors like Ida B. Wells and Rosa Parks, young Black women employ the hashtag from a site of fugitivity. By fugitivity, I mean the epistemological tradition developed by those who refused enslavement, catapulted the movement of the Underground Railroad, and ultimately overthrew slave-power in the United States (Robinson 1997, 31). Underlying these acts in the historical record, a logic persists that transcends the dichotomies that emerged during Enlightenment to justify and expand slavery. This logic defies both the claim that Blacks lacked humanity and that they deserved, benefited, and willfully accepted their own enslavement. By detaching themselves from the spaces and people that confined them, combined with an overwhelming desire to not return nor be recognized through those spaces/persons, their collective refusal cannot be summed up as merely a “critique” of white supremacy (Harney and Moten 2013, 28). Applying this epistemological tradition to Black women’s political activism in and through the hashtag #IfIDieInPoliceCustody, I insist that the constant movement of these women’s bodies and the hashtag itself disrupts anti-Black stereotypes, bypasses those institutional barriers upheld by the traditional gatekeepers of the Black politics (read cis-gendered, heterosexual, middle-class and elite Black men), and opens the narrow and implicitly white prevailing notion of humanity in the American colonial trajectory based on settling.

A combination of individual expression, activist organization, and twenty-first-century public sphere construction, #IfIDieInPoliceCustody insists the criminal justice system is broken. Forgoing the contextual evidence for African Americans’ skepticism of the official accounts of police killings and deaths of Black people in their custody, some Americans whose interactions with the police do not reflect this reality may read the messages accompanying this hashtag as premature. Sociologist Nikita Carney (2016) provides empirical analysis of this trend when attending to the “contested signs” of #AllLivesMatter versus #BlackLivesMatter in what she sees as an emerging social media public sphere. Carney argues “that our position within complex systems of oppression affect what we believe to be ‘fact’ in the national discourse about police violence against people of color” (2016, 182).

Others may highlight the persistence of white skin privilege in the deployment of #IfIDieInPoliceCustody in maintaining this divide, but one specific comment regarding Bland’s death from Kerry McLean, a human rights lawyer in New York City, pushes me to re-evaluate a tradition adopted by the Black community that aimed to counter that privilege – the politics of respectability. McLean said, “There have been [instances] of Blacks mysteriously dying while in police custody for generations. Sandra Bland’s death is a reminder for some that even if you are a woman, or upwardly mobile, ultimately all that matters to the police is your Blackness. Respectability will not save you” (quoted in Prupis 2015). In this reflection, Bland appears to be just another Black person subjected to police oppression, but perhaps more poignantly for those who took up #IfIDieInPoliceCustody was her activist status within the Black Lives Matter movement (hereafter BLM). As conveyed in her self-produced series of videos known as #SandySpeaks (Nathan 2016), Bland’s activism was an blend of acceptance of her beauty, her intelligence, and even her own limitations all the while encouraging others to embrace themselves in their entire humanity and respect their limitations as part of that humanity. She did

not curtail her political subjectivity by those tropes reserved for “respectable” Black women; furthermore, it is not clear that by embracing respectability would have saved her life. It is through this paradox that I explore the politics of respectability and its usefulness for democratic theory in this essay.

The politics of respectability became a strategy adopted mainly by middle-class Blacks and emerged from the intersection of various social movements as they vied to steer the American polity towards political and social equality for Black people as well as women. Coined by Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, it “equated public behavior with individual self-respect and with the advancement of African Americans as a group” (1994, 14). Analyzing the women’s club movement, Higginbotham located its emergence as a social strategy for the promotion of the Black community at the turn of the twentieth century; however, historical scholarship attending to the dual and overlapping social reconfigurations of race and gender as a result of the abolitionist movement and the backlash against its partial institutionalization during Reconstruction suggest an earlier genealogy of the politics of respectability placing its development in the nineteenth century (Farmer-Kaiser 2010; White 2001).

This essay compares Black women’s activism in response to two cases of the policing of their bodies while in transit - Sandra Bland in the twenty-first century and Black women abolitionists facing streetcar segregation in nineteenth-century Philadelphia, PA. Using such a comparative historical approach, I consider the following questions to think about Black women’s political activism beyond, and not merely in reaction to, respectability:

- To what extent, if at all, did respectability politics constrain, enable, and shape Black women’s post-emancipation abolitionist activism in the nineteenth century?
- How are Black girls and women today effective, if at all, in dealing with the legacy of respectability politics?
- What role, if any, does their use of new social media aid in their endeavors?

By theorizing the practice of hash-tagging as a contemporary politics of self-expression through the lens of queer of color critique, I show how Black women reclaim their bodily and intellectual integrity that defined their everyday lives during slave captivity and lingers on in the politics of respectability (Hartman 1997). In so doing, this hashtag, and hash-tagging more generally, can be read as a mode of political expression uniquely suited to queer Black feminist organizing in the contemporary moment.

In section one, I focus on the Reconstruction era, W. E. B. Du Bois’s theory of abolition democracy, and their import for the genealogy of respectability. Here I emphasize the experiences of Black abolitionist women in their organizational efforts against Philadelphia’s streetcar segregation during the 1860s. In doing so, I aim to add nineteenth-century Black female abolitionists’ political struggles during the Civil War and Reconstruction era to the genealogy of the politics of respectability all the while reorienting the archive of the Black counter-public in Philadelphia, which emerged during the various mobilizations by anti-slavery agitators (P. S. Foner 1973; Silcox 1997; Diemer 2009), towards Black women’s contributions.

In section two, I apply queer of color critique to understand the disruption of respectability in our current neoliberal moment. Drawing on the politics of self-expression inherent to the abolition projects exemplified in the first section, the second turns to twenty-first-century Black female activists as they continue to experience the legacies of respectability. Here

I analyze various media sources accessed by Black women to engage with and amplify the case of Sandra Bland. I borrow from Cristina Beltrán's analysis of DREAM activists to understand how these women could be read as advancing a "queer vision of democracy" (2014). Beltrán defines this vision as "a participatory politics that rejects secrecy in favor of more aggressive forms of nonconformist visibility, voice, and protest" (247). Using the insights from queer of color critique, I suggest that Black women's presence and centrality to BLM is less an issue of "coming out"; rather, BLM's attention to the centrality of the police in our neoliberal society pushes back against the ideology of respectability that renders police brutality "reasonable" and their victims unruly.

In section three, my analysis centers on the practice of hash-tagging as it relates to discursive power, the trajectory of democracy via social media platforms, and the ongoing critique of white hetero-patriarchy. I use Jacques Derrida's concept of iterability (1988) to assess the political potential of Black women's use of social media to reconstitute the Black counterpublic that was destroyed and/or co-opted by the neoliberal turn (Dawson 1994; Harvey 2008; Spence 2015; Taylor 2016). Using Jack Halberstam's formulation of fugitivity to combine the queer of color critique with digital democracy, I suggest that hash-tagging deploys a kind of fugitivity that defies the tradition of settler-colonial agency (2013, 11). It allows democratic subjects their humanity rather than punish them for their imperfections (e.g. the politics of respectability). Put differently, #IfIDieInPoliceCustody as well as #BlackLivesMatter insist that those among us interpellated by the white-settler-colonial-hetero-patriarchal-prison state are not settling for predetermined expectations of neoliberal calculation, media overdetermination, or the sovereign power of death. This is what I mean by Black women's use of hash-tagging as laying the groundwork for a politics of respect as opposed to reinforcing a politics of respectability.

I conclude by bringing together another hashtag that rose to popularity in the same year of #IfIDieInPoliceCustody and is the topic of this special edition: #BlackGirlMagic. Almost out of nothing and against socio-historical odds, Black women are disarticulating the discourse of respectability long co-opted by institutions of state violence and fashioning anew a politics of respect. In so doing, they connect to and build on nineteenth-century Black women's abolitionist efforts that sought to broaden the horizons of U.S. democratic thought and practice previously marginalized in the historical record. Essential to their discursive politics of respect is the creative use of new forms of social media that while arising with neoliberal forms of political life can be used to challenge many of their central terms.

### **Abolition Democracy, Reconstruction, and the Genealogy of Respectability**

The work of abolitionists is typically thought to have concluded with the ending of slavery in the United States. The overwhelming losses during the U.S. Civil War led to an ongoing social aspiration to move beyond such a violent part of our history. As a result, the historical record trends toward the containment of abolitionist politics to the antebellum era or suggests that any remnants of their thought become subsumed by more moderate agendas (Kazin 2012). Leading up to emancipation, many anti-slavery activists relied heavily on Victorian and Christian morality to argue against the evils of the institution. For them, mere integration after the war satisfied their abolitionist vision since the extension of citizenship to those who adopted sexual restraint, individual duty, and an abhorrence for criminality would lead to the creation of good laws and move the nation toward a more (liberal) democratic union.

Radical abolitionists took a different approach. They choose to work alongside and center Black life in the fight against slavery and for an interracial America. Through a meticulous historical account of Black people's agency in *Black Reconstruction*, W.E.B. Du Bois (1998) locates this type of radical abolitionism's theoretical center largely after the war's completion. From 1860-1880, Black Americans became soldiers, won elected office, established schools, built community centers, and developed businesses. Together with white abolitionists and other collaborators, they insisted on developing new institutions that would be accountable to former slaves, largely located in the south, as well as other Blacks who were either fugitives or well-established members of free communities throughout the country. Du Bois calls this interracial agenda for an egalitarian society abolition democracy. Given that streetcars emerged as a new public good at roughly this time, their usage by both Black and white patrons in already self-defined "free" states can be held out as an agon of abolitionist politics from just before emancipation through the Reconstruction era.

Naming the streetcar platforms as "theaters of war," historian Judith Giesberg correctly identifies Black women's actions against segregation as distinctly political and connected to other battlefields of the Civil War (2009, 94). In explaining the lack of attention by historians to Black women's participation in these struggles, Giesberg hints at what Farrah Jasmine Giffin calls the "promise of protection" (2000, 34). Put simply, Black men's political rhetoric against streetcar segregation emphasized vindicating their masculinity by defending Black women's virtue. In recounting their various transit narratives, Giesberg concludes that Black women rejected the Victorian standard of defenseless femininity and engaged public institutions to assert their right to ride (2009, 107). Though Giesberg notes their discursive commitment to Victorianism, she downplays the political capital gained by Black men in this practice. Black men's compliance with Victorian gender norms rewarded them with sole access to the dominant political sphere all the while relegating Black women's actions to perceived apolitical spheres—the home and community. Also, worth noting is that streetcar segregation in Philadelphia emerged out of a context where political propaganda against "amalgamation" (e.g. miscegenation) fanned the fears of sexual contact between Blacks and whites (Robinson 2012, 45–60). By emphasizing women's gender identity through reductionist lines like their sexual capacity for motherhood under Victorianism, Black women's vulnerability in transit was heightened by these racial politics rather than neutralized them.

Taking a closer look at the archive of late nineteenth-century Philadelphia, I want to suggest that Black women negotiated rather than rejected the politics of respectability in the Reconstruction era. I will use three narratives of Black women to explore how respectability enabled their activism, constrained its scope, and ultimately hindered the broader abolitionist trajectory. The first two narratives fit almost seamlessly into Du Bois's frame of abolition democracy: Frances Ellen Watkins Harper (1825-1911) and Fanny Jackson Coppin (1837-1913). As an abolitionist lecturer and a schoolteacher respectively, these women worked in tandem to educate the mass public about racial prejudice and provide nourishment to a Black community that "yearned to learn and know" (Du Bois 1998, 637). Both from the border state of Maryland, Harper was born free whereas Coppin was born into slavery. In a public speech, Harper describes Philadelphia's streetcar segregation as social displacement: "To-day I am puzzled where to make my home. I would like to make it in Philadelphia, near my own friends and relations. But if I want to ride in the streets of Philadelphia, they send me to ride on the platform with the driver" (Harper 1990, 218). Coppin's personal reflection in her autobiography

echoes this sentiment as she reflects on her experience after first moving to the City of Brotherly Love in 1865: "I had been so long in Oberlin that I had forgotten about my color, but I was sharply reminded of it when, in a storm of rain, a Philadelphia street car conductor forbid my entering a car that did not have on it 'for colored people,' so I had to wait in the storm until one came in which colored people could ride" (Coppin 1995, 14).

In putting these two accounts side by side, Harper's statement appears to be the more political not only because it is a public speech, but also because she asserts her very existence when she screams "murder" at the conductor who demanded she gives up her seat (Harper 1990, 219). However, when Coppin contrasts the platforms with Oberlin College, she provides us with a glimpse of the alternative democratic horizon which opened during Reconstruction. Much in the fashion of Jürgen Habermas's theory of the bourgeois public sphere (1991), she holds up streetcars as sites of democratic possibility - a space where people come together to bargain over the rules of government, vie for political power, and improve the quality of their lives. As a result, there seems to be room in Coppin's narrative for thinking more productively about the physical contact of bodies that the politics of respectability, with its emphasis on Victorian sexual morality, forecloses.

Lacking in these two narratives is an account of the state in relation to the control of Black women's bodies while in transit. This brings me to my third example, which is perhaps the lesser known in the literature of political theory but resonates the clearest with the case of Bland. On March 22, 1867, Pennsylvania's Governor John Geary signed a bill outlawing streetcar and railroad segregation. It aimed to punish conductors, by fine, imprisonment, or both, who either denied service or engaged in unequal treatment toward Black riders. Just days later, a conductor on the Lombard Street line refused service to Caroline LeCount: a well-known figure in the Black community, a teacher, and a graduate of the Institute for Colored Youth. The conductor dismissed her with, "We don't allow niggers to ride." LeCount immediately lodged a complaint with the nearest police officer. Either ignorant of the recent political victory by Black activists throughout the Commonwealth or unresponsive to LeCount on the grounds of her race and gender, the officer insisted the conductor was lawful in his refusal. Carrying a newspaper announcing the new legislation, LeCount promptly showed the officer. Deemed as unofficial by his standards, she took her plea to the Commonwealth's Secretary of State who she knew was visiting the city. Familiar with the almost decade-long battle over streetcar segregation, he provided LeCount with a certified copy of the bill. She returned with it to the same policeman. The conductor was arrested and fined \$100. The officer who dismissed LeCount performed the arrest. LeCount's audacious and transgressively public demand that the state protects her rights, despite women not yet achieving political equality as she could not yet vote, prefigures the actions of Ida B. Wells, Rosa Parks, and Sandra Bland.

Yet there is a startling difference. Negotiating respectability aided LeCount in her personal and public struggle to survive dismissal from the demos either by her fellow citizens or by agents of the state. Her social connections made it possible to hold the officer accountable to the law, just like the institutional and professional connections held by Harper and Coppin made their narratives resonate as exemplars of Black women's politics of self-expression. Taken together, the narratives and actions of these three women, along with many others, were central to the cause against streetcar segregation in the home city of American democracy, but the contradictions of the politics of respectability used to hold up Black women's virtue in public space could not shift the parameters of the demos to allow for the abolitionist vision of



democratic society to be rooted in our political institutions. Such institutions are necessary not only “to incorporate black people into the social order” (A. Y. Davis 2005, 95), but to inoculate against the reproduction of structural racism as informed by denying Black women agency over their own bodies (Angela Davis 1972; Roberts 1997; Adrienne Davis 2009).

### **Disrupting Respectability in the Neoliberal Age: A Queer of Color Critique**

Bland, like her nineteenth-century predecessors, found herself between the politics of respectability and a claim to bodily integrity. Here I turn to her contemporaries as they aim to give political voice to Bland and others who are silenced by police brutality through their use of emerging social media technologies. Bland’s death occurred less than a month before the one-year anniversary mark of the 2014 Ferguson uprising. During the protests marking that anniversary, Johnetta Elzie tweeted out “If I’m arrested today please know I’m not suicidal. I have plenty to live for. I did not resist, I’m just black” (quoted in J. King 2015). Elzie along with Brittany Ferrell and Alexis Templeton formed a group of women on the frontline of the uprising known as Millennial Activists United (MAU), which, among other things, provided support, medical aid, and food to protestors.

In the wake of Bland’s death, MAU curated a series of videos on Instagram that filmed Black women in public spaces. The front lawn of the Ferguson police station served as the common backdrop for many of these videos which documented their short testimonials. All of them opened with the phrase “If I die in police custody...” (millennial.au 2015). In choosing the space which holds and represents state violence, these women went beyond symbolic critique towards outright refusal. Occupying spaces for protesting state violence means placing oneself in physical danger. All members engaged in BLM understand this, so much so that they have taken it upon themselves to learn from others who face similar conditions in protest, like Palestinians (Tharoor 2015). For Black women, this requires more than learning how to deal with American-made tear gas and a highly-militarized police force. They face sexual objectification, even amongst their fellow protestors:

As women are the majority in the movement here in St. Louis, it puzzles me as to why we have to make sure we are heard and seen for the work we are doing, rather than just pretty faces. I’ve had to check so many brothers for coming at me .... [One asked] me if my clothing I had on were my ‘activist clothing’ because I looked way to[o] beautiful to be out there at night. (Brittany Ferrell quoted in Braswell 2014)

As members of MAU, Ferrell, Elzie, and Templeton refuse to be confined either by the state or by their fellow activists’ tendencies to reduce their role for a political movement to “looking pretty” due to an over-essentialization of their gender performance. In doing so they emphasize the constitutive relationship between place and identity (Kirkwood, McKinlay, and McVittie 2013). It is along these lines that I read BLM activists as participating in what political theorist Christina Beltrán calls “a queer vision of democracy.”

Queer itself is a direct critique of respectability if we read respectability as a project of narrow and prescriptive normalcy, an obsessive and unending practice of self-policing. Without using the word respectability, Beltrán gestures towards its critique in two ways. The first is by deconstructing the legislative language of the DREAM Act, a temporary relief program in lieu of comprehensive immigration legislation for undocumented youth. Exposing the liberal



discourse of the “good” immigrant, Beltrán finds the Act to shore up the dominant narrative that independence comes from hard work and individual responsibility. Much like the politics of respectability in the case of Black middle-class normatively, this discourse pits one part of a community against another. The Act “criminalizes undocumented parents as lawbreakers but labels their children ‘innocent,’ upstanding, and assimilated” (Beltrán 2014, 246). The second way in which Beltrán broaches on the concept of respectability is by using Michael Warner’s conception of queer, which he defines as the rejection of “a minoritizing logic of toleration or simple political-interest representation in favor of a more thorough resistance to regimes of the normal” (cited on 250).

Following Beltrán’s intuition, I want to deploy the concept of queer to analyze #IfIDieInPoliceCustody by juxtaposing its usage to that of another hashtag that emerged after the killing of Michael Brown the year before Bland’s death – #iftheygunnedmedown. In so doing, I suggest that the political power of a hashtag depends on its ability to queer the public consciousness through the personal politics of self-expression. These two hashtags share the same objective to counteract the stereotypes used by mainstream media to legitimate police violence against Black people while going about their daily lives. While the earlier hashtag was largely used by men, the more important difference is that it relied on the strategy of circulating an acceptable image of a potential victim. A tweet or post would include “dueling” photos of the user alongside the hashtag followed by the question “which image would they use?” One presented him or her as wholesome and respectable (e.g. a graduation photo), whereas the other image would reinforce the stereotype of Black criminality and stoke fear in the public eye (Chappell 2014).

The logic of this hashtag underscores the overwhelming power of an image to frame the discursive terrain in the media. It reinforces the critical reflections made by Kimberlé Crenshaw and Gary Peller that an image cannot “speak for itself” when mediating what transpires between the police and those subjected to state violence (1993, 69). Reflecting on the discourse surrounding the killing of Mike Brown, Jasmine Banks criticizes the internalization of the politics of respectability when she insists that the deaths of Black youth by police are tragic, whether or not they are on their way to college: “We cannot and should not engage in discussions that look like black and brown people explaining that an unarmed person shouldn’t have been shot because they lived in a way of which we are proud” (Banks 2014). Banks pushes back against the concept of respectability as a frame for either measuring a victim’s human dignity or rationalizing police brutality, opting rather for a political articulation of respect to be upheld by our political institutions that serve all the people.

I want to suggest that it is in its disruption rather than attempt to recapture respectability that #IfIDieInPoliceCustody was more successful than #iftheygunnedmedown. Despite both capturing private experiences and using technology that allowed dissent to flood the public sphere, #IfIDieInPoliceCustody blurs the socially manufactured separation between the personal and the political that the politics of respectability aims to reinforce. Circulating quickly and connecting vast distances, messages stamped with #IfIDieInPoliceCustody facilitated public pressure aimed at the mainstream media, the DPS, and the Federal government to account for the anomalies surrounding Bland’s death. Since each responded with more critical journalism, the release of a second version of the dash-cam footage, and an investigation by the FBI respectively, this hashtag facilitated political wins, albeit small and temporary, for the current Black liberation struggle known as BLM as opposed to the earlier hashtag.

In an interview asking about her own usage of the hashtag, Jamilah Lemieux, a senior editor of *Ebony* magazine, describes a similar deployment of respectability politics as her nineteenth-century counterparts when confronted by police:

I was taught how to interact with the police from a young age.... It wasn't about revering them or their position in the community, but about self-preservation. Sometimes this is at the cost of my dignity or my humanity. ... [F]or black people, being polite or deferent to police is not a guarantee of safety. [Taking such precautions] has more to do with the police than it has to do with us. (quoted in Thomas 2015a)

Here Lemieux demarcates a politics of respectability from a politics of respect. Her distrust of the police due to their historical legacy of abusing power, especially in relation to Black communities, informs her use of respectability as a survival mechanism despite its high probability of failure. This adoption of respectability can be contrasted with examples of its direct rejection. A tweet by Brie Powell exemplifies a direct rejection of respectability that resonates with Warner's conception of queer: “#IfIDieInPoliceCustody know that 2 college degrees and a ‘proper’ English vocabulary couldn’t save me, fuck your respectability politics” (quoted in Ballin 2015). Combined, these Black women conclude, albeit by taking different approaches, that the politics of respectability hinders rather than furthers Black liberation because it constrains action and limits the public imagination to consider Black people in their imperfection, which means recognizing their common humanity and thus right to life.

Despite its victories, in their deployment of #IfIDieInPoliceCustody, some users manage to reinsert a formulation of respectability politics as related to another intersecting marginalized identity marker – ability. While Bland's family pressed for negligence on behalf of the correctional officers and denied suicide as the basis for Bland's death, others found the discourse reflected by the hashtag insensitive and see it as closing the door on a real conversation about mental health (Gibson 2015). The hashtag's coupling with a proclamation that “I did not commit suicide” is seen as a possible reinforcement of “the strong, resilient, Black woman narrative” (Crockett 2015). There are those, however, who are attentive to an overall concern regarding mental health stigmatization, and who also do not want to rule out suicide as potential self-reclamation. In their contribution to *Black Girl Dangerous*, Ray(nise) Cange reads the dash-cam video of Bland's arrest as “a violent, racist, and trauma-producing encounter with the police” (2015). From this, Cange concludes the following:

I refuse to dismiss the idea that she may have committed suicide. ... The shifting of suicide from a position of weakness is why I want us to not take suicide off the table and to recognize the power within that action, if she did commit suicide. Sandra, from the beginning, refused to give up her power. ... [J]ail cell suicide may have been a form of resistance and an astounding statement of self-love. A statement saying I will not give you the power to kill me and I love myself enough to not endure you killing me slowly.

The resolve evident in this interpretation of the circumstances of Bland's death pushes past the individualization of responsibility by regarding the act of taking her own life as political agency. In so doing, Cange describes the abolitionist practice found in the powerful acts of self-disclosure that are the declarations of #IfIDieInPoliceCustody. They name injustice and

provoke healing by reorienting our own relationships to space and people.

Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor (2016) highlights the intersectional quality of the organizers of BLM as they mobilize against state violence and American exceptionalism. In pursuit of justice for all Black people, Taylor describes their strategy as a pivot “away from a conventional analysis that would reduce racism to the intentions and actions of individuals involved. ... [It] calls attention to the systematic forces that allow the individuals [i.e. police] to act with impunity” (167). Noting that Black queer women are key architects, Taylor’s analysis suggests that their participation is not part of a progressive evolution within the Black protest lineage; rather, they are reshaping that lineage by exposing the heteropatriarchal state violence that props up neoliberalism. Practices spanning from slavery to the “New Jim Crow” locked Black Americans out of democratic institutions by denying them both privacy as well as political standing (Alexander 2012). Queer of color scholars suggest that such a locking out continues in the twenty-first century through the locking up of more and more people of color understood by the state and market forces as “surplus populations” and thus expendable (Jordan 2003; Ferguson 2004; Hong 2012). Yet it was these queer Black women’s invention of hashtags and the circulation of them that facilitated a challenge to various publics through emphasizing the multiplicity of their narratives and not through the construction of a singular, internally hierarchical, and self-policed counterpublic like the one predicated on a politics of respectability that dominated much of racial uplift in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

### **Hash-tagging as Fugitivity: Counterpublics, Iterability, and Digital Democracy**

Moving from the genealogy of respectability to its disruption in the form of #IfIDieInPoliceCustody in the prior sections, I want to step back and think about the unique practice of hash-tagging as a queer tactic that brings together democratic theory and the notion of fugitivity all the while extending Du Bois’s concept of abolition democracy out of the nineteenth century and into our present moment. Again, I find Beltrán’s analysis of new social media fruitful. In their use of social media, Beltrán highlights how DREAMers’ “coming out” from the undocumented shadows reenacts their vulnerability to state violence but also exposes the limits to the liberal notion of privacy: “One’s visibility now has a kind of permanence, as an online presence retains a life beyond the initial post” (Beltrán 2014, 255). Rather than a creation of yet another public that counter-acts others like the mainstream public sphere (e.g. Congress), the economic discursive terrain defined as “a borderless economy” (247), and the nativist calls and actions towards “a barricaded border” (ibid.), to name a few, these activists refuse to be captured by these competing, and at times co-constitutive, interpellations. They claim a fugitive inheritance (Fernandes 2007, 236). In so doing, they decidedly move away from the politics of respectability and towards the creation of a public built on a politics of respect, even if the result may be their further incarceration and possible death. Put simply, hashtags mark a new transformation in how marginalized people challenge and construct the public sphere.

Historically, Black Americans carved out space in opposition to the official public sphere as a result of and tactic for responding to the particular seclusion imposed on them by inter-personal racism (e.g. lynching), structural economic constraints (e.g. redlining), and political policies (e.g. legal segregation). Michael Dawson refers to this space as “the black counterpublic” (1994). After going into relative hibernation between the 1970s through Barack Obama’s election in 2008 as Dawson showed, the age of new media and instant communication facilitated by both the material groundwork and global reaches of the Internet seems to have

resurrected the Black counterpublic. As I have been showing, hashtags are central to this shift. #BlackLivesMatter itself first emerged in this social media form as a call to action for Black people after the acquittal of George Zimmerman for the killing of Trayvon Martin in 2012 (Garza 2014). It echoed across neighborhoods, cities, states, and nations.

As a political intervention, one can measure the effectiveness of a political demand that comes from a marginalized community when it departs the “counter” and reaches the “official” public sphere. For #IfIDieInPoliceCustody, this occurred on September 27, 2015, when Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) delivered an address to the Edward M. Kennedy Institute. There she insisted that all of us “[l]isten to the brave, powerful voices of today’s new generation of civil rights leaders. Incredible voices. Listen to them say: ‘If I die in police custody, know that I did not commit suicide.’ ... This is the reality all of us must confront, as uncomfortable and ugly as that reality may be” (Warren 2015). Using the phrase of this hashtag, she mentions the racial disparities in the New Deal and home ownership policies and draws a connecting thread between past failures and present conditions. Going beyond the history of the Civil Rights Era, which C. Vann Woodward called the “Second Reconstruction” (1955), Warren gets to the point of BLM, MAU, and #IfIDieInPoliceCustody. She holds up names like Sandra Bland, Freddie Gray, and Michael Brown as figures around which emerging protests call out the violence of white supremacy within and without the police.

I want to suggest that by emerging first as a hashtag, the use of the phrase by Warren goes beyond the definition of a successful counterpublic set out by Dawson. As a reminder, Dawson understands the Black counterpublic as “a set of institutions, communication networks and practices which facilitate debate of causes and remedies to the current combination of political setbacks and economic devastation facing major segments of the Black community, and which facilitate the creation of oppositional formations and sites” (1994, 197). He laments the loss of this position largely to identity politics as they emerged with the embracing of third-wave feminism and the subsequent backlash by the right. Despite Dawson’s attentive read on gender and acknowledgement of intersectionality, the political implications of the overly masculinized space of “the public sphere” limits how women’s actions are acknowledged in both the public and counterpublic spheres.

In *Check It While I Wreck It*, Gwendolyn D. Pough (2004) provides a critical assessment of Black womanhood and its relation to the public sphere. Using speech act theory, she assesses the history of Black participants in reshaping the public gaze for the recognition of their humanity and the consideration of their political contributions. Calling this practice “bringing wreck,” Pough likens it to an illocutionary force that “redraws understandings of justice and the good life and deconstructs the liberal understanding of the public/private split” (104). She provides a genealogy of Black women’s expressive culture in the United States as they disrupt harmful stereotypes beginning with Harriet Jacobs’s slave narrative through an analysis of the lyrics and physical presence of female hip-hop artists like Roxanne Shante, Salt-N-Pepa, and Missy Elliott. As a result of her study, bringing wreck is not merely an opposite strategy to Black respectability, it is a refashioning of the public sphere by offering up new ways of being, knowing, and claiming “a living for themselves in a society bereft of opportunity for them” (27). As seen in the last section, the use of the specific hashtag #IfIDieInPoliceCustody captures much of this sentiment. By applying Derrida’s concept of iterability, which attends to illocutionary force generally, to the practice of hash-tagging, I add #IfIDieInPoliceCustody, and hashtag usage more broadly, to the list of expressive cultures that Black women use to bring

wreck, remake the public sphere, and forge political power.

The usage, circulation, and repetition of such hashtags do not imply revision to the public or publics they counter; rather, they act as signatures compounding collective power through their multiple iterations. Put simply, the hashtag that emerged after the death of Sandra Bland is particularly telling as a device that holds the simultaneous oppositions that Jacques Derrida (1988) expressed as iterability - difference and sameness. Derrida's concept of iterability provides a useful tool for the analysis of the continuities and departures for the Black consciousness ideology present in BLM (Howarth 1997). As a discursive practice, BLM's use of hashtags captures the complex interaction between identity and difference while simultaneously exposing the layering of both universality and particularity of the Black experience in America. If “#IfIDieInPoliceCustody reveals both vulnerability and resilience” (Ballin 2015), then it serves as a discursive mechanism through which a shared performative practice calls a network into being that testifies to their mutual vulnerability and enacts a collective refusal of individualized marginalization. Like graffiti tagging, this is a practice of reclaiming space. It re-assembles the disassembled community (whether by police violence, de facto segregation, economic deprivation, etc.) through its multiplicity. Hash-tagging connects people across physical distances and in so doing engages in reflexivity. It serves as a device for what some have called, and critiqued, as “digital democracy” (Hague and Loader 1999; Hindman 2008; Dean 2010; Zúñiga et al. 2010)

With hash-tagging as a key practice, the role of new social media facilitates flexibility as well as a redefinition of political leadership as traditionally defined by social movement scholarship. BLM is diffused yet linked, physically distanced while generating intimacy. According to Johnetta Elzie, social media plays a significant role in being able to co-opt these interstitial sites between rupture and capture that burdened traditional styles of leadership: “Thankfully for this generation, instead of waiting for a letter in the mail from Malcolm X, we have social media to drive this movement and get the truth out to millions of people, live” (quoted in Braswell 2014). Insisting on a group-centered model of leadership, the tools used by these women and their comrades directly facilitate that goal: “The new tools of technology - particularly social media and especially Twitter - have facilitated the emergence of just such a bottom-up insurgency led by ordinary people, and have displaced the top-down approach of old guard civil rights organizations” (Harris 2015). These social media archives provide a written account of the labor done largely by women, in particular by women of color, for clearly political ends that would otherwise be rendered invisible and/or seen as merely social rather than political work (Rentschler and Thrift 2015).

### **In Conclusion: From #IfIDieInPoliceCustody to #BlackGirlMagic**

Throughout U.S. history in their attempts to gain mobility by accessing modes of transportation, state-sanctioned violence against Black women varied from region to region and from racial regime to racial regime. The execution of such violence also shifted correspondingly to the evolution in societal advances such as technology and economic prosperity. These shifts are materially reflected in the changes of the dominant mode of transportation by all peoples in each society— boat, streetcar, train, bus, and private vehicle. I have turned to two cases from two significantly different regions and periods – Sandra Bland and Caroline LeCount. In doing so, I do not mean to suggest that these cases are representative of Black women's experience of violence while in transit. However, I use them because individually and taken in concert



they raise important questions about the central and distinctive role that Black women's bodies and mobility play in the horizon of democratic thought, particularly but not exclusively, in the context of a post-emancipation United States.

As Black girls and women grace multiple publics through their various use of hashtags, they mark themselves as confident, powerful, and, above all else, present. This is the underlying sentiment of #BlackGirlMagic, a hashtag that celebrates Black women's greatness, competence, and humanity which, if one only paid attention to the dominant public construction of Black womanhood and girls, would be unimaginable. Made popular by a care worker from Washington, D.C. named CaShawn Thompson (Thomas 2015b), it rose to mainstream popularity the same year as #IfIDieInPoliceCustody (Wilson 2015). While one might be said to be celebrating Black women's lives as cultural, political, and business titans and the other as focusing on their impending mortality in the face of state violence, combined I find them to be evidence of a Black feminist disruption of the normal. They urge Black women and girls "to recapture the feminine and discover the fierceness of a black girl's magic" (Morgan 1999, 93). In recognizing their contributions to the movement, Johnetta Elzie, Brittany Ferrell and Alexis Templeton were featured as part of the *Essence* magazine cover story for the February 2016 issue announcing the "#BlackGirlMagic Class of 2016." Their radical democratic subjectivity serves as a reminder that Black women are present and powerful, but also limited. Their limitation is not a flaw, but rather a fact. Individually they are but one person, but when put together, as the hashtag is deployed, they open a democratic horizon built on respect of their differences that augment their combined historical trajectory.

In focusing on Black women's usage of #IfIDieInPoliceCustody for this exploration of #BlackGirlMagic, I am not implying that it does not aptly apply to or is not used by Black men and others targeted by the police. Rather its intersectional sensibility accentuates the problem of white skin privilege and its operationalization of gender in discussions of race and respectability. An unfolding archive of living testimonials, #IfIDieInPoliceCustody displays the always already politically informed, yet simultaneously personal, dismissal of Black women's interactions with police both in the official accounts and by the Black community in addressing police brutality. Through its multiple iterations, it posits a space for democratic accountability beyond the public/private distinction of (neo)liberalism. Put simply, the digital signal/signature reasserts the humanity from which a radical democratic imaginary emerges in our collective existential struggle for Black lives rather than the calculative nadir of the neoliberal market and policing order.

### Notes

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- Jonathan Gomez) and finally the blind reviewers and editors of this special issue for their gentle provocations as they pushed for clarity (Julia Jordan-Zachery and Duchess Harris).
2. One Twitter user posted on July 16, 2015, “On today, Ida B. Wells 153rd birthday, I know she’d be imploring us to find out #WhatHappenedToSandraBland! Because that’s what she’d do” (quoted in Ballin 2015). Ten days later, Roxa Diaz commented on the dashcam video posted on YouTube, “Sandra Bland reminds me of Rosa Parks because like Rosa she stood up for her rights as a citizen of the United States” (Diaz 2015). Almost a year later, critical race scholar and intersectionality studies originator Kimberlé Crenshaw gave a lecture entitled “From Rosa Parks to Sandra Bland: Does the Arc of Struggle Bend Towards Justice for Black Women?” at Gustavus Adolphus College (Crenshaw 2016).
  3. In reference to the two cases from significantly different regions and periods regarding Sandra Bland and Black women abolitionists facing streetcar segregation, I do not mean to suggest that these cases are wholly representative of Black women’s experience of violence while in transit. However, I use them because individually and taken in concert they raise important questions about the central and distinctive role that Black women’s activism play in the horizon of democratic thought, particularly but not exclusively, in the context of a post-emancipation United States.
  4. BLM originated from the culmination of the multiple labors of queer black women who were already out (Garza 2014; Taylor 2016, 165–168).
  5. Du Bois even notes that the desegregation of streetcars in the nation’s capital was on the agenda of Radical Republicans in Congress such as Thaddeus Stevens and Charles Sumner (Du Bois 1998, 562).
  6. Founded in 1837, the Institute for Colored Youth (ICY) provided a classical education for young African Americans in Philadelphia. Its curriculum included advanced mathematics and sciences, English, philosophy, various social sciences, as well as classical languages. Here in 1869, Fanny Jackson Coppin became the first Black woman to serve as a principal of a public school. In 1902, the Institute was relocated outside the city into Delaware County and changed its name to Cheyney University. There it continues as the oldest historically Black college in the United States (Conyers 1990).
  7. Various historians have given accounts of the case involving Caroline LeCount (Foner 1973; Silcox 1997; Diemer 2009; Giesberg 2009).
  8. LeCount was the fiancée of Octavius Catto, one of the Black men who publicly advocated for the abolition of streetcar segregation both in Philadelphia and the state capital of Harrisburg (Diemer 2009, 41).
  9. I credit conversations with and insights from Scz Zarantonello for helping develop my thoughts on “hash-tagging” in relation to Hip-hop (Zarantonello 2016). Thinking more systematically about hip-hop’s practice of tagging, Tricia Rose notes the importance of claiming space as the public is redefined away from the needs of the urban working class and poor (Rose 1994, 41–47).

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NATIONAL POLITICAL  
SCIENCE REVIEW

**Trends: Black Politics in and  
Beyond the Discipline or  
The Ethical Imperatives of  
Black Politics**

## Rastafari Women's 'Black Girl Magic' in the Pan-African World

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We sat in the outdoor food court at Accra Mall. The open air space made for a cool respite from the heat of mid-evening Accra. Beatrice drank tea as she spoke about her life and travels. She is originally from Haiti, but studied in France and taught in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. At the time we met in 2017, she resided in Togo. She learned about Rastafari through culture—the music and the literature—but became Rastafari because of her “political ambition” (Personal Interview 2017). In order to learn more about Rastafari, she wrote her masters thesis entitled *Rasta Women: From Myth to Reality*, based on the experiences of Rastafari women in Paris during the 1980s. She explained, “I guess my political education had come from Haiti... but Rastafari gave me another dimension, which was more like worldwide... definition of how a militant can act through culture” (Personal Interview 2017). Her desire to live on the continent was driven by her self-identification as a “political Rastafarian” (Personal Interview 2017). Her embrace of Rastafari had everything to do with her militant commitment to African Unity and locating herself within the Black radical political tradition of Rastafari.

Rastafari is a Black, Pan-African, anti-colonial, spiritual movement that began under British colonial rule in 1930s Jamaica to challenge imperialism and racialized oppression of the Black majority population. In a world dominated by white imperial rule, Rastafari created new discursive frameworks for understanding the self, the community, and the world by deifying Emperor Haile Selassie I of Ethiopia, creating their own language (Pollard 1994) and valuing their Black African identity. Since Jamaican independence in 1962, Rastafari has become a worldwide cultural and political phenomenon advocating for human rights and environmental justice (Fox and Smith 2015). Rastafari is often studied as a masculine movement. Many scholars have argued that the movement was established to redeem the Black man (Sterling 2010). This notion of Rastafari has led to the erasure of women's contributions as transformative within the movement and to the dismissal of Rastafari women's activism in Africa and the Caribbean. Rooted in twelve years of ethnographic research with Rastafari women and the small group of scholars, especially Barbara Makeda Blake Hannah (1980); Terisa Turner (1994); Carol Yawney (1994); Mansani Montague (1994); Imani Tafari-Ama (1998, 2012); Maureen Rowe (1998); Jahzani Kush (2011); Asheda Dwyer (2013), and Jeanne Christensen (2014), who have challenged androcentric interpretations of Rastafari, I have found that these women are central subjects in studies of social and gender justice activism in Africa and the African Diaspora.

Beatrice's militancy indexes a longer history of Rastafari women's commitment to Pan-African struggle. Imani Tafari-Ama earlier described this militant Rastafari woman as a ‘rebel woman,’ someone who understands herself as part of traditions of freedom fighting women in opposition to “a Babylon system” (Tafari-Ama 1998). Rastafari women continue in this freedom fighting tradition by dismantling sexism, racism, and classism through their livy because they redefine normative understandings of gender, engage in anti-colonial work and create Black womanist spaces.

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The term “livity” is a Rastafari word denoting the lived philosophy guiding everyday anti-colonial practices of sistren and brethren (‘Sistren’ and ‘brethren’ are terms that refer to women and men in Rastafari). Rastafari women critique the ways white imperial rule used Christianity and capitalism to develop gender constructs that valued nuclear families over extended kinship networks and gendered private and public space, which led to women’s relegation to the domestic sphere. According to Jeanne Christenson (2014), RastaWomanism challenges the oppression of women by critiquing the ways plantation and colonial society employed gender norms to limit the mobility and choices of women. In order to dismantle this sexism, Rastafari women developed their own theorizations of balance between masculine and feminine energies within the body. Christensen writes, “Rastafari feminists understand “feminine” and “masculine” as ways of conceptualizing energy that ought not to be conflated with male and female bodies” (Christensen 2014, 143). By Rastafari women refusing to concretize gender as only rooted in bio-anatomical sex, they challenge imperial prescribed gender roles. In 2008, Blakk Madonna, a Rastafari woman who repatriated to Ghana from Jamaica, questioned how a man could understand a woman outside of himself when he didn’t understand the woman inside of himself. She thought it was critical that every person understand the masculine and feminine aspects of their character. Challenging sexism by reformulating their understandings of gender is a critical contribution of Rastafari women’s thought. Most Rastafari women would not use the terms feminism or womanism to describe the work they do or their thoughts on gender. Beatrice explained that she had many issues with some of the ways the term feminism is used and the practices it encompasses. While academics have used the terms womanism and feminism to describe Rastafari women’s contributions, most Rastafari women prefer the term “balance” to describe their advocacy around gender justice within the movement. The term “balance” denotes both the balance of feminine and masculine energies and parity in terms of treatment and respect for men and women within the movement.

Prior to Jeanne Christiansen’s (2014) development of RastaWomanism, Tersia Turner’s (1994) identified two strands that characterized the Rastafari movement—the ‘old Rastafari,’ which is rooted in sexism and male dominance and the ‘new Rastafari,’ which is rooted in Rasta feminism. Turner defined Rasta feminism as an ideology and practice that dismantles capitalism, fights for land rights, and unites with anti-colonial struggles in continental Africa, specifically the Mau Mau struggle against British colonialism. Turner’s formulation of the ‘new Rastafari’ documents the historic nature of Rastafari woman livity and their transnational contributions to Pan-African work. Julia Sudbury (1998) and Asheda Dwyer (2013) underscore the transnational nature of the Black womanist spaces Rastafari women create by combining their Rastafari Pan-African stance with their gender justice critiques. All of these authors pinpoint a unique epistemological thread that comprises a consciousness or world sense that women within the movement employ through their livity (Oyewumi 1999). Oyeronke Oyewumi’s concept of “worldsense” has been key to this analysis.

I asked Beatrice why she wanted to write her thesis. “To me, Rasta women were totally invisible.” (Personal Interview 2017). The erasure of Rastafari women from the English and French literature led Beatrice to write her unpublished thesis in the 1980s. Beatrice’s work helped her personally “embrace the militancy” of the Rastafari women she worked with and contributed enduring truths that still hold today. Beatrice’s thesis found that Rastafari women existed, were militant—but discrete, were committed to “Black unity through family” (Personal Interview 2017) and were loyal to Black men. She found that while women occupied multiple roles both in the domestic and public spheres, they lived their lives as role models from their hair

to their balanced sense of self-awareness.

“Also because of their being Rastafarian woman and showing it or showcasing it like an example for others in public life—so you have teachers, you have doctors, you have nurses, you have singers, artists—in all domains of art—you have politicians...—women who grow their locks and somehow are identified as Rastafari. ...That kind of political or ...militancy in Rastafari... I really find interesting because its super important to have models—role models and if as a young woman you see other young women or elderly sisters growing their locks and just living their lives and being totally balanced and aware of what they are doing, you just feel like you are empowered as well to do the same” (Personal Interview 2017).

Not only were these women leading by embracing and loving themselves, they empowered others like Beatrice to embrace herself. The transcendent nature of Rastafari women’s livy is the core of their unique form of Black girl magic. Beatrice defines Black girl magic as “the revelation of the (sometimes unexpected) potential of any young black girl/woman and eventually her contribution to the redressing of past prejudices against black women at large” (Persona Correspondence 2018). By defining Black girl magic as the realization of the self and joining the fight against injustice, Beatrice locates Black girl magic as an essential facet of the rebel woman freedom fighting tradition. Although Beatrice’s thesis has joined the canon of unpublished or lost work that Rastafari women have produced over the years, it underscores woman’s desire to be documented as contributing partners in the evolution of the movement and highlights the transnational nature of their lived realities because the work was produced in Paris by a Haitian Rastafari woman.

I met Beatrice on her first trip to Ghana. She planned an Arctivism event, which combines art and activism. Arctivism is a conceptual framework for organizing groups of artists to use their artwork to educate communities around West Africa about different Pan-African figures. The event she planned in Accra united music, fashion, spoken-word and guest speakers, like Sonia Lye-fook, to think about Pan-Africanism through repatriation to Ghana. Beatrice’s Pan-African work uses the wealth of her experiences to educate others about Pan-African figures and broader notions of African unity and justice. Beatrice is just one example of the many Rastafari women who are doing similar Pan-African work in Africa, Europe, the Caribbean, Canada and the Americas, but are not highlighted in the literature. Rastafari women’s ideas and community work are central to forming new intellectual archives, transgressing epistemic barriers between African Diaspora and African Studies, and diversifying the groups of Black women scholars think of when they consider ‘Black Girl Magic.’

### Notes

1. Beatrice defines the term militant as “As someone who dedicates part of his/her time/skills/voice to participate in a collective cause.”
2. See Chevannes 1994, Sterling 2010, Edmonds 2012, Niaah 2015. Horace Campbell (1987) pointed out the serious omission of women in scholarship on Rastafari as early as the 1980s. Most of the central texts within Rastafari Studies do not engage the contributions of women.

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## Narratives that Heal: Black Bodies, Black Voices, Black Girls

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### Abstract

This article reports findings from a study that was conducted that explored Black girls' schooling experiences. In this essay, a scholar-practitioner within a K-12 education system explores the intersections of race, class, gender, and strain to better understand the educational experiences of Black girls' who attend an urban middle school in Northern California. The lack of representations in both the media and society of the historical contributions and positive experiences of Black girls motivate this work. Existing literature on psychology and health also highlight that schools have served as sites of (re)traumatization for Black girls, thus prompting the researcher to ask "when do we matter?" and how do Black girls "survive" in school settings? In addition, research on Black children in America has rarely centered the experiences of Black girls. Instead, Black children have historically been treated as a monolithic group. This paper therefore contributes to the growing literature on Black girls narratives, and challenges educators to further examine these narratives as a space of healing for Black girls. Furthermore, the author explores the interviews that were conducted with focus groups and participants from her study and navigates the reader to results that revealed two major themes – trauma and loss – as well as recommendations for how schools can transform from sites of disruption to sites of healing for Black girls through the practice of sacred telling and witnessing.

**Keywords:** Black girls, Intersectionality, Strain, Middle School

### Introduction

My research on Black girls reminded me of how troubling my own educational experiences were. The existing scholarship primarily pathologized Black girls, highlighting areas such as health disparities, criminality, and educational failure (Crenshaw, Ocen & Nanda, 2015; Estell, Farmer, Pearl, Van Acker & Rodkin, 2008; Xie et al. 2003). There was a dearth of literature that centered Black girls' narratives about their schooling experiences. This gap in the literature on Black girls was foundational in the study that was conducted to reclaim their voices and add them to this growing field. The narratives unveiled that the institution of school continued to disenfranchise Black girls through their experiences of perceived racism and harsh disciplinary practices. What was more troubling is that these experiences were connected to a larger historical narrative that was socially constructed and involuntarily inherited by Black girls from one generation to the next. The tropes of the mammy, the jezebel, and the sapphire are stereotypes that framed Black girlhood from outsiders perceptions. They were also birthed from the racist ideologies that influenced society's understanding of Black girlhood. Black girls and women have been forced to contend with these racial, sexual and gender stereotypes that eventually became common school characterizations of Black girls: being aggressive, masculine, and loud (Collins 2000; Morris 2005, 2007; Evans-Winters 2011; Crenshaw et al. 2015; Morris 2016). These characterizations did not evolve by accident. They were deeply connected to the

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historical marginalization that Black girls experienced in America. Wright (2016) and Chatelain (2015) works spanned two centuries of Black girlhood and provided historical accounts both fictional and personal narratives that described how Black women and girls faced danger throughout their years of maturation. Both scholars expounded upon Black girlhood in the 19th and 20th centuries. These historical accounts shared a theme of the burden Black girls endured on behalf of the Black race. The discourse on Black girls relied extensively on their performance of girlhood, because the dominant culture measured Black girls bodies as a litmus test for the entire race (Wright 2016). For example, there were expectations of conduct that were particular to the Black girls who migrated from the southern united states to the north. Many of these girls left with their families in search of a better life in cities like Chicago, hoping to flee from the atrocities of the Jim Crow South. However, where families hoped for protection and safety for their daughters this usually was not the outcome. Since many of the Black families from the south were fleeing situations of extreme poverty, which impacted educational resources and living situations there was a particular trope about southern Black girls. These girls were considered “not as intellectual” as northern Black girls, which positioned them between the tension of northern and southern Blacks (Chatelain 2015). The historical accounts of trauma, troubled schooling experiences and other beliefs about Black girls that were captured in the writings of Wright (2016) and Chatelain (2015) are still present in the lives of Black girls today.

### **Why study Black girls?**

Historically, Black girls narratives were scarce in the literature as Black children were seen as a monolithic group. Many narratives that existed about Black girls were socially constructed by race ideologies that dominated the discourse about Black children (Wright 2016; Chatelain 2015). These ideologies about Black life forced Black girls and women to contend with racial, sexual and gender stereotypes often used in school settings that labeled them as being aggressive, hypersexual, masculine, and loud (Collins 2000; Morris 2005, 2007; Evans-Winters 2011; Crenshaw et al. 2015; Morris 2016). The intersections of race, class, gender and sexuality converged with inequitable schooling practices to create disruptive schooling experiences for Black girls (Crenshaw et al. 2015; Morris 2016). Evans-Winter’s (2011) states there is a need to co-create opportunities for Black girls to speak their truth to the oppressive power of the educational institutions that they exist in. How might educators interrogate the teacher-student hierarchical relationship so that it is developed around centering Black girls voices? As bell hooks (1994) states, how might we envision “education as the practice of freedom”? Would this freedom include Black girls having access to educational opportunities similar to their peers? Would schools use Black girls’ narratives to help eradicate the pervasive sexualization and criminalization that they encounter in these same settings? (Morris 2016). Could this be the language that anchors a schools vision for all children?

In hook’s *Teaching to Transgress* (1994) she states that there is a need for liberation around Black girls intersecting identities. These identities weave themselves into the educational journeys’ of Black girls and calls for a progressive and holistic education that must be rooted from within the narratives of their schooling experiences. Evans-Winters (2011) similarly argues that urban girls educational trajectory is gravely influenced by the perceptions of outsiders who pathologize them. Brown (2007; 2014) and Evans-Winters’ (2011) explored the untold stories of young Black girls and their personal narratives. Brown’s *Remembering Maleesa* (2007) explored how “power shapes the social construction of black girlhood in the United States” (p. 122). Brown states that young Black girls must understand the politicization of their Black

identity, because it is an essential component of their survival in all institutions (2007). Evans-Winters' (2011) *Teaching Black Girls: Resiliency in Urban Classrooms*, explored the untold stories of young Black girls through their personal narratives. Her positionality with these students transcended emotional spaces that were newly explored. Their interlocking identities gave birth to stories of joy, pain, and their envisioned selves as these young women told of who they were and who they wished to become. Evans-Winters' stated that through this process she learned to understand the local culture in which her participants experience schooling and other important aspects of belonging that impact their lives (2011). Their work exemplified the importance of co-creating these narratives. This practice is critical as Black girls have been historically attached to the Black male body as an extension of his existence, yet the focus and attention remained solely on him (Evans-Winters 2011; Brown, A.F; Smith, 1982). The scholarship by both authors reiterates the importance of the inclusion of Black girls narratives as schools often become sites of disruption to their educational journey that displace and "push out" Black girls instead of nurture and embrace them.

Similar to the work of Brown (2007;2014), Chatelain (2015), Evans-Winters (2011), Morris (2016) and other Black women scholars who are writing about Black girls, the narratives that were shared by the participants in my study unveiled a level of strain that was a recurring theme. Black girls' are forced to navigate a "triple threat" within their own school campuses: perceived racism in their classroom settings, unwanted sexual advances and physical touching of male classmates in school hallways/playgrounds, and differential treatment due to dress code and disciplinary dispositions from school administration. This triple threat converges with Black girls multiple identities and coalesce to endanger their academic and social-emotional survival in school settings. These strained environments that schools create are at the root of the so called "acting out" among Black girls. For example, the altercations in schools and the perceptions of physical aggression (Putallaz et al. 2007) that teachers and peers report about Black girls is markedly less than what is reported about their White and Latina counterparts (Morris 2016; Skiba 2011). Psychological and health literature highlights that schools have also served as historical sites of (re)traumatization for Black students and created strained environments (Estell, Farmer, Pearl, Van Acker & Rodkin, 2008; Xie et al. 2003). Skiba, Horner, May, & Tobin (2011) and Wu, Pink, Crain, & Moles (1982) research found that teacher referral bias rather than students' actual behavior is at the crux of the phenomenon of disproportionality in exclusionary discipline and referrals for Black girls. While the research provides evidence of the implicit biases towards Black girls, schools continue to enforce policies and practices that have the potential to negatively impact the educational trajectory of this population. For example, Black girls are more likely to experience harsh and punitive discipline for "dress code violations," or wearing "natural or untidy" hairstyles to school. Although current research has work to center the voices of Black girls there is yet to be an erasure of the racialized and sexualized encounters that greet Black girls at the schoolhouse.

### **Racialized experiences and its impact on Black girls**

As I continued to explore Black girlhood and situate it within the region that I studied, other assaults upon Black girls bodies were occurring throughout the U.S. and globally. In the United States Black girls were being pushed out of school for inappropriate hairstyles, violating school cell phone policies, and subjective behaviors that were said to have violated school policy (Morrison, 2016; Crenshaw, Ocen, Nanda 2015). While in South Africa Black girls were under the same assault. For instance, in Pretoria, South Africa, at a prestigious girls

school a video of Black girls singing and chanting in unison against the schools policies that forbid them from having hair that is “untidy” (i.e. displaying Afro’s, braids with patterns) had gained international attention. The research that was unfolding in the United States highlighted how these experiences for Black girls and educational institutions, law enforcement and the public at large were fueled by deficit-centered scholarship written about this population (Morris 2016; Crenshaw, Ocen, Nanda, 2015; Evans-Winters 2015). In South Africa, the activism that was exploding in Pretoria due to Black girls being told to “fix their hair” led to the hashtag #StopRacismAtPretoriaGirlsHigh. Education officials were forced to revisit how school policies are rooted in explicit biases against a targeted population. Within these stories are Black girls who lived in different continents yet connected due to similar historical atrocities and identical racialized and discriminatory schooling experiences.

To further compound the complexities of young Black female’s multiple identities, Brown, Powell, & Earls (1989) conducted a compelling large-scale study, with over 1300 Black, adolescent females who sought to address the long-held myth that “Black females are strong” and able to cope and adapt with any situation. The results differed markedly from this historic myth. Instead, they found a strong relationship between stress and several types of psychiatric disorders in these Black adolescent females (1989). It further showed that these “Black females were not insulated in any special way from the harmful influences of stressful events” (pg. 140). The stress from the perception of racism, and its potential health implications compounded with increased behavioral disruption of Black youth (Burchinal, Roberts, Zeisel, & Rowley, 2008) not only impacts their academic success it also propels them into the arena of exclusionary discipline.

As the literature on Black girls and Black girlhood expands, these personal narratives must be centered in the discourse

### Methods

This study used in-depth interviews as the primary source for data collection. All interviews were conducted at locations agreed upon by the researcher and the parent. The use of in-depth interviews allowed for the participants to share their educational experiences in their own words. The use of in-depth interviews also allowed for me, the researcher, to explore the phenomenon using a line of questioning that elicited historical information that aided the study (Creswell 2003).

#### *Participants*

For this study 25 urban middle school Black girls in grades six, seven, and eight, participated in in-depth interviews and focus groups. All participants resided in Alameda County and attended the same urban school district. Participants demographic information revealed that 20 of the 25 resided in single family households, and lived in low-income communities.

### Narratives of Black Girlhood

*“I’m not upset that someone wants to call me an ‘angry black girl’. What I’m upset about is that they don’t care why I’m angry.” (Geneva, 8<sup>th</sup> grade)*

Through a secondary analysis of the interviews from the participants in my study I began to connect to the spiritual experiences of “witnessing” and “sacred telling” (Dillard, 2006). As

a researcher I witnessed the lives of these young Black girls come forth and take shape in the form of their own collective identity of who they viewed themselves to be through the sacred telling of their experiences. This was often in contradiction of how they felt they were viewed in the larger world. What made the sharing sacred was the actual telling of these experiences (both good and challenging). Many of the participants talked about their schooling experience, family, community, and other personal triumphs and challenges as they located themselves at the center of their personal narratives.

The data collection included focus groups, and during one of the groups several participants commented on what it was like to be a Black girl. Comments such as Black girls being more natural, trendsetters, and being the best were some of the many descriptors that were shared. This was such a rich discussion that I was left to believe that speaking about their experiences as Black girls was a conversation rarely had with adults bearing witness. The girls appeared comfortable discussing their experiences amongst each other. They were also able to share similar encounters as they awakened their “rememory” (Morrison, 1987) and continued nodding, clapping, and saying yes to each other’s experience - because they could relate. However, there were two participants in the focus group who simply stated, “I don’t know”, when they were presented with the opportunity to talk about how schools could support middle school Black girls’ academic success, or asked questions about their schooling experiences as it related to being a Black girl. Although some of the girls shared affirming experiences, there were three narratives that captured mine and other participants’ attention. These narratives were presented by Shadae, Ariel, and Tammy.

Shadae:

Well I like being a Black girl its not that I like it I love it, but at times its kinda hard, because I get criticized a lot, because I’m tall and I really have crazy hair and I like to wear it like that, and people have something to say somethin about it. Sometimes Black girls are not comfortable with the way they look, and their bodies. Usually, Black girls they get taken advantage of the most. Usually, like for being a Black girl it’s really like some fathers are irresponsible and walk out on Black children and its really just your mom. Most young girls get taken advantage of by older people, because they don’t know what boys to stay away from.

Ariel further elaborated:

Sometimes I don’t like being Black, because the way young Black girls put themselves. A lot of them young girls be on the streets or in fight videos on YouTube. People like ot watch them and laugh or whatever.

Tammy continued by saying:

Being a Black girl at times yes, at times it’s not that great to be a Black person, especially a Black female, because if you say if there was still like segregation and stuff think back to times like way back Black females use to be treated like animals. They use to have to spend all of day in the house barefoot cleaning, cleaning, cooking caring for the kids doing all that type of stuff and the Males can go out and have fun.

As the three participants discussed their views on Black girlhood I could not help but wonder how triggering school environments can be for them and the other participants in the study. Shadae shared from a place of personal pain as her personal schooling experiences proved to be very challenging at times. In her expression, Ariel equated the weight of Blackness to being negative, because of how she understood Black girls represented themselves. She lived in a community where she has witnessed Black girls and women being sexually exploited. Ariel's response was motivated in part by the negative media representation that she has seen Black girls portrayed in. Tammy associated the life of a Black female with what she viewed as menial work that has been historically associated with the Black mammy. The mammy is the most recognized induction of formalized schooling for Black women in American History. Yet, as Valenzuela (1999) poignantly states, that this "schooling (pg. 5) process is what urban students reject.

However, Tammy also offered a counter-narrative when she said:

People stereotype you, the things that are negatively attached to Black people are also things that other races/cultures participate in.

Black girls often contend with these stereotypes. Tammy clearly understood that behaviors that are considered unruly or poorly represented a person's race occurred in other cultures as well. During a one-on-one interview with Ariana, a 6th grade student who resided with her mother and brother - currently incarcerated - a painful reality emerged while she shared her thoughts on Black Girlhood:

In my opinion 5 out of 10 Black girls will probably drop out or cut, but its probably easy to success [sic] if you just do the work... sometimes the work is too hard for them to do and the teacher is all up in their face to get them to do it.

I did not question Ariana's statistics, but I later reviewed the school district's graduation statistics and learned that they graduate approximately 53% of their Black population. I was not surprised that Ariana had a keen awareness about Black girls academic struggles in her school district. Also, Ariana who self-identified herself as a C-/D+ student, shared a 1-bedroom apartment with her family and expressed great difficulty in getting to and from school. Her biggest concern was that she had to take two busses to school, and if she missed the first bus, she then had to take three busses to get to school. With such an awareness about the educational challenges for Black girls, Ariana's current school performance causes me to wonder how she too had internalized the lack of educational attainment for Black children within her schooling community as her performance also suffered.

In contrast to some of the perceptions on Black Girlhood that revealed the many difficulties that participants faced, they also expressed feelings of self-confidence and self-affirmation. Words such as fun, creative, beautiful, energetic, and smart were shared by some of the participants. Loresa shared that being a Black girl means "knowing how to fit myself into where I belong. I feel powerful. I feel like I can change the world."

Dimond, a 7th grade student who resided with her mother and father in a middle-income neighborhood stated:



Being a young Black girl is really fun, because there's a lot of young Black people that you get to meet and talk to and it's really fun. It means that you are smart and that you rise above other people. You have educational access and opportunities to this access.

Dimond's affirming experience of her Black girlhood was not shared by the majority of participants. However, Geneva, a student who had a very oppressive encounter with a staff member due to the length of her skirt, also felt affirmed as a Black girl. She stated the following about what she saw when she looked in the mirror:

I see a Black girl who is intelligent, who's smart, who's pretty, who goes through a lot of stuff, but she, she overcomes it and she faces her problems. I see a very strong person. I see someone whose going to eventually be something great in life. I see. That's it.

These counter-narratives affirm that there is a level of resistance in the language that these young women use to survive in communities where language may be used to dismiss and *other* them in very harmful ways. Their ability to see themselves in such positive light gives hope to the birth of their dreams. These instances (although few) also support the literature surrounding racial attitudes and self-esteem. Buckley and Carter (2003) concluded that gender role orientation and racial identity were two factors put forth to explain the bolstered self-esteem in Black girls versus other girls from different racial or cultural groups. More specifically, Black girls who were able to have a defined racial identity exhibited higher levels of self-esteem than those who did not (2003). For instance, Geneva had very negative encounters with staff within her schooling environment, yet when she looked in the mirror she saw intelligence, strength and beauty.

The narratives that are presented are a small sample of the rich stories shared by the participants of the study. Each narrative told a story of resilience in addition to the trauma and loss some girls experienced. These narratives also told a story of hope.

### **Claiming healing narratives**

In (re)claiming the spaces Black girls occupy it was important to explore what it meant to reflect, reimagine and heal within my practice as an educator. The "regular" or "ordinary" acts of "disciplining" Black girls that came to my office on referrals had evolved into "revolutionary acts of love". These revolutionary acts were inclusive of developing a praxis of intentionality via listening and seeing these young women differently. It begged the question of how educators (in their hierarchical relationship with students) can work to dismantle the narrative of the body as object and target of power and move away from schools being a place where one controls and corrects (Foucault, 1977). Instead, school for Black girls can become a space where they engage and explore. I offer two intentional acts such as "sacred telling" and "witnessing" for re(imagining) school as a locality that is inclusive of Black girls experiences' as sacred and important.

My connection to these young women's stories allowed for moments of (re)imagining Black girlhood. These narratives were personal, vulnerable, and privileged me with stories of who these girls were instead of allowing the discipline referral to paint this picture. It also forced me to become acutely aware of the spaces Black girls entered when they left my office



and how these spaces received them. The Black girls who were continually referred were often ignored and dismissed. The practice of “spirit murder” (Williams, 1991) began in the classroom, continued in the disciplinary office and often ended with some form of exclusionary discipline. I began to engage these young women as a way of getting to know them aside from why they were sent to the office. It made me wonder how Black girls who held so much responsibility and met so many expectations in their families, came to school, made attempts at learning and tried to navigate a school setting that posed many challenges for them. It forced me to hold their narratives differently. It was important that the opportunities of healing were identified as each narrative was shared.

### **Sites of Disruption**

The narratives that were shared clearly present schools as sites of disruption for Black Girls. The challenge presented here is a call for educators to further examine schools instructional design, schooling practices, and policies to understand how they coalesce to create inequitable experiences for Black girls. It further calls for educators and educational institutions to explore schools being sites of disruption of the disparities that Black girls experience within these settings, instead of disrupting their access to learn, access to safety, access to love. In other words how will schools use these narratives from Black girls as opportunities to inform disciplinary decisions and promote healing opportunities.

However, these sites of disruption caused many of the young women to engage in a level of resilience that worried me at times, because I understood the cost of their “strength” in standing in these spaces that required so much emotional capital. Their resilience may very well come at a cost without the necessary support system and services in place to address the trauma that may be present in their lives. According to psychological and health literature on Black girls (Estell, Farmer, Pearl, Van Acker & Rodkin, 2008; Xie et al. 2003) these young women were almost guaranteed to experience bouts of depression, hopelessness, or educational failure if their social and emotional needs were not supported in strained schooling environments. Thus, behaviors exhibited by Black girls existing in a state of being hyper-aroused, which may interfere with their relationships with teachers, peers, and family are a cause for concern.

### **From sites of disruption to healing and (re)imagining schools**

What I have tried to capture in this paper is the importance of centering Black girls’ schooling experiences in educational discourse. These narratives led me to revisit my own teacher training and how higher education institutions prepared me to enter these sacred places called schools. The teacher training was inadequate, Euro-centric, and failed to prepare me and my peers to work in school communities. Conversations about race, class, and gender were also non-existent. We were simply not prepared nor trained to think about educating the whole child, or being prepared to support them. However, one such way to (re)imagine schools is to train teachers and administrators to address the socio-emotional needs of Black girls and other students by holding healing circles. These provide an opportunity to connect with students and for students to connect with each other through “sacred telling” and “witnessing”. For an adult to bear witness to these stories and connect with students outside of the curriculum is invaluable to both the student and the adult.

### Conclusion

This paper identified issues of strain among urban middle school Black girls in Northern California. Through the explanation of what is ‘strain’ and what ‘healing narratives’ are or could be for Black girls, I laid the foundation for understanding the strained experiences and relationships among Black girls within the school setting as well as the link between school and hope i.e. What happens to the Black girl before she get to school, what does she go through after school and so forth. These are related experiences.

As educators, how might schools consider this research to explore the teacher-student relationship as it relates to Black girls? Questions to be considered include *How do we make space for young Black girls and acknowledge their existence? Where do we confront our own bias (implicit or explicit) towards behaviors that we view as aggressive that may actually be a resistance to the oppressive practices of “schooling”?* As I continue my journey into this practice of witnessing, I bring forth the call for other Black women educators and scholars to examine their “rememory” (Morrison, 1985) of Black girlhood, of their experiences of schooling in their Black bodies. This journey is not only for myself, it is for my mother, my grandmother, my great-grandmother, and the beautifully complex and rich female lineage that birthed me into existence. For these women, my Ancestors, will forever characterize my work as an educator, a healer, and a human being.

By engaging in scholarship that will privilege the voices of Black girls I wish to omit this outsiders perception by capturing their personal narratives. As a scholar-practitioner whose work is on Black girls and women, the opportunity to read and engage with women who went from practitioner to scholar has also provided me with a collection of contemporary stories that resembled my own educational trajectory. Bearing witness to Black girls educational experiences provided much insight into how these experiences impacted their successes and failures in school. The erasure of my being in my childhood classroom was salient to who I became as a young adult. Like other urban schooling environments, my education was impacted by so many systematic challenges that the quality of instruction was derailed by these environmental phenomena. These experiences were representative of the oppressive teaching practices inflicted upon me daily (such as as being subjected to... or feeling unseen...), and it only fueled my self-doubts about my intellectual abilities. My body internalised the theory that Black children did not matter. Black girls were more than invisible. We were never considered.

The triangulation of my encounters with inequality in K-12 schooling for Black girls, the challenge that was set forth by my mentor to study Black girls, and my over two decades experience of working with Black youth, gave me the courage to further my research on a population that I knew very intimately, yet had my own struggles of disassociation with along my adolescent and adulthood journey. These narratives that explored Black girlhood would become the body of work that resulted in my qualitative dissertation which examined the schooling experiences for Black girls and how their raced, classed, and gendered bodies, coupled with strain were impacted within an urban middle school setting. Particularly for this study, these multiple identities collided with the notion of education being the great equalizer for this population. For Black girls, this meant that they were often subjected to experiences and decisions from adults that rendered them hopeless within the institution of education — an institution that is revered as this provider of meritocracy.

### Notes

1. In this essay the author defines “triple threat” as the classroom/hallway, playground, and administrative offices. These spaces are threats to Black girls because they often serve as sites of disenfranchisement and make them vulnerable to unsafe practices within school environments.
2. On April 26, 2018 the National Women’s Law Center released a report on the bias that was reported by Black girls due to the dress code policies in several D.C. public schools. See DRESS CODED: Black Girls, Bodies, and Bias in D.C. Schools for more.
3. On April 15, 2017, 15-year old twin sisters Deann and Mya Cook were sent to the school office for uniform infraction due to wearing their hair braided in hair extensions. In 2016 in Pretoria, South Africa, Unathi Gongxeka a student attending Pretoria Girls School was threatened to be withheld from completing her written exams if she did not change her afro. This was one of many findings after the school came under international scrutiny from Black girls’ reporting allegations of racism, which prompted an investigation from the Department of Basic Education (DBE). The DBE issued a report finding many of the allegations of racism to be true and called for the school to immediately cease the practice of discriminating against action against teachers who were found to be part of this practice.
4. Revolutionary Acts of love - an act of providing a safe space for a child when they were supposed to be ‘punished’ or ‘disciplined’ but they are rather paid attention, and asked about their family, their community and their personal self-care and love. These act are created in a space that is confidential, and transcends the educational- classroom space as well as the home-parent relationship.
5. Sacred Telling - an act of reclaiming the middle passage through narratives. As young Black women re(tell) their schooling experiences, the stories become a vessel for healing, hope, and recognition. Black bodies have a historic experience of being silenced, thus having a voice and using it is a revolutionary act, especially for Black girls. Sacred telling goes hand and hand with the creation of a safe space which may not be available or accessible to Black girls in their bodies, in their homes or communities and at school. If they can have that safe space for a few hours (with a trusted teacher or a counselor or peers) then there is a level of healing and being heard in this way is also a narrative of healing.
6. Witnessing - a particular state of listening and connecting to the experiences of Black girls. In this study I use the term ‘witnessing’ in a way that validates the lives of young Black girls through the act of being present and spiritually open to the embodied experiences as stories of pain, joy, and reflection are shared in moments of sacred telling. I expand upon this term from Cynthia Dillard’s (2008) work in which she includes the discourse of spirituality to explore what this means for African-American women who educate and conduct research.
7. Exclusionary Discipline - any disciplinary action that removes or excludes students from their usual educational setting. The most common types of exclusionary discipline practices in schools are suspension and expulsion.

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## **Association of Black Psychologists 2018—The 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary: A gathering of wounded and healing deers<sup>1</sup>**

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University of South Africa*

### **Elders can we speak!**

Asked the children  
More than just a request  
But an affirmation from the future  
That the old have lived their divine purpose

Elders can we speak?  
A symbolism of a good example set  
Duties fulfilled  
Lessons taught  
Values instilled

Elders can we speak?  
And let you know that  
Your teachings were not in vain  
The future is safe  
In our palms it shall be held tenderly

Elders can we speak?  
Of the humanity of our world  
Scribes of our ancestors

Elders can we speak?  
Of a path your bare feet created  
As testimony  
That Africa's spirit is as free as water  
Elders can we speak  
Of your daring LOVE!

It became home when the youth wouldn't just grab the podium without requesting permission from the elders. An elder is the spirit I describe in the poem above. Someone who has ensured that the future shall live. So with their permission, I shall pay tribute to some of the elders I met. To those unmentioned- you touched me too!

The Association for Black Psychologists (ABPsi) has been with us for 50 years yet it was my first attendance. Born in the fertile year of 1968 when the ancestors of the black nation birthed pearls of wisdom, strength and weapons! When they appeared to be sending their children to the battlefield. Stand up and fight back- they said! Stand up and fight back is the song of our children 50 years later and there I found myself in Oakland, California, at the birthplace

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of the Black Panther- my ancestors.

Greeted by Charles (the street minder and the very first hand I shook in Oakland) upon emerging from the underground BART station looking lost and confused I soon became assured that my soul was no wanderer. There were familiar spirits and long lost friends. Charles ensured that I found a cab to my hotel which was about three kilometers away.

ABPsi 2018 convention began the evening after my arrival and it took a poem from a young black man for my brain to enter intellectual lockdown and for my spirit to claim ground- this was no place for intellectual gimmicks. The poem set my spirit on grieving mode because;

**Human beings had died on this land,  
on my land and other lands!  
CORRECTION- human beings were murdered on this land,  
my land and other lands  
and nobody has accounted for their lives!**

Speaker after speaker the next morning and the mornings that followed sent my soul into permanent mourning. I suddenly remembered that I never cried for my murdered ancestors. I never thought of British and Dutch invasions of my land with tears in my eyes. I remembered that when I was a child in 1985 while visiting Cape Town- though shocked, I never cried for the terrorized Africans in KTC squatter camp whose homes were demolished by police. Images of the unfazed faces of the affected children flashed through my eyes and suddenly I recalled that they never appeared in grief.

I never cried for Mongezi Tax Cakata whom apartheid police killed and later made to stand trial together with his surviving comrades through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and was posthumously denied amnesty- thus found guilty! For what?! Defending his land against the invaders! That would have been my big brother. He would have taught me about Sobukwe and Afrikan philosophy. Yes, he is now my favourite ancestor and he does teach and force me to write to life stories he only knows. But I needed to cry to mark his transitioning. I welled up at ABPsi. I knew my grief was safe among other wounded deers. I also knew that my healing was among those beautiful Afrikan spirits.

ABPsi to me soon became a space like no other. It is where I felt I didn't have to explain my blackness. My spirit felt nestled and the people were themselves. There were no phony performances of intellectualism where academics gather to speak at one another. The soul was doing its divine duties. People remembered you, spoke with you, were kind to one another, helpful, wanted you to be fine.

I met Dr Wade Nobles and I dreaded greeting him. I had been around Westernised scholars long enough to learn that you have to sound a particular way and utilize a certain vocabulary for them to even acknowledge your humanity. But Dr Nobles is not that kind- he was humane and engaging and guiding and loving and elderly- he reminded me of the elders I grew up around in my village. Who speak their truth without separating it from its humanity for truth is humanity! I attended a few of Dr Nobles presentations and I left with even more respect for black creative outputs! We do not entertain but heal by creating! Nothing is by accident.

My friends laughed at my exuberance and love for my dearest Dr Na'Im Akbar. Meeting him brought me to tears. I wanted to introduce him to my ancestors but then I remembered that my ancestors already know this dude and have sent him to get work did! I remembered that they

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sent him first so we would know it is possible to stand up and fight back! He is everyone who died fighting and everyone in the future. He is the REFERENCE they send us to find hoping we come back bare handed. So yeah-I love him, I want all the students under my care to know him and love him and quote him and want to meet him and to say “tata you did it for us! You made us present! You made us matter- we are the black lives who matter”

I found my healing in the presence of the matriarchs. Dr Linda James Myers whose spirit is forever smiling and arms stretched ready to give love. She is the intellectual our wounded students deserve to have. The humane one, whose pen spits bullets of wisdom yet heart filled with love and beauty. Dr Vera Nobles’ intellectual work found a home in my soul. It added new pathways to my understanding of naming practices of Africans both in Africa and the diaspora. She is a spiritual giant who is always affirming and loving. I told her we have met before and she agreed. I was at ease with her the way a daughter would be to a mother. Dr Huberta Jackson-Lowman, the outgoing ABPsi president is a leader I would love to be. Then there is a Johannesburg trio my beautiful sisters whom I met in South Africa about 12 months ago. I was thrilled to reconnect with them and got to understand what they do. Drs Rachel Bayard-Cooks, Merry Parrish and Patricia Nunley are special to me and carry with them beautiful gifts. I was honoured to be a guest lecturer at Dr Nunley’s class at the City College of San Francisco. I am also grateful for her heart. She is the one with whom I got to spend most time. She is everything and everything is her. She loves each one of us exactly how we should be loved. Well, she loves me and took me everywhere, crossed bridges with me, took pictures of me and showed me different shades of San Francisco. Most importantly she introduced me to the real SOUL FOOD!

I felt truly blessed to have made it to ABPsi 2018 and I thus say camagu koo Bhayeni, ooManzi, ooYiwa, ooNotsheko. Camagu manina ooThangana, aMabamba, ooBhodlinja. ooNozala abazala izizwe ezihle- ooNOZIZWE- mother of nations who brought me to nations of Afrikans from whom to learn! (Ancestral praises).

### Notes

1. The reference to deers is from a poem by the author. In a personal conversation (Aug 2018) Dr. Cakata explains, “I took it from a poem I wrote about wounded deers, the animal. A metaphor for our woundedness and ability to heal. It is one of the oral songs I keep composing about deers since 2016. When I visited an arts residency in Italy, as my host and one other guest drove up the mountain to the house on my arrival, a deer came out of nowhere, stood unfazed looking into the car then ran off. It all happened without alarm, the other guest said ‘perhaps it’s your people from Africa, ensuring you arrived.’ I believed her and embraced the deer.” The original unpublished poem is

*Deers Who Wouldn't Die* by Zethu Cakata  
 As I journeyed through  
 The raging water  
 I had to remember I am  
 of the deers  
 Who bore multiple  
 Wounds  
 Yet forged, assured  
 That bones mend  
 And flesh rebirths  
 All in a process  
 Called healing

## **“NOT ON MY WATCH”: GENOCIDE & FAILURE OF R2P IN SOUTHERN CAMEROONS**

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After more than thirty-five years in power, with no single independent public institutions and despite a heavy reliance on the “mechanics of violence,” a protest against government policies erupted in a remote part of the country. What started as a peaceful protest soon degenerated into violence because of the government’s disproportionate use of force in dealing with unarmed civilian protesters. According to Amnesty International Report, “... the use of live bullets by security forces led to the deaths of ...people during a protest in the northwestern city...”

People in (these) regions are in the grip of a deadly cycle of violence. Security forces have indiscriminately killed, arrested and tortured people during military operations which have also displaced thousands of civilians. Their heavy-handed response will do nothing to calm the violence - in fact it is likely to further alienate ... communities and fuel further unrest.” (Amnesty International 2017; 2018)

The preceding paragraphs could succinctly describe either Libya in 2011 or Cameroon in 2018. In 2011, Muamar Gaddafi had been in power for 42 years but unrests which started with the Arab Spring in Tunisia and Egypt gained momentum in the Eastern Libyan city of Benghazi. Gaddafi’s government, according to reports was accused of using helicopter gunships, snipers, and foreign mercenaries against opposition fighters. As a result of these abuses and coupled with allegations of genocide, mass rape and summary executions, the UN Security Council invoked the doctrine of R2P intended “to halt human suffering” and successfully passed Resolution 1973 which granted NATO the right to use force in the Libyan intervention (Conner 2017).

In July 2018, the eighty-six year old president of Cameroon, Paul Biya, declared his intent to seek reelection in October. Biya has been in power since 1975 when he first became prime minister and 1982 when he acceded to the top office as president. In October of 2016, teachers and lawyers in the English-speaking city of Bamenda protested against government imposition of French-speaking teachers on English-speaking students and the transfer of Civil-law trained judges from French Cameroon to the Common Law courts of English-speaking Cameroon. Like the Libyan situation in 2011, the government of Cameroon “responded to what began as an unarmed political protest with a cruel campaign of killing, rape, kidnapping, torture, disappearances, and the burning of crops and villages, driving out their inhabitants into the bush” (Mann 2018). Despite the fact that since 2016, the situation in Cameroon has steadily deteriorated with many international groups calling it a prelude to a civil war or genocide and asking for the UN Security Council to intervene, there is noticeable silence. So why and how did UNSC successfully invoke R2P in the Libyan case but has so far failed to summon a meeting to “halt human suffering” in Cameroon?

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This paper addresses both the failure and selective application of the principle of R2P with particular references in the case of Cameroon (Amnesty International 2017; 2018).

### **The Birth of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) & The Rwandan Genocide**

In 1948 in the aftermath of World War II, the question on minds of many centered on the Jewish Holocaust. What could be done to prevent a repeat of the mass killing of innocent people by their own government? The United Nations Convention on Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide was the first major step towards achieving this goal and it added a significant development in international criminal law. As with any landmark document of this nature there were disagreements among the negotiating member states which ended in a flawed compromise. Despite some of its glaring lacunae this new law was still better than the status quo ante. When the Genocide Convention came into force in 1951, it “was seen by its own creators as an incomplete compromise, a starting point which they hoped, “in spite of its imperfections... could not fail to have a preventive effect.” Unfortunately the Cold War forced this optimism into a long period of hibernation in which despite the many cases of genocidal conflicts, (such as in Cambodia), the Convention remained dormant. It was not until 1992 at the end of the Cold War that many felt the UNO could go back into full work mode as it was intended at its founding especially with regards to mass atrocities like genocide (Maddox 2015).

It was not an accident that the end of the Cold War coincided with the UN’s mission to redefine its purpose in the twenty-first century. Under these circumstances and with the sustained cracks within the wall of absolute sovereignty one would have expected that, when the crisis started in Rwanda, the international community would have been in a better place to intervene. Rwanda was relatively smaller, militarily and economically it could not compare with any of the major powers. It was not of any geopolitical interests to any of the major powers except France. Unlike in other cases where countries used sovereignty to prevent information flow or limit access about the crimes, in the case of Rwanda, the country had “since been acknowledged as a genocide “both foreseen and flagged” and thus, entirely preventable” (Maddox 2015).

The triggers of the Rwandan genocide are well documented. From the moment French colonial rule utilized its pseudo-scientific system to justify Tutsi superiority and dominance over Hutus and Twa, to the Hutu Revolution in 1959 which attempted to reverse the colonial system and the successfully exiling of many Tutsis in the 1960s the Rwanda turmoil was not unknown. When the Rwandan Patriotic Front in the early 1990s invaded the country from Congo, to repatriate Tutsi exiles, the UN intervened to broker peace and created a power sharing deal with the Arusha Accord of 1993. Under this deal, the UN sent over 2500 peacekeeping soldiers into Rwanda under the United Nations Mission in Rwanda (UNAMIR). Subsequently, when the situation started deteriorating and even with the presence of UN representatives on the ground in Rwanda and the reports which they sent back to the UN head offices, there was general lack of action by the key players. The various documented stages of the genocide such as the assassination of President Juvenal Habyarimana in 1994, targeted execution of Tutsis, the formation of *Interhamwe* militias, production and distribution of hate speech against Tutsis were all reported by UN officials including the Commander of UNAMIR Romeo Dallaire and the UN human rights investigator Bacre Waly Ndiaye. Even after it was evident that the International community had failed to prevent the conflict, when the genocide broke out there was still inaction (Maddox 2015).

While there are many factors which may explain the reasons for this indifference and

lack of will to intervene, it is important to highlight a few here that may be applicable in the case of Cameroon. The most commonly proffered excuse claimed the UN was heavily involved in the many crisis all over the world such as in Bosnia, Haiti, South Africa, North Korea and Somalia. Therefore, there was just not enough resources to do something else in Rwanda. The Somalian case is pertinent because the UN had intervened in Somalia in 1993 to ultimately some disastrous consequences which left about eighteen American rangers and twenty-four Pakistani soldiers dead. The fallout from this mission was that it propagated a general unwillingness on the part of U.S politicians to restrict and limit the role for US interventions. Despite the drawdown and inaction, when ten Belgian peacekeepers were killed in Rwanda, the UN was able to raise funds and evacuated all foreign nationals from Rwanda in April 1994. When the UN ultimately had a debate in May and approved an intervention by asking for an increase in funding for UNAMIR there was still a general delay as the funds were slow coming in and the forces did not get to the ground until July 1994 after the genocide had ended. Lastly, many of the world powers resisted the application or use of the term “genocide” in the Rwanda crisis. Some argued that it was an African civil war based on “ancient tribal rivalries.” The government of the United States claimed that, “events in Rwanda clearly seem to meet the definition of genocide” but was concerned that if the UN Security Council was to make such a determination then “it may be forced to ‘take such action’ as provided for in Article VIII.” Ambassador David Hannay, from Britain added that if the UNSC used the word “genocide” but failed to act afterwards, it would become a “laughing stock” (Maddox 2015).

The two genocides in the last decade of the twentieth century - Yugoslavia in 1992 and Rwanda in 1994 challenged the theory that the end of the Cold War made it possible for the UN to return to its mission as it was intended in 1948. The birth of the doctrine of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) and the Office of the Special Advisor to the Secretary General on the Prevention of Genocide (OSAPG) are often cited as two examples for this. OSAPG became a fulltime position in 2007 with a clear mandate to focus on how to prevent genocide by “gathering information, providing early warning and presenting appropriate recommendations to prevent a situation from degenerating into genocide.” The failure of the global community and the Genocide Convention in the face of these horrific mass executions forced the UN to re-evaluate its purpose and mission in the twenty-first century. In its Millennial Report of 2000, Kofi Anan posed this question: “If humanitarian intervention is, indeed, an unacceptable assault on sovereignty, how should we respond to a Rwanda, to a Srebrenica, to gross and systematic violation of human rights that offend every precept of our common humanity?” In response to this question the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS), created by the Canadian Government in December 2001 published a report, “The Responsibility to Protect” (Conner 2017).

The ICISS had among its main goals the need to understand why the world had stood idly by while human beings were being massacred in Rwanda and to make sure that there were “no more Rwandas.” ICISS concluded that among the many reasons for the inaction on Rwanda, the most paramount included the unwillingness by member states to deal with human rights abuses and the UN’s lack of a legitimate capacity to assist. On the count of legitimacy on the part of the UN, the ICISS explored the possibilities of adopting specific rules and norms of engagement in cases requiring international humanitarian intervention in order to justify a preventive action. The ICISS went further to delineate three cardinal aspects of the R2P doctrine. Firstly, states have an obligation to prevent or a duty to tackle the root causes of conflict (economic, political, regional, cultural etc.) that may give rise to egregious violations of



human rights. The responsibility to react is the second and requires that states are obligated to respond with appropriate measure in cases of blatant disregard of human rights. These measures are defined as including sanctions and military intervention as a last resort. This second standard has been considered “the most practical element of R2P,” because often states only react to genocides or violations of human rights “after the initial atrocity (or atrocities) that triggered the event.” This responsibility brings a more practical element to R2P than the first criterion since many governments do not seek to prevent genocides instead they often only react after the fact. The last requirement is the responsibility to rebuild. This requires that after an intervention to stop a genocide, the international community has a duty to remain and assist the country to recover and in reconciliation (Conner 2017).

Despite all this clarity and definition of standards, R2P doctrine faced an uphill battle in many other areas. For example, because of the fact that R2P at present is only an international norm, but not a formal law amongst states, it is not legally binding. Notwithstanding this limitation, under international law, once a norm is established, failure to comply by a state could result in pressure from other states to force the non-complying state to fulfil its international obligations. The concept of state sovereignty is also another area where R2P constantly ran into roadblocks. Historically, state sovereignty has granted leaders the ability and impunity to conduct their internal affairs without fear of interference from outside powers. Raphael Lemkin who coined the term “genocide” in 1944 and crusaded in favor of the Genocide Convention argued against absolute sovereignty. He posited especially after what had happened in Germany that absolute sovereignty could not be construed as granting states “the right to kill millions of innocent people.” The Nuremberg Trials became the first case where perpetrators of genocide were tried and it therefore opened a major crack in the wall of absolute sovereignty. R2P like the Genocide Convention was based on the idea that states cannot be accorded impunity under sovereignty to commit mass atrocities against their own people (Maddox 2015).

According to UN Charter Article 2.7:

[n]othing contained in the present Charter shall authorize the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state or shall require the Members to submit such matters to settlement under the present Charter; but this principle shall not prejudice the application of enforcement measures under Chapter VII.

State sovereignty is the cornerstone of the UN Charter and Article 2.7 granted the state jurisdiction in all domestic matters which may even include genocide. Despite the mention of Chapter VII, (military intervention) in Article 2.7, according to Peta Conner, it has been generally accepted that state sovereignty trumps human rights issues within that state. This is so because in international politics most countries are governed by their practical interests as opposed to any ethical, moral or ideological considerations. But it is fair to recognize that undeterred by this system of realpolitik, R2P has provided more than just a challenge to sovereignty, it has now presented the world with a newly acceptable paradigm by defining sovereignty as a responsibility. Unlike before when states could claim that the welfare of their citizens is an exclusive domestic concern, R2P now requires that states be held responsible (both internationally by the UN and internally by their people) for protecting the lives of citizens. With the changes in the meaning of sovereignty, human security is becoming very important and has been redefined “to include the protection of people, not just states.”



The final question regarding R2P is the circumstances under which a state or coalition of states may intervene in the event of a genocide or other violations of human rights. In the domestic situation under the new definition, if a state failed in its duty to protect its citizens, it may be held accountable by its citizens or the international community. But who has jurisdiction to hold an intervening state accountable? Under the ICISS, the core requirement for the intervening states included, “the primary purpose of the intervention, whatever other motives intervening states may have, must be to halt or avert human suffering.” This goal of “right intention” has been heavily criticized because it provided justification for other motives of intervention as long as the claim to save lives has been made. The ethical questions raised by this interpretation has provoked the question, can a single country claim humanitarian grounds as justification for intervention in another country? Which cases would be most protected under R2P and why? Who will make the determination? Noam Chomsky offered some answers to these questions by stating unambiguously whose narrative of R2P will prevail. “The self-described bearers of enlightenment happen to be the rich and the powerful, the inheritors of the colonial and neo-colonial systems of global dominion: they are the North, the First World,” (Chomsky 1999) these are the people who will make the final determination on whose behalf R2P can be invoked and when. Peta Conner goes even further to assert that the former colonial powers through R2P get the right to decide who merits to be saved based on their own strategic interests.

### **The Bankruptcy of R2P in the Case of Darfur**

As the first recorded case of genocide in the twenty-first century, Darfur posed certain fundamental challenges to the Genocide Convention and the doctrine of the Responsibility to Protect. Before delving into those issues, it is important to briefly review the historical facts surrounding Sudan and Darfur. After gaining independence from Britain in 1956, Sudan, Africa’s largest country was thrown into two successively prolonged civil wars. At issue was the political, economic and social domination by the Arab Muslim north over the non-Arab south Sudan. These problems were exacerbated by the civil war, increased desertification, famine and drought which forced the nomadic Arabs to compete for grazing land with the sedentary societies in the south. As a result, “a seemingly barren wasteland” of Darfur became a flashpoint as different groups competed for whatever grazing land was available. But the government did not pay much attention to Darfur because of the civil war raging between the north and the south. Continuous government support of the Arab Sudanese grazers over the non-Arab Sudanese had an impact in Darfur in 2003 when the main rebel groups Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) launched an attack against the Sudanese Air Force base in North Darfur (*World Without Genocide*).

The Government of Sudan (GoS) responded to this attack by unleashing an aerial bombardment by the Sudanese Air Force. This was followed by arming the Janjaweed militia, which systematically burned villages, polluted water sources and executed women and children. Even though these large scale human rights abuses were happening, the GoS and the international community focused mostly on negotiating the Comprehensive Peace Agreement which started in 2001. In 2005 they were able to broker a deal which brought an end to the war between the north and the south by granting greater devolution of powers to south Sudan. But the human rights crisis in Darfur was also gaining greater traction in the press at the same time. The UN Humanitarian Coordinator in 2004 made public statements comparing the mass executions and displaced persons to the Rwanda genocide. Due to consistent pressure and activism, the US government investigated the details of the Darfuri crisis and found consistent patterns

of atrocities directed at the non-Arab ethnic groups in Darfur. As a result of these findings, Colin Powell, U.S. Secretary of State testified on September 9, 2004 before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, that, “genocide had been committed...and may still be occurring,” in Darfur. He therefore invoked Article VIII of the Genocide Convention, which required the UN to open “a full-blown and unfettered investigation.” The UN responded with Security Council Resolution 1564 on 18 September, which created a Commission of Inquiry (COI) to investigate the allegations of crimes in Darfur (Maddox 2015).

From November 2004 to January 2005 the Commission of Inquiry conducted its investigation in Sudan and concluded that the “Government of Sudan had not pursued a policy of genocide,” contrary to the finding of the United States. However, the COI recognized that there were “gross violations of human rights” including war crimes and crimes against humanity. This declaration by the COI that violence in Darfur amounted to human rights violations but not genocide had significant consequences. Many people in the general public and in the news media believed that the COI had let the global community off the hook especially as newspapers carried headlines such as “murder – but no genocide,” “UN clears GoS of genocide” etc. Even after the COI made a finding of gross human rights violations (but not genocide) instead of recommending an intervention of some sorts, it referred the matter to the International Criminal Court for prosecution. This approach is problematic because it bypassed the prevention and intervention phases and acted as if the genocide had ended (Maddox 2015).

The fact that the US investigation and the UN Commission of Inquiry arrived at different conclusions about the situation in Darfur has raised concerns about the “definitional ambiguities” in the wording of the Genocide Convention. Because of varied methodological approaches and standards, it is possible to see how the two teams could have come to the different results. But the wording of Article II of the Genocide Convention also presented a problem. It provided a list of transgressions that may qualify as a genocide depending on whether they were “committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such.” The Convention failed to define clearly whether the words “in whole or in part” were applicable to the intent only or to the actual destruction or both. Both the US investigation and COI agreed that those words (in whole or in part) applied clearly to the actual physical destruction in Darfur. Where they disagreed was whether those words were applicable in the “intent to destroy,”

The US investigation found that “evidence corroborates the specific intent of the perpetrators to destroy a group ‘in whole or in part’” and that “intent may be inferred from their deliberate conduct.” In contrast, the COI found that “the crucial element of genocidal intent appears to be missing” This was argued on the basis of “several indicators” such as “the fact that...attackers refrained from exterminating the whole population...but instead selectively killed groups of young men” (Maddox 2015)

Some scholars have concluded that the UN COI may have harbored a bias from the beginning and had decided against a finding of genocide even before embarking on the Darfur mission (Maddox 2015).

The protected groups under the Genocide Convention were limited only to religious, racial, ethnic or national groups. This implied that certain groups were excluded from protection and that in order to ascertain a finding of genocide it must be proven that the victims fell under one of the protected groups and whether they were targeted with the intent to destroy as part

of that group. Some authorities have argued that religious, racial, ethnic or national groups are historically and culturally mutable terminologies with fluid meanings that can change over time. Who has the final authority to define group identity – the UN, scholars or the members of the group themselves? These issues were the focal points in Darfur especially because outsiders could not tell the difference between victims and the perpetrators. American investigators employed broadly defining terms such as “nonArab” or Arab groups, but the COI which employed a somewhat detailed approach to classify the ethnic makeup of Sudan concluded that, “the victims objectively do not appear to make up ethnic groups distinct from the perpetrators.” But the COI also conceded that although the victim and perpetrator groups shared some common cultural values, most of the people “have come to perceive themselves as either ‘African’ or ‘Arab’” and consequently, victims “subjectively make up a protected group.”<sup>1</sup>

It has now been established that a “culture of debilitating debates” emerged around these questions of definitional ambiguities and became the principal method to delay intervention by prolonging debates. Besides the fact that while they are debating, the genocide was proceeding unimpaired, such discussions like the requirement to investigate the genocide before any intervention or preventive action all added to the delay to act in a timely manner. Notwithstanding the America investigation and the determination of a genocide in Darfur, the length of time the matter took for the UN investigation to complete its own finding, the genocide in Darfur had already reach proportions and as discussed above, by the time of intervention in Rwanda, the genocide was already over. In the face of all these debates, “the use of genocide can morally embarrass, and to an extent oblige, politicians who might otherwise seek to avoid efforts to prevent or halt genocide.” Perhaps, it has been argued, it was agonizing consciousness of the bankruptcy of the United Nations to intervene in Rwanda which pushed President George W. Bush in 2004 to conclude that, “not on my watch” in relation to Darfur.<sup>2</sup>

### **Genocide in Southern Cameroons & The Culture of Debilitating Debates**

By August of 2018, many major newspapers across Europe, Africa, United States and even Asia, had reported the increasingly dire human rights crises in Southern Cameroons.<sup>3</sup> The New York Times on July 25, 2018 reported an incident caught on tape in which some Cameroon security officers led two women (one with a baby strapped to her back) with the other child walking along to a remote area before they were executed. Although the government of Cameroon initially challenged the authenticity of the video, Zeid Ra’ad al-Hussein, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights reminded the government of Cameroon of its responsibility to investigate the matter. Granted that this specific incident which was captured on video occurred in a different part of Cameroon, Agbor Balla, a human rights activist based in Cameroon, confirmed that such “extrajudicial killings are part of a broader pattern,” of the culture of impunity which exists within the Cameroon forces. The minority English-speaking people of Southern Cameroons used the video to argue that it represented the type of human rights abuses they had been complaining about from the government of Cameroon. This view was supported by the UN as affirmed in *The New York Times* article:

Videos of abuses by security forces posted to social media have served to escalate the violence. In English-speaking areas, it has worsened significantly in recent weeks and claimed at least 425 lives, according to the United Nations agency UNICEF. Many of the clips cannot be verified. The statement from the United Nations said it had repeatedly asked to enter English-speaking areas, but the government had denied access. (Searcey 2018)

In addition to the reporting from major newspapers, many international human rights groups such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and International Crisis Group have increasingly been calling attention to the massacre of the English-speaking minority by the government of Cameroon. U.S. Ambassador to Cameroon Peter Belerin after meeting with the President Paul Biya in May 2018, issued the following statement condemning the targeted killings and other abuses against the minority English-speaking people as they advocate for independence.

On the side of the government, there have been targeted killings, detentions without access to legal support, family, or the Red Cross, and burning and looting of villages. On the side of the separatists, there have been murders of gendarmes, kidnapping of government officials, and burning of schools. (Nigerian Vanguard 2018)

These comments by U.S. ambassador echoed the reports published by Amnesty International. In a series of publically issued communiques, Amnesty International documented the recent stages of the egregious violations of human rights in Southern Cameroons. The current “Anglophone” uprising in Cameroon started with the teachers and lawyers strike against government “marginalization” in December 2016. The government of Cameroon responded by “arbitrarily arresting peaceful protesters and... used excessive force to disperse gatherings in Bamenda and Buea, leading to several injured and at least one civilian dead. On 26 November more than 100 people were arrested in Bamenda.” Amnesty called for the investigation of about six people who were killed by government action. As Amnesty predicted, such unnecessary and excessive force escalated an already tense situation. But what started as a strike against specific conditions soon degenerated into a crisis largely because of the government’s policy of denial, disregard, and intimidation and when all these failed outright large scale ethnic cleansing (Amnesty International 2017; 2018). It is important at this point to revisit the historical origins, continuities and change in the crisis that has until recently been known as the Anglophone problem in Cameroon.

### **From German Kamerun to Southern Cameroons: The Creation of an Identity**

The modern history of Cameroon is in many ways directly tied to its colonial past. From 1884, what became known as German Kamerun gradually stretched from the shores of the Atlantic Ocean in the southwest to the arid desert of Lake Chad in the north. It was a massive region wedged between British controlled Nigeria in the west and French Equatorial central Africa in the east. The German control over this colony like the rest of its possessions in Africa was interrupted by World War I. In 1916 Germany surrendered Kamerun after it was weakened by a combined African, English and French attack. Consequently German Kamerun fell under a short lived Anglo-French Condominium which in 1922 became a Mandate of the League of Nations. But this new status did not last for a long time as the two powers partitioned Kamerun into two at a ratio of 1:4 with the British taking a relatively 20 percent of the land which they ruled as part of the Nigerian colony. The French maintained the rest of Kamerun and controlled it using the same policies implemented in other French possessions (Adig 2017). Thus Kamerun which had no responsibilities in causing the war, was partitioned and thus suffered the consequences which were supposed to be assigned to a vanquished Germany.

After World War II the status of all former mandate territories changed as they became UN Trusteeship Territories in 1946. In theory therefore Kamerun was neither a colony of

the British nor the French, but the League's Mandate and a UN Trusteeship. Despite these proclamations under international law, in practice, former German Kamerun was ruled as a colony by the new administering countries. The British called their section Cameroons while the French referred to theirs as Cameroun. The difference in policies implemented by these colonial authorities resulted in separate and distinct cultures and experiences in each of their respective spheres. For example, English replaced German as the official language of its own territory, the Common Law system, the British currency, social norms and educational systems became the new order. British Cameroons eventually led to the developed a democratic, multiparty, self-government and a free press prior to independence. Despite these developments, British Cameroons which was made of two noncontiguous pieces of territory resented the fact that they were ruled as part of Nigeria (Adig 2017). In fact, when compared to the rest of Nigeria, British Cameroons which had now been further divided by the British into Northern and Southern Cameroons, was relatively underdeveloped.

The British colonial policies in Nigeria affected the status of both Northern and Southern Cameroons. The colonial constitutions which were used to govern Nigeria, treated the country as three separate regions under the British Crown. Southern Cameroons was joined as an appendage to the eastern region with no coequal status or recognition under the Nigerian constitutions. This situation implied to many Southern Cameroonians that they were considered and treated as a colony of Nigeria. Southern Cameroons therefore as far back as 1925 started agitating for a separate status within Nigeria. The British repeatedly ignored or rejected these appeals until 1953 when Southern Cameroons representatives decided to sever all ties with the Nigerian Assembly. That year, legislative elections which took place in Southern Cameroons was contested on the major issue of whether Southern Cameroons should or should not remain part of the Eastern Region of Nigeria. The Kamerun National Congress won twelve of the thirteen seats which meant an overwhelming support for an autonomous region for Southern Cameroons. Therefore starting from 1954, Southern Cameroons had its own separate public service, legislature, judiciary and an executive as a separate and fourth region within the Nigerian constitution (Adig 2017). In the elections of 1959, another Southern Cameroons party, the Kamerun National Democratic Party (KNDP) won on the agenda for complete separation from Nigeria and reunification with French Cameroun (Adig 2017).

The United Nations in 1959 mindful of the developments in the British Cameroons trust territories passed resolution 1350 which called on the organization of a plebiscite to determine the true wishes of the people. Justice Muluh Mbuh has questioned the impartiality of the UN Commissioner for Plebiscite for the Cameroons and the British Government for recommending that two separate plebiscites be held in British Cameroons and on different days. In addition, the choices presented to the peoples of British Cameroons in the plebiscite did not represent all the wishes of the people. For example, the two options provided were for British Cameroons to gain independence by joining either Nigeria or French Cameroun. The absence of the third and most popular option which was for the independence of British Cameroons was left out of the plebiscite questions because of the vested interests of the administering authorities. Even after the first plebiscite were held in British Northern Cameroons, where there were reports of confusion among the voters who had mistaken reforms made by the local government as secession from Nigeria, the UN refused to postpone the second plebiscite to address these concerns. The results of the plebiscite were split with British Northern Cameroons voting to stay with Nigeria while Southern Cameroons voted for independence by joining with French Cameroun (Adig 2017).



Following the conduct of the plebiscite in the Cameroons, the UN Security Council passed resolution 1608 of April 21, 1961 which affirmed the independence of British Southern Cameroons to go into effect in October first 1961. Southern Cameroons was expected to gain its independence *by joining* the already independent French Cameroun (*La Republique du Cameroun*) which became independent in January 1st 1960. The United Nations prior to this had laid out the processes involved in “independence by joining.” For example UN General Assembly Resolution 1540 of 1960 granted unconditional independence to all trust and colonized territories. For countries that were too small and perhaps incapable of self-rule, the UN passed resolution 1541. The process of joining did not compromise the independence of any of these territories. The parties could join by association whereby the smaller territory retained control of its own laws and government and the right to amend its own constitution without any interference from the bigger party. The other process was through integration. In this case the parties would have to share the three branches of government equally. For example, a rotating presidency, equal number of judges appointed to the judiciary and with an alternating chief justice. Finally, the smaller territory held a veto power in the federal legislature (Mbunwe 2017). These processes were all clearly spelled in various UN General Assembly Resolutions to guide and direct these experiments.

### **The Annexation of Southern Cameroons**

So before the plebiscite took place in Southern and Northern Cameroons in 1961, the UN had already laid out the process to gain *independence by joining*. In addition, both parties as in the case of British Southern Cameroons and French Cameroon had to comply with UN charter Articles 102 and 103 respectively. Both articles mandated that any agreement reached between the two parties must be submitted in writing to the United Nations Secretariat for publication. It is interesting to note that *La Republique du Cameroun* was among twenty-three countries that opposed UN resolution 1608 which granted independence to Southern Cameroon. Sixty-four other countries voted in favor of the resolution. No formal agreement between the *La Republique du Cameroun* and Southern Cameroons setting out the terms of integration or association as mandated by UN Charter Articles 102 and 103 were ever submitted to the United Nations. This is the bane of Southern Cameroons quest for separation. Some scholars have argued that without this proof of integration or association at the UN, there is therefore no legally binding agreement between the two parties as required by the United Nations (Mbunwe 2017).

Before the two Cameroons met in July 1961 for a constitutional conference, the President of the already independent *La Republique du Cameroun* toured some areas of Southern Cameroons where he assuaged the fears of the people by promising that reunification will not constitute annexation or assimilation. Perhaps this was the reason why Southern Cameroons delegates at the Foumban Constitutional Conference did not press for protections of their institutions and values from the majority. But the failure to do so turned out to be a grave miscalculation. The new constitution was promulgated into law in September 1961 even before Southern Cameroons officially became part of the union and adopted by the legislature of *La Republique du Cameroun*. Under the new constitution, the Federal Republic of Cameroon was made up of two states: the former Southern Cameroons (now known as the State of West Cameroon) and *La Republique du Cameroun* now became State of East Cameroon (NFI Joseph LON 2017).

The president had unlimited powers under this constitution and could dismiss all or any elected officers in any of the federated states. He was elected by universal suffrage and



could not come from the same state as his vice president. The legislature comprised of a federal assembly, East Cameroon State Assembly while West Cameroon had a bicameral legislature – the West Cameroon House of Assembly and the House of Chiefs. To protect the interest of each state and the federal constitution, a bill became law only when it was adopted by the majority in both state legislatures. Federal authority was vested in the president and the federal national assembly. This implied as stated under Article VI of the constitution, that the judiciary was not independent because the President of the Federal Republic was expected to “ensure the independence of the judiciary, and (to) appoint to the bench and to the legal service of the Federated States” (The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Cameroon, Article IV). Article 10 of the Constitution is of particular importance here because it stated that “No bill to amend the Constitution may be introduced if it tends to impair the unity and integrity of the Federation.”

Barely twenty days after Southern Cameroons gained *independence by joining La Republique du Cameroun*, President Ahidjo signed a presidential decree which reorganized the entire country into six administrative regions. He then appointed federal inspectors for each region and the inspector over West Cameroon had more powers than the duly elected Prime Minister. In fact, the federal inspector did not hide his disdain for the institutions of government in West Cameroon including the legislature. This caused great consternation among Southern Cameroonians who believed that the Federal Constitution protected them and that the president lacked the power to change the structure of the union (International Crisis Group 2017). But this was just the beginning of the assault on the Federal Constitution by *La Republique* and it has raised the question whether Ahidjo was ever genuinely interested in a co-equal union.

The Constitutional Conference also failed to decide on the important question of revenue allocation. While West Cameroon was required to give up its sources of revenue such as customs, the same standard was not applied to East Cameroon. The president promised to create a formula by which the two states will be financed from the federal coffers but in reality West Cameroon lost its financial underpinnings and became dependent on federal subventions. Nfi Joseph Lon argued that despite all pronouncements to the contrary, President Ahidjo had long harbored plans to gradually assimilate West Cameroon. The best way to achieve this was to make it economically dependent coupled with the weak protections for the federal constitution. Four years after reunification, the Prime Minister West Cameroon demanded a loan of 500 million francs from the federal government. In 1966, Ahidjo used this argument of financial insolvency to propose the dissolution of all Southern Cameroons political parties and then asked the people of West Cameroon to join his party *Union Camerounaise* to create a single party state. By 1972, he went further to claim that the federal state was too expensive to maintain and therefore proposed a referendum to replace the federal constitution with a unitary state (NFI Joseph LON 2017).

But the most immediate reason offered by Nfi Joseph for the collapse of the federal constitution was the discovery of oil in West Cameroon by a French owned company. As discussed above, the British had argued that Southern Cameroons was not economically viable as justification for why the territory should be integrated with Nigeria. But considering the extent of British oil exploration in the Niger Delta and the proximity of those oil fields to the location of oil in Southern Cameroons, some scholars believed that the British had deliberately falsified their report to prevent Southern Cameroons from leaving Nigeria. Once Ahidjo learned of the existence of oil in Southern Cameroons in 1964, he explored many options on how to transfer complete ownership away from that territory. For example, he planned to transport the oil by

pipeline from West Cameroon into East Cameroon and for a refinery to be built there. When E.M.L Endeley the former Prime Minister of Southern Cameroons resisted and threatened to blow up such a pipeline, Ahidjo relented but made sure that after the refinery was built in Victoria in West Cameroon, all the top executives were from East Cameroon. Ahidjo also wanted to dismantle the boundaries between West and East Cameroon by combining the people of the northern West Cameroon with the Western region of East Cameroon and the people of South of West Cameroon with the littoral region of East Cameroon. Again, because of resistance from West Cameroonians regarding this plan, it was dropped but the ultimate plan was to dissolve the federal constitution and replace it with the unitary state. Nfi concluded that the discovery of oil in Katanga in Congo and Biafra in Nigeria had led to secessionist conflicts in Africa and Ahidjo was worried that if the federal structure was not replaced, an economically viable West Cameroon could one day secede (International Crisis Group 2017).

But how could the federal constitution be abrogated when Article 10 of that Constitution prohibited any amendment which impaired the unity and integrity of the federation? Ahidjo proposed a referendum as a legitimate means of bypassing this obstacle. But a referendum in which the entire country voted meant that even if all of west Cameroon opposed this idea, they could never prevail. Paul Biya who succeeded Ahidjo in 1982 as president continued with these annexationist policies. For example, in 1983, he divided up the state of former West Cameroon into North West and South West Provinces and in 1984 he unilaterally changed the name of the country from United Republic of Cameroon to Republic of Cameroon (*La Republique du Cameroun*). This was the name of the former French Cameroon which gained independence on January 1, 1960. This issue of the name of the country is seen by many West Cameroonians as a final attempt to completely write their existence off the books. Fon Gorji Dinkar a prominent attorney in West Cameroon, declared that Southern Cameroons should gain its independence under the name of Ambazonia since by returning to *La Republique du Cameroun*, French Cameroun had abrogated the union (International Crisis Group 2017).

### **The Quest for Restoration & the Making of a Genocide**

While the government of Cameroon has referred to the problems in the English-speaking regions as instigated by secessionists, today, many of the people from these areas see themselves as fighting for their right to self-determination and the restoration of the stolen independence of Southern Cameroons. Therefore they call themselves restorationists and not secessionists who are fighting a war of self-defense against the colonial occupiers of *La Republique Cameroun*. Many restorationists disavow the use of the term Anglophones to define them. They prefer to be called simply restorationists or Ambazonians. These definitions are important because not all Anglophones are in favor of “restoration.” Those who want to maintain a union with Francophones through a return to the 1961 federal constitution see themselves as federalists and lastly, those Anglophones who do not concede that there is any problem in Cameroon as it is presently constituted are defined as unionists. So far and based on the participation in the protest marches in the different western cities, it seems the restorationists may have the largest majority. In the two regions in Anglophone Cameroon, there was a significant overflow of people into the streets on October 1, 2017 as requested by the Ambazonia government in exile during the peaceful march to restore their independence. These numbers could be used to infer that the restorationists are in a majority.

Although they had always been resistance against the assimilationist and policies of the country’s government, in the 1990s the English-speaking minority switched the course

of resistance. There had long been a general feeling that reunification had brought nothing but political violence economic and political decline in the status of their territory. The main economic pillars of West Cameroon such as the airports in Tiko and Bamenda were abandoned as the region was forced to rely on the airports in East Cameroon. Powercam, the main power company, the marketing board and eventually Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC) the largest employer in West Cameroon – all faced decline or went completely bust. In 1990, an Anglophone Ni John Fru Ndi launched the Social Democratic Party a pro federal opposition party and ran for president in 1992. An All Anglophone Conference (AAC) I & II was convened in 1993 and 1994 demanding a return to the 1961 federal constitution or secession (International Crisis Group 2017).

In the middle of these demands, the government of Cameroon claimed that it wanted to “harmonize and unify” the educational systems of both Francophone and Anglophone Cameroon. This generated a backlash as the English-speaking teachers union and students protested and even boycotted school until the government was forced to concede and create a board to manage the educational needs of Anglophones and another one for the Francophones. When the government rejected these calls for a return to the two-state federation, some Anglophones demanded for secession by creating the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC) which engaged in a diplomatic offensive to gain international recognition of the problem by going to the UN and filing cases with the International Court on Human and Peoples’ Rights in Banjul (International Crisis Group 2017).

In 1999 and in 2009, some Southern Cameroons intellectuals declared the independence of their region in what they Ambazonia. Despite these efforts, Anglophones continued to lose power in Cameroon and by 2017 there was only one Anglophone cabinet secretary out of a total of 36 who had portfolio. The current uprising which started on October 11, 2016 has now metastasized into a full blown conflict. After failing to negotiate with the lawyers and the teachers, the government arrested their representatives, increased targeted killing and summary executions in the Anglophone regions. In addition the government cut-off internet for a period of over three months in 2017 in the two Anglophone regions. All these actions forced some members of the teachers and lawyers union to flee into exile into Nigeria where they created Southern Cameroons Ambazonia Consortium United Front (SCACUF). This group elected a government in exile and on October 1, 2017 declared the independence of former Southern Cameroons. The response of the government of Cameroon to these developments have ranged from massive execution of English-speaking communities perceived as supportive of the independence movements to burning down of entire villages. Currently there are more than 180, 000 internally displaced persons and refugees in Nigeria. Amnesty International and the International Crisis Group have both reported that the government has deployed heavy military equipment in the Anglophone regions and has engaged in summary executions, mass arrests and disappearances all in an effort to repress the uprising. But the Southern Cameroons diaspora is now playing an increasing role in the conflict. They have raised money and shipped goods from across the U.S. and Europe to support the refugees in Nigeria. Increasingly, they have written petitions to various western governments, secured a hearing in the U.S. House of Representatives and on Sunday August 19, 2018, they staged a massive protest in front of the White House calling for an intervention to stop the genocide. They have been very vocal on social media. Different self-defense groups have been created to fight back against the government killing.

### Notes

1. The Genocide Convention and the Failure to Prevent or Halt Genocide ©2015 Genocide Studies and Prevention 9, no. 1 <http://dx.doi.org/10.5038/1911-9933.9.1.1263> 57
2. The Genocide Convention and the Failure to Prevent or Halt Genocide ©2015 Genocide Studies and Prevention 9, no. 1 <http://dx.doi.org/10.5038/1911-9933.9.1.1263> 57
3. Washington Post's Edwin Moki and Cara Anna discussed another video of Cameroon's elite forces, "shooting at least a dozen unarmed civilians during a counterterror operation in the Far North region" as reported by Amnesty International. The BBC has increasingly been carrying stories about the "violence" in Anglophone Cameroon especially in its Pidgin English radio news. This raises the question about language because while Pidgin English is spoken widely across West Africa and Southern Cameroons, news about the Southern Cameroons crisis in Pidgin English does not get to the parts of the world with the power to call for an intervention. The Guardian newspaper was among the first to refer to the situation in Southern Cameroons as a genocide, "Cameroon's military accused of burning alive unarmed civilians." *The Guardian*. July 20, 2018. The Times of India is among the few in Asia that has carried stories about the human rights crisis in Anglophone Cameroon including news about the targeted killing of Anglophones. May 18, 2018. Despite these stories, there is still growing disappointment among many Southern Cameroonians that the atrocities do not generate the same type of global response like those in Libya, Syria or even Yemen. Among television networks in the U.S., news about the human rights crisis has generally been absent.

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## Zero Tolerance: The Latest Chapter for Central Americans in the US

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In the summer of 2018, many people are outraged at the Trump administration's Zero-Tolerance policy at the border. Mainstream media bombarded us with images and sounds of crying children who were forcefully separated from their parents at the Mexico-U.S. border, then detained separately, often without a plan for reunification. As a scholar who writes about the consequences of U.S. immigration policy in the lives of migrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers, I am grateful that people are finally paying attention and demanding an end to such legal violence. Thank goodness for human decency and solidarity. On the other hand, as a Central American immigrant, so many of the current narratives feel incomplete and, in a broader context of US-Mexico-Central American realities, it is painful to see this all playing out without recognition of a much longer history of violence against Central American peoples. For example, one of the policy changes raised by the Trump administration aimed to do away with the Flores Settlement. Political pundits' discourse around this attempted change often missed the point that the settlement was based on a case of a Salvadoran minor who had to sue the government to achieve basic human rights in detention. It took a legal battle with a resulting settlement to get this country to recognize that its practices of jailing Central American minors with unrelated adults in the 1980s were inhumane. The *Flores v. Reno* Settlement requires that immigration officials provide detained minors with 1) food and water, 2) medical assistance, 3) toilets and sinks, 4) adequate temperature control and ventilation, 5) adequate supervision, and 6) separation from unrelated adults. To be clear, Obama's administration tried to work around this, as well. They used euphemisms like "family residential centers" to disguise the often long-term detention of mothers and children and went to legal battle multiple times to secure longer periods of detention. Trump is now trying to end the practices of the Flores Settlement altogether. Since the 1980s, the largest affected group of detained children and families is from Central America.

Central Americans have been migrating in large numbers to the United States since the early 1980s. Cities like Los Angeles, New York, Houston, and Chicago have been home to many of us for over 40 years. Think about how often you see us represented on mainstream media. If you can think of any TV or movie characters, what are those roles like? More than likely, they are negative representations that portray us as either sassy maids or as inexplicably and irreparably violent men and children. Now think about when Central Americans are discussed in the news. Most recently, as members of MS-13 ("animals" according to Trump) and as "shithole countries" (again, according to Trump). These representations, beginning with Reagan who portrayed us as dangerous, heartless communists, have been dehumanizing us for decades for political purposes. (And representations on Spanish-language media are not much better and just as infrequent.) In that context, it is immensely painful to see our children being torn apart from their parents. Without ever seeing ourselves represented in media as full human beings, we are now watching images of our people as they are being traumatized, used as pawns, and fueling anger that does not recognize how long all this has been going on. For many of us, it is re-traumatizing.

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Trump's Zero-Tolerance Policy has now officially ended, but hundreds of families have yet to be reunited and, without a plan, it is unclear how this government will accomplish the task. There is much more to say about US responsibility in all this; about the Mexican government's disgracefully similar treatment of Central American refugees; about the reprehensible silence of Central American governments in the face of so much suffering; and about the long-term, likely intergenerational trauma this is causing. For now, I just want to recognize the community that has been made invisible even as it is the target of decades of oppressive foreign and immigration policy.

## **The Hate that Hate Produced: Donald Trump and the American Presidency**

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We are in dangerous times. In actuality, the United States has created a perpetual state of danger for Blacks since the first enslaved Africans were unwillingly brought to its shores. Even as the framers of the Constitution debated the lofty ideals of citizenship, equality, liberty, and freedom, they did not see fit to include Blacks living in America. When we think of so many of the freedoms legally granted to Black Americans, the vast majority were granted in the latter half of the twentieth century and almost all fail to live up to their promise.

Beginning with discussions of George Washington, the revered first president of this then young nation, far too many Americans are addicted to the narrative and the myth of his greatness. Indeed he upheld the institution of the presidency and left after two terms, thus providing a blueprint and stability for the young nation. However, this is the same man who wore the teeth of his enslaved Africans and obsessively tracked down his “property” when they dared to escape him and the torture of the “peculiar institution of slavery”. Therefore, if we are to look to our presidents for moral guidance, yet again we will find the American tree of wisdom rotten from root to tip. Thus it comes as no surprise that this very nation produced, nurtured, and uplifted Donald Trump as its forty-fifth president.

Donald Trump did not create this modern day culture of fear and white supremacy. Trump actually follows a pattern of corruption and ignorance we have seen in our past presidents for centuries. He represents a long line of presidents who have been compelled by personal avarice and a racist institutional history to harm nonwhite and Black People. What Trump has been able to do quite effectively and in a relatively short period of time, is excavate so many of the dormant attitudes and behaviors of American citizens that fall in line with what America has always been - a nation of genocidal white supremacists whose long lasting project of patriarchy and anti-Black racism have been central tenants of their capitalistic endeavors.

What is so dangerous about Trump is his ability to expose the weakness of our institutions, that is, the separation of powers, the legislative and judicial branches, and the thin line between executive and authoritarian. So much of American democracy and its subsequent success has been the adherence to norms, not only laws per say. The country has been able to function, albeit not always ideally, due to norms that have dictated modes of behavior by our elected officials. Trump has eroded and erased so many of the norms that have been tenuously holding this country together. The American road toward increased inclusion for many has been incoherent and incremental. However, in the past two hundred years we cannot deny that there has been progress for marginalized groups in this country.

It is surreal to watch a democratic nation unravel at the seams. It is even more disappointing and frightening to watch complicit elected officials literally pledge loyalty to a man and an ideology of exclusion. Trump has exposed just how disaffected Americans have been with their elected officials, power, and the voting process writ large. Far too many Americans did not participate in the 2016 presidential elections and even fewer will bother to turn out for the 2018 midterm elections. As Trump flaunts his disdain for fake news, our international allies, sitting members of Congress, our intelligence community, and a litany of

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other individuals and institutions, he further sows the seeds of apathy in the minds of the citizenry. He is tar. Everything he touches is affected by his world view, one filled with winners and losers, raping and pillaging Mexicans, terrorist Muslims, ungrateful Black athletes, and so many other negative tropes against non-white groups living in this country and abroad.

So here we are, on a train being driven arguably by the least qualified and most morally compromised president in our nation's history. We are being led by members of Congress who see his destruction and are too morally compromised themselves to stand up to the blustering boy king. Initially, I viewed their acquiescence as a form of deference to the institution of the presidency, and then I remembered the Republican behaviors and attitudes toward Barack Obama for the eight years of his presidency. Current Republican behavior is not deference but fear of the bully. Trump has appointed more federal judges in his short tenure than any of his predecessors, therefore, if the nation does survive four or possibly eight years of a Trump administration, the effects of his borderline treasonous and white supremacist agenda will be felt for generations to come.

The Trump presidency has had devastating effects on immigrant communities, both documented and non-documented. However, this particular administration has laid bare a peculiar institutional and emotional destruction for Black American communities. The pendulum swung from Barack Obama to Donald Trump, which has had dizzying effects for Blacks in America. By no means did Black communities view the election of Barack Obama as the end of centuries of racist American practices and policies. However, what Obama provided was a sense of hope and possibility. Trump has ripped the veneer off of whatever Black Americans may have thought America was becoming. Police brutality, deportations, disinvestment in cities, and so many other societal ills happened during the Obama administration. However, most Blacks were convinced that Obama was working tirelessly to right some of the wrongs of this nation. Trump is the opposite. His desire is to enrich himself and those who pledge their loyalty to him. We are watching new lows each day in the media, from his unwillingness to communicate with the press, the bold lies and changing narratives often times in the same speech, the policies toward immigrant groups and more generally non-white people living in America, his blatant solidarity with dictators and authoritarian regimes at the expense of relationships with our allies, and far too much more to recount in this limited space.

So what do we do with Trump and the hate that this nation produced and continues to do so? Will a more expansive understanding of linked fate save us? How can substantive alliances among immigrant and communities of color spread even further across the nation? I don't have the answer, but I look to our fellow political scientist Ralph Bunche for guidance when he wrote, "To make our way, we must have firm resolve, persistence, tenacity. We must gear ourselves to work hard all the way. We can never let up."

## Trump, Conte, and Comparison in the Authoritarian World Order

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On 30 July 2018, U.S. president Donald Trump hosted a meeting with recently elected Italian prime minister Giuseppe Conte, in which he expressed approval for the new Italian government's stance on immigration. Not long into this joint meeting with the press, he translated that into a compliment for himself and his own aggressive anti-immigration policies in the U.S. Conte readily agreed, remarking that Italy and the U.S. were "almost twin countries...there are so many things that bring us together" This comparison was troubling, not merely for the strategic and reductive display of ideological proximity, but the ways in which the exchange rang true, and what its historical implications may be for those migrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers whose lives hang in the balance of the whims of two authoritarian regimes and their reactionary immigration policies. The invocation of being "twin countries" or otherwise identical regimes violently elides the discrete historical, geopolitical, and social valences of each nation-state. As a mode of critique, comparison (often enacted via the rhetorical devices of analogy and hyperbole) is rarely useful ethically, analytically or politically. If the ultimate aim is to bring about the end of the suffering inflicted by the violence of colonial regimes, and to dismantle the very systems or structures that maintain their power—namely, of ubiquitous racial capitalism—then a relational analysis that resists conflating two objects by studying the dynamic relationship between them is needed, since the desire to compare horrors makes a zero-sum game of human lives and human suffering rather than facilitating that work. However, this was clearly neither Trump nor Conte's aim, and there are indeed many striking similarities between Italy and the U.S., not least in their approaches to regulating citizenship and immigration, their borders, and their retrenchment into fascist and colonial logics. Many of these analogies are readily apparent, though their geopolitical specificities caution us to resist such neat and superficial comparison.

Both governments rely on anti-black, anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim, and otherwise xenophobic or anti-indigenous sentiment to appeal to their nativist bases, all while being identified as "populist" by mainstream media and scholars. The slogans "Make America Great Again" and "America First" echo in "Italians First." Matteo Salvini, the current Italian deputy prime minister and minister of the interior, employed the latter slogan during the national Italian elections in March. Salvini, head of the Northern League, strategically chose to drop the "Northern" from the party's name, using simply *La Lega* or "The League." The party has, up until recently, ardently advocated secession from the South, and has been antagonistic of the central and southern regions in favour of an inherently white supremacist independent state called "Padania," which would be composed of Italy's 11 northern regions. This move to drop the "Northern," which seemingly anchored its politics since its formation in 1991, was part of Salvini's strategic campaign to appeal to poor and Southern ethnic Italians to vote in support of the party's platform of regional autonomy, anti-global Euroscepticism, and anti-immigration. This shows that the aim was more about the accrual of power than a historical or ideologically pure connection to such regionalism. The idea that the supposedly charismatic leadership of authoritarian male figures duped the white working class

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into buoying their ascent to power is one that is often circulated in mainstream media and political spheres. The tendency to succumb to the base comparison of these figures to fulfil the desire for narrative resolution actually upholds white supremacy and misconstrues how these particular regimes have come to positions of power and historically informed one another.

The relationality between the Italy and the U.S., partially identified by their own heads of state and respective cabinets, are striking but also dynamically and historically co-constitutive, as with all regimes produced under racial capitalism—even as they go about obfuscating and omitting that fact. For instance, it is a common assertion in Europe that racism is an “American problem” and race an American conceit. France has recently proposed the removal of any mention of the word “race” from its Constitution, to near unanimous parliamentary support. In addition, many European nation states refuse to collect or receive Census data on racial or religious demographics, in favour of identifying place of birth or national affiliation alone, unlike what they deem to be the American “obsession” with race. Many scholars of critical race and migration studies have described how these omissions further entrench racial hierarchies and systemic oppression. In his seminal text, *Forgeries of Memory*, Cedric Robinson described racial regimes such as these as “unrelentingly hostile to their exhibition,” remarking that “This antipathy exists because a discoverable history is incompatible with a racial regime and from the realization that, paradoxically, so are its social relations” (Robinson 2007, xii). The historical fact of the matter is that it was European colonialism that led to the exportation of race. Ships bearing the logos of European companies and the flags of European states carried enslaved African peoples as both cargo and labour force and helped to solidify the settler colonial racial order of the Americas and the Caribbean, including what is now referred to as the United States.

But this was by no means unidirectional influence. Centuries later, that evolving racial order informed Adolf Hitler’s genocidal Nazi regime, which was inspired in part by the legal precedents set by American jurisprudence to oppress Black American citizens, the settler colonial American expansion projects that were facilitated by the detention of indigenous people in native reserve systems, and the occupation of Ethiopia and the detention of Ethiopians under Mussolini during the 2<sup>nd</sup> Italo-Ethiopian war (1935-1939). In June 2018, Salvini reportedly relished turning over 600 asylum seekers away from the Italian border, stranding them at sea for days in the horrifying case of the “Aquarius” operation, while Trump kidnaps the children of parents seeking asylum as a deterrent to future asylum seekers. One of many historical precedents would be that in 1939, after being refused harbour in Cuba, the U.S. turned away the German transatlantic liner the *St. Louis*, carrying 937 Jewish refugees of the Third Reich. Upon return to Germany, over 25% of those refugees were murdered in the Holocaust. These are but a few instances of how the carceral and fascist logics of white supremacist regimes circulate and inform one another. It’s important to be vigilant in recognising the dynamic relationality between them.

The ramping up of overtly authoritarian and dehumanising policies concerning Mediterranean migration has been described as a response to the notion of crisis. Those of us attentive to the global conceit of anti blackness and have an analysis of immigration that takes a global feminist, anticapitalist, and abolitionist point of view are fully aware that this is not the case. As Paul Gilroy notes in *There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack*, a primary strategy of white supremacy is to deny the past and to contain Black people and their presences in the here and now (Gilroy 1987, 11–13), ignoring the relational refrain uttered by many activists in defence of immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers: “We are here because you were there.” Those of us concerned with race and immigration bias globally must resist the notion of crisis when it

comes to the reallocation of resources under violently guarded and maintained system of racial capitalism. These contemporary “crises”—along the U.S./Mexico border, in the Mediterranean, and elsewhere—are ones we must refuse to accept and continue to historicize since their origins are routinely obfuscated.

The self-protecting, fear-borne idea of “crisis” systematically put forward and enforced by Europe at every level is one that encapsulates, distils, and crystalizes complex histories. Thus, we should refuse the moniker of “crisis” as utterly contemporary. This is something that people of African descent living in Western nations have long understood. Trump’s sanctioning and support of Conte’s government may give the latter the leverage he needs to continue Italy’s dehumanising authoritarian campaign. It is but another in a long series of setbacks for people of African descent in Italy, but it’s by no means the first. Moreover, the conditions of possibility that allowed these laws to be set in motion and these (in)actions to continue with no ramifications shows us that the structures undergirding these contemporary policies are steeped in a history of oppression. Black Italians, Italians of color, Romani people, and immigrants have been demanding for citizenship reform in Italy for years. The anti-migrant sentiment that has led to an increase in the murder and racialised abuse of migrants throughout the country is one rippling throughout the West, which as a construct has always already sought the extrication of racialised others, gender and sexual minorities, etc. from its borders once the extraction of their labour or use value is completed. The difficulties presented by the current Italian and American administrations have exacerbated longstanding modalities of oppression, but also modes of resistance. More than comparison, we need to engage a relational politics of solidarity that allows for global concern and collective efforts to protect the most minoritised and migratised from oppressive regimes.



## Tweeting about Race: An Analysis of U.S. Senatorial Twitter Activity Regarding Issues Impacting Blacks and Latinos

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### Abstract

This study examines U.S. Senators' social media use by content analyzing senatorial Twitter activity in the two months preceding the 2014 midterm elections. Specifically, we analyze more than 17,200 tweets by sitting senators to assess frequency of Twitter usage and to address how frequently senators tweet about issues relating to race. We find that senators are generally willing to microblog about issues relating to racial/ethnic minorities and that senators seeking reelection are not actively avoiding these issues, although we may expect them to do so out of a fear of alienating voters. Unlike previous research, however, we do not find that Republicans use social media more frequently than Democrats, or that electoral competition affects the propensity to tweet. Finally, this study reveals that senators representing large minority populations are more likely to tweet about race than those from less diverse states, though these senators tweet more about other topics, too.

**Keywords:** social media, congressional elections, Twitter, race and ethnicity, U.S. Senate

In response to political parties' use of the social media platform, Twitter, *Newsweek* reported that "Strategists on both sides agree that Twitter—or at least, the short-form communication that Twitter has pioneered—will be crucial to campaigns for years to come. It turns out that a powerful message can indeed be delivered with only 140 characters" (Newsweek 2009). The public has embraced the use of social media and members of Congress have followed suit. As of November 2016, Pew Research reports that 85% of American adults are online and 65% of online adults use multiple social media sites, without notable differences among usage rates by race. Specifically, Greenwood, Perrin, and Duggan (2016) state that while Facebook remains the most widely-used platform for most Americans, Twitter use has been increasing;

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24% of online adults in 2016 had Twitter accounts compared to 16% in 2012 and 18% in 2013. They further report that 42 percent of those with Twitter accounts are daily users and another 24 percent use the platform at least once a week. Members of Congress have also embraced the use of social media. As of October 2015, all 100 U.S. Senators have an official Twitter account and many have additional unofficial and campaign accounts.

Senators are clearly finding Twitter to be a convenient method of communicating their activities, policy positions, and electoral ambitions. For instance, on January 9, 2015, Sen. Diane Feinstein, a regular Twitter user, tweeted (or micro-blogged), “Joined 45 Senate colleagues and pledged to strengthen, protect and improve Medicare and Medicaid. [sic]” While on November 26, 2014, Sen. Al Franken tweeted, “This year was the most expensive midterm election ever. Take a stand against #CitizensUnited: [Http://bit.ly/11UcwHO](http://bit.ly/11UcwHO).” Sen. Pat Roberts even used Twitter on Election Day 2014 to invite supporters to an election night celebration, tweeting, “Join our Election Night Party tonight in Topeka.” All this use, however, raises questions about what patterns exist in senatorial Twitter activity and what impact it might have on elections.

This research project investigates the manner in which senators use Twitter as it relates to racial and ethnic minorities, specifically African-Americans and Latinos. Research suggests that building broad electoral coalitions is necessary in multicultural environments (see Collet 2008) and that African-Americans and urban residents are slightly more likely to use Twitter than are whites or suburban and rural residents (Duggan and Brenner 2013). Hence, this manuscript asks whether electoral status (whether or not senators are running for reelection during this election cycle and the safety of their seats), minority constituencies, and the proximity to Election Day is related to greater willingness to micro-blog about racial and ethnic minorities and/or related policies. In order to examine the relationship between electoral status and Twitter activity relating to racial and ethnic minorities, we content analyze the Twitter activity of senators during the two months preceding the 2014 midterm elections. This methodological approach allows for a thorough investigation of the content of the tweets posted by senators and contributes to the growing literature examining the political impact of social media.

Ultimately, the hypotheses articulated below find mixed levels support, suggesting that scholars need to update our current beliefs about social media usage in our rapidly changing modern environment. We find convincing evidence that rather than avoiding issues impacting racial/ethnic minorities, which may be seen as controversial, senators appear to tweet about these issues with some frequency. This is especially true of those currently seeking reelection who we might otherwise suspect would avoid such issues. Furthermore, there is an important nuance to the relationship between the size of a senator’s minority constituency and their willingness to tweet about race.

### **Growing Use of Social Media**

As the online and social media populations grow, the ways in which legislators utilize the internet and social media platforms evolve. Members of Congress initially began using the internet in the 1990s and it became a powerful campaigning and fundraising tool as well as offering an efficient means of communication with constituents (Johnson 2004) and supporters (Davis 2009). This direct communication with constituents and their supporters affords legislators an opportunity to engage in dual-directional communication that traditional media such as newspapers and television do not regularly offer (see Gainous and Wagner 2013). However, as Cornfield (2004) indicates, individuals do not tend to revisit campaign websites because they may perceive them not to offer new information. Social media platforms, on the other hand, have become part of

many Americans' daily routines through e-device alerts, mobile applications, and email. And this use is not limited to specific segments of the population – among the online adult population, Duggan et al. (2014) find social media use to be widespread across a variety of demographics including age and race, indicating that social media use is also prevalent in the age 65 and older portion of the population. Legislators and their staffs have taken notice of this trend and have incorporated social media into their office culture.

Though Republicans and Democrats are equally as likely to follow political leaders on social media (Smith 2014), research suggests that Republicans in Congress may be using Twitter with more frequency than Democrats (Gainous and Wagner 2013; Glassman et al. 2009; Shogan 2010). In Glassman et al.'s analysis of the 158 House members with registered Twitter accounts in August 2009, 54% were Republicans. However, members of Congress in general are active on social media platforms through micro-blogging (Williams and Galuti 2009) and updating posts (Auter and Fine 2016). Specifically, the Congressional Management Foundation (CMF) surveyed Congressional staff to determine that legislators use media in a variety of ways such as gauging public opinion and communicating Congressional activities (CMF 2011). Moreover, the CMF found that 54% and 39% of Congressional staff found Facebook and Twitter respectively to be very or somewhat important (CMF 2011). They also note in this same study that their data was collected in late-2010 and that "more recent research shows that Twitter has further penetrated Capitol Hill since that time" (CMF 2011, 3).

This use of social media to connect with constituents, particularly supporters, has become incredibly effective. Gainous and Wagner (2013) report there is a large segment of the American public that use social media to gather political information and that much of this population is seeking political information that reinforces their preexisting opinions. In other words, those individuals that consume political information via social media are doing so in order to gather information with which they already agree and avoid information that is inconsistent with their current political views. This aversion to dissonance by large portions of the social media audience then presents members of Congress with an opportunity to "circumvent the gatekeeper" of traditional broadcast and published media and speak directly to those that are most likely to support them in their bids for reelection (Gainous and Wagner 2013). There is some evidence that this preference may be related to partisanship; Pew reports that Republicans and Republican-leaning independents are more likely to cite the "ability to get more reliable information than what is available from the traditional media" as a major reason for participating in social media networks (Smith 2014).

### **Social Media & Elections**

While the impact of social media on elections is debatable, evidence suggests that the format does increase political participation (see Gainous and Wagner 2013). Smith (2011) reports that 21 percent of online adults got involved politically in some way through social networking sites 2010 midterm elections. Between 2010 and 2014, the percentage of adults following political figures on social networking platforms increased from 6 percent to 16 percent (Smith 2014). Moreover, the way in which members of Congress use the internet has evolved, and they have clearly embraced the use of social media. The 2000s saw increasing use of the internet as a campaigning tool (Bimber and Davis 2003; Davis 2009). For instance, Williams and Galuti (2009) found Facebook to play a growing role in Congressional elections. This trend has continued. Auter and Fine (2016) content analyzed the Facebook posts of incumbent Senators and challengers in 2010 to determine that Facebook was used primarily as a reelection tool by

Senators. Research also suggests that in 2010, Republicans and challengers were more likely than Democrats and incumbents to utilize Twitter as a campaigning tool (Gainous and Wagner 2013).

Social media postings share many of the similarities with how members of Congress communicate with constituents from franking and newsletters. First, social media, like newsletters and franking, gives the politician the ability to control the message. This control is desired by both the members of Congress that seek a means of reaching constituents and supporters unrestrained by a gatekeeper (such as the media) and the audiences that seek out comfortable and like-minded information (Gainous and Wagner 2013). Furthermore, social media offer a low-cost method of reaching many people. However, social media has benefits beyond traditional forms of communication. It is important to understand that members of Congress are not just tweeting and posting text. They may also tweet/post hyperlinks, images, photos, and videos that may then be retweeted by followers and, hopefully, go viral (reach a large distribution of people through multiple online formats) (Gainous and Wagner 2013). Creating and controlling a message or video that reaches an incredibly large audience while spending relatively little compared to television advertising is clearly advantageous to members of Congress. In addition, social media activity more easily allows for a two-way form of communication to take place; constituents can easily respond to posts, quickly send direct messages, or otherwise interact with the politician.

### **Tweeting Minority Issues**

Twitter specifically garnered attention from African-American activists following the acquittal of the Ferguson, MO police officer tried for the murder of Michael Brown, an unarmed black teenager. The organization Black Lives Matter started on Twitter in response to the protests in Ferguson through the organized use of the “hashtag” #BlackLivesMatter. In the following months, the Black Lives Matter movement went beyond digital activism to real-world protests in order to get their message directly in front of politicians and average citizens, though social media remained a key organizing tool. The use of #BlackLivesMatter, #ICantBreathe (in response to the choking death of Eric Garner by New York City police officers in 2014), and other online protests drew attention to “Black Twitter,” which is the term used to describe African-American sociopolitical activity on the social networking site (Guo 2015). African-Americans on Twitter can interact with each other through racialized hashtags that Sharma (2013) coined “blacktags.” Blacktags diffuse quickly through Twitter over a short period of time, allowing African-Americans to digitally connect to provide humorous, sentimental, or socio-political commentary on Twitter (Sharma 2013) and there is evidence that other minority groups use Twitter to digitally assemble in a similar fashion (Wills and Fecteau 2016). The highly-active presence of African-Americans on Twitter is likely a result of a narrowing in the “digital divide” among young people (Guo 2013). By 2013, young African-Americans were just as likely as young whites to have internet access and smartphones and were significantly more likely to have Twitter accounts, with 40 percent of African-Americans 18-29 having a Twitter account, compared to just 28 percent of whites (Smith 2014).

The presence of racial discussions in media, specifically social media, raise questions about how race-related messages are received by individuals. Immigration, welfare, and crime are controversial issues that are racially coded, or evoke images of specific racial and ethnic groups. Given that literature indicates that new information via the media can impact political views (see Campbell 2008; Lau and Redlawsk 2006) and racially coded news can result in negative evaluations of targets (see Avery and Peffley 2003; Bailey 2011; Gilliam and Iyengar 2000), it

is reasonable to suspect that tweeting issues relating to race/ethnicity could result in negative evaluations. However, the application of the theory of cognitive dissonance suggests that the reception/acceptance of messages in social media that are inconsistent with strongly held beliefs is unlikely as audiences are likely to discount information or avoid sources with which they disagree (Gainous and Wagner 2013); indeed, both liberals and conservatives have been found to have ideologically homogenous social media feeds as a result of “blocking,” “unfriending,” and not following those who post dissonant messages (Mitchell et al. 2014). Thus, the tendency for individuals to follow (subscribe to regular Twitter updates) specific members of Congress on Twitter suggests that most, but not necessarily all, of a politician’s followers are likely to support these members and/or agree with their issue positions, undercutting the potential impact of negative evaluations.

Moreover, the use of social media as a toggling tool illustrates how the medium can be used as a way to provide symbolic representation. Collet (2008:712) defines toggling as “a strategy that seeks to build or maintain a victorious electoral coalition in a potentially polarized, multicultural environment through the balanced communication of broad- (i.e., “main stream”) and narrow-cast messages, symbols, issue positions, personal characteristics and socio-cultural cues to specific racial and ethnic groups.” Collet presents toggling as a more inclusive alternative to deracialization. Deracialization is a campaign strategy that avoids explicitly racial statements/content in favor of focusing on issues that are racially transcendent (McCormick and Jones 1993). This concept emphasizes a largely “either-or” approach to incorporating race into political campaigns – either candidates include references to race understanding that some voters will be turned off by the approach, or candidates avoid racial appeals altogether in the attempt to capture a broader electoral coalition. For example, Juenke and Sampaio (2010) suggest that the elections of Latinos John and Ken Salazar in Colorado to the U.S. House of Representatives and U.S. Senate respectively were successful due to deracialized campaigns. Specifically, the Democratic Salazar brothers appealed to rural whites in Colorado and paid relatively little attention to issues that were seen as relevant to the Latino population such as bilingual education and immigration.

Toggling, as opposed to deracialization, is explicitly not a zero-sum approach to using racial appeals in campaigns. Rather, the focus is on incorporating race while also appealing to non-minority voters. The extant literature on toggling is scant and focuses on Asian Americans rather than African-Americans and Latinos. Nevertheless, Collet (2008) illustrates that minority candidates can be successful by both appealing to the white majority as well as the minorities that identify with them. For example, Vietnamese Republican Van Tran employed a toggling strategy when running for a seat in the California State Assembly by promulgating ads in English deemphasizing his background at the same time he ran ads specifically targeting ethnic minorities in Vietnamese. Social media, such as Twitter, may very well present a forum for political candidates to make similar appeals to racial/ethnic minorities and those already likely to support the candidate while maintaining a deracialized strategy in more mainstream media.

Research addressing the politics of immigration suggests that news coverage of immigration does not have a demobilizing or negative effect on political participation. Specifically, Merolla et al. (2013) find that media coverage of immigration results in the mobilization of Latinos and has little to no effect among others. Based on this notion that groups that are personally impacted by an issue are more likely to be motivated by media coverage of that issue, we can speculate that tweeting about racially charged issues could be beneficial to legislators, with the understanding that individuals are not likely to follow members of Congress



with views radically different than their own.

Given that audiences tend to seek out information with which they agree and that coverage of minority issues may increase turnout among affected groups, it is reasonable to suspect that members of Congress seeking reelection would frequently post about these issues in social media platforms. After all, they do have control over the message. Moreover, the incumbency advantage in reelection is rooted, at least partially, in the ability of incumbents to serve their constituents (Erikson and Wright 2013; Mayhew 1974). In turn, as both national television coverage (see Prior 2006) and local news coverage have been shown to positively impact the incumbency advantage (Schaffner 2006), it is also reasonable to assume that legislators' frequent use of social media to address constituent populations (in this case minority populations) would have a positive electoral impact.

The fact that social media offer a low-cost means of providing symbolic representation further supports the notion that legislators would use the medium to address minority populations. Symbolic representation refers to constituent populations feeling as if they are being represented and is not necessarily congruent with representatives' political actions (Pitkin 1967). Research suggests that members of Congress with greater minority populations have the need to manage the low-cost symbolic representation of sizable minority populations with the electoral incentives of focusing on the majority (see Hansen and Treul 2015). In turn the symbolic representation of large minority groups provided by social media does not necessarily have to correspond to a given legislator's voting record; s/he can, therefore, be somewhat insulated from potential negative reactions by constituents in the majority.

Early research into the general use of online campaigning points to political candidates using online sources cautiously to present highly crafted images and impact media coverage while distancing themselves from direct interaction which could have deleterious effects (see Stromer-Galley 2000). However, the proliferation of social media platforms presents candidates with both the ability to present highly crafted images and the ability to directly interact with constituents without potentially critical intermediaries. If social media usage by candidates is likely to bring positive electoral benefits, allows candidates to target messages to disproportionately friendly audiences with minimal risk of backlash, and can be a way to directly represent the concerns of minority groups, it is reasonable to expect that candidates facing reelection will be more likely to post about race-related topics on social media. Similarly, given that candidates are strategic in their behavior in seeking reelection, we expect those involved in perceived close races for reelection to do so more than those in safe seats.

Despite the logical suspicion that incumbent Congressmen would use social media to address minority issues, one must consider the possibility that proximity to a general election may encourage members of Congress to be cautious. More specifically, it is reasonable to assume that as Election Day nears, legislators will post about issues impacting racial/ethnic minorities less frequently. As Hassell and Oeltjenbruns (2014) show, candidate communications shift dramatically towards election-related themes and get-out-the-vote appeals as election day approaches, which would in turn lead to an overshadowing of issue-based posts, including racial ones. Nevertheless, the notion that social media offer a low-cost method of providing symbolic representation to minority populations for incumbent Congressmen is convincing.

### **Hypotheses**

The preceding theoretical development leads us to summarize that Social Media are a powerful tool that can impact Congressional campaigns. Specifically, social media allows legislators to



control the content they post, audiences self-select based on preexisting beliefs, and legislators are likely to benefit from posting/micro-blogging about racial issues. Thus we reach the following hypotheses:

Partisanship Hypothesis: *Republicans use Twitter with greater frequency than Democrats;*

Incumbency Hypothesis: *Those running for reelection will tweet more often than those not running;*

Minority Tweets Hypothesis: *Those running for reelection will tweet about issues impacting minorities more often than those not running;*

Competitiveness Hypothesis: *The more competitive the race, the more often Senators will tweet about issues impacting minorities;*

Minority Constituency Hypothesis: *As the percentage of minorities in a state increases, Senators will tweet more often about issues impacting minorities;* and

Electoral Proximity Hypothesis: *Senators will tweet less about issues impacting minorities as Election Day draws near.*

### Data and Methods

In order to test the hypotheses stated above, we content analyzed the Twitter activity of U.S. Senators in the two months (September 4–November 4) preceding the November 2014 midterm elections. 17,226 micro-blogs tweeted by 97 sitting senators, 27 of which were seeking reelection, were coded during this 61-day period. Three senators from the 113<sup>th</sup> Congress, Ted Cruz (R-TX), Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), and Tim Scott (R-SC), did not post to Twitter during the time period covered in our analysis. Two of these three senators did have active Twitter accounts during the period covered in this study, however. Only one of these senators, Tim Scott, was seeking reelection; Sen. Scott was one of two African-Americans serving in the Senate during this study.

### Dependent Variables

In order to test the Partisanship and Incumbency Hypotheses, we utilize the total number of tweets per senator as the dependent variable. In order to create this variable, we use senators as the unit of analysis rather than the individual tweets. This variable ranges in value from 0 total tweets (see above) to 842 by Corey Booker (D-NJ), who was one of two African-American Senators included in this study. The mean is 172.26 tweets per senator. The mean for Republican senators is 132.96 tweets while the mean for Democratic senators is 204.42.

We test Minority Tweets and Competitiveness Hypotheses with two different models. The first uses the total number of tweets with references to minorities and related policies (minority/racially coded references) as the dependent variable. Of the 97 senators actively tweeting, this variable ranges from 0 tweets during the time period covered in the analysis to 220. The mean is 9.22. Individual tweets are considered to be minority-related and/or racially coded if they contain references to related social policies (e.g. welfare and immigration) and groups (i.e. African-Americans and Latinos) or one of the following terms (or phrases): police, prison, crime, drug use, shooting, immigrant, immigration, Hispanic Heritage Month, Ferguson, and Holder.

**Figure 1: Total Tweets by Senator (September 4-November 4, 2014)**

<b><u>Democratic Senator</u></b>	<b><u># of Tweets</u></b>	<b><u>Republican Senator</u></b>	<b><u># of Tweets</u></b>
Tammy Baldwin	293	<i>Lamar Alexander</i>	134
<i>Mark Begich</i>	303	Kelly Ayotte	407
Michael Bennett	8	John Barrasso	72
Richard Blumenthal	403	Roy Blunt	170
<i>Corey Booker</i>	842	John Boozman	42
Barbara Boxer	46	Richard Burr	42
Sherrod Brown	51	Saxby Chambliss	147
Maria Cantwell	31	Dan Coats	144
Ben Cardin	437	Tom Coburn	82
Tom Carper	387	<i>Thad Cochran</i>	239
Bob Casey	92	<i>Susan Collins</i>	192
<i>Chris Coons</i>	433	Bob Corker	56
Joe Donnelly	450	<i>John Cornyn</i>	255
<i>Richard Durbin</i>	577	Mike Crapo	51
Dianne Feinstein	621	Ted Cruz	0
<i>Al Franken</i>	209	<i>Mike Enzi</i>	159
<i>Kirsten Gillibrand</i>	0	Deb Fischer	429
<i>Kay Hagan</i>	70	Jeff Flake	298
<i>Tom Harkin</i>	209	<i>Lindsey Graham</i>	89
Martin Heinrich	84	Chuck Grassley	77
Heidi Heitkamp	84	Orrin Hatch	74
Mazie Hirono	214	Dean Heller	20
Tim Johnson	44	John Hoeven	47
Tim Kaine	171	<i>Jim Inhofe</i>	11
Amy Klobuchar	377	Johnny Isakson	130
<i>Mary Landrieu</i>	49	Mike Johanns	11
Patrick Leahy	218	Ron Johnson	78
Carl Levin	159	Mark Kirk	153
<i>Ed Markey</i>	318	Mike Lee	78
Joe Manchin	106	John McCain	315
Claire McCaskill	232	<i>Mitch McConnell</i>	239
Bob Menendez	51	Jerry Moran	103
<i>Jeff Merkley</i>	39	Lisa Murkowski	66
Barbara Mikulski	175	Rand Paul	279
Chris Murphy	575	Rob Portman	147
Patty Murray	12	<i>Jim Risch</i>	179
Bill Nelson	90	<i>Pat Roberts</i>	74
<i>Mark Pryor</i>	414	Marco Rubio	28
<i>Jack Reed</i>	159	<i>Tim Scott</i>	0
Harry Reid	68	<i>Jeff Sessions<sup>R</sup></i>	118
Jay Rockefeller	69	Richard Shelby	52

<i>Brian Schatz</i>	5	John Thune	150
Chuck Schumer	244	Pat Toomey	61
<i>Jeanne Shaheen</i>	100	David Vitter	143
Debbie Stabenow	42	Roger Wicker	342
Jon Tester	306	<b>Total:</b>	5983
<i>Mark Udall</i>	470	<b>% of Total by Republicans:</b>	34.73
<i>Tom Udall</i>	54		
John Walsh <sup>D</sup>	9		
<i>Mark Warner</i>	127		
Elizabeth Warren	68		
Sheldon Whitehouse	102	<b>All Senators seeking reelection:</b>	<b>5857 (34% of total)</b>
Ron Wyden	151	<b>Republicans seeking reelection:</b>	<b>1688 (9.80% of total)</b>
Angus King <sup>I</sup>	216	<b>Democrats seeking reelection:</b>	<b>4169 (24.20% of total)</b>
Bernie Sanders <sup>I</sup>	179		
<b>Total:</b>	11243		
<b>% of Total by Democrats:</b>	65.27		

*Senators seeking reelection in italics.* <sup>I</sup>Senators King and Sanders identify as Independent but caucus with the Democrats. <sup>R</sup>Sen. Sessions was not challenged in his reelection campaign. <sup>D</sup>Sen. Walsh pulled out of his race in July and was not seeking reelection during the time of this study.

The number of racially-coded tweets varies by senator. Thirty-five senators failed to post a single minority/racially coded reference while Sen. John Cornyn (TX) posted 220 tweets with minority/racially coded references. Because there is so much variation in Twitter activity across senators, we also test the Minority Tweets Hypothesis using the percentage of tweets that can be characterized as minority/racially coded (total number of these references/total number of tweets). This variable ranges in value from 0% to 86% with a mean of 5.3%.

Finally, this paper also looks at individual tweets and determines whether or not a racial term (as defined above) is included in the tweet. During the two month period covered in our analysis, 893 tweets (5.2 percent) contained minority/racially coded reference. This dependent variable is used in tests of the Competitiveness, Minority Constituency, and Electoral Proximity Hypotheses.

### *Independent Variables*

There are four key independent variables in our analysis. The first is simply candidate partisanship. We treat this as a dummy variables where Republican=1. There are 45 Republicans in the U.S. Senate during the time period covered in our analysis. The two senators serving as Independents at the time of this analysis (Sens. Angus King and Bernie Sanders) are grouped in our analysis with the Democratic senators that they caucus with, bringing the total number of Democratic Senators to 55.

Two of our key independent variables address senators' electoral status. In other words, we are

concerned with whether they are running for reelection and how competitive their respective races might be. The variable “competitiveness” captures the perceived closeness of the election using Politico’s 2014 Senate Race Ratings.

This is an ordinal scale based on the likelihood of a senate seat switching parties, where 0=not running/retiring, 1= safe seat for incumbent’s party, 2= likely win for the incumbent’s party, 3= leans in favor of the incumbent’s party, 4= leans in favor of the opposing party, 5= likely win for the opposing party, and 6= safe seat for the opposing party. Of the 28 senators running for reelection in our analysis, 17 are considered safe seats, 4 are considered likely retentions, and 3 lean towards the incumbent. Four of the senators were characterized as competing for seats that were projected to go to the opposing party. The remaining 72 senators were either not seeking reelection or retiring. In addition to competitiveness, we also estimate models using a simple binary measure of electoral status that we refer to as running (0=not running/retiring and 1=running).

The percentage of nonwhite residents in a state is calculated from the 2010 Census by subtracting the percentage of a state’s residents that are “white alone” from 100. Thus, this variable includes minorities and mixed-race individuals.

A particular tweet’s proximity to Election Day ranges from 61 days until Election Day 2014 (September 4, 2014) to 0 days until Election Day (November 4, 2014).

The remaining independent variables used in each of our models are region, the senator’s race, age, sex, and level of education. Region (1=South), the senator’s race (1=white), and sex (1=Female) are dummy variables. Age refers to the senator’s age as of September 4, 2014. Education refers to highest level of education attained and is measured on an ordinal scale from less than a bachelor’s degree (0) to M.D. (5). In September 2014, the U.S. Senate consisted of 5 non-white senators, 21 women, and 30 southerners. The average age of senators in this sample is 62.26 and highest level of education attained ranges from less than a bachelor’s degree (this value only occurs once with Mark Begich) to M.D. (John Barrasso, Tom Coburn, and Rand Paul). The dominant education level achieved by sitting U.S. Senators in 2014 was a law degree.

We estimate each of the models featuring total number of tweets, total number of tweets with minority reference, and percentage tweets with minority references with ordinary least squares regression. However, models using the binary measure as the dependent variable, whether or not a racial term is included in the tweet, necessitate logistic regression.

### Findings

Table 1 illustrates a test of the Partisanship and Incumbency Hypotheses.

**Table 1**  
**Total Tweets by Senator**

Independent Variable	Coefficient
Running	62.87* (35.68)
Republican	-54.91 (33.57)
Age	-0.90 (1.60)
Sex (1=Female)	-13.58 (39.75)
Senator Race (1=White)	96.86 (74.38)
South	-55.10 (38.18)
Education	19.82 (13.83)
Intercept	113.04 (120.71)
n	100
R <sup>2</sup>	0.13

OLS with standard errors in parentheses. \* indicates  $p < 0.05$ , one-tailed

Contrary to the hypothesized expectations and prior studies, the model does not present any evidence that Republicans are more likely to tweet than Democrats. If anything, the opposite appeared to be true in 2014. After controlling for the other variables, a Democrat was expected to tweet about 55 times more than a Republican ( $p=0.105$ ). Thus, the Partisanship Hypothesis is not supported.

There is some evidence that senators running for reelection tweet more than not running and retiring senators; the model suggests that senators running for reelection issue 63 more tweets than those not running/retiring ( $p=0.04$ , one-tailed). While that is not overwhelming evidence in support of our hypothesis, the findings were in the expected direction, which leads us to consider this somewhat supportive of the Incumbency Hypothesis.

Table 2 tests the Competitiveness and Minority Constituency Hypotheses by using the percentage of tweets that mention racial issues as the dependent variable. The model in the first column uses seat competitiveness as a measure of electoral status and the model in the second column uses the dummy variable indicating whether a senator is running for reelection. Both models fail to find any evidence that electoral competition influences a senator's willingness to tweet about racial and minority issues.

The percentage of nonwhite residents in a state also shows no relationship with the percentage of tweets that mention racial issues. This null finding suggests that the willingness of a senator to discuss race issues online is independent of the racial makeup of his or her constituency and raises questions about the representation of minorities in Congress.

For the final analysis, we treat each individual tweet as a separate observation to predict whether a racial term is included within a given tweet. Table 3 shows the results. Starting in Column 1, it is first shown that senators do indeed tweet less about racial issues as Election Day approaches; the coefficient on “Days until election” is positive and significant, indicating that as the number of days remaining before races decreases, the probability of a tweet containing a racial term decreases as well. The predicted probability of a tweet containing a racial term drops from 0.12 two months prior to the election to .09 on Election Day. This is evidence in support of the Electoral Proximity Hypothesis.

To further examine this relationship, we tested whether the influence of the election’s proximity varies across the parties. Figure 2 shows the number of each day’s tweets that reference racial terms for both Republicans and Democrats. The differences across the parties is stark, with Republicans generally tweeting about racial issues more than Democrats. While the number of racial tweets declines as the election approaches, Democrats are much less likely to mention racial issues closer to Election Day than Republicans.

To test this pattern from Figure 2 with control variables while also considering the total number of tweets (not just those mentioning race), the second column of Table 3 adds an interaction between Days until Election and the party of the Senator to the previous model. The coefficient on the interaction term is negative and significant, though it is easier to examine the substantive findings by discussing the predicted probability of a tweet mentioning a racial term while holding one of the interaction’s terms constant and allowing the other to vary. A typical Republican’s tweet has a predicted 0.11 probability of mentioning a racial term 60 days out from the election and a 0.10 probability on Election Day; this slight change in probability is not statistically significant from zero. A Democrat’s tweet, however, has 0.08 predicted probability of mentioning race 60 days out from an election but just a 0.04 probability on Election Day; this difference is statistically significant.

As noted above, the Minority Constituency Hypothesis was unsupported in Table 2; the percentage of a senator’s tweets that mention racial issues was not related to the percentage of nonwhite residents in a senator’s state. However, when we look at the data using individual tweets as the unit of analysis, we see clear support for the hypothesis. The coefficient on the percentage of a state that is nonwhite is positive and statistically significant, with a strong substantive relationship as well. The likelihood of a tweet from the senators representing the states with the lowest minority populations mentioning race is just 0.04. However, that likelihood increases to 0.17 for states in the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile of non-white population percentage.

Many of the other variables are also informative. Republican tweets are 0.043 more likely to include racial terms than Democratic tweets. Tweets from women are 0.037 more likely to include racial terms than tweets from men. Finally, the tweets of minority senators are 0.049 more likely to mention racial issues, suggesting that the few minority senators attempt to raise racial issues at a greater rate than their colleagues.



**Table 2**  
**Percentage of Senator's Tweets with Minority/Racial References**

	Model 1	Model 2
Competitiveness	-0.005 (0.013)	
Running (1=Seeking Reelection)		0.021 (0.030)
Percent Nonwhite in State	0.001 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)
Republican	0.001 (0.029)	0.011 (0.028)
Age	-0.000 (0.001)	-0.000 (0.001)
Sex (1=Female)	0.054 (0.034)	0.056 (0.034)
Senator Race (1=White)	-0.009 (0.080)	-0.019 (0.080)
South	0.025 (0.034)	0.017 (0.033)
Education	0.018 (0.012)	0.019 (0.012)
Intercept	-0.020 (0.128)	-0.024 (0.127)
N	97	97
R <sup>2</sup>	0.07	0.08

OLS with standard errors in parentheses

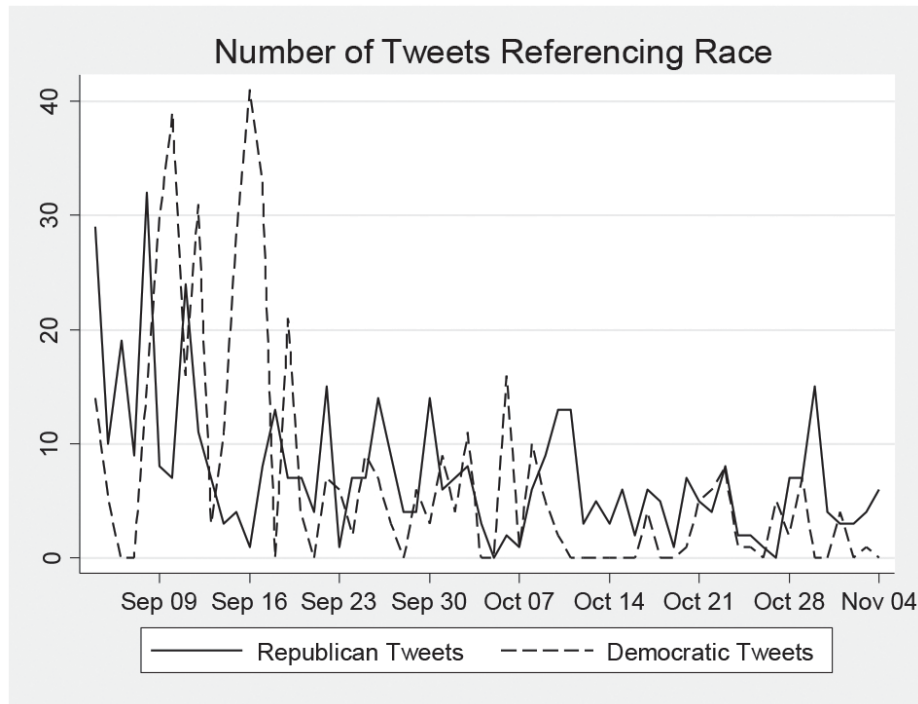
**Table 3**  
**Whether Race is Mentioned in a Tweet**

	Model 1: No Interaction	Model 2: Party*Days Until Election Interaction
Days Until Election	0.006** (0.002)	0.012*** (0.001)
Republican	0.650*** (0.088)	1.067*** (0.210)
Days Until Election*Republican		-0.010* (0.005)
Competitiveness of Race	0.005 (0.036)	-0.004 (0.036)
Percent Non-White in State	0.448*** (0.003)	0.044*** (0.003)
Age	0.006 (0.004)	0.006 (0.004)
Sex (Female=1)	0.532*** (0.095)	0.542*** (0.095)
Senator's Race (White=1)	1.380*** (0.207)	1.284*** (0.216)
South	0.174 (0.085)	0.202* (0.092)
Education	0.334*** (0.031)	0.323*** (0.033)
Constant	-7.288*** (0.336)	-7.459*** (0.343)
N	17,208	17,208
Log pseudolikelihood	-3282.38	-3279.71

Logit (DV: Tweet mentions racial issue=1), robust standard errors in parentheses

\* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p<0.001 using two-tailed tests.

Figure 2



## Discussion

### *The Minority Constituency Hypothesis*

These findings suggest that nuance is needed to explain the relationship between senators' minority constituencies and their willingness to mention racial issues. On one hand, the representation of minority constituents (at least when it comes to whether racial issues are brought up by senators in social media) appears to be poor when we look at the mentioning of racial issues as a percentage of total tweets; senators that represent large minority populations are no more likely to focus their Twitter activity on racial issues over other concerns than senators not representing many minority constituents (Table 2). However, the willingness of a senator to tweet about racial issues at all is strongly correlated to the size of a senator's minority constituency (Table 3). Tweets about race tend to come from those representing more diverse states and it appears that those senators are more than willing to discuss issues important to minority communities online. The reason why no relationship was found between the percentage of racial tweets and minority constituents in Table 2 is simply because those actively tweeting about racial issues also tend to tweet a lot in general; this has the effect of diluting the overall percentage of their tweets that are about race, which explains the null result when looking at the *rate* of race mentions rather than the content of individual tweets.

To illustrate this nuance, we can turn back to the data that treats each senator as a unit of analysis. There is no statistically significant correlation between the total number of tweets posted by a senator and the percentage of those tweets mentioning race ( $r=0.117$ ,  $p=0.256$ ).

Conversely, the correlation between the total number of tweets by a senator and the raw number of tweets mentioning racial issues is 0.26 ( $p=0.009$ ). In other words, the senators who tweet about race also tend to tweet a lot in general, not just about race but also other concerns.

When deriving the hypothesis, we discussed how toggling theory (Collet 2008) might offer a strategy for mobilizing minority voters without risking a backlash by white majority voters. This theory is often seen as conflicting with deracialization, which suggests that candidates should downplay race altogether to focus on majority concerns. We suggested that perhaps Twitter can be a potential venue for toggling, since those following a candidate on social media are already likely to be supporters of the candidate. However, our results suggest a more complex reality. While candidates from states with higher minority populations are more likely to engage in race-based discussions on Twitter that may garner support from their heterogeneous constituency, these candidates also appear to be simultaneously engaging in a deracialization strategy, downplaying their attention to racial concerns by couching their race-based tweets among a diverse set of many other non-racial posts. This may be because politicians cannot be sure that a pure toggling strategy will not produce a backlash; a politician's Twitter following will not entirely consist of supporters and tweets can be easily shared with unintended audiences by supporters or the media.

#### *Electoral Proximity and Partisanship*

It appears that Democrats are more likely than Republicans to alter their Twitter behavior as Election Day approaches when it comes to race. While it would be premature to definitively say why this is the case because this research does not take into consideration the tone of the tweets, we can speculate that by avoiding the issue of race, Democratic candidates are becoming more cautious as Election Day approaches, perhaps trying to avoid alienating white voters or creating the appearance of over-representing minority constituencies. Due to the fact that African-American and Hispanic voters are overwhelmingly Democratic, Republican senators do not typically have such worries. Instead, they are free to comment on racially charged issues, regardless of tone, and do not have to fear a backlash among white or minority constituents.

#### *Incumbency and Competitiveness*

While those running for reelection posted more tweets than those not running for reelection, whether a senator is running for reelection and the competitiveness of the race do not appear to have any bearing whatsoever on the likelihood of their tweets mentioning racial issues. A couple possible explanations may clarify this null result. First, the rationale for the hypothesis was that the ability to directly target your supporters with race-based messages on Twitter would have electoral benefits that outweigh the risk of a backlash by voters (see Avery and Peffley 2003; Bailey 2011; Gilliam and Iyengar 2000). Thus, it is simply a possibility that this is not true, that benefits of such unmediated race-based appeals are understated or that the protection from a backlash that such appeals bring is overstated. Future research would be needed to address these questions, however. The second possible explanation is that a relatively small sample obscures electoral competition's influence. Seventy-two of the senators were either not running or retiring. Among those running, only 7 senators were involved in races that were so competitive that they were not considered safe or likely seat retentions.

### Conclusion

This research endeavors to contribute to the literature addressing the impact of social media by content analyzing the Twitter activity of United States Senators as it relates to electoral status and issues impacting racial/ethnic minorities. Our findings provide insight as to how members of Congress, specifically senators, may use social media to connect to their constituents and supporters when campaigning for reelection. We clearly find that rather than avoiding issues impacting racial/ethnic minorities, which may be seen as controversial, senators appear to tweet about these issues with frequency. Senators do not tend to avoid issues involving racial/ethnic minorities. They seem to embrace them.

This paper makes a contribution to the literature regarding how the concerns of minority constituents are voiced on social media by elected officials. Our study suggests there is a great deal of nuance to the question of whether senators representing large nonwhite populations are more likely to discuss racial issues online. There is a strong relationship between the racial diversity of a senator's constituency and the overall mentions of racial issues in tweet; the concerns of minority constituents are represented by politicians on social media, though it should also be noted that senators who frequently tweet about race also tend to tweet a lot in general.

As Gainous and Wagner (2013) note, controlling the message with social media is quite important, but one should not overlook that senators are likely tweeting primarily to supporters. Those that tend to disagree with a senator's policy positions are not as likely to follow him/her on Twitter. Thus tweeting about controversial issues to people that are likely to already agree with his/her position could potentially have a rallying effect for a senator.

Some of this study's findings contradict expectations set by prior research. We did not find that Republicans used Twitter with greater frequency than Democrats, which prior research suggested would be the case (Gainous and Wagner 2013; Glassman et al. 2009; Shogan 2010). In addition, we failed to find conclusive support that those seeking reelection use Twitter with greater frequency than those not running or retiring, as Auter and Fine (2016) suggest; those running for reelection did tweet more in 2014 than those not running or retiring, but this relationship is only significant at  $p=.04$  (one-tailed). These inconsistencies with prior studies are likely the result of the rapidly changing landscape of social media. Twitter (along with other social media platforms) is still a new tool that is available to politicians and as the number of people across all demographics using the platform increases, we can expect further changes as politicians adapt to become more effective communicators.

Nevertheless, we do find that Twitter is becoming not only a common campaigning tool, but also a means of communication that circumvents traditional media. A 2014 Pew survey found that 58 percent of respondents who follow political figures on social media listed the reliability of getting information on social media (instead of the traditional media) as a major or minor reason for using such networks. Clearly, the ability to bypass the traditional media and communicate directly with supporters is a trait of social media that is valued by the receivers of those messages, as well as the politicians themselves. Moreover, for those elected officials that wish to maintain (or establish) a more deracialized presence in traditional media, social media may offer a venue for toggling. Smith (2014) notes that 73% of online African-Americans use social networking sites and notes that Twitter is particularly popular among younger African-Americans, with 40% of online blacks between the age of 18 and 29 on the platform. Overall, 22% of online blacks are Twitter users, compared to 16% of online whites. Certainly, the size of

minority populations using social media platforms offers elected officials the ability to provide symbolic representation to minority constituents.

Our findings should be interpreted cautiously for a few reasons, however. First, we do not control for the tone of the tweets in this study. A subsequent study using the tweet as the unit of analysis so that tone could be more accurately addressed would provide greater insight. Third, our research focuses on Twitter. While the CMF points to the growing use and importance of Twitter, Facebook is still the dominant online social networking platform. Finally, it is possible that our measure of minority/racially coded tweets overestimates the connection respondents may make with affected groups. As explained above, we are confident in this measure, given the political climate at the time of data collection.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

This study and the data collection leading to its completion point to several opportunities to study the political impact of social media as it relates to racial and ethnic minorities. To begin, our research largely focuses on the supply side of Twitter messages. That is, we address the content of senators' tweets and their frequency. We do not address the impact of tweeting about minority/racially coded issues on participation. Second, we do not treat retweets differently. Third, we do not treat tweets posted as text-only differently than tweets posted with links and/or images and videos. We can only assume that tweeting with images and videos would increase the likelihood that the tweet would go viral.

### **Notes**

1. For a more detailed discussion of scholarship relating to the Black Lives Matter movement and its impact see Scott and Brown (2016).
2. The minority-related Senatorial Twitter activity in this study was overwhelmingly related to African-Americans and Latinos. There were, however, notable references to Native Americans specifically relating to Indian Tribe Treatment.
3. Given the August 2014 shooting of a black teenager by a white policeman in Ferguson Missouri and the public aftermath, we chose to include the terms police, shooting, Ferguson, and Holder (U.S. Attorney General, Eric Holder launched a federal investigation into the incident in September 2014), understanding that some of the tweets that contain these terms may not be overtly racial in nature. However, because the shooting in Ferguson, Missouri led to much speculation about race relations, racial attitudes, and the treatment of black suspects by police, we are confident that the terms carry racial undertones.
4. An alternative model replaced the running for reelection variable with an ordinal variable indicating the competitiveness of the state's senate race; there was no evidence that those in seeking reelection in close races tweet more than those in safe seats or who are not running/retiring.
5. The predicted probabilities are estimated for a white, female, Republican senator running for a safe seat in a non-Southern state; other variables are set at their means.
6. We would like to thank an anonymous review for this suggestion on testing whether the influence of the election's proximity varies across the parties.
7. A third possible explanation for not finding a relationship between electoral competition and Twitter behavior is that politicians are strategic. Senators who are likely to be helped in a close race by tweeting about race might do so but their actions may be



“cancelled out” by others in the sample who refrain from mentioning race because they would be punished by the electorate for doing so. However, we could not find evidence for this after running separate regressions that interacted the electoral competitiveness variables with the percentage of the state that is non-white.

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NATIONAL POLITICAL  
SCIENCE REVIEW

## **BOOK REVIEWS**

Caroline Shenaz Hossein. *Politicized Microfinance: Money, Power, and Violence in the Black Americas* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), \$29.95, 209 pp. ISBN: 978-1-4426-1624-0 (paper).

*Politicized Microfinance* by Caroline Shenaz Hossein tells the untold story of indigenous African banking systems in the Caribbean. It also tells the story of how commercialized microfinance is failing Black people. In the 1990s, microlending programs to groups of poor, rural women, such as through Bangladesh's Grameen Bank, came to be seen as the "magic bullet" of development. Today, however, Hossein suggests that the microfinance industry suffers from serious mission drift (xv). Commercialized microlenders are no longer effective at reaching the poor; in fact, they are purposively excluding certain groups of borrowers, namely Black men. Borrowing from diasporic Black feminist theory and an intersectional framework of analysis of race, class, and gender, Hossein argues that the ingrained cultural and racial prejudices of the professional, middle-class microfinance staff serves to exclude the African diaspora from meaningful participation in the economic life of their respective nation-states. This is a bold claim and one that is certain to generate significant scholarly debate over the merits and limits of microfinance. Despite its sobering message, *Politicized Microfinance* is filled with inspiring examples of marginalized social actors organizing collectively to take control of their financial destinies.

Hossein provides compelling evidence to substantiate her findings. Her study is based on interviews and focus groups with over 500 small lenders and borrowers in five countries of the region: Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, and Trinidad (24). A major conceptual contribution of the work concerns the author's distinction between two forms of politicized microfinance; one that is clientelist and oppressive in nature (as demonstrated in the cases of Guyana, Jamaica, and Trinidad), and another that is activist in nature, with a social justice orientation (as evidenced by the cases of Grenada and Haiti). What drives the different outcomes, according to Hossein, are the people who run these microfinance programs (15). In Guyana, Jamaica, and Trinidad, where local managers tend to come from different class and racial backgrounds than the majority of their clients, cultural biases affect decision-making with regards to lending practices. As a result, lenders in these cases meet only 10% of the demand for microloans on the part of the African diaspora (65). In contrast, microfinance staffs in Grenada and Haiti have similar social origins as their clients. They typically share a socialist perspective that purposefully seeks to counter elitist business practices to reach the poorest sectors or the *moun andeyo*. Haiti's microlenders are estimated to meet the needs of 25% of the local Black population (120).

While the distinction between two forms of politicized microfinance runs the risk of dichotomizing good/bad politics based on the left/right political spectrum, it does draw attention to the changing nature of the microfinance industry and its relationship to the social economy. The social economy is the third sector between the private and public sectors that includes cooperatives, not-for-profit organizations, social enterprises and charitable associations with an express mission to serve the needs of society's marginalized groups. Conventionally, the microfinance industry is viewed as part of the social economy. Hossein's findings challenge the conventional wisdom by suggesting that commercialized microfinance has lost its traditional footing in the social economy (92). She asserts that the incorporation of indigenous or non-formal banking practices into microlending programs, similar to what is occurring in Haiti, serves as an important corrective for the industry.



To enhance the study's comparative analysis, the chapters of the book are organized by theme rather than by country. Chapter 1 introduces the reader to the topic of microfinance as situated within the United Nations International Decade for People of African Descent (2015-2024). Chapter 2 provides the historical and political context for the country cases. Chapter 3 applies an intersectional framework of analysis to the cases, highlighting how the dynamics of race, class, and gender can lead to the exclusion of targeted groups by microfinance managers and their staffs. Perhaps most revealing, the study uncovered an anti-male bias in lending practices by uptown middle-class female staff against men from Kingston, Jamaica's downtown slums (66). During personal interviews, the female counterparts of these excluded male entrepreneurs reported serious domestic conflict and violence as a result of such discriminatory practices. In the case of Guyana, the situation is reversed as predominantly Indo-Guyanese male staff within the microfinance industry lend primarily to men. Chapter 4 delves into the issue of how partisan politics and clientelist practices limit the reach and effectiveness of microfinance in the deeply divided societies of Guyana, Jamaica, and Trinidad. Chapter 5 explores alternative forms of banking in the positive cases of Grenada and Haiti. The chapter is rich with testimonials of local borrowers and lenders, speaking in their own dialects, of their rewarding experiences participating in collective, non-formal banking systems that are directed mainly by women or "banker ladies." Formal lenders in these cases are influenced by indigenous banking practices. Chapter 6 concludes the study with a nod to the potential of collective banking systems that are rooted in African traditions to improve the reach and inclusivity of commercial microfinance schemes.

The major substantive contribution of the book to the social economy literature is the important discussion that it begins on how to constructively link formal and non-formal banking institutions. Non-formal institutions refer to indigenous values, beliefs, and practices. They are neither informal institutions nor formally recognized by the state or market. According to Hossein, local banking systems rooted in African cultural traditions have always operated alongside formal economic programs in the Americas, yet they have not received the recognition that they deserve by colonial-minded thinkers and practitioners (xiii). This oversight in the literature is even more puzzling given that the "reinvention" of microfinance in the 1970s drew on the tradition of self-help and localized money pool systems known collectively as rotating savings and credit associations (ROSCAs). Hossein's work serves as a counterpoint to the dominant assumption that non-formal money pool systems among the poor would disappear once formal banking systems extended their reach into marginalized communities. Instead, Hossein suggests that the reverse has happened. The African diaspora does not trust the microfinance industry for the reasons outlined in the book, preferring to access their savings and credit from non-formal, community-based microbanks such as Haiti's *Sols*, Jamaica's *Partner Banks*, Granada's *Susus*, and Guyana's *Box-Hand* systems. This key insight helps to explain why commercialized microfinance programs have generally underperformed in the Caribbean. The book concludes with a series of recommendations to reform the microfinance sector in ways that will assist excluded groups, in particular: rooting microfinance in the cultural traditions of local populations; emphasizing shared social experiences; and rethinking banking along race, class, and gender lines (156-157). *Politicized Microfinance* makes it clear that much work needs to be done to make one of the most celebrated institutions in the field of international development live up to its promise.

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Marcia Chatelain. *South Side Girls: Growing Up in the Great Migration* (Duke University Press, 2015), \$23.95, 264 pp. ISBN: 978-0-8223-585 (paper).

Marcia Chatelain's first book, *South Side Girls: Growing Up in the Great Migration*, is a homage to African-American girls whose voices are yet to be heard. Written specifically in an effort to reimagine history's picture of Chicago during the Great Migration, Chatelain dedicates each page of her book to being as representative of those girls as she can. Chatelain utilizes compelling storytelling alongside references to archival material to weave an account of an integral period of American history, and in this account, the minds and hearts of an entire segment of new Chicagoans are permitted to share their stories. Black girls are finally encouraged to tell of their lives through expressions of desire, hope, and worry, even if only through the writings of a historian decades after they have come and gone.

Chatelain begins her work by telling readers that she intends to fill a chasm that exists in historical accounts of a period when large numbers of African-Americans migrated to cities in the northern part of the United States. In many of these cases, migrants came in search of what they believed would be a better life for themselves and their families. Using the promise of improved economic opportunity and freedom from severe labor conditions as their driving forces, African-Americans migrated in large numbers beginning in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century during a period that would come to be referred to as the Great Migration. Chatelain dedicates some of her introductory pages to chronicling this period, specifying that her book will cover the period only until 1940. Her goal for the project was to utilize primary sources such as letters, court documents, and personal journals to convey a history told from an otherwise obfuscated point of view. She hopes to breathe life back into the experiences of Black girls who made the migration and came to inhabit the city of Chicago alongside their families.

In addition, Chatelain's intent is to properly grasp and then adequately communicate the feelings and perceptions of society-at-large as it pertains to African-American girls during the Great Migration. She offers a great deal of archival evidence which indicates that the surrounding society had a wide-ranging perception of Black girls, many of which were not consistent with how these girls and young women perceived themselves. During the period, legislation and public policy, which focused on how society would approach the question of black girls, their education, and their upbringing, abounded. Chatelain shows that African-American girls occupied a paradoxical space, one that was ill defined and wrought with contradiction. In one sense, Black girls were regarded and treated as vulnerable and innocent beings who deserved to live their younger years as children. In the view of others, however, these very same girls were seen as future mothers of the black race who were best suited to undergo domestic training at the earliest age possible. Considering this, Chatelain is primarily concerned with presenting the story of Black girls through their very own lenses. What were these girls expecting when they made the transition to living and working in Chicago? What did they hope for and how did they perceive themselves in this new world? Chatelain speaks to these questions and endeavors to answer them in a way that exposes and clarifies their stories.

Chatelain's aim is clearly stated, if not always achieved. Although she is transparent about the limitations of her sources in her attempt to tell these girls' stories, Chatelain falls shorter in her endeavor than perhaps she anticipated. There is no doubt that Chatelain's goal is to be as representative of these silenced girls as she can, but at times she portrays the voices of others in

a more thorough manner than she does the very girls she studies. Readers hear more from school matrons, public policy officials, newspapers, and other related sources than they do from the girls for whom the book hopes to speak. In-depth interviews with some of the girls, now women, who lived through the Great Migration to Chicago would have lent an element of authenticity and depth to Chatelain's work. If Chatelain shaped her research design to allow for in-depth interviews with Chicago's surviving South Side girls, perhaps readers would have been able to gain a richer understanding of the ways in which these girls lived their lives, dreamed their desires, and forged their paths. In the early part of the book, Chatelain mentions that the First Lady is a beloved daughter of the South Side. To be sure, Michelle Obama grew up in this area of Chicago after the period Chatelain studies, but even a short account of a living voice would have been beneficial to Chatelain's stated goal.

Despite the barriers imposed by limited source materials or availability, Chatelain provides enlightening coverage of the life experiences of African-American girls living in the South Side of Chicago during the Great Migration. She focuses her gaze on a relatively small group of people who have arguably not yet been recognized as those whose story is worth telling, and in this way, Chatelain contributes a great deal to history and Women and Girls Studies. This book fills a gap in historical feminist literature that has long been neglected and even dismissed. While Women's Studies has experienced a notable upsurge in interest and scholarship in recent decades, studies conducted about girls are still woefully absent. Chatelain's quest to ameliorate this is both significant and noteworthy. There is certainly room for more research to be done regarding the same girls she writes about, but Chatelain has now helped to shape the discussion.

Chatelain is tapping into a movement that has gained momentum in recent years. While government initiatives such as President Obama's "My Brother's Keeper" target the concerns of Black men and boys, there is a burgeoning movement concerned with the uplift, education, and reclamation of African-American women and girls. The organizations dedicated to these causes are concerned with forging paths for Black women and girls to position themselves advantageously in a world that has traditionally been overwhelmingly male and White. The first priorities for many of the groups such as "Why We Can't Wait" is to highlight the lived experiences of Black girls and women, which is achieved first by allowing the voices of Black girls and women to be heard when and where they have otherwise been silenced. The new fervor over the "Black Girl Magic" movement has taken a similar form. From celebrities to scholars, journalists to Twitter users, the phrase is being evoked in an effort to let it be known that Black women and girls are reclaiming their image, inserting themselves into places where they were previously barred, and asserting themselves in spaces where they have always been, but otherwise neglected and ignored. Chatelain attempts to do this in her work and is successful in notable ways. She puts a spotlight on a number of women who served as matriarchs to the movement to protect African-American girls in Chicago. From women who founded girls' schools to Club women focused on creating and implementing curriculum and training protocols, Chatelain makes certain to communicate their concerns and hopes. She tells readers of the influence the shifting religious landscape had on Black girls in Chicago and speaks to how these girls felt about their physical images and identities in their new host city. *South Side Girls* is a noteworthy and admirable work, which deserves recognition for its groundbreaking contribution to the study of African-American girls. Chatelain's focus on the Great Migration -- and the lives of Black girls during this period -- is profound in many ways, and scholarship and discussions on the subject have already benefitted from her efforts.

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Kwame Dixon. *Afro-Politics and Civil Society in Salvador da Bahia, Brazil* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2016), \$74.95, 192 pp.  
ISBN: 978-0-8130-6261-7 (hardcover).

Is there a black civil society in Brazil? Why is it so hard to mobilize around racial identity in Brazil, despite the fact that it is the ‘blackest’ country in Latin America? What does the future look like for black politics given Brazil’s long history of racial denial and racial violence? These are some of the key questions political scientist Kwame Dixon asks in his book, *Afro-Politics and Civil Society in Salvador-Bahia, Brazil*. At the heart of Dixon’s analysis is the recurring question of how to make black voices heard in Brazilian civil society. Many scholars have asked this question before, among them Michael Hanchard in his 1994 groundbreaking book, *Orpheus and Power: The black Movement in Brazil*. Hanchard forcefully argued that mainstream Brazilian society establishes hegemony by de-politicizing the meanings of race, thereby preventing black mobilization. Because mainstream society denies the existence of racism, it is practically impossible for black activists to organize around race, unless such organizing relies on an almost folkloric celebration of black culture. The debate that followed Hanchard’s analysis criticized his U.S.-centered reading of the Brazilian black movement and his over-emphasis on what he called ‘culturalism’ without considering the diversity of strategies embraced by the black movement. Scholar Luisa Barrios (1996), for instance, contended that the ‘myth’ of racial democracy is called a ‘myth’ precisely because the black movement has occupied the public sphere and made its point. Others like myself contended that to understand the Black Movement in Brazil, one has to consider the many ways in which black politics are rendered not necessarily as a ‘black issue’ but rather as a struggle for daily demands such as public transportation, health care, and safety.

Dixon’s book is a welcome and timely contribution to this unsolved debate around black activism in Brazil. Centering his analysis in the post-democratization period (the early 1980s to the present), he is able to document several attempts by black activists to denounce and change the Brazilian racialized regime of citizenship. Particular attention is given to the emergence of the Movimento Negro Unificado (MNU) in 1978. The MNU, the author rightly affirms, presented a new paradigm in Black politics insofar as it tried to move beyond the ‘culturalist’ and fragmented perspectives embraced by black activism and instead embraced a radical black politics focusing on citizenship rights. Strongly identifying with the left-wing Workers Party (PT) (in fact many of MNU’s members were also members of PT), the MNU saw in the struggle against the military dictatorship an opportunity to “advance a series of critiques of the treatment of Blacks by state institutions” (p. 66) and to denounce the leftist parties’ silence on racial oppression. Members of the MNU actively participated in the first municipal elections after the twenty-four-year dictatorship was toppled and held some strategic positions in city halls around the country. Dixon dedicates some attention also to MNU’s political project, which could be summarized into what we (in the black movement) continue to call transformation from within and the author names as a “pressure on the state to recognize processes of racialization” (p. 8).

As a political scientist, Dixon provides an even closer analysis of black electoral politics. In doing so, he fulfills a void on the question (or lack) of the black vote in Brazilian society. Analyzing three decades of black participation in Salvador, the author shows the successes and pitfalls of the black movement in galvanizing black voters. From the first black mayor appointed for a two-year period by the military regime (1978-1979) to the current eleven black activists elected for Salvador’s city council (2013-2016), he provides a comprehensive analysis of the

controversial, multifaceted, and ideologically confused black vote. For instance, what should we make of a black woman who holds the position of vice-mayor for the main right-wing political party that is implicated in most of the structural violence perpetrated against Afro-Salvadoreans? What should we make of the growing black evangelical movement, which has established ties with conservative forces that persecute Candomblé, the main Afro-Brazilian religion? Dixon is able to bring these issues to the forefront of his analysis, sometimes with sympathy for the pragmatic approaches of black politicians and sometimes taking it a step further by unveiling the difficulties for black participation in a city dominated by a traditional political elite.

Similar to the explicitly politicized agenda of the MNU, black politics in Salvador also take the form of cultural production and self-help educational projects. Dixon studies the emergence of the Blocos Afros “Ilê Aiyê” and “Olodum” as an important arena for the affirmation of blackness (i.e., the “re-Africanization of Salvador,” in the case of Ilê Aiyê) and for building larger alliances under the premise of multiculturalism, as Olodum’s approach suggests. Another black initiative are the pre-vestibulares comunitarios or PVNCs, which focus on helping low-income students with poor academic performance pass Salvador’s public universities entrance exams. The PVNCs are part of a political strategy aiming to raise black consciousness through concrete demands, such as the access to free education. While in the case of the PVNCs the black movement has been able to push forward a national debate which resulted in the adoption of affirmative action policies in public education (the federal law was signed by President Dilma Rousseff in 2012), the ‘blocos Afros’ have succumbed to the ethnic marketing of Salvador’s tourism industry. Black culture has been consumed and appropriated as folklore by the white transnational civil society. As Dixon points out, while the ‘blocos Afros’ are still connected to the disenfranchised black and poor, “they do not challenge or represent a threat to the social order because they are now on some levels a wing of the state’s hegemonic discourse for black identity” (p. 62).

Although *Afro-Politics and Civil Society in Salvador* shines in providing insightful analysis of the painful and creative black activism in Brazil, there are some questions that the author fails to address. The reader may wonder, for instance, about the impact of 15 decades of the Leftist federal government of the PT on black politics in Brazil, particularly in the city of Salvador. To be fair, Dixon devotes a chapter to analyze the process of implementing the quota system in Brazilian and Salvadoran public universities. In doing so, he provides a fair and compelling picture of the black movement’s success in shifting discourses around race and educational attainment under Lula da Silva’s government. Still, insofar as participation in the political-electoral system is concerned, MNU’s thirty-year critiques still hold true. The Left is unable to accommodate black demands. Similarly, black politicians participating in conservative coalitions may subscribe to the Left’s incapacity (or unwillingness?) to accommodate black matters. These fundamental questions are buried in chapter seven, one of the main chapters of the book. Related to that, the author’s positive assessment of what he calls “Afro-civil society” may be met with skepticism. However, I do not wish to deny some remarkable achievement by the black movement in the last decade or so. In fact, what makes this book particularly compelling is Dixon’s resolute acknowledgment of black agency, despite (or because) of the constrained terrain of the politics of rights in the Brazil racial order. Such contribution should not be underestimated, especially within the context of a certain scholarly refusal to give the black movement’s credit for challenging the myth of racial democracy in Brazil.

We should not go too far, though. For instance, how would the black presence in the state



create a “radical new political space” (p. 126) for blackness? This question emerges from the author’s understanding that the black movement is expanding to the public sphere and creating new democratic possibilities in Brazil. Dixon believes that such radical politics resonate within the African diaspora for the transnational dimension of Salvador’s black culture. However, if we consider a marginal yet incisive critique of the antiblack animus of civil society and its public sphere (i.e., Vargas, 2014; Wilderson II, 2003), how would it affect the ways we understand black politics in Salvador? Likewise, if we consider Dixon’s own assertion that in Brazil, and Salvador in particular, blacks occupy a “schizophrenic social geography of belonging and non-belonging simultaneously” (p. 156), how sustainable is this emerging black civil society? Genocidal proportions of homicide, mass incarceration, residential segregation, and day-to-day humiliations invite serious doubts about the possibilities of changes from the paradigms of civil society or electoral politics. What are we left with then? Here is where *Afro-Politics and Civil Society in Salvador* makes its strongest contribution: in a society where black lives do not matter, the contradictions, pitfalls, and small victories of the black movement show that the reinvention of black civil life is a painful, compromising, non-linear, and sometimes seemingly impossible project. As Dixon does well, such a depressing context does not authorize us to take away black agency, even when it is contradictory (as in the black participation in the genocidal state) or pragmatic (as in the case of affirmative action policies). Without a doubt, this book is an important contribution to the emerging literature on the black public sphere, and black politics vis-à-vis racialized civil society in the African diaspora. If we consider the current anti-black climate in societies like the United States, Colombia, and Brazil, *Afro-Politics and Civil Society in Salvador* stands out as an engaging and serious attempt to recognize and understand the roadblocks blacks face in their (our) attempt to hold a civic existence.

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Bill V. Mullen. *Un-American: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Century of World Revolution* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2015), \$28.95, 264 pp. ISBN: 978-1-43991-110-5 (paper).

Bill V. Mullen's *Un-American: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Century of World Revolution* breaks from past Du Boisian scholarship, as it situates Du Bois as less of a race man and more of a global intellectual within a radical leftist framework. Mullen skillfully navigates the reader through five chapters of exquisite analysis regarding the intellectual transformation and challenges of leftist ideology presented by Du Bois by persistently juxtaposing the American race problem to the endemic forces of global imperialism vis-à-vis capitalism. As noted, "[t]he problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line" is a recasting of that sentence's inaugural iteration – not, most famously, in *The Souls of Black Folk*, but as the concluding sentence of the 'To the Nations of the World,' the statement collectively constructed by participants in the Pan-African Congress of 1900" (16). Mullen does not attempt to recount Du Bois's life and legacy as a Pan-Africanist or iconic civil right's activist, as other scholars have addressed.

Mullen's scholarship is a timely advancement of classic Du Boisian tomes, such as David Levering Lewis's *W.E.B. Du Bois 1868 – 1919: Biography of A Race*, and Lewis's *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919 – 1963*. Though Lewis's groundbreaking work on Du Bois brought layers of detail to the biographical forefront in assessing the life-long accomplishments of Du Bois, it failed to place Du Bois as an international actor by focusing on him during the twilight years of his life as Mullen has done. The depth at which he explores the latter years and growing emergence of Du Bois as an intellectual leftist far exceeds other biographies.

Mullen begins chapter one by referencing Levering Lewis's argument that Du Bois became aware of his inner Bolshevism when he proclaimed "I am a Bolshevik" after a 1926 visit to the Soviet Union. Du Bois, like C.L.R. James, contextualized slaves and former slaves as "black Bolsheviks" (24). Mullen, however, dissects this position by addressing the waves of political phenomena before 1926 that impacted Du Bois's political development, which he calls the "diasporic international." This transformation was seen in Du Bois as he wrestled with his understanding of the international question and issue of global Communism. *Un-American* places Du Bois in a position of contradictions; it juxtaposes Du Bois with Vladimir Lenin regarding their interpretation of modern imperialism. Mullen, however, is quick to show their differences when it involves the colonizer and the colonized.

Mullen's objectivity is seen through the countless narratives and interworking developments of Du Bois, as he demonstrates the paradoxical struggles Du Bois faced in addressing his ideological identity as a pacifist with non-pacifist motives by Communist leaders such as Joseph Stalin. Throughout *Un-American*, Mullen's tone toward Stalin feels antagonistic, particularly as Du Bois is positioned to cast doubt on Stalin's leadership, and therefore doubts on Communism. Chapter two opens with Du Bois's support for the Russian Revolution of 1917, but he quickly shifts to an indictment of Stalin's state capitalism. In 1926, while visiting the Soviet Union for the first time, Du Bois looks past Stalin's betrayal of the revolution, which Mullen casts as Du Bois's disappointment in the post-Lenin and post-revolutionary state in celebrating his Bolshevik identity (52). The chapter further explores Du Bois's sense of Bolshevism through his Marxist interpretation of the American race problem, connecting it with the Russian Revolution of 1917 in *Black Reconstruction in America*. Mark Van Wienen concluded that Du Bois saw that "social equality could be achieved by gradual, parliamentary, and peaceful means" (59). This Fabian

perspective, in part, entails the far-reaching extent to which Du Bois evolved. In light of a need for global socialism and a revolution, a Victorian Du Bois expressed concern regarding reports of abortions, famine, hunger, and despair during the Russian Revolution of 1917. Du Bois's contradictions with theory and reality were pervasive. By the late 1930s, Du Bois's concerns about Trotsky's exile were noted, as he expressed doubts about Stalin and fears of the rising tide of fascism (84).

Du Bois was drawn to William Walling's interpretation of the Russian Revolution, which influenced him to join the Socialist Party in 1911. Mullen traces Du Bois's leftist journey through a number of international activists, who also sought to assess the problems of capitalism and imperialism, eventually finding a self-exiled Du Bois submitting an application to join the Communist Party USA (CP-USA) in 1961. Du Bois's evolution was shaped by his experiences with activists like Agnes Smedley, Lajpat Rai, Jawaharlal Nehru, and George Padmore. Mullen tells of Padmore's metonymic nationalism, allowing the reader to quickly engage in his tension with Stalinism and eventual divorce from the Communist International while befriending Du Bois and developing a new typology in his interest toward Pan-Africanism and the "self-determination" thesis.

This portrait of Du Bois – as a pronounced intellectual who was analyzing and synthesizing the experiences of the American Negro and people of color across the world – was captured in his political thought as a "Bolshevik." In making such claims, however, Mullen notes the blinders that encapsulated Du Bois's imagination. Mullen argues, "...the Lenin-Stalin thesis...the greatest determining pull on Du Bois's sympathetic expropriation of the Russian Revolution... enabled his rereading of nineteenth-century Reconstruction through the revolution, and in dialectical reverse" (63). Hence, from 1926 to 1961, his writings delved into a coherent Marxist analysis, though uneven, as he faced internal struggles with Stalinism and his purges (64).

*Un-American* provides insightful analysis into Du Bois's imagination of world revolution. Both *Black Reconstruction* and *Dark Princess* paint the greatness of the Russian Revolution and the Soviet Union during the Comintern. This imagination – introduced by Claude McKay after his 1922 visit to Moscow – shaped a vision of a better world for the American Negro, though Du Bois's sharp critique of the International Labor Defense and the CP-USA during the Scottsboro trial clouded such trajectory.

Mullen places Du Bois in the realm of international relations when navigating the challenges faced by Indian and African peoples due to imperialism. Mullen notes some early fundamental flaws in Du Bois's aim to juxtapose the American Negro problem with that of the darker lands. Du Bois observed a fractured world in need of unity. Yet, the challenges of mending the color line in a capitalist framework were observed by the disunity of the working class. Mullen shows how the aging Du Bois was energized by the larger stage of the color line and the problems presented by imperialism, and later at the dawn of the Cold War. Mullen argues that Du Bois's *Black Reconstruction in America* brought forth the forces to promulgate world revolution. However, Du Bois was guilty of miscalculations in making false parallels about the American race problem and the Indian caste system. Though mistaken, his proclamation was clear for Indian socialism and unity against imperialism (99).

Finally, Mullen's biographical narrative of Du Bois allows the reader to follow him on his global tour of the Soviet Union, China, Germany, and Japan (127). Du Bois in China and his relationship with Mao Tse-tung is a familiar narrative, but his contemplation of Marxism and Japan, as well as his inner wrestling of an imperialist Japan, are not as familiar. Mullen's Du Bois is portrayed as a diplomat, moving from land to land in hopes of coalescing the struggles

of black, brown, and yellow people. The complexity of race and imperialism is what makes this work unique. Japan – the land of yellow people, acting as the colonizer of black people, is paradoxical. Du Bois wrote, “[w]e have no illusions about Japanese motives...[t]hey are going to Ethiopia for purposes of profit” (129).

Mullen concludes with an intellectually radical Du Bois. It offers the reader a concluding journey that places him in Accra, Ghana and a member in the CP-USA. Mullen showcases a Du Bois that is more than an American civil rights activist, but also as an international diplomat. Mullen’s work moves Du Bois from a caricature to a transcendent of global revolution. One is reminded of the CP-USA and its African-American vanguards, such as Richard Wright, Angela Davis, and Esther Jackson. Value is found in Mullen’s criticism of twentieth-century leftist scholarship that ignored leftist women of color (203), and Mullen does an admirable job introducing international women of color. Readers will discover that Levering Lewis’s biographies and Gerald Horne’s *Race Woman* presents Shirley Graham Du Bois as an active partner in his radical life, a point not fully discussed.

*Un-American* is an exceptional work. Readers will be challenged by the nuance of unfamiliar scholarship and rewarded by how well it develops Du Bois in his later years. Those unfamiliar with the extent of Du Bois’s work outside the context of the United States will find Mullen’s work very challenging. It is fitting for readers seeking to engage in black intellectual and radical politics.

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Yu-Fang Cho. *Uncoupling American Empire: Cultural Politics of Deviance and Unequal Difference, 1890-1910* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2013), \$ 24.95, 212 pp. ISBN: 978-1-4384-4899-2 (hardcover).

In *Uncoupling American Empire*, Yu-Fang Cho examines how the subtlest tools of the state—the ones regulating marriage, domesticity, and intimacy -- played a crucial role in shaping US imperialism. Set in the late-nineteenth century, this study works from the inside out, through legislation against white slavery, or white prostitution, and anti-Asian sentiment, to show how the US manufactured a powerful critique of deviance among racial minorities and new roles for women that validated America's empire and the logic of white supremacy. Using Foucault's genealogical approach that couples highbrow discourse of elites with the vernacular language of the poor and working-class, Cho presents the story in two parts: one on creation of a "regime of white heterosexuality" in the US, and another on how Asians and blacks responded to that standard. American elites applied the regime at home and abroad, but never with enough pliancy to fit Asians and blacks into its image. The regime, in fact, worked to actively undermine or "uncouple" the relationships of racialized groups, which doubled their oppression and forced them to turn on themselves.

The book opens with the crisis of single young white women in the urban labor market. The presence of these young women in the streets signaled the demise of the Victorian family, especially its practice of coverture or male protection. In response, social reformers turned to the state, unleashing its powers of surveillance on young women's bodies with age of consent reforms directed at the sexual exploitation of adolescent girls and laws to stop white prostitution. Deviance was a working-class problem in reform discourse, but the period's fiction, Cho notes, suggested otherwise. Separating the literature into two themes -- young white women's education and their social development customs -- Cho shows the anxiety's deleterious effect on elite white women as well. For education, she focuses on Josephine Dodge Bacon and Jean Webster's fictional accounts of elite college women. College suspended the demands of adulthood creating a "third space" of homosocial intimacy and safety for elite women. But it was also a place beyond the coupling norms of white heterosexuality, which multiplied elite white women's alienation when thrust into domesticity following graduation.

Similar forces were at play in the customs of young white women's socialization. Cho examines Henry James's coming of age story (*bildungsroman*) about the pre-pubescent daughter of a British diplomat, *What Maisie Knew*. Maisie was alienated from her mother and faced with competing examples of womanhood. First, there were the women who jockeyed for the attention and coverture of her divorced father; then, there was a wealthy Countess who lived independently of male patronage. Maisie is unable to rationalize the Countess's independence because it violates the norm. Repulsed by the Countess's deviance, which she denotes by reclassifying the Countess as nonwhite, Maisie chooses the derelict women and the sexual act of "coupling" that only deepens her alienation. Cho reads the text as a precaution against dangerous paradoxes of the heterosexual regime, even for elite white women.

The marriage norm had resonance far beyond the white community, however, and Chapter 2 explores its influence on the writings of Pauline Hopkin and the movement for black racial uplift. As founding editor of *Colored American Magazine*, and author of the uplift novel, *Contending Forces*, Hopkins represents the self-defeating contradictions of African Americans who attempt to conform to the white heterosexual regime. The three pillars of national identity--citizenship, marriage, and empire -- never cohered for Hopkins, which Cho claims compounded

her difference. Like most black elite, Hopkins used the *Colored American Magazine* to promote black assimilation into America through domesticity, respectability, and patriotic nationalism; conceived as such, uplift required blacks to cosign America's most racist attitudes about immigrants and foreign subjects, even though it meant affirming the very assumptions that alienated blacks. To Cho, Hopkins struggles with this contradiction in her novel, *Contending Forces*, which narrates the double burden of two married black women in Bermuda who did not benefit from the presumed protection of coverture. It was the state that failed to protect the married black women, which was coverture's bargain. Instead, the state vilified them for their subsequent exploitation. Hopkins shows that marriage, or state-sanctioned coupling, without coverture is no more than sex work, and for Cho that demonstrates the uniquely enclosed nature of black women's social alienation.

Chapter 3, *Uncoupling American Empire*, inverts its perspective and examines how questions of marriage, deviance, and empire influenced people on the receiving end of US empire. This also starts the second part of the book, and Cho begins with the way Americans denaturalized Chinese marriage, sex, and labor by labeling them deviant as a group. Periodicals like the San Francisco *Wasp* discursively denied that the Chinese could "couple" because they denied that Chinese took wives. Instead, white Californians depicted all Chinese women as slaves used for prostitution and lobbied against what they called, "yellow slavery." The invocation of slavery, Cho argues, distorted historical memory by displacing the shame of US slavery onto immigrants. The accusation, however, had real political consequences, first in a law that prohibited the immigration of Chinese wives, then in a law that stripped US women of citizenship when they married Chinese nationals. Asian Americans responded in numerous ways, but Cho highlights the role of fiction and singles out Sui Sin Far's fictional account, "Lin John." The story depicts the life of a Chinese woman who chooses prostitution as the rational alternative to the sex economy of the heterosexual regime. "Lin John" reverses the logic of prostitution, and places it within the framework of capitalism and labor choice in a contract society. Cho maintains that marriage and prostitution in Lin John represent a form of "domestic imperialism" in the US that reproduced and doubled Chinese women's subordination.

The theme of domestic imperialism carries over into Chapter 4, where Cho uses it to examine interracial relationships and assimilation. Beginning with Margaret Stabler's story, in *Overland Monthly*, about a Chinese father who traffics his daughter Sooy into marriage, Cho once again shows white disdain for Chinese marriage. Yet, Stabler depicts Sooy as an accomplice in her sale, which Cho argues is used to affirm Chinese deviance and America's exclusionary laws. Similar troubles appear in Sui Sin Far's writings, and Cho focuses on two stories, "A Chinese Feud" and "A Chinese Ishmael," that seek to counter white stereotypes about Chinese marriage but offer unwitting validation. In both stories, the protagonists are Chinese couples bent on assimilating in the US through marriage or coupling, but in each instance, Chinese tradition and intra-community politics drag them down. Sui Shin Far believed the tragic stories contained elements of domesticity worthy of respect, as does Cho who inelegantly tries to depict the tragedy as comedy. But neither story ever quite makes that leap, and the protagonists remain alienated.

At the end of *Uncoupling American Empire*, Cho shifts to marriage, deviance, and empire in America's missionary endeavors. Missionary women created a referential grid of China through their writings in such prominent periodicals as *The Helping Hand*, *Globe Magazine*, and *Harper's Monthly*. Unlike the narrative about adolescent prostitution among Chinese immigrants in the US, missionary women focused on child labor, child slavery, and child abuse.

These themes played into the calls for heterosexual domesticity in periodicals like *Globe Magazine*, but they also turned prostitutes into criminals in the American mind. The real lesson to Cho, however, was their ability to affirm the value of marriage and domesticity at home by denying it, even discursively, to people abroad. That message frames the final section of the book, called the “Obama Paradox,” where Cho reminds the reader that Barack Obama was only palatable to the American people once he could affirm their assumptions about the white heterosexual regime. Instead of representing the integration of the differences in America, Obama is another illustration of domestic imperialism.

The last section, which imposes the present on the past, illustrates the many flaws of *Uncoupling American Empire*. A central tenet of the book is that marriage, and the benefits that follow from it, are the exclusive domain of white heterosexuals. By virtue of their success at reshaping the meaning of the presidency and the first family, however, the Obamas seem to prove otherwise. Cho does not consider whether marriage, as a social practice and institution, is more pliable than the book suggests. But that oversight follows other problems, like the absence of a clear distinction between marriage and coupling, which seem to operate with equal weight in the argument and the mechanics of empire. Lack of clarity also spills over into the book’s approach, which never finds secure footing between literature, history, and gender studies. Had *Uncoupling American Empire* accounted for these incongruities, it would stand with some of the best studies in the growing literature on gender and empire.

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Reuel Schiller. *Forging Rivals: Race, Class, Law, and the Collapse of Postwar Liberalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), \$23.39, 355 pp. ISBN: 978-1-107-62833-5 (paper).

Schiller's *Forging Rivals: Race, Class, Law, and the Collapse of Postwar Liberalism* is an interrogation and legal historiography of the current contours of liberalism, examining how its political agenda shifted from one focused on "economic egalitarianism" to an agenda committed to "promoting ethnic, racial, and sexual equality" (5). More specifically, *Forging Rivals* offers additional insights into the investigation of the collapse of postwar liberalism, focusing attention on both the legal and policy disputes that divided the civil rights movement (racial egalitarianism) and the labor movement (mild economic egalitarianism). Relying heavily on archival material, Schiller outlines the contentious relationship between the labor movement and the civil rights movement in the 25 years following World War II through an examination of five vignettes that illustrate the relationship between labor unions and civil rights activists of the period through a legal lens. Both the labor movement and the civil rights movement were prominent supporters of the Democratic Party whose political agendas were central attributers "of the version of liberalism that shaped American politics after the war" (3). Schiller argues that though both factions benefited from legal gains during the 25-year period, they failed, however, to maintain a political alliance because they "forged rivals, creating a legal landscape that promoted conflict between the two groups that were indispensable to the fortunes of postwar liberalism" (ibid.).

*Forging Rivals* is situated within a long history of scholars who have examined the social and political implications of the ensuing conflicts generated from the fight for fair labor practices and the fight for equal opportunities for non-Whites in the mid-1900s. Schiller's research into the disastrous effects of those conflicts is a critical intervention into the existing scholarship because it locates the divide in the 1940s and 1950s, as opposed to the 1960s, offering a longer historical context through which to examine the fall of post-war liberalism and the rise of its current agenda. In addition, he enters the conversation through an examination of the legal regime that developed from postwar liberalism. *Forging Rivals* is structured primarily around case studies from lesser explored post-war San Francisco, which he uses to narrativize his larger contextual argument for the failing of postwar liberalism. At its inaugural moment, Schiller argues, postwar liberalism was weakened by its legal architecture, and in effect was a divisive force between Black and White workers of the 1960s.

Chapter 1 lays the groundwork for Schiller's arguments through a thorough address of the transition from Roosevelt's New Deal-era liberalism to a more Keynesian model of economic policy, softened by privatization and focused on increasing consumer spending. He draws on two defining events of the 1940s: the unionization of more American workers and the new recognition of Black political power. Schiller argues that the case of William Steele, "a Black fireman for the Louisville and Nashville Railroad" (41) who was terminated from his position of thirty years in favor of a White employee with less seniority, concretized the course of liberalism in the years following World War II. The case, which, directly challenged the prerogatives of unions around the fair representation of laborers, "embodies the beginnings of an increasing political and legal commitment to racial egalitarianism" (44). The exclusion of Black workers from labor unions is central in Chapter 2, which centers Ed Rainbow, business manager of Local 6 of the International Brotherhood of Boilermakers, the American Federation of Labor (IBB), the 1943 all Black Marinship shipyard strike in Sausalito, and the 1944 Supreme Court decision,

*James v. Marinship*. *James v. Marinship* severely limited the exclusion of African American workers as a labor union practice, eventually resulting in the dismantling of auxiliary sub-unions for Black workers and the integration of the IBB. Importantly, Schiller notes that the integration of labor unions was “a pyrrhic victory for the African American worker” (75) because it did not guarantee jobs for them. On the one hand, the case helped to solidify “a fraught alliance between trade unionism and the civil rights movements” (78-79). On the other hand, it did not create a more substantive remedy for racial discrimination because it did not attack the seniority system that positioned the Black worker as the last hired and first fired, reifying the division between Black and White workers. Although the alliance helped to generate antidiscrimination legislation and policy, it failed to enforce fair labor practices by employers.

*Forging Rivals* goes on to document that the *James v. Marinship* decision and the alliance between Bay Area civil rights activists and progressive unions such as the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) resulted in the creation of the San Francisco Commission on Equal Employment Opportunity (CEEEO). The CEEEO—which expired in 1960 after a three-year tenure—was established to adjudicate employment discrimination grievances. Chapter 3 exposes the ineffectiveness of the Commission to intervene on any of the discriminatory, racist practices of San Francisco employers, pointing specifically the *Pacific Motor Truck* case. At stake for the labor unions in their alliance with civil rights leaders was the loss of their autonomy and power to maintain employment practices that benefited their community.

The subsequent chapter documents the increasing splintering of the civil rights movement and the labor movement’s alliance in the late 1950s and early 1960s, due in part to failing legislation. Further weakening of the alliance to its breaking point included “disputes over fair employment practices both in San Francisco’s workplaces and in City Hall” (157), as well as propaganda and support around idealistically oppositional California propositions: Prop 18, which was designed to weaken the power of labor unions; and Prop 14, which repealed the 1963 fair housing law in the state. Chapter 5 points to a particularly significant event in the civil rights activities of San Francisco, the March 1964 sit-in at the Sheraton Palace Hotel on Market Street, which demonstrated that Black workers would no longer be placated by labor unions’ protections of their legal entitlements and would insist on social justice and empowerment that offered more guarantees around equal and fair employment. Black resistance to discriminatory labor practices is also the focus of the following chapter, which narrates the 1968 boycotting of Emporium department store in San Francisco. While largely “an unremarkable event,” Schiller argues that “the conflict among the Emporium, its African American Employees, and the union . . . was emblematic of the distance Bay Area civil rights organizations and labor unions had traveled in the twenty-five years since African American workers ha[d] walked off the job at the Marinship shipyard in Sausalito” (194). However, similar to the Marinship shipyard event, the department store boycott resulted in the Supreme Court decision *Emporium Capwell v. Western Addition Community*, which declared the actions of the employees in violation of the union bargaining agreement clause.

Schiller’s conclusions drawn throughout the text and more specifically in Chapter 7, the conclusion, illuminate the strength of *Forging Rivals*, as it contributes a greater understanding of city- and state-level conflicts and the resulting legislation that can inform our thinking about contemporary liberal discourses both on labor and against systemic and institutional discrimination. It also makes evident that there is a need for a deeper investigation into the social implications of race and racism, which complicate the texts framing union “majoritarianism” and “individual rights” and would account for union member’s opposition to nationwide fairness and equality legislation that did not directly affect the union’s practices.

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Sohail Daulatzai. *Fifty Years of The Battle of Algiers: Past as Prologue* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), \$7.95, 104 pp.  
ISBN: 978-5179-0238-4 (paper).

“The Battle of Algiers is still being waged, only now on a planetary scale. Everywhere the unrest is permanent, and everywhere the war declared on it is perpetual” (xi). Sohail Daulatzai, drawing on the language of America’s National Defense Authorization Act (2012), which declared, “the world is a battlefield,” boldly asserts, “The world is a crime scene, with borders drawn in chalk outline” (ibid.).

In his book, *Fifty Years of The Battle of Algiers: Past as Prologue*, Sohail Daulatzai looks to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the film, *The Battle of Algiers* (dir. Gillo Pontecorvo, 1966) by providing a non-traditional film examination of a movie widely viewed as the greatest political film ever made. Daulatzai centers this revolutionary film within a “traveling theory” and focuses on the various routes *The Battle of Algiers* has taken over the past fifty years, going back to its origins in the Third Cinema. The author aims to situate his book and “the roots of this film within the era of decolonization, revolutionary struggle, and the emergence of Third Cinema... This book tells the enduring story of how a larger tapestry of resistance to the legacies of slavery took shape throughout the world in different historical contexts” (xiv). The legacy of *The Battle of Algiers* is in jeopardy because of how it is being used currently in the post-9/11 world. In its counter-insurgency efforts around the world, the American military uses the film as a tool to win the war on terrorism, thus convoluting the revolutionary legacy of the film.

*The Battle of Algiers* is a film that does not focus on one person, but rather on the resistance and revolutionary movement organized by the Algerian people known as the National Liberation Front (FLN). The author opens the book by proclaiming “Je Suis Ali La Pointe,” a rebel leader from the film, taking aim at the “Je Suis Charlie,” a phrase that became quite popular after the Charlie Hebo Paris attacks. The post-9/11 world in which we inhabit turned a film about revolutionaries who happened to be Muslim into a film about Muslim terrorists. Daulatzai hopes to illustrate in this book that *The Battle of Algiers* historically has been a film centered on fighting against colonialism. He charges that France is attempting to erase its Algerian colonial past by putting forth the belief that the Charlie Hebo attacks were attacks on free speech. This is why Daulatzai structures his book in the similar format of the film. He does not focus solely on the director Gillo Pontecorvo, which is often done with evaluations of these kinds of films, but rather he focuses on all of the components and consequences of the film, such that “*The Battle of Algiers* serves as a diagnostic, a parable, or even an allegory of the moment” (xix).

A unique aspect of his analysis is the firm insertion of Frantz Fanon, the revolutionary and theorist, within the discourse of *The Battle of Algiers*. In the chapter, “Fanon as Prophet, Algeria as Revolutionary Mecca,” Daulatzai describes *The Battle of Algiers* as the cinematic embodiment of *The Wretched of the Earth*. According to the author, “Frantz Fanon became synonymous with the righteous indignation of the Third World” (14). The Third World and the various revolutionary organizations inspired by the Algerian people in the film are also in Daulatzai’s analysis of the film’s journey. *The Battle of Algiers* was required viewing for groups such as the Black Panther Party for Self Defense, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), and the Weather Underground. The movie was so popular with leftist organizations and revolutionaries that it helped to position Algeria as Mecca for revolutionary training for rebels fighting against anti-imperialism around the world. Furthermore, Algeria is where Eldridge and Kathleen Cleaver hid while in exile and became the first country to host the first Pan-African

Cultural Festival in 1969.

In the chapter entitled, “Taking Aim: Shooting the Revolution,” Daulatzai discusses the lasting and arguably the most influential historical impact of the film within the Third Cinema. The Third Cinema, according to the author, is charged with turning its “viewers into active spectators who would become witnesses and, ultimately, rebels” (29). This is why Daulatzai places Saadi Yacef, the military commander of the FLN—and not Pontecorvo—as the person most instrumental in filming *The Battle of Algiers*. It is his memoir, which he wrote while in a French prison (*Souvenirs of the Battle of Algiers*) and Yacef’s Casbah production company, which helped to finance the film. He fought with the Italian director Pontecorvo to ensure that the story placed the colonized, not the colonizers at the center. It is this aspect that made the film so nuanced and provocative at the time; it utilized non-traditional actors and the rebels who fought in the real Battle of Algiers (1954-57), and filming took place at locations and bombsites where the fighting occurred. Daulatzai correctly ascertains that none of this would have been possible if not for Yacef, thus placing the rebel gaze, not the white European gaze at the center of the film. Algeria gained its independence in 1962, and the film was released in 1966, adding a freshness and real-world feel to the film. In fact, in some American theaters disclaimers had to be used to inform the audience that no newsreels were in the film. Daulatzai utilizes the language and analysis of historian Lerone Bennett, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King to discuss the historical impact and influence of the film on African American liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s, thus demonstrating the global impact of the Algerian revolution.

Throughout this short yet richly packed book, the author not only traces the path of *The Battle of Algiers* on the left, but he somberly traces its path as it is utilized by dictators and military juntas on the right. The brutal dictatorships of Iran, Chile, Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina, Paraguay, and Bolivia all utilized this film and the French method of counterinsurgency to suppress rebels and revolutions in their countries. Almost all countries that had civil unrest banned *The Battle of Algiers* for fear it would only insight the rebels more once they realized the methods they used were that of the French to suppress the Algerians in the film. Daulatzai cleverly asserts that most people watching the film would fall into two camps: those who saw the French point of view or the Algerian rebel point of view.

The dynamic fifty-year journey of *The Battle of Algiers* is currently on a dangerous path, according to Daulatzai. The post-9/11 world in which we live is warped, so much so that any act of rebellion or violence committed by a person who happens to be Muslim is seen as terrorism. The United States, according to the author, has taken up the imperialist mantle in the perpetual “War on Terror,” thus turning the entire planet into a possible battlefield. Sohail Daulatzai’s analysis of the fifty-year afterlife of *The Battle of Algiers* illustrates the continued relevance of this film and how its eerily prophetic call to arms is the only way to change the current trajectory we are on in this post-9/11 world. I would recommend this book to anyone hoping to continue the revolutionary dialogue started fifty years ago by Fanon and the Algerian rebels of Algiers’ Casbah.

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Rev. angel Kyodo williams, Lama Rod Owens, and Jasmine Syedullah.  
*Radical Dharma: Talking Race, Love, and Liberation* (Berkeley: North  
 Atlantic, 2016), \$11.95, 214 pp. ISBN: 978-1-62317-098-1 (paper).

*Radical Dharma* grew out of a conversation between Zen priest, Sensei, and Buddhist teacher, Rev. angel Kyodo Williams and Buddhist teacher, Lama Rod Owens in 2014 on their practice of radical dharma in response to the series of police killings of Black people (without indictments or guilty verdicts) across the United States. *Radical Dharma* teaches the profound lesson that “liberation from suffering is not an entitlement but a practice” (86). Together with Professor Jasmine Syedullah, they offer a new dharma, or third space, developed from their spiritual and political alliance of resistance to the legacies of racial and structural injustices in the U.S. since slavery.

The preface, titled “A Lineage of Insurgence,” declares the urgency of the moment and immediacy for action. Indeed, the timing of *Radical Dharma*’s publication prior to the 2016 presidential election was intentional. It ominously warned against being suffocated and paralyzed by “collective anxiety about transitioning from the first Black U.S. president,” because despite opinions on his presidency, “the pure optics of it is that it returns us to a white-led country” (xi). After analyzing Black centered movements, specifically Black Lives Matter, advanced by Blacks and their non-Black “compañer@s” through the lens of Buddhist thought, “the book situates every person who claims the lineage of liberation... both as bodies that bear the wisdom, witness, and wounds of intersecting and overlapping structures of violence, policing, and erasure... Every body bears these wounds, so... we bear the ... prophetic wisdom of liberation from that suffering... together” (xii, xvii).

In the introduction, the case is presented for an evolutionary thrust into an unknown but emerging third space where we bear witness to suffering out of which freedom from suffering and liberation arises. A new Dharma, radical Dharma is defined as the embodiment of the universal truths, the laws, and Dharma, or the teachings of Buddha. The authors embody the radical when “we cast our bodies into the third space that emerges when radically inhabiting the ... inner and outer paths toward liberation,” and in which neither prevails (xxii). A new Dharma is required to deconstruct systems of suffering, oppression, and domination in one’s own mind (individual ego) and in society (social ego, whiteness, Mind of Whiteness, White Superiority Complex; xxiv). The individual ego and social ego are both constructs and void of any inherent identity (xxvii).

The authors challenge Western-convert Buddhist America to embody their practice and teachings. They also appeal to the America that desires to fulfill the Constitutional promise of the right to life, liberty, property, and the pursuit of happiness, suggesting they “kick the habit of racism, cultural dominance, and the upholding of oppressive systems” (xxvi). In deconstructing identities and labels that perpetuate dualisms and domination, the bad habit can be unlearned and corrected through daily awareness practices of “bearing witness to suffering, opening yourself to not knowing... cultivat[ing] compassion from wise action” (195). Awareness practices cultivate transcendence of the physical form (labels, identities) to become the courageous collective ready for the discomfort of confronting systems of racist and homophobic oppression. This is not only a radical, new Dharma—it is a radical intervention into political participation.

“Section I: Homeleaving” includes each author’s personal narrative of how they came to practice Buddhism. For each, being Black and queer-shaped their journey, the paradoxes, and what aspect of their lives they left behind. In williams’s personal narrative, she identifies



with M. Scott Peck, Desmond Tutu, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Malcolm X, and Bhimrao Ambedkar, who are all religious and concerned with social justice in their societies (25, 26).

“Section II: Stakeholders” offers a Theory of Queer Dharma exposing the deep connection between personal liberation, collective liberation, and social transformation (39). The authors’ testimonies are blended with excerpts from transcribed discussions on the dharma of gender identity and sexuality in relation to their practices of embodied personal liberation. Their concept of embodied-intersectionality is “more than a political concept.” It is “the lived reality of an increasing number of people crossing boundaries of race, class, gender, religion, sexual orientation, national citizenry, ethnic origin, etc., and the cultures formed by those identities and locations” (200). Embodied-intersectionality develops our understanding of liberation politics because the authors define “race” as an unstable social construct, yet they convincingly demonstrate how they embody daily meditation practice and dharma teachings as self-identified radical, Black, queer, Western-convert Buddhists. Thus, embodied-intersectionality allows them to “get past the limitations of identity politics without passing over the particular politics of our embodiment” (xxxii). The authors invoke the words of James Baldwin, Audre Lorde, Essex Hemphill, Nina Simone, Toni Cade Bambara, Badiozzaman Forouzanfar, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, and bell hooks.

“Section III: The Conversations,” began in 2014 when Lama Rod Owens and Rev. angel Kyodo Williams were asked to collaborate for the first time on their practice of radical dharma by *Buddhadharma* magazine. Their discussion was impacted by the mass mobilizations against the killing of unarmed, eighteen-year-old Michael Brown by police officer Darren Wilson in Ferguson, Missouri. While the timing of their discussion was intentional, no one could have predicted the online release that would occur on the very day of the no-indictment verdict in the case of Michael Brown, only to be followed the next week with the decision by a grand jury not to bring murder charges against police officer Daniel Pantaleo for the chokehold killing of forty-three-year-old Eric Garner. These tragic injustices opened the dialogue to include the authors’ personal experiences of racial injustice in the American-convert Buddhist community and in American society. Moreover, the discussion challenged Western Buddhists to “confront white supremacy” in their own *sanghas* (communities) and in the larger “community” of America. Embodied personal and collective liberation are the practice of radical dharma, “an integration of the ways we are present or not to the issues of race, love and liberation that shape our collective awakening” (109). *Breaking Bread* (1991) by bell hooks and Cornel West is an example of the Black oral tradition and Black prophetic tradition reproduced in *Radical Dharma*. *Breaking Bread* influenced the authors to organize “open-community conversations” to facilitate “creative solutions to emerge from the collective” (xi). The chapters on Race, Love, and Liberation include excerpts from the “open-community conversations” at The Shambhala Center, Charis Books, Brooklyn Zen Center, Harvard Divinity School, and the Center for Transformative Change.

“Section IV: Closing Words” reiterates how *Radical Dharma* is “a new politics of friendship, a new practice of the political, a new way of being together in which we can imagine the value of freedom anew...as a practice of mutual respect, reconciliation, and repair through which our communities might heal from the injury American freedoms have exacted upon our bodies” (184). *Radical Dharma* ultimately argues societal transformation is “inherently spiritual but not in the sense of a particular tradition” (100). Instead, the emergent, dynamic new dharma or new space reveals how “in a world of multiplicity, the path toward liberatory mastery-personal and social-can no longer remain rooted in a single ideology, discipline, or viewpoint; it itself



is becoming intersectional and interdependent” (203). The new dharma is an invitation to live in a space of transformative change through the daily practice of “being in relationship with the reality of what is” (ibid.), creating new alliances that will critique and confront systems of oppression beyond what people perceive they are personally affected by.

This is a significant book for political science, Black studies, religious studies, gender and sexuality studies, and international studies. The qualitative methods of personal narrative, testimonies, and conversations center the voices of the subjects and researchers so no one voice is greater than another. *Radical Dharma* speaks to multiple audiences expanding the genre beyond the traditional confines of political science. At its core, *Radical Dharma* insists the politics of racism, privilege, and white supremacy will never be the solution to the current problems that the legacy of those same politics has caused. Political participation is more than choosing a political party, registering to vote, voting, political representation, and political protest because “radicalizing dharma dreams of liberation into political practice is no guarantee that we’ll be free from spaces of confusion, pain, separation and suffering” (85). Instead, committed to peace rather than aggression as a more sustainable path to liberation, “we must begin to practice sitting together to stand together” (ibid.). Consequently, *Radical Dharma*’s compassionate response to the violence of racism, privilege, and white supremacy extends the discussion of political participation to Buddhism in ways that seem practical, productive, and important.

We all are bearing witness to hyper-visible posts of bullets being unloaded into Black bodies, depicting an unequal and unjust America. *Radical Dharma* argues it is our duty to fight for liberation and win, not with violence but with compassion, and the freedom to imagine a more peaceful and just reality for “everybody.”

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andré m. carrington. *Speculative Blackness: The Future of Race in Science Fiction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), \$25.00, 296 pp. ISBN: 978-0-8166-7869-9 (paper).

Drawing upon his perspectives as both a scholar and fan of speculative fiction, andré m. carrington examines the ways “that popular culture plays a role in mediating racial politics” in *Speculative Blackness: The Future of Race in Science Fiction* (8). Throughout, carrington pulls from a wide range of speculative fiction in various media— “novels, short fiction, memoirs, performance, film, television, comics, amateur publishing, and works circulated on the Internet”—to explore how these forms of media “reproduce conventional understandings of race” through both the processes of construction and consumption (2).

Beginning with “The Whiteness of Science Fiction and the Speculative Fiction of Blackness,” carrington lays out his theoretical framework, pulling from cultural studies, African American studies, American studies, and literary criticism. Using Samuel Delaney’s *paraliterary*, carrington probes the various paths during his study of speculative fiction: biographical information, the history of production, and the ways consumers respond to the product. The opening essay grounds carrington’s study within a body of scholarship about science fiction that has essentially eschewed contemplating ideas of race. carrington proposes that instead of focusing on the metaphorical innovation of race in speculative fiction, we should examine the ways “in which race thinking and speculative fiction converge on the meaning of Blackness,” not just in regard to representation but also in relation to “the ways in which Black people’s heterogeneous interests come to bear on [a] range of cultural endeavors” (3).

The chiasmic function of “The Whiteness of Science Fiction and the Speculative Fiction of Blackness” forces us to recognize the overrepresentation of Whiteness within the construction of and experiences found within speculative fiction instead of treating Whiteness as something that does not exist. Furthermore, it forces us to engage with the ways that speculative fiction presents depictions of Blackness to its audience. Expanding upon these ideas, carrington provides the concepts of “Afrofuturism, surrealism, Otherhood, and haunting” to reconsider Blackness within speculative fiction (22). carrington notes that the chiasmic formulation that frames the book is not exhaustive; however, it serves to provide us with a means “to develop a more sophisticated understanding of race thinking and cultural production” (28).

Chronologically organized, *Speculative Blackness* presents a body of evidence that moves from the dawn of science fiction clubs and fanzines through the current moment where the Internet has transformed fandom and reception. The case of Carl Joshua Brandon serves as a fitting opening examination of the ways that identity formation in relation to race and gender exists within speculative fiction. carrington teases out multiple threads in his exploration of how Terry Carr, a White fan from California, constructed the identity of an African American fan and writer named Carl Brandon. Importantly, carrington highlights how Brandon “illuminates the centrality of Whiteness to fandom” (32). Throughout the chapter, carrington treats Carl Brandon as a Black writer, and through this positioning, he works to show how Brandon’s appearance in the fan community opened discussions of Blackness but also served as a way for the community “to learn what Whiteness meant” (42). This education came in numerous forms, most notably surrounding whether the Fantasy Amateur Press Association (FAPA) in 1956 would let Brandon remain on the waiting list to join after the group held discussions about the possible ramifications of a new Black member. When fans discovered Brandon did not actually exist but was a mere construct created by Carr, some sought to maintain the memory of Brandon “to reaffirm their

attitudes towards Carl Brandon's Blackness," but ultimately Brandon's departure from FAPA left fans with the "possibility that [they] were not as enlightened towards Black people as his presence made them think they were" (59, 61).

Moving from the constructed Brandon, carrington inspects the ways *Star Trek* actress Nichelle Nichols, and her character Lt. Uhura, both reinforced the whiteness of science fiction on *Star Trek* and later subverted it with her role as an ambassador for NASA. Nichols' role as a pioneer in cinema and popular culture is brought up repeatedly, but carrington shows that for all the laudatory praise *Star Trek* receives for its progressive image of utopia, Nichols had to overcome racial and gendered constructions both behind the scenes and on screen. carrington highlights the struggles Nichols faced regarding her contract, which placed her as a "day player" rather than a permanent cast member. On screen, Nichols had to deal with situations where she became confined to the *Enterprise* while other characters went out on missions, thus relegating her to the domestic sphere. Using critics such as Elizabeth Alexander, Madhu Dubey, and Hortense Spillers, carrington shows how Nichols counters the confinement of Uhura through her performance, essentially allowing her "to define Uhura as a character" who presents a strong sexual identity and Black aesthetic (80).

Just as Nichols redefined and transformed the representation of Uhura through her performance, the transformations of Marvel Comics' character Storm, as carrington argues, serve "as a negation of the negations involved in constructing Black womanhood" through the lens of the mutant metaphor trope in speculative fiction (91). To show this, carrington argues that the changes Storm undergoes highlight that Storm, or any other character for that matter, cannot serve as a stand-in for an all-encompassing representation of Blackness and Black Womanhood specifically. carrington traces Storm's origins in *Giant-Size X-Men* #1 (1975) through various representations over the years, concluding with the "Lifedeath" story arc where Storm loses her powers, has a relationship with Forge, a mutant with Cheyenne ancestry, and ultimately returns to East Africa on a pilgrimage to rediscover herself. In discussing "Lifedeath," carrington explores the ways that Storm navigates varying loci of identification, ultimately coming "to stand for potentially transformative questions" regarding "the politics of representation" (116).

Put side by side with his examination of Storm, carrington's discussion of the Black-owned Milestone Media and its comic *Icon* contrasts with the essentialist, albeit ever changing, representation of Blackness in the character of Storm to a more all-encompassing representation through the characters in *Icon*. With *Icon*, carrington argues, "Milestone augmented the conventions of representing both the futuristic world of superhero comics and the historically constrained politics of Black culture in the urban United States" (118). As a speculative fiction text, *Icon* challenges genre conventions by positioning Raquel, "a highly intellectual Black female protagonist," at the center of the narrative and her mentor Augustus Freeman IV as a counter to the Superman narrative that sees Freeman, an extraterrestrial, take on the guise of a Black slave upon arriving on Earth in the Antebellum South (118). Alongside his study of *Icon*'s narrative and the crossover with DC comics, carrington draws attention to the fan letters' section at the end of issues as a space that "staged an encounter between the genre conventions of cultural production within a familiar kind of speculative fiction text—the superhero comic—and the genre conventions that shape other representations of Black Americans" (119).

The final two chapters build upon what carrington has scaffolded over the course of *Speculative Blackness*. Keeping in line with the rest of the study, carrington's examination of the *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* episode "Far Beyond the Stars" brings Steven Barnes' novelization of the episode into the discussion, thus expanding the paraliterary in much the same as he does

with the fan letters in *Icon*. The episode and the novelization both draw attention to the nexus of race and gender in the history of speculative fiction, and carrington shows how Barnes' adaptation serves as a "reparative" to Blackness in the history of speculative fiction. This "reparative" reading also comes into play in the concluding chapter where carrington pulls from his personal experience with the fan fiction site *Remember Us*. Here, carrington looks at the ways that fan fiction on the site, focusing on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Harry Potter*, "emerged as a response to marginalizing discourse in fandom and cyberculture" (205). This chapter does not maintain a focus on the completed cultural product; rather, it delves into the ways that consumers interact with the product and then respond to it, specifically to address issues of race and gender within speculative fiction that the cultural product marginalizes.

Overall, *Speculative Blackness* strives to fill in the gaps while also laying the groundwork for future studies. Ultimately, carrington challenges us to look beyond the cultural product and to expand our inquiry into the ways that fans interact with and remix these cultural products to highlight that "blackness is already an integral part and always will be" in speculative fiction (237). In addition, carrington makes us think about the politics of identity and representation through his historical grounding of the study, especially in his discussion of Carl Brandon. carrington adds to the current scholarship of Deborah Elizabeth Whaley, Adilifu Nama, and more, providing an indispensable study for exploring Blackness in speculative fiction.

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Damien M. Sojoyner. *First Strike: Educational Enclosures in Black Los Angeles* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), \$27.00, 288 pp. ISBN: 978-0-8166-9755-7 (paper).

A little over a month into his presidency, the Trump administration rescinded the protections for transgender students put in place in the final months of the Obama era. Although the provision, which allowed transgender students to use the bathroom that matched their gender expression, affected the public-school system, it was implemented by the Department of Justice (DOJ). As a result, it required signatures from both the DOJ and the Department of Education. Betsy DeVos, the embattled billionaire whose confirmation as the Secretary of Education occurred only because the vice president cast an unprecedented tie-breaking vote for her, faced the strongest opposition among Trump's cabinet appointments to date. Yet she wanted to maintain these protections. Instead, Justice Department head Jeff Sessions, a man who has spent his career enforcing racial and gender inequality, led the charge to overturn them. DeVos caved, Sessions won, and transgender students once again face official hostility to their personhood.

That the Department of Justice would have a determining say over whether certain children can reasonably assume a right to basic safety at school provides a dramatic counter to the idyllic notion that public schools are somehow outside of the American carceral state. The idealistic premise of public education, to mold young minds for the challenges of society, is daily compromised by other policy agendas that run counter to the hope of an educated populace. The outsized influence of the criminal justice system threatens to erode the hope of education for marginalized students, especially working-class Black and Latinx youth.

Years before the excesses of the war on drugs gained popular attention as an explanation for why the United States incarcerated so many people, students of color and their allies identified the negative correlation between school funding and prison building. In protests and conferences, in hip-hop music and agitational broadsides, activists raised demands such as “schools not jails” and “books not bars.” This organizing was particularly strong in California: the state had been an aggressive leader in America's aggressive push to become the biggest jailer in the world. Between 1980 and 2006, California built 23 new prisons but only one new university campus (Acey, 2000; Gilmore, 2007; Knafo, 2013).

Emphasizing a self-evident connection between schools and prisons, this critique has identified the problem as a “school to prison pipeline.” The pipeline metaphor identifies several prospective connections between these two state apparatuses. First, the rise of punitive school discipline policies in the last four decades disproportionately impacts Black and Brown children. Second, such punitive approaches lead to early contact between Black and Brown children, their families, and the criminal justice system. Third, such contact increases the likelihood that Black and Brown children will wind up in prison. And finally, the less a state invests in schools, the more it discursively and financially invests in prisons. To talk about the school to prison pipeline is to raise awareness, at least implicitly, that we need to shift resources from prisons to schools.

According to anthropologist Damien Sojoyner, however, the “pipeline” concept misses something far more damaging: contemporary American schooling already punishes Black (and Brown) children, as much through its curriculum as through disciplinary procedures. As he explores in *First Strike*, the problem is not a “pipeline” that moves Black children out of school and into prison. Rather, schools and prisons already converge in a punitive structure he labels “enclosure.” By enclosure, Sojoyner refers to “historical contestations over power, resources, and ways of life that have ushered us to the present” (xiii). These enclosures are conceptual as

well as physical; they target both individuals and “Black communal traditions” at large. The multipronged attack suggested by the term “enclosure” also animates his title to the book: “first strike” is meant to signal both the deadly baseball metaphor that has characterized American punishment over the last twenty-five years (i.e., through three-strikes sentencing laws), as well as suggests that schools constitute the “first point of attack by efforts to undermine a truly democratic social vision” (xi).

Sojoyner’s framework draws on three major sources: Cedric Robinson’s canonical formulation (2000) of the Black radical tradition as an antagonist to Western modernity, Clyde Woods’ framing (1998) of the Black working class as battling against the enclosures of white supremacy, and Dylan Rodriguez’s discussion (2006) of prison as constituting a “regime” rather than a series of distinct, isolated institutions. Sojoyner extends these scholarly insights—drawn widely across the fields of political science, geography, history, literary studies, and Black Studies—with a strategic focus on the education system. *First Strike* combines ethnography and intellectual history in its investigation of how public schools reproduce racial violence against Black youth.

The subtitle notwithstanding, *First Strike* is less a site-specific ethnography than an intellectual history critiquing the constitutive anti-Blackness of Western institutions. The first chapter begins with Sojoyner’s ethnographic fieldwork documenting how the school he worked at as part of his fieldwork denigrated Black cultural expression and discouraged Black students from creative enterprises such as music. It ends with a lengthy critique of Christianity and slavery as the foundation of anti-Black enclosures in the West (14-31). Subsequent chapters display similar approaches, combining his twenty-first century fieldwork with meditations on slavery, Reconstruction, and Black radicalism. This balance of grand theory, sweeping history, and local ethnography is politically astute but hard to sustain in so short a book. Some of the examples discussed, such as the “Grim Sleeper” serial killer who murdered several Black women in South Central Los Angeles between 1985 and 2007 (134-138), stray far from his stated objective of interrogating the problem of orienting high school classes to correct for the low-test scores of Black boys.

*First Strike* makes a compelling, if fragmented, case against the school-to-prison pipeline (STTP) concept. “At the heart of failure of the STTP model is an analytical framework that positions schools as separate from the political and economic realities that give structure to society as a whole. That is, it falls victim to the upward mobility logic that through reform (primarily discipline reform), education in the United States can be (and perhaps was) a utopic enterprise wherein all students can have an opportunity to learn and become productive citizens. However, a historical mapping of educational enclosures in the United States shows that ... state-based education has been one of the central interlocutors of structural forms of oppression” (148). With that broader historical perspective, Sojoyner understands schools themselves as sites of confinement rather than the banal starting point of a journey that only *ends* in incarceration. Sojoyner argues that analysts ought to focus more on this model of “enclosures” rather than school discipline policies that result in encounters with the criminal justice system: “The history of Black education demonstrates a key facet missing from the STPP literature: perhaps more important than visceral forms of discipline (that is, suspension and expulsions), the pedagogy, curriculum, and economics of Black education are central to the maintenance of the enclosure process” (149).

Though we learn less about the “educational enclosures in Black Los Angeles” than the subtitle promises, *First Strike* offers a strong critique of the enclosure process as a fundamental



component of anti-Blackness. It makes a strong case for understanding schools as a fundamental component of the prison regime. In that, its contributions lie more in the burgeoning field of critical prison studies—itself indebted to Black Studies—than in education studies. Sojoyner's discussion of testing (173-185, *passim*), for instance, draws on articles published before *No Child Left Behind* accelerated the pace and emphasis of high-stakes testing. Yet his fieldwork happened after that Bush-era educational policy took effect, and critical education scholars (e.g., Au, 2013) have trenchantly opposed it as part of the same racist forms of pedagogy, curriculum, and economics to which Sojoyner rightly draws our attention. The epilogue closes with strong questions about the praxis of education in our contemporary moment—including the role of charter schools and other assaults on public education—that would have been productive for the book itself to examine.

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Matthew Carotenuto and Katherine Luongo. *Obama & Kenya: Contested Histories and the Politics of Belonging* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2016), \$18.36, 240 pp. ISBN: 978-0-1431-2032-2 (paper).

*Obama & Kenya* is a timely book given that President Barack Obama has now left the international stage as the most powerful person on earth. Authors Carotenuto and Luongo primarily focus on the relationship between Obama and his paternal roots in Kenya, and one of its key themes is to debunk the many stereotypes that follow African nations in the West. Obviously, more attention was paid to Kenya after the 2008 presidential election, which brought Obama to power. His story is unique not only because he is the first acknowledged U.S. president of mixed heritage, but also because his roots are undeniably both African and Euro-American and because he brought the African nation of Kenya to the forefront of political attention. In a real sense, this book elucidates that very distinct social identity and rouses the readership to comprehend Kenya beyond a limited cardboard cut-out depiction. Going beyond the superficial is a core goal of the authors who aim to put Kenya and President Obama in a more nuanced framework that will be of use to the general reader or academia. In short, *Obama & Kenya* is a study that will prove to be a very useful text linking the history of Kenya to the Obama family, Kenyan politics and to U.S.-African relations.

The authors provide copious references for this study (46 pp. of notes; 16 pp. of bibliography; however, only a slim index of 4 pp.), and they provide a chronological timeline covering the history with a short glossary that will prove to be invaluable to students of Kenya. Therefore, from a scholarly perspective, *Obama & Kenya* is a very useful contribution to the knowledge of President Obama in relation to his Kenyan roots. Moreover, it provides general readers with an insight into a part of Africa that is often obscured by unsubstantiated information (“alternative facts” in today’s parlance) that merely create further ignorance of this much maligned but majestic African nation. The authors are careful not to fall into the academic trap of comprehending Kenya from the mind and eyes of the European settlers (i.e., British) or even the colonial resistance of the Mau Mau without critique and instead set the tone for an empowering read that sustains its Kenyan authenticity without being overbearing. It is a book that is essentially written from the perspective of African agency over African inferiority; the latter is the common norm for European accounts of Africa.

*Obama & Kenya* is structured into two parts. Part one has three chapters covering aspects of Barack Obama’s initial encounters with Kenya, representations of this nation in terms of myth and reality, and a look at Obama’s family origins in terms of the ethnicity and the politics of belonging. Ironically, given the meteoric rise of his son and having come from the Luo peoples in Western Kenya, his father would have struggled to rise to the prestigious heights of political office in his nation due to the discrimination meted out to his Luo cultural group. Therein is a conundrum of humanity’s internal destructive nature whereby one group gets over on another cultural group. It is refreshing, albeit sad in tone, to note that the authors of this book do not romanticize Kenya or Africa’s internal conflicts based on one’s belonging to a specific cultural group. It seems that hierarchy is bread and water to human beings wherever they reside on planet earth, and Kenya is no different in this sense.

The analysis of President Theodore Roosevelt’s 1909 avariciously racist hunting expedition to Kenya in chapter 2, which was financially supported by the Smithsonian Institution, illustrates how the authors integrate the negative “white settler” history juxtaposed by the positive story of Barack Obama, who became the U.S. president one hundred years

later in 2009. It is a finely balanced book that informs the reader of Kenya's complex history, its British colonial heritage, and its resistance to such myths of racialized superiority. What we have in essence is the African/Kenyan proverb in book form: *until the lions start writing down their own stories, the hunters will always be the heroes*. Indeed the authors point out that the "white hunter," President Theodore Roosevelt, was given a paid assignment (\$50,000) by *Scribner's* to write an account of his trip to Africa and Kenya. These serialized *Scribner* reports later formed the book *African Game Trails* (1910). This excursion to Africa and Kenya forged the tourist Safari industry that still exists today. More negatively, Roosevelt cemented the notion of the "great white hunter," "African savages" and/or "dark-skinned races" of primitive standing (p. 26-29). The authors do not sugarcoat this ugly history of British colonialism or the "scramble for Africa" by collective European nations that led to there being much disregard for self-determined African development up until the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

Barack Obama's father, a descendant of the Luo people of Western Kenya, died at the young age of 46 years due to a car crash in Nairobi in November 1982. His mentor and fellow Luo was the renowned Pan-Africanist Tom Mboya (1930-1969). This is how in 1959 Barack Sr. was in part able to gain a scholarship for study at the University of Hawaii and later Harvard. Through this Pan-African lens we see origins of Barack Obama, who was born August 4, 1961. His father had met and married a fellow university student, Ann Dunham (1942-1995), a white woman from Kansas. The cosmopolitan perception of Barack Sr. may not have been the reality given the short lived marriage (1961-1964) and his return home in 1964 to take a position in the Ministry of Economic Planning in the newly independent Kenya (p. 60). A weakness in the book is that there is little to no interrogation of the connection between Barack Sr. and Dunham. Even though the authors have chosen the thesis being Obama and Kenya, surely we cannot fully comprehend Barack Jr. without including his mother, who is not even in the index of the book.

Nevertheless, it is a study that will bring much needed insight into the links between President Obama and his family roots in Kenya. What is particularly insightful in *Obama & Kenya* is in the fact that it situates Obama Sr. as a mentee of Mboya, who was assassinated for his political views and potential threat to opposing groups/individuals. Moreover, because of this Obama Sr. too faced a precarious life in Kenya, and it is not certain if he was targeted too for his strong links to Mboya. It is evident from what the authors put forth that President Obama's father was an important civil servant figure in the mid-1960s postcolonial Kenya. His ancestral ties to the Luo people and leaders like Mboya marked him out politically in the early days of Kenyan independence. Further studies will be required to fully appreciate this aspect of the Obama legacy in Kenya.

Part two of the book offers both critique and celebration. Chapter 4 focuses on the viciousness of the far right in North American politics and commentary to belittle, undermine, and stereotype President Obama's ancestral links with Kenya. The authors cite center-right reporter from the *Washington Times*, Wesley Pruden, who sums up much of the ignorance that emanated from the far-right, as he states: "He [President Obama] was sired by a Kenyan father, born to a mother attracted to men of the Third World and reared by grandparents in Hawaii, a paradise far from the American mainstream" (p. 73). The authors rightly assess Pruden as not being prudent with his inherent racism. Employing colonial stereotypes that cast President Obama as an outcast and foreigner who had somehow usurped American politics was to become the staple diet for far-right "Tea Party" supporters and politicians. The then celebrity apprentice host, Donald Trump, began to attack his President Obama's birthright to American citizenship. The authors explain this ugliness with sound analysis and referencing (p. 76).

The final chapters of *Obama & Kenya* take into account the past and present of Kenyan politics and show that they are inextricably interwoven. Ending the book by assessing his trip back to Kenya in 2015 and his roots to the Kenyan/Luo peoples, the authors offer an admonition for the reader to use both primary and secondary sources relating to Kenya with caution. Due to the European colonial heritage and misrepresentation of African peoples there is a distorted view that can impair one's comprehension of the "true Kenya" and its place in history. Crucially, *Obama & Kenya* will be an important book for general readers and high school to college students. It is well placed to be an important contribution to President Obama's African roots. Indeed, too much colonial-inspired stereotyping continues to bombard the non-African and African psyche to distort the beauty and complexity of African people. This book restores some necessary equilibrium. Therefore, it is a book recommended to those who have an open mind to Africa, its complex history, and President Obama's ancestral roots on the continent.

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John J. Betancur and Janet L. Smith. *Claiming Neighborhood: New Ways of Understanding Urban Change* (Chicago: University of Illinois, 2016), \$28.00, 280 pp. ISBN: 978-0-2520-8197-2 (paper).

John J. Betancur and Janet L. Smith's fresh study, *Claiming Neighborhood: New Ways of Understanding Urban Change*, takes a case studies approach to examine the influences that shape specific neighborhoods in Chicago, Illinois today. In this rich examination, which contributes to the fields of political science and social science, the authors merge scholarship and grounded theory to create an appealing look at the way one views the concept of "neighborhood" in the city. Thus, the study deconstructs a notion of "neighborhood constructed by mainstream researchers" in prevailing scholarship by invoking one that is more flexible and considered negotiated (xiv). Further, the authors use data and census tracts to examine how "The race, ethnicity, and class of a people get inscribed onto space" (x).

Divided into eight chapters, this text carefully examines select spaces that have been considered changed over time in the city of Chicago. In a few case studies, the changes are still taking place at the time of publication, as in the case of the Lower North Side area of the city, which contained the Cabrini Green housing development. Each of the chapters is meant to be one entity in the study; however, together they paint a picture of Chicago as a rich case study in urban planning.

Chapter one, "Prevailing Approaches to the Study of Neighborhoods and Change," especially challenges the existing approaches to studies that take on city change. Thus, the text's own approach to the neighborhood city is central to this chapter. The authors argue that, historically, prior studies have not been intersectional in their approach. They claim, "...we must incorporate social constructs such as income, class, race, ethnicity, and gender to produce a *historicized* analysis of the different factors that facilitate the production of uneven space and places" (22). However, Betancur and Smith caution, "While we disagree with the underlying assumptions of the ecological framework...we are not necessarily opposed to the indicators or data used by analysts or even their methods of studying neighborhood change. What we contest are the epistemological assumptions that determine how data is interpreted that subsequently limit our interpretation of urban dynamics" (24). Thus, while the first chapter in the study challenged existing scholarship as it laid the groundwork for its specific departure, chapter two, "Understanding Change in Today's Changing Urban Mosaic," expanded on the use of certain previously used methods and data in existing scholarship with this historicized approach.

Furthermore, *Claiming Neighborhood* is important because as housing developments in Chicago such as the Robert Taylor Homes and the Ida B. Wells Homes, have been technically demolished, the focus has shifted to entire "spaces" in Chicago, Illinois, such as Roseland and Englewood. Thus, Englewood as a place of poverty is under careful examination in this text. The chapter on Englewood, chapter four, "Constructing Carceral Space: How Englewood Became the Ghetto," is perhaps one of the most important chapters in the text because of the dominance of Englewood in national mass media today. Thus, offering an examination of this space now is important because of the tendency of outsiders to fail to see how occupants of a particular urban environment can feel trapped in such a space. Rather than consider a locale a "neighborhood," this study identifies a "space" as a place where citizens inhabit and live. Whereas neighborhoods are perceived as being fixed, spaces are more fluid and negotiated. Therefore, the authors contend that their investigation of Englewood is:

told only in fragments of the ongoing convergence and divergence of processes shaping and reshaping it over time... This case exposes a dynamic and nuanced picture in which factors such as class, race, and gender within groups find expression, and in which outside and inside forces clash, diverge, and converge as people carve out their spaces for survival and resistances 'within the dominant culture' (de Certeau 1888, xiv) (77).

It is here where the text allows the reader to disavow any attempt to blame the vulnerable in the oppressive structural forces that have had a hand in claiming spaces like Englewood and those like it around Chicago. This chapter also illustrates the strength of the scholarship in case studies. Englewood is perhaps one of the most closely regarded "spaces" today throughout the country, especially in terms of public education and economic development.

Promising in this work is the intervention of a certain aspect of representation of the spaces that it examines. There is a glimpse of the mass media and popular culture's portrayal of spaces that are central to the study at hand. For example, in chapter seven, "Reinventing Neighborhood? Transforming Chicago's Public Housing," the authors examine the social engineering path that the Chicago Housing Authority has taken regarding creating space and ghetto. They remark about how representations of new introduced mixed-income developments are being used in propaganda about gentrification; however, these areas are still inhabited by poor citizens regardless of race. This chapter was intriguing particularly because of its focus on the Cabrini Green housing development and this particular area of the North Side of the city. Like Englewood, there is a strong connection to this space in mass media, particularly in popular culture. The authors briefly refer to it; however, this could have been elaborated on. Cabrini Green was one of the most visible housing developments in the history of popular culture. *Good Times* (1974-1979), a popular television sitcom about a financially struggling African American family living in Cabrini Green in the 1970s, and whose actors were concerned about their portrayal of the citizens living in the housing development at the time, could have accented the text. What did this representation do to this space? How did this representation of Blackness impact the lived experiences of African Americans living in Cabrini Green, and around Chicago, at the time?

On the other hand, chapter seven's strength is clear as Betancur and Smith discuss prevailing scholarship on neighborhood gentrification in Chicago around spatial proximity to whiteness. For example, the authors state the assumption that gentrification through mixed-income communities should be aspired to because wealthy citizens bring stability and values to lower income citizens. This notion of "lack of middle class role models" in the restructuring and creating of spaces in Chicago has been central to existing scholarship and theory (156). *Claiming Neighborhoods* challenges the Eurocentric assumptions of whiteness as classed based and African Americans as inherently poor with no values. Chapter seven is also an example of how a text is fluid because its study is still in progress. In many ways, the powers that attempt to occupy this area have continued to face resistance and, as such, "In the case of Cabrini and other developments in Chicago, legal protections have given residents power to stay...it's uncertain what each space will look like in ten years...these representations and constitutive forces and conditions warrant different forms of resistance and approaches to community development" (170).

The final chapter of the text, chapter eight, "Building the Organization or Building the Community Development in a Time of Flexible Accumulation," further highlights the resistance that chapter seven introduces. Chicago has a long history of community development and the



authors end their study by discussing how people in Chicago have collectively organized to combat the forces that have colonized their spaces. Thus, this chapter traces this organizing from its inception to the present. Betancur and Smith state, "...community development has always been inspired both by demands for rights, opportunities, equal standing in the eyes of the law, and fairness and by particular group interests struggling with racism, classism, and calls for assimilation...These efforts provide evidence that those marginalized by society can appropriate and turn around the power relations that marginalize them" (190). They outlined community development approaches such as Alinsky-Style organizing, civil rights organizing, community economic development, social-service oriented community development, and state-directed initiatives. In conclusion, the authors found limits with the institutionalization of these approaches to resistance:

Institutionalization may be the main challenge today. This approach certainly limits the options and ways of social change (e.g., Piven and Cloward 1978). Still, community developers have found ways to challenge the status quo, to engage in movement, and advance change...These efforts provide evidence that those marginalized by society can appropriate and turn around the power relations that marginalize them. (190)

In all, the importance of *Claiming Neighborhoods* is that it transcends Chicago and, as the authors state, "...coincidences shaping urban spaces in the context of Chicago, the genesis of scholarly and applied studies of neighborhood change in the United States and beyond" (vii). Thus, the examination can be beneficial to other approaches in looking at forces that impact spaces and centers in cities around the United States.

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## A Note on Passing

*Dr. Michael Frazier  
(February 14, 1946 – June 14, 2018)*

The National Conference of Black Political Scientists - or NCOBPS as it is commonly known - celebrates the legacy of Dr. Michael Frazier, a Professor in the Department of Political Science at Howard University. Dr. Frazier was an accomplished teacher and a mentor to thousands of students and supervised countless doctoral dissertations and Master's theses.

In 2015, Dr. Frazier received from NCOBPS the prestigious Jewel Limar Prestage Mentorship Award. The award is named after Dr. Jewel Limar Prestage, one of the most well-known black political scientists who mentored and influenced dozens of prominent black political scientists, students, and political actors. Dr. Frazier carried on that tradition.

It is important to mention the roots of Dr. Frazier's political orientation. He is MIDWEST strong, representing the proud city of Gary, Indiana. The city was ground zero for a unique set of black political contestations and events including the historic election of Richard Hatcher in the 1960s and the groundbreaking 1972 National Black Political Convention. Both events impacted the orientation of post-civil rights black politics and the field of Black Politics. Dr. Frazier loved his roots and this tradition of black politics.

Dr. Frazier also worked hard to internationalize the black political experience as he mentored students and consulted political players from all over the world. In honoring Dr. Frazier, NCOBPS sends our condolences to his family, to Howard University and the Department of Political Science family, and to his beloved students and community who will miss him dearly.

Sekou Franklin  
Middle Tennessee State University

Clarence Lusane  
Howard University



NATIONAL POLITICAL  
SCIENCE REVIEW

**INVITATION TO THE  
SCHOLARLY COMMUNITY**

***The National Political Science Review (NPSR)***  
**Invitation to the Scholarly Community**

The editors of the National Political Science Review (NPSR) invite submissions from the scholarly community for review and possible publication.

The NPSR is a refereed journal of the National Conference of Black Political Scientists. Its editions appear between two and three times per year and comprise the highest quality scholarship related to the experiences of African-Americans in the American political community, the African diaspora in the Western Hemisphere, and on questions of Black Politics globally. It also focuses on the international links between African-Americans and the larger community of nations, particularly with Africa.

Among the more common areas of research, which the NPSR considers for publication, are those typically associated with political theory and history; gendered politics; diasporic and internationalist movements; political behavior and attitudes; the performance of political institutions; the efficacy of public policy, interest groups, and social movements; interethnic coalition building; and theoretical reflections that offer insights on the minority political experience. On the basis of recent interest, the NPSR also considers work on the role of culture in politics.

Manuscripts should be submitted in the following format. Submissions should follow the style conventions of the American Political Science Review (APSR). The journal Style Guide is available upon request. Two copies of the submissions should be conveyed electronically to the editors at the e-mail addresses listed below. One copy of the submission should include the author's or authors' information comprising the name that will appear in the published version along with the author's/authors' institutional affiliation and e-mail addresses. The other copy should delete the author's/authors' information from the title page. Please indicate the lead author and his/her email address in cases of multiple authors. Manuscripts should not carry footnotes at the bottom of the page but should be inserted as endnotes. They should not exceed thirty typewritten pages; should be double-spaced, inclusive of notes and references; and should be prepared and sent to the editors in the Microsoft Word format. Graphics should be done in grayscale rather than in color.

Manuscripts are reviewed on a rolling basis. Further queries about the NPSR as well as submissions may be addressed (e-mail only) to the editor at:

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