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# Diplomová práce

“Development of Civil Right in the United States: Black Lives Matter”

„Vývoj lidských práv ve Spojených Státech Amerických: Black Lives Matter“

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**Keywords**

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Klíčová slova: lidská práva, Black Lives Matter, rasa, sociální problematika, aktivismus

## **Abstract**

This diploma thesis deals with the development of fight for civil rights in the United States with particular focus on the movement Black Lives Matter. Furthermore, it focuses on the feminist aspect of activist movements, and explores the neglect women are usually forced to deal with when it comes to this particular social issue. In specific examples, I show how women are often overlooked when it comes to cases of police brutality and basic human rights. Using the enlightening literature by Ta-Nehisi Coates, Toni Morrison and Leila Mottley, but also important works by activists and scholars such as Robin DiAngelo, bell hooks, Mikki Kendall, and Angela Y. Davis, I attempt to demonstrate the depth of this particular problematics, and the importance of understanding it, in order to eradicate police brutality and systemic racism.

This thesis will consist of four chapters: in the first chapter I take a look at the history of development of civil rights and what preceded, and also influenced the Black Lives Matter movement. The second chapter then focuses on Black Lives Matter itself, how it came to be and how it evolved from a simple hashtag into the world-known movement it is today. The third chapter focuses on the main theme of the Black Lives Matter movement, which is police brutality and the state-issued violence against people of color. In the fourth chapter I provide socio-cultural analysis of the demographic in the United States, as well as the concept of white fragility, postulated by Robin DiAngelo, and the impact it has on people of color living in the United States.

## Abstrakt

Tato diplomová práce se zabývá vývojem boje za lidská práva se Spojených státech amerických a specificky se zaměřuje na hnutí Black Lives Matter. Dále se také zaměřuje na feminismus v aktivistických hnutích a to, jaké problémy způsobuje jeho velice časté opomíjení u této konkrétní problematiky. Na specifických případech ukážu, jaký dopad má ignorování případů policejní brutality na ženách a rasistických útoků na ženy v Spojených státech. Za použití novel od autorů jako jsou Ta-Nehisi Coates, Toni Morrison nebo Leila Mottley, ale také důležitých prací aktivistů a odborníků jako jsou Robin DiAngelo, bell hooks, Mikki Kendall nebo Angela Y. Davis se snažím poukázat na hloubku této problematiky a důležitosti jejímu porozumění, abychom vymýtili jak policejní brutalitu, tak systémový rasismus.

Tato diplomová práce se skládá ze čtyř kapitol: v první kapitole se zaměřím na historický vývoj boje za lidská práva, co předcházelo hnutí Black Lives Matter, a jak tento vývoj hnutí ovlivnil. Druhá kapitola se zaměřuje na samotné hnutí Black Lives Matter, a jak se z prostého hashtagu vyvinulo celosvětově známé hnutí, kterým je Black Lives Matter dnes. Třetí kapitola pojednává o policejní brutalitě, státem vyvolané násilí a konkrétní případy, které vyvolaly toto hnutí. Ve čtvrté kapitole poskytnu socio-kulturní analýzu demografie ve Spojených státech amerických a konceptu bílé křehkosti, který postulovala Robin DiAngelo, a jeho dopad na Afroameričany, žijící ve Spojených státech amerických.

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## Introduction

The United States claim to be the land of the free, yet it was founded on genocide of the Native Peoples and co-built by kidnapped and enslaved Africans. Ever since the enslaved African people were first brought to the United States of America, they have been fighting for their rights. At first, the fight included even such basic rights as to be free, not to be considered someone else's property, or not to be disposable. In the beginning of the Civil War, the worth of enslaved bodies was around four billion dollars, which was more than all of American industry and all of American railroads and factories combined. Stolen bodies were used to make their riches, held in bondage even by the presidents and traded as seen fit by their owners.<sup>1</sup> And even though these times are long gone, African Americans are still not considered equal to white people in the United States. Despite the fact that the African people were first brought to the United States in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and slavery ended with the ratification of the 13<sup>th</sup> amendment in 1865,<sup>2</sup> it is now year 2023 and the African Americans are still not considered equal.

It is precisely this history that has led some to believe that "racism is inevitable, permanent and eternal part of all social landscapes."<sup>3</sup> There is one quote by the author and journalist Ta-Nehisi Coates that I find particularly important in exploring the oppression of people of color, and that is: "Race is the child of racism, not the father."<sup>4</sup> It is important to keep in mind that the exploitation came first, and the ideology on race followed, as it was just means to justify the exploitation,<sup>5</sup> and it could therefore be said that at present racism and racial differentiation serve as a means of social control. If poor white people focus on feeling superior to those below them in status, they are less focused on those above them.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me* (New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2017), 101.

<sup>2</sup> Mary Elliot, "The 1619 Project.", *The New York Times Magazine*, April 19, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/1619-america-slavery.html?mtrref=www.google.com&gwh=9235C7D87A80676517E6CDDE1C8C55BC&gwt=regi&assetType=REGIWALL>.

<sup>3</sup> Toni Morrison, "Black Matters" in *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the literary imagination* (New York: Vintage Books Publishing, 1992), 11.

<sup>4</sup> Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*, 9.

<sup>5</sup> Robin DiAngelo, *White Fragility: Why Is It So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism* (London: Penguin Books Publishing, 2019), 16.

<sup>6</sup> Robin DiAngelo, *White Fragility*, 19.

Nevertheless, many people claim that racism is no longer present in the United States, especially after the election of Barack Obama as a president. However, if Obama's presence in the White House indicates the eradication of racism in the US, why is it also the era that has seen the establishment of a system of mass incarceration that ferociously targets black communities?<sup>7</sup> In my view, it is hardly shocking that there was a pushback soon after Barack Obama was elected president. There has always been some animosity toward the concept of Black success within American society. After all, it was racism that prevented the post-Civil War reconstruction from moving forward. And despite the fact that the United States put up a front of principles of freedom and equality for all, anti-Blackness and inequality are fundamental to American society. Furthermore, even if the racism we might encounter nowadays may not be as blatantly open as it would have been before the initiation of civil rights movements, it is still present. It is a highly adaptive process, and therefore it changes over time. As Robin DiAngelo mentions, "systems of oppression are adaptive; they can withstand and adjust to challenges and still maintain inequality."<sup>8</sup> This applies to all forms of oppression, such as gender oppression or oppression of people with disabilities, not just racism. Film professor Martin Barker coined a new term for this racial disparity, and calls it *the new racism*, which describes the ways in which racism has adapted over time so that "modern norms, policies and practices result in similar racial outcomes as those in the past, while not appearing to be explicitly racist."<sup>9</sup>

It seems to me that hate is one of the bases of racism, as well as being the basis of violence. Moreover, it was also hate that created the systems of oppression in the United States. In *Between the World and Me*, Ta-Nehisi Coates notes that hate helps people establish themselves within a community, to clearly highlight the borders. In his novel he writes:

I am black, and have been plundered and have lost my body. But perhaps I too had the capacity for plunder, maybe I would take another human's body

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<sup>7</sup> Rickford Russell, "Black Lives Matter: Toward a Modern Practice of Mass Struggle," *New Labor Forum* 25, no. 1 (2016): 37, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26419959>.

<sup>8</sup> Robin DiAngelo, *White Fragility*, 40.

<sup>9</sup> Martin Barker, *The New Racism: Conservatives and the Ideology of the Tribe* (London: Junction Books, 1981), 12.

to confirm myself in a community. Perhaps I already had. Hate gives identity...we name the hated strangers and are thus confirmed in the tribe.<sup>10</sup>

It is crucial for us to understand and uncover the racist patterns within the social structure in order to beat racial inequity. Robin DiAngelo, an author and a professor in the field of whiteness studies, explains: “We cannot understand modern forms of racism if we cannot or will not explore the patterns of group behaviors and their effects on individuals.”<sup>11</sup> Group behavior is something tremendously significant when discussing race – when we are in a group, we feel stronger, more secure. The sense of belonging is something I feel is essential when it comes to discussing race. White people do not have to think about belonging too much, because we usually already do belong, it is natural for us. We are represented everywhere we look – in the media, in magazines, in most works of literary fiction, in classes, in work spaces, etc. According to DiAngelo, “whiteness has psychological advantages that in turn has material returns.”<sup>12</sup> But people of color tend to stand out in these settings – they have to fight for their place within these spaces. Russell explains:

Dominant conceptions of ‘race relations’ posit interpersonal relations, or the visibility of black elites, as critical indexes of progress. Such measures obscure both the persistence of systemic racism and the extent to which racialized practices have fueled the explosive growth of the carceral state.<sup>13</sup>

Additionally, Black history and experience tends to be erased from the awareness of the general public’s knowledge when certain very specific works of literature, works that cover topics such as races, history and feminism, are banned (i.e. Maya Angelou’s *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* and *Bluest Eye*, Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*, non-fiction books such as *Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You* by Ibram X. Kendi and Jason

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<sup>10</sup> Coates, *Between the World and Me*, 60.

<sup>11</sup> Robin DiAngelo, *White Fragility*, 12.

<sup>12</sup> DiAngelo, *White Fragility*, 54.

<sup>13</sup> Rickford Russell, “Black Lives Matter: Toward a Modern Practice of Mass Struggle,” *New Labor Forum* 25, no. 1 (2016): 37, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26419959>.

Reynolds, *How to Be an Antiracist* by Ibram X. Kendi, or even the more contemporary books such as *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas, or *Dear Martin* by Nic Stone.)<sup>14</sup>

Feminism poses another topic that is very relevant when discussing racism and oppression, because women often tend to be overlooked in the mainstream movements. This goes hand in hand with intersectionality, a subject matter that has been stressed a lot by contemporary activists claiming the need for a party that is conscious and cognizant of the intersection between gender and race oppression.

In this MA thesis, I will focus primarily on activist movements supporting freedom, justice and liberation of African Americans in the United States, specifically the Black Lives Matter movement, and their fight to abolish racism within American society – I will concentrate especially on the theme of police brutality, as seen by the mainstream, general public and authors, on the one hand and by the feminist and female authors on the other. My thesis is that the progress on achieving racial equality is hindered mainly by the marginalization of female and LGBTQIA+ victims, by white fragility, and by specific cases of systemic racism.

By means of methods such as close reading of books and articles, analysis of manifestoes, die-ins, visual materials, and political leaflets, I will explore these movements in order to understand and describe their development, as well as the outcomes of their efforts. Primarily, I will concentrate on authors such as Robin DiAngelo, Ta-Nehisi Coates and Toni Morrison with regard to the notions related to the civil rights movements. In the first chapter, I will talk about the fight for civil rights in general, but primarily focus on the crucial movement for this thesis, which is Black Lives Matter (BLM), as well as its more intersectional and inclusive branch, Say Her Name. In the second chapter, I intend to examine the systemic racism in the US, mainly in the form of police brutality. This goes hand in hand with the marginalization of female and LGBTQIA+ victims. In the third chapter, I will discuss white fragility, while focusing mainly on the concepts from Robin DiAngelo's book of the same title.

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<sup>14</sup> Jennifer Martin, "50 Most Banned Books in America," *CBS News*, November 10, 2022, <https://www.cbsnews.com/pictures/the-50-most-banned-books-in-america/51/>.

## Fight for Civil Rights

Activism, on the one hand, is an immense part of American identity. On the other hand, there is also very prevalent anti-Black mentality and strong sense of racism within American society in general. Therefore, attitudes toward Africa, African Americans, and people of color in general, are deeply ingrained in society. There is a pattern of immigrants arriving in this nation who are unaware of the contributions made by black people fighting for freedom and how that has actually broadened emancipation and freedom for everyone.<sup>15</sup> With the rise of the Harlem Renaissance, African American culture started to spread across the United States and gave birth to various new parties, organisations and movements, one of them being the Black Panther Party. People were embracing the African American culture through music, paintings, but for the most part through literature. Emergence of novels with racial themes such as slavery, discrimination and violence against Black people that depicted the street life and were often written using the African American vernacular from authors such as Richard Wright, Zora Neal Hurston, Claude McKay, or poetry authors like Langston Hughes or Jean Toomer brought a new perspective to the racial issue. These writers and artists were trying to redefine the concept of “the Negro” and separate it from the already existing white stereotypes that were, by and large, determining their position in society. Similarly, anthropologists such as Franz Boas were trying to change the obsolete racist paradigms previously stipulated by Victorian scholars, and overturn the “separate but equal” notion.<sup>16</sup>

Historically speaking, during the time of slave patrols, maintaining racial hierarchy had always been one of the major responsibilities of the police. Today's criminal justice system fulfills social control functions that Jim Crow segregation and other apparent forms of oppression once carried out, including the management of black bodies and the exploitation of black surplus labor for corporate profit<sup>17</sup>— from a historical perspective, immigrants have been treated as a second-class citizens in the US. As Karina Muniz claims, “whiteness within the community is privileged over dark skin, with Black being at the bottom. It shows up in

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<sup>15</sup> Tom, Alex, Margi Clarke, Preeti Shekar, Karina Muñiz, Megan Swoboda, Felicia Gustin, and Devonté Jackson, “Black Lives Matter Allies in Change,” *Race, Poverty & the Environment* 20, no. 2 (2015): 27, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43873217>.

<sup>16</sup> George Hutchinson, “Harlem Renaissance,” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, August 9, 1999, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Harlem-Renaissance-American-literature-and-art>.

<sup>17</sup> Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2010), 14.

assumptions, stereotypes, and fear based on skin color and not on an overall understanding of systemic structural racism and white supremacy.<sup>18</sup> Officers are encumbered with the authority of the American state and the weight of the American legacy, and as a result, a disproportionate majority of the bodies that are murdered each year are black. Criminal justice professor at Columbia University Lyle Perry says:

Police abuse of authority and crime data relating to abuse of minorities generally demonstrates reasons for mistrust of the criminal justice system that dates back and follows along the lines of American history as the country grew and organized public policing followed.<sup>19</sup>

When people are continually faced with abuse and mistreatment, it is no wonder it leads to mistrust and protest, and the American history is a silent witness of that. The 1896 decision of the Supreme Court in *Plessy vs. Ferguson* did far more than just uphold segregation. The decision strengthened the constitutionality of “separate but equal,” formalizing racial segregation as state policy and the foundation of a caste system based on race in the US.<sup>20</sup> With the Plessy decision, the system of Jim Crow flourished without legal scrutiny, allowed for the continuation of racial segregation, and furthermore paved the way for widespread residential segregation in the country for a very long time. Black people and African Americans remained disproportionately concentrated in the poorest areas of the city even after the enactment of civil rights laws in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries<sup>21</sup>. To name a few, unequal access to high-quality public and higher education, public housing, the criminalization and incarceration of black people, are all examples of Plessy's lasting effects on African Americans. The history of Plessy ultimately supports the idea that difference is deviance,

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<sup>18</sup> Karina Muñiz, “Black Lives Matter Allies in Change: Mujeres Unidas y Activas,” *Race, Poverty & the Environment* 20, no. 2 (2015): 28, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43873217>.

<sup>19</sup> Lyle Perry, and Ashraf M. Esmail, “Sworn to Protect: Police Brutality – A Dilemma for America’s Police,” *Race, Gender & Class* 23, no. 3–4 (2016): 162, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26529213>.

<sup>20</sup> “Plessy v. Ferguson 163 U.S. 537 (1896)” *National Archives*, accessed May 15, 2023.

<https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/plessy-v-ferguson#:~:text=The%20ruling%20in%20this%20Supreme,numerous%20laws%20passed%20by%20Congress.>

<sup>21</sup> Gaynor, Tia Sherèe, Seong C. Kang, and Brian N. Williams, “Segregated Spaces and Separated Races: The Relationship Between State-Sanctioned Violence, Place, and Black Identity,” *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences* 7, no. 1 (2021): 50–66, <https://doi.org/10.7758/rsf.2021.7.1.04>.

labeling black people as unfit and hence socially illegitimate. These unspoken rules of racial segregation determined the value of a person, and spread the idea of caste system, which consequently lead to negative social notions linked to people of color, and furthermore about the heightened criminality linked to blackness and black neighborhoods. As a result, these communities are overpoliced, and black and brown bodies continue to be under societal control. Plessy created a legacy that contrasts blackness with whiteness sharply. Crucially, this dualism created an environment where state-sanctioned racial violence is not only tolerated but also encouraged by law enforcement officers and organizations.<sup>22</sup> Importantly, it was precisely this state-sanctioned violence that gave rise to social justice and equality movements, such as Black Panther Party, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), or later on, Black Lives Matter (BLM).

Black Lives Matter, which is the primary focus of my thesis, was first born through a hashtag. It started to be used in 2013 by people on Twitter, at first only to share their daily struggle, but over time it grew into the movement that it is today. Moreover, it gave people the opportunity for their voices to be heard. Black Lives Matter thus began, quite modestly, as #BlackLivesMatter. The hashtag was created by a trio of Black women: Patrice Cullors, Alicia Garza, and Opal Tometi—California and New York-based organizers active in incarceration, immigration, and domestic labor campaigns—after the acquittal of George Zimmerman for the murder of the seventeen-year-old Trayvon Martin in Florida. The slogan's deeper meaning as the anthem of a developing movement came into focus in 2014 during the anti-police brutality protests in Ferguson, Missouri. The phrase “Black Lives Matter,” which Garza has referred to as “a love note” to black communities, is now used to refer to a variety of organizing initiatives that have been ongoing and sporadic around the nation. The phrase has sparked a passionate, if dispersed, movement since it is the most well-known representation of mass black fury over police brutality and racist violence.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Gaynor, Tia Sherèe, Seong C. Kang, and Brian N. Williams. “Segregated Spaces and Separated Races: The Relationship Between State-Sanctioned Violence, Place, and Black Identity.” *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences* 7, no. 1 (2021): 50–66. <https://doi.org/10.7758/rsf.2021.7.1.04>.

<sup>23</sup> Rickford, “Black Lives Matter: Toward a Modern Practice of Mass Struggle,” 37.

Black Lives Matter movement is addressing a reality that affects the lives of a large segment of people of color by challenging racist methods of policing. In the post-segregation era, structural racism has typically lacked clear-cut symbols of apartheid around which a public movement could coalesce.<sup>24</sup> The methods of racialized policing the system relies on—broken windows, broken tail-lights, and other harsh forms of surveillance—have highlighted the updated but no less brutal white supremacist framework. Seeing that police officers primarily “monitor and subjugate” rather than “serve and protect” has stoked deep animosity and extreme, oppositional consciousness in impoverished black and brown communities.<sup>25</sup>

This furthermore raises the question of multiracial people – they do not fit into the binary categories of black and white, therefore they hang somewhere in the middle and because of that they face unique challenges, and often are pressured to “pick a side”. It is precisely this “us” versus “them” mentality that has created this problematic in the first place. This mentality was first argued against by American anthropologist and founder of cultural anthropology, Franz Boas, who was strongly against determinism and the “separate but equal” doctrine. Boas criticized both the false justifications for racism and the purportedly evolutionary division of races that this pseudoscience promoted. His most important argument as an anthropologist was also the simplest: it was bad to believe that one's own culture or race is better than another. He claimed that since human beings are liable to change depending on their environment or culture, so are the facts about them.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, Boas “fought against American colonialism, the rise of fascism, and for civil liberties and free immigration.”<sup>27</sup>

It may be somewhat difficult to understand how drastically the sociocultural context has changed in recent decades of the movement for black lives, because nowadays it is a wide term embracing the numerous formations loosely connected to Black Lives Matter, and is

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<sup>24</sup> Rickford, “Black Lives Matter,” 37-38.

<sup>25</sup> Edward J. Escobar, “The Unintended Consequences of the Carceral State: Chicana/o Political Mobilization in Post–World War II America,” *Journal of American History* 102 (2015): 177, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44286145>.

<sup>26</sup> Regna Darnell, “Who was Franz Boas and why should we read him today?” *Routledge*, January 29, 2021, <https://www.routledge.com/blog/article/who-was-franz-boas-and-why-should-we-read-him-today#>.

<sup>27</sup> Matthew Wills, “The Life and Times of Franz Boas,” *Jstor Daily*, December 1, 2019, <https://daily.jstor.org/the-life-and-times-of-franz-boas/>.



often referred to as a new civil rights movement.<sup>28</sup> Scholar and activist Mary Church Terrell stated in 1904 that “hanging, shooting, and burning black men, women, and children in the United States have become so common that such occurrences created but little sensation and evoke but slight comment now.”<sup>29</sup> If things like this are considered the normal, we cannot consider ourselves a civilized society, in my view, and we must make a change.

When it comes to civil rights, one of the primary personalities that come to mind, is Malcolm Little, better known as Malcolm X. He is viewed as one of the main protagonist, who started the fight for civil rights along with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Even though Dr. King was not as radical as Malcolm X, both of them have become icons when it comes to activism. One instantly recalls the unyielding spirit of the Black Power and civil rights movements, especially the militancy of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Equally to the members of Black Lives Matter, the young SNCC members belonged to a generation that was galvanized by the 1955 murder of Emmett Till by racists in the South, that is so chillingly similar to the murder of Trayvon Martin in 2013. There may be other historical comparisons made. In some ways, the 1960’s rioters, or street insurrectionists, predicted today’s activists who contend with militarized police in metropolitan areas. The Black Power’s commitment to human rights and self-definition rather than just social inclusion in the contemporary generation of protesters is clear. Naturally, the commitment to uphold black life in the face of white supremacist violence has always been a rather radical principle. Examples include Ida B. Wells’ anti-lynching campaigns at the turn of the 20th century, the 1917 Negro Silent Protest Parade, the 1930s Scottsboro Boys case protests, the 1951 We Charge Genocide petition by the Civil Rights Congress, the efforts of the Deacons for Defense and the Black Panthers. The revolutionary nature of these campaigns, as well as those of innumerable socialist and labor causes, and the persistence of their rank-and-file participants—qualities that Black Lives Matter exemplifies—were what gave them life.<sup>30</sup> There is a long tradition of protests and resistance standing behind the Black Lives Matter movement. It is apparent that its members are strongly aware of it and take inspiration from their predecessors, and their legacy.

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<sup>28</sup> Rickford, “Black Lives Matter: Toward a Modern Practice of Mass Struggle,” 37.

<sup>29</sup> Nishaun T. Battle, “From Slavery to Jane Crow to Say Her Name: An Intersectional Examination of Black Women and Punishment,” *Meridians* 15, no. 1 (2016): 109–36, <https://doi.org/10.2979/meridians.15.1.07>.

<sup>30</sup> Rickford, “Black Lives Matter: Toward a Modern Practice of Mass Struggle,” 37.

Malcolm X, the most prominent Black nationalist in the country, challenged Martin Luther King Jr.'s multiracial, nonviolent strategy, which helped set the stage for the doctrinal and practical disputes that erupted inside the black liberation movement of the 1960's. Angela Y. Davis, a feminist political activist and former member of the Black Panther Party, explains the essence of The Black Power movement in her most recent book *Freedom is a Constant Struggle*:

The Black Power movement – or what we referred to at the time as Black liberation movement – as a particular moment in the development of the quest for Black freedom...we not only needed to claim legal rights within the existing society but also to demand substantive rights – in jobs, housing, health care, education, et cetera – and to challenge the very structure of the society.<sup>31</sup>

These demands then eventually became the Ten-Point Program of the Black Panther Party. The Black Panther Party was founded in 1966, in the wake of assassination of the influential Malcolm X, and quickly became the most influential militant Black power organization. Its members confronted politicians, resisted the police, and stood up for the rights of black people. The party offered food, clothing, and transportation as part of its “survival programs” for the neighborhood. Members sought to radically alter the American society as opposed to integrating it. Black power was a global revolution in their eyes. The leaders of the party, Huey Newton and Bobby Seale, disappointed in the civil rights movement's inability to better the situation of Black people outside of the South, perceived the brutality displayed toward civil rights activists as a continuation of a long history of police abuse and governmental repression. They became completely engrossed in the narrative of Black Americans, and they brought young, uneducated, and destitute Black Americans together to form the Black Panther Party.<sup>32</sup> In my view, this party was not only too radical for its time, but too radical and violent in

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<sup>31</sup> Angela Y. Davis, *Freedom is a Constant Struggle*, 2.

<sup>32</sup> “The Black Panther Party: Challenging Police and Promoting Social Change,” National Museum of African American History and Culture, accessed April 20, 2023, <https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/black-panther-party-challenging-police-and-promoting-social-change>.

general. However its leaders remain important and inspiring personalities in black activism until this day.

## Black Lives Matter

Black Lives Matter (BLM) is a social movement and organization that campaigns against violence and systemic racism towards black people. It is based on the tradition of Black protests and attracts passionate participants of all races. It differs from other past movements in the fact that it is not lead by a singular person, usually a politician, but by a divergent group of people. Importantly, it was started by three black women, two of whom identify as gay, and it has also inspired a wide range of local activists in other places. Few people within the movement work as full-time organizers, but many have experienced racism policing or have been somehow directly impacted by mass incarceration. Many of them are also feminists, part of the LGBTQIA+ community, from working or lower class backgrounds, tech-savvy on social media, and street smart.<sup>33</sup> The movement began in 2013, in response to the acquittal of George Zimmerman, who had fatally shot Trayvon Martin, an unarmed black teenager, in Florida. It was founded by Patrisse Cullors, Alicia Garza, and Opal Tometi, when they formed the Black Lives Matter Network, an online platform, which served to provide activists with a certain shared set of principles and goals. The movement gained widespread attention in 2014, following the death of Michael Brown, another unarmed black teenager, who was fatally shot and killed by a white police officer in Ferguson, Missouri. The movement seeks to raise awareness of the injustices and inequalities faced by black people in the United States and around the world. The movement aims to challenge the systemic racism and violence that Black people experience in many aspects of life, including in the criminal justice system, education, healthcare, employment, and housing.<sup>34</sup>

It is decentralized and led by a diverse group of activists, organizers, and supporters who work together to achieve its goals. The movement uses various tactics, such as protests, rallies, social media campaigns, and community outreach, to raise awareness and demand change. The BLM movement has also faced criticism and opposition from some individuals and groups who oppose its message or tactics. Some people have criticized the movement for promoting violence or for being divisive, while others argue that it does not address other forms of inequality or discrimination, such as those faced by other minority groups. Despite the criticisms, the Black Lives Matter movement has had a significant impact on public

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<sup>33</sup> Rickford, "Black Lives Matter: Toward a Modern Practice of Mass Struggle," 35-36.

<sup>34</sup> "About" Black Lives Matter, accessed January 20, 2023, <https://blacklivesmatter.com/about/>.

discourse and policy. The movement has brought attention to issues such as police brutality, racial profiling, and mass incarceration, and has inspired many people to take action and demand change. BLM movement has also influenced political and social movements around the world, and has inspired the formation of similar movements in other countries.

As mentioned above, the movement gained even more attention in 2014 with the death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. Social media platforms managed to connect not only US activists, but activists across the globe, and in this way further promote the movement for black lives and put an end to the atrocities black people all over the world face on daily basis. Kimberly McNair, professor of African and African American Studies at Stanford University says:

The constellation of hashtags as visual material, the adoption of “Black Lives Matter” as a political frame, and resistance to violent policing as a legitimate response contributed to the solidarity among Blacks in the United States and the United Kingdom.<sup>35</sup>

When rising activists Johnetta “Netta” Elzie and DeRay McKesson, decided to stop being complicit with the silence and started fighting for equality, together they founded *Campaign Zero*, an online platform with the goal of ending police brutality. This campaign has a ten point plan that aims for a police reform which would reduce police violence.<sup>36</sup> Activist and former director of the Chinese Progressive Association Alex Tom says, “I think a lot of the people who are on the streets right now in different communities of color have a lot of outrage in knowing how Black folks are being systematically killed, one every 28 hours.”<sup>37</sup> In my opinion the movement is connected and goes all the way back to the Emmett Till case, which was the first recorded case of such prominence of brutality against a black individual, and it perfectly portrays the attitude towards African Americans, or any immigrants really, of that time.

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<sup>35</sup> Kimberly McNair, “Beyond Hashtags: Black Twitter and Building Solidarity across Borders,” In *#identity: Hashtagging Race, Gender, Sexuality, and Nation*, edited by Abigail De Kosnik and Keith P. Feldman, 283–98, University of Michigan Press, 2019, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvndv9md.21>.

<sup>36</sup> “About,” What We Do, Campaign Zero. Accessed March 8, 2023, <https://campaignzero.org/>.

<sup>37</sup> Tom, Alex, Margi Clarke, Preeti Shekar, Karina Muñiz, Megan Swoboda, Felicia Gustin, and Devonté Jackson, “Black Lives Matter Allies in Change,” *Race, Poverty & the Environment* 20, no. 2 (2015): 26, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43873217>.

Emmett Till, a fourteen year old boy from Chicago, who was visiting a family in Mississippi, happened to find himself in a white neighborhood, which white supremacist Carolyn Bryant could not bear and falsely accused him of whistling at her, and making a pass at her. Emmett was then lynched and brutally murdered. This case is still very relevant to this day. It still remains true that even though African Americans are a part of American society, it is obvious, that they are not, and frankly never were, treated as such. Same is true, in my view, for all other immigrants that come to America in search of the American Dream. Rickford Russell says: "Immigrant rights have always been a part of our work, and though most African Americans have citizenship, we are treated as second-class citizens in this country."<sup>38</sup>

Black Lives Matter is not necessarily politically unified, which is understandable since it is such a huge movement now. Since traditional electoral politics has long been a hostile environment for the pursuit of genuinely progressive visions of change, the movement has shunned affiliation with it. Black Lives Matter leaders immediately disavowed the Democratic Party's formal sponsorship after learning of it and reiterated their dedication to autonomy. However, some members of the movement were obviously interested in having a dialogue with elites such as Hillary Clinton rather than just confronting them. On the other hand, much of the movement seems to be characterized by a strong cynicism regarding electoral politics, or politics in general. Some activists want to go beyond reformism entirely and choose a revolutionary course. Black Lives Matter has been urged by leftists both inside and outside the movement to address its ideological contradictions, including somewhat ambiguous positions on electoral politics and the idea of class struggle, denouncing any traces of cooperation with the ruling class, and identifying capitalism itself—rather than just white supremacy—as the enemy. Members of the movement are adamant about maintaining their independence from both the American political system and old guard figures like Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton who are perceived as being more interested in a public commentary, rather than a public fight.<sup>39</sup>

Black Lives Matter activists have advanced their cause by employing a variety of disruptive strategies. Their primary tactic has been occupation of streets, intersections,

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<sup>38</sup> Tom, Alex, Margi Clarke, Preeti Shekar, Karina Muñiz, Megan Swoboda, Felicia Gustin, and Devonté Jackson, "Black Lives Matter Allies in Change," *Race, Poverty & the Environment* 20, no. 2 (2015): 31, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43873217>.

<sup>39</sup> Rickford, "Black Lives Matter: Toward a Modern Practice of Mass Struggle," 39.

sporting events, shops, malls, political rallies, police stations, and public buildings. They have planned “die-ins”<sup>40</sup>, marches, and protests in a number of locations because they see artistic disturbance as a way to dramatize everyday assaults on black life. Adequately, the mantra of such demonstrations has evolved from “Hands up, don’t shoot!” to the more emphatic “Shut it down!” However, in my view, the movement achieved the most by the spreading of videos and photos of individual cases of police brutality on social media. Whether the movement categorically rejects—or simply mistrusts—electoral politics remains unclear. What is evident is that most Black Lives Matter adherents recognize the inherent shortcomings of appeals to politicians, the courts, and other “acceptable” channels of redress, and have wholeheartedly embraced the arena of the street.<sup>41</sup> The movement has a lot of achievements to support its claims. Police officers have occasionally faced charges and punishment for misconduct, which suggests that public pressure can sometimes compel even the most oppressive systems to make compromises. However, the movement's main achievements lie in popularizing radical ideas and offering a dynamic example of democratic involvement.<sup>42</sup>

Participants in the movement have refrained from criticizing the victim. They have resisted narratives that lead nowhere and focus on “black-on-black” crime or advocate cultural reintegration while avoiding righteous protest. Such viewpoints support the racist idea that the state's systematic persecution of black people is primarily the result of black pathology, not white superiority.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, the “black-on-black” crimes are only caused by the inability of black people to rely on the state, from which arises the need to rely on the “brothers” from the neighborhood gangs that help support many families within their community. It arose from the basic survival instinct, which – based on their experience – needs to be in high alert at all times. In turn, the police targets these boys and men, calling them thugs, without knowing what this acronym really means, or that it even is an acronym, and that it is once again just a result of systemic racism. The real meaning of thug, as explained by Tupac, is “The Hate You Give Little Infants Fucks Everybody.”<sup>44</sup> This statement is pretty self-

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<sup>40</sup> Nicholas D. Mirzoeff, “Black Lives Matter Is Breathing New Life Into the Die-In,” *The New Republic*, August 10, 2015, <https://newrepublic.com/article/122513/blacklivesmatter-breathing-new-life-die>.

<sup>41</sup> Russell, “Black Lives Matter: Toward a Modern Practice of Mass Struggle,” 36.

<sup>42</sup> Russell, “Black Lives Matter: Toward a Modern Practice of Mass Struggle,” 36.

<sup>43</sup> Russell, “Black Lives Matter: Toward a Modern Practice of Mass Struggle,” 36.

<sup>44</sup> Claire Reid, “The Real Meaning Behind Tupac’s Thug Life Tattoo,” *The Lad Bible*, May 30, 2018, <https://www.ladbible.com/entertainment/celebrity-the-real-meaning-behind-tupacs-thug-life-tattoo-20180530>.

explanatory and points out the cyclical repetitions of the hate directed towards black people. However, BLM has been often criticized for centralizing black males and heteronormative behavior, and dismissing the marginalized groups - women, queer people and other members of the LGBTQIA+ community – an abbreviation which stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex, asexual and more, words that are used to describe a one’s sexual orientation or gender identity ,<sup>45</sup> as well as various other non-elites.

As a whole, Black Lives Matter activists have largely neglected to engage progressive trade unionism or to identify labor as a major ally. To ensure that BLM is not just a passing trend but rather the start of a movement that brings about genuine change, it is crucial, I believe, that we build our approach on utilizing the strength of the working class. What does it mean to be an ally? There are various approaches to allyship, starting with the individual acknowledgment of racism and progressing to more active forms like taking part in protests and calling government authorities, and starting a discussion about race.<sup>46</sup> According to a BLM activist based in Los Angeles Hanna Al-Malssi, “it is important to note that allyship must not be a politicization of Black lives and white saviorism. Allyship must, first and foremost, start with listening.”<sup>47</sup> Given how negatively recent events have affected black people’s lives and their mental health, maybe the value of allies is more important now than it has ever been. However, some activists have also mentioned that it happens that white people coming to protests do not want to be led by a black person. “White people often come to these protests and they want to lead them and they want to be screaming the loudest and they want to throw things at police,”<sup>48</sup> says Benjamin O’Keefe, a black political organizer in Brooklyn. Behavior like this then inevitably leads to negative narratives about BLM protests. As a result, this leaves black activists wondering whether the supposed white allies are serious about their cause, or whether they are participating just for Instagram content.

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<sup>45</sup> “What Is LGBTQIA+?” The Center, accessed May 18, 2023, <https://gaycenter.org/about/lgbtq/>.

<sup>46</sup> Hanna Al-Malssi, “How to be an ally for Black lives,” *Medical News Today*, August 28, 2020, <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/how-to-be-an-ally-for-black-lives>.

<sup>47</sup> Al-Malssi, “How to be an ally for Black lives.”

<sup>48</sup> Brian Mann and Liz Baker, “Black Protest Leaders To White Allies: ‘It’s Our Turn To Lead Our Own Fight’,” *npr*, September 22, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/2020/09/22/913094440/black-protest-leaders-to-white-allies-it-s-our-turn-to-lead-our-own-fight>.



## The Gender Perspective

In my view, the fact that the BLM movement primarily focuses on male victims of extrajudicial killings – may make black women, as well as the LGBTQIA+ community – feel as if no one cares about the rest of the cases. Connected with this is the campaign “Say Her Name!”, which was founded as a reaction to the primary focus on black males. It focuses on female killings and incarceration, as well as homophobic and transphobic attacks. Originally, it was founded by The African American Policy Forum (AAPF) and Center for Intersectionality Studies and Social Policy (CISPS) in December 2014. According to research, black women are 17% more likely to be stopped by police and 150% more likely to be killed than their white counterparts.<sup>49</sup> Say Her Name aims to highlight the gender-specific ways in which black women are disproportionately affected by fatal acts of racial injustice.<sup>50</sup> As the founders of this movement said:

Black women and girls as young as 7 and as old as 93 have been killed by the police, though we rarely hear their names. Knowing their names is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for lifting up their stories which in turn provides a much clearer view of the wide-ranging circumstances that make Black women’s bodies disproportionately subject to police violence. To lift up their stories, and illuminate police violence against Black women, we need to know who they are, how they lived, and why they suffered at the hands of police.<sup>51</sup>

In my view, it is very important to bring the marginalized groups to the surface and make them the media focus, because even though extrajudicial deaths and police violence does predominantly affect black men, they are not the only victims of this systemic oppression. Thus I consider it very important that the Say Her Name campaign works to end the marginalization of females who have been assaulted by police or imprisoned. The LGBTQIA+ community has experienced the same phenomenon, with discussions of transphobia and

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<sup>49</sup> Rebekah Barber, “Say Her Name Campaign Targets Police Killings of Black Women and Girls,” *Facing South*, July 15, 2020, <https://www.facingsouth.org/2020/07/say-her-name-campaign-targets-police-killings-black-women-and-girls>.

<sup>50</sup> “Say Her Name” The African American Policy Forum, accessed January 20, 2023, <https://www.aapf.org/sayhername>.

<sup>51</sup> The African American Policy Forum, “Say Her Name.”

heterosexism as well as a willingness to reevaluate patriarchal and heteronormative leadership.

Historically, black women and have always been undervalued, viewed as not feminine enough, and with a few exceptions, removed from the mainstream society. In fact, sociologist Barbara Welter came up with a concept she called “Cult of Domesticity”— sometimes also called “Cult of True Womanhood,” which valued submissiveness, piety, purity and domesticity, thus basically creating a caste for women, claiming white women had higher value than any other race of women. Furthermore, black women were not even included in this list, which sent a clear message that they do not possess any of these traits. In the past, African women, who were largely all slaves, possessed no honor according to the doctrine of the worship of genuine womanhood. They belonged to a wider social structure that employed, mistreated, and punished them in accordance with the principles of racial superiority, and upholding white privilege. Black women were never given the benefit of the doubt about their sexuality.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, this kind of treatment only promoted violence against black women and justified their inadequate legal protection. These disparities are still present in the society, even when it comes to feminism, and that is why intersectionality is so important.

Black feminist scholar activists, many of whom identified as LGBTQIA+, created theoretical frameworks in the 1970’s to serve as role models for other women of color and to widen the definition and application of feminism. Women of color wrote a number of groundbreaking works that emphasized these dynamics during the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. They highlighted the intricate networks that shape women's lives in the process. Kimberlé Crenshaw, a civil rights advocate and a scholar in critical race theory, popularized the term intersectionality to describe the philosophy behind those systems. In her 1991 piece “Mapping the Margins,” she described how discourses that are “designed to respond to one identity or the other,” rather than both, marginalize those who are “both women and persons of color.”<sup>53</sup>

While fighting on the front lines, LGBTQIA+ activists have employed strategies similar to these to combat marginalization. Queer attendees at the Movement for Black Lives

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<sup>52</sup> Barbara Welter. "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820–1860" *American Quarterly*. 18 (2): 151–174. doi:10.2307/2711179. JSTOR 2711179.

<sup>53</sup> Arica L. Coleman, “What's Intersectionality? Let These Scholars Explain the Theory and Its History” *Time*, March 29, 2019. <https://time.com/5560575/intersectionality-theory/>.

National Convening in Cleveland staged a positive intervention, mounting the podium during one session to denounce what they perceived to be elements of transphobia and heterosexism within the larger movement. They have said that a key component of Black Lives Matter's long-term survival will be its ability to reconsider patriarchal and heteronormative leadership.<sup>54</sup> We cannot assume that it is possible to be successful in any inequality movement, unless we consider the gender, sexuality and class, and what part it plays within such movement. The issue that even BLM is facing, is that it is mostly viewed as a male struggle, and therefore “the interconnectedness of antiracist movements with gender is crucial.”<sup>55</sup>

The movement for Black equality does not only help the African Americans. These movements also elevate the voices of those who have been silenced within the American society, such as Southeast and South Asians, Arabs, Muslims, the whole of the LGBTQIA+ community – the queers, and trans people, and helps to redefine what it means to be American. Chinese American civil rights activist Alex Tom says:

We are in the belly of the beast, and I feel like many of us as organizers, young people and folks who have been oppressed, we have been robbed of our ability to imagine and robbed of our ability to even dream. I want to see a society that can shift from centering capital and capitalism, to our human development. How that relates to this conversation is that the idea of solidarity and allyship is sometimes, in U.S. context, very siloed and static.<sup>56</sup>

These words resonate with Coates's quotes, and explain how truly devastating the effects of systemic racism are. It leaves many wondering where there is a possibility of a society that instead on profit and capitalism, focuses on the people that live in it. A society where people are accepted for who they are, and are not defined by their skin color, gender, sexuality, or the lack thereof. A society, where it would be normalized that we are one. A society with solidarity. As the founders of this movement have written:

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<sup>54</sup> Rickford, “Black Lives Matter: Toward a Modern Practice of Mass Struggle,” 39.

<sup>55</sup> Angela Y. Davis, *Freedom is a Constant Struggle*, 51.

<sup>56</sup> Tom, Alex, Margi Clarke, Preeti Shekar, Karina Muñiz, Megan Swoboda, Felicia Gustin, and Devonté Jackson, “Black Lives Matter Allies in Change,” 27.

When we say Black Lives Matter, we are broadening the conversation around state violence to include all of the ways in which Black people are intentionally left powerless at the hands of the state. We are talking about the ways in which Black lives are deprived of our basic human rights and dignity . . . How Black women bearing the burden of a relentless assault on our children and our families is state violence. How Black queer and trans folks bear a unique burden from a heteropatriarchal society that disposes of us like garbage and simultaneously fetishizes us and profits off of us, and that is state violence.<sup>57</sup>

It is my belief that it was this powerful statement that drew masses to the protests organized by BLM. It represents the shift in understanding activism and the stance towards the racial issue. However, as a reaction to the Black Lives Matter movement, people have started similar movements, such as All Lives Matter, Blue Lives Matter and most bizarrely, Southern Lives Matter (a response to criticism of the display of Confederate flags).<sup>58</sup> This is very problematic because it diminishes the issue Black Lives Matter is trying to point out, and draws attention to other problematics. Swoboda says:

...what we've been trying to combat through our actions is the issue of people turning Black Lives Matter into "all lives matter," the invisibilizing, decentralizing, and denying of Black experience specifically and trying to insert white lives and all lives. We highlight how problematic that is and how much it hurts the movement and ourselves as well.<sup>59</sup>

As I have already mentioned, the Say Her Name campaign resurfaced as a reaction to BLM movement prioritizing primarily the male victims of police brutality. I would say that this

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<sup>57</sup> "About the Black Lives Matter Network," Black Lives Matter, accessed April 19, 2023, <http://blacklivesmatter.com/about/>.

<sup>58</sup> David Weigel and Katie Zezima, "Cruz Leads a GOP Backlash to 'Black Lives Matter' Rhetoric," *The Washington Post*, September 1, 2015, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2015/09/01/cruz-leads-a-gop-backlash-to-black-livesmatter-rhetoric/>.

<sup>59</sup> Megan Swoboda, "Black Lives Matter Allies in Change: Bay Area Solidarity Action Team," *Race, Poverty & the Environment* 20, no. 2 (2015): 26–32, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43873217>.

campaign, which considers itself to be a part of the BLM movement, is more liberal, as it focuses not only on cases concerning women, but also on the whole of the LGBTQIA+ community, which are often overlooked. Black women are disproportionately affected by violent racial injustice in ways that are specific to gender, as shown by #SayHerName, which also conveys the accounts of black women who have been killed by police. The movement's goals and objectives were outlined in their May 2015 report, which also made recommendations for fostering community dialogue and advocacy regarding black women's experiences with police violence, taking into account racial and gender dynamics in efforts to combat state violence, and enacting laws to prohibit sexual misconduct and harassment by police officers.<sup>60</sup> According to the co-founder of the movement, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Black Lives Matter is a movement that Say Her Name considers to be a member of. However, Say Her Name intends to extend people's perspectives on what it means to be vulnerable to anti-Black police violence. Conflicts between men are typically the focus of the common narratives and what people believe to occur. So, the police come across a normal Black man going down the street who appears suspicious despite not being so. What we are learning to see is that. People's reactions to George Floyd's case are like that.<sup>61</sup> Many of the situations under which black brothers, fathers, and sons were slaughtered also applied to those of women. Kimberlé Crenshaw explains the importance of sharing the female and queer experience: "Because if we can mention their names, we can learn more about their experiences, Say Her Name is attempting to promote awareness by requiring that we do so."<sup>62</sup> Their losses simply haven't resonated in the same way despite the fact that they were killed while driving, experiencing a mental crisis, or most frightfully, at home.

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<sup>60</sup>"Say Her Name," Iowa State University, Archives of Women's Political Communication, accessed April 19, 2023, <https://awpc.cattcenter.iastate.edu/directory/say-her-name-sayhername/>.

<sup>61</sup> Mary Louise Kelly and Heidi Glenn, "Say Her Name: How the Fight For Racial Justice Can Be More Inclusive of Black Women," *npr*, July 7, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/sections/live-updates-protests-for-racial-justice/2020/07/07/888498009/say-her-name-how-the-fight-for-racial-justice-can-be-more-inclusive-of-black-wom%20accessed%2022.4>.

<sup>62</sup> Mary Louise Kelly and Heidi Glenn, "Say Her Name: How the Fight for Racial Justice Can be More Inclusive."

## Police Brutality

Police brutality is a very important concept for the race equality movements, but it is also a fairly new concept in terms of media. It started to be talked about in a wider context only after black people were able to prove without a doubt that such things have been happening that is, support their testimonies with a video recording. This has been made somewhat easier with the rise of social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter or TikTok. Through these platforms, people are able to not only post proofs of police brutality, but also educate themselves on the whole problematic of police brutality through other people's experiences, and visual content, which can often be very disturbing, and many times serves as a wake-up call for many people. Furthermore, people have been creating specific accounts to provide proof of police brutality, racist acts of violence and other cases of racial injustice. These platforms are easily accessible, and therefore they have become "an everyday tool of resistance for the weak."<sup>63</sup> Twitter, and other social media platforms provide a chance to communicate with other marginalized communities.

Although it is still a relatively new invention, social media has quickly emerged as one of the most popular and powerful social movement tools. Utilizing the popularity and value of social media usage, modern smartphone technology is being widely used to reveal violent incidents with police members in local areas. These incidents have exposed the disparities in legal policies that disproportionately impact Black people whenever they interact with the police or other state agents, as well as the framing of Black victims in televised news.<sup>64</sup> The photos and videos that surface on these platform, on one hand, urge people to join the fight for racial equality and serve as a useful defense, but on the other hand, it also unites the ones on the other side of the movement. It remains unclear, whether the cases of racially motivated violence against BIPOC – black, indigenous, and other people of color – are rising since the emergence of social media, or whether they are just put in plain sight and there has always

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<sup>63</sup> Lynda Chinenye Iroulo, "A Weapon of the Weak: Fighting Police Brutality through Social Media," *German Institute of Global and Area Studies (GIGA)*, 2021, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep37816>.

<sup>64</sup> Kimberly McNair, "Beyond Hashtags: Black Twitter and Building Solidarity across Borders," In *#identity: Hashtagging Race, Gender, Sexuality, and Nation*, edited by Abigail De Kosnik and Keith P. Feldman, 295. University of Michigan Press, 2019, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvndv9md.21>.

been that many of them. Ashraf M. Esmail, the programme coordinator of criminal justice at Dillard University, says:

Police abuse is the purposeful practice of unwarranted coercion, frequently physical, but potentially in the form of verbal assaults and psychological intimidation, by police which, constitutes abuse and official misconduct. Police brutality is a grievous form of crime done by the police hired to prevent the crime itself. The use of force may be judged necessary or excessive depending on whether it was determined to be legitimate under the circumstances to fulfill the police duty.<sup>65</sup>

There are numerous ways in which black people and people of color in the United States are subjected to state-sanctioned violence. To name just a recent few of these overt acts of violence—Ahmaud Arbery's murder in Glynn County, Georgia on February 23, 2020, Breonna Taylor's murder in Louisville, Kentucky on March 13, 2020 and George Floyd's murder in Minneapolis, Minnesota on Monday May 25, 2020— they were motivated by the racism that permeates every aspect of American society.<sup>66</sup>

Some people see police brutality as a problem of individual people, but mostly it is seen as a systemic problem. “The police departments of your country have been endowed with the authority to destroy your body. It does not matter if the destruction is the result of an unfortunate overreaction. It does not matter if it originates in misunderstanding. It does not matter if the destruction springs from a foolish policy,”<sup>67</sup> claims Ta-Nehisi Coates in his biographical book called *Between the World and Me*. He goes on to say, “turn into dark stairwell and your body can be destroyed. The destroyers will rarely be held accountable. Mostly they will receive pensions...the destroyers are merely men enforcing the whims of our country, correctly interpreting its heritage and legacy,”<sup>68</sup> hinting to the systemic oppression

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<sup>65</sup> Perry Lyle and Ashraf M. Esmail, “Sworn to Protect: Police Brutality – A Dilemma for America’s Police,” *Race, Gender & Class* 23, no. 3–4 (2016): 155, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26529213>.

<sup>66</sup> “Institutionalized Racism and State-Sanctioned Violence: The Killings of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd,” *Legal Action Center*, May 27, 2020, <https://www.lac.org/news/institutionalized-racism-and-state-sanctioned-violence-the-killings-of-ahmaud-arbery-breonna-taylor-and-george-floyd>.

<sup>67</sup> Coates, *Between the World and Me*, 9.

<sup>68</sup> Coates, *Between the World and Me*, 9.

of BIPOC. The abuse of people of color by the police has become so common that it is considered almost a daily occurrence. Because of the stigma that surrounds all people of color, courts tend to trust the police officers over the claims of the families of the murdered, oftentimes no matter how improbable they are. Coates writes:

Police in Prince George Country had killed Elmer Clay, then claimed he had rammed his own head into the wall of the jail cell...they had shot Gary Hopkins and said he had gone for the officer's gun...they had beaten Freddie McCollum half-blind and blamed it on a collapsing floor...reports of officers choking mechanics, shooting construction workers, slamming suspects through the glass door of shopping malls, they shot at moving cars, shot at the unarmed, shot through the back of men and claimed it had been they who had been under fire...they did this with regularity, as though they moved by some unseen cosmic clock.<sup>69</sup>

This is the reality of black people, their daily bread, and the reason why they keep calling for a change, a real change. Throughout history, activist groups have had a tendency to attract certain problematic individuals who are perceived as social outcasts or misfits and who may or may not actually have issues with the cause being advocated. Activist Megan Swoboda says:

We wanted to call out how the anti-Black racism in our country is particularly expressed through police violence. Supposedly, it's in the name of safety of white folks that the police carry out their mission of brutality and murder. This idea of "safety for white folks" is embedded in police in a systemic way... The safety that they're talking about is the safety of white people, so we need to combat these ideas of what safety really is.<sup>70</sup>

Militarization of the police remains a big issue, because it threatens the people and adds power to the system they are trying to fight against. Swoboda et al add: "We talk to people

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<sup>69</sup> Coates, *Between the World and Me*, 75-76.

<sup>70</sup> Megan Swoboda, "Black Lives Matter Allies in Change: Bay Area Solidarity Action Team," *Race, Poverty & the Environment* 20, no. 2 (2015): 29, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43873217>.



about the militarization of police and call on them to pressure the city council and the mayor to demilitarize the police and stop having military hardware within the police department.”<sup>71</sup>

Oftentimes there is no presumption of innocence with black people, they are thought to be guilty until proven innocent, not the other way around as it should be. If we look at the case of Trayvon Martin, we may notice the similarities in the brutality within these cases. Trayvon Benjamin Martin was a 17 year-old teenager, walking home from a store after buying some Skittles, when he was fatally shot by George Zimmerman, who claimed Trayvon was acting suspiciously, and therefore decided to take “justice” into his own hands.<sup>72</sup> What is it to act suspiciously? In many cases, for black people it is clearly just existing. In the transcript of the incriminating phone call George Zimmerman made to the police on the day he murdered Trayvon Martin, it says:

He described an unknown male “just walking around looking about” in the rain and said, “This guy looks like he is up to no good or he is on drugs or something.” [Zimmerman reported that the person had his hand in his waistband and was walking around looking at homes. He also mentioned that Martin was wearing a “dark hoodie, like a grey hoodie.”] On the recording, Zimmerman is heard saying, “these assholes, they always get away.”<sup>73</sup>

It is abundantly clear that Zimmerman is a racist, as he describes a black child as an asshole, purely based on the fact that he is walking down the street. Black children with all their hopes, dreams and aspirations are taught in schools, sometimes in their homes that all their hopes are impossible in the society they live in, and they should remain humble and unlike the white kids, who are in most cases taught that the “sky is the limit.” It is not so that they put them

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<sup>71</sup> Tom, Alex, Margi Clarke, Preeti Shekar, Karina Muñiz, Megan Swoboda, Felicia Gustin, and Devonté Jackson, “Black Lives Matter Allies in Change,” *Race, Poverty & the Environment* 20, no. 2 (2015): 30, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43873217>.

<sup>72</sup> Wesley Lowery, *They Can't Kill Us All: Ferguson, Baltimore and a New Era in America's Racial Justice Movement* (London: Penguin Books Publishing, 2016), 67.

<sup>73</sup> “The George Zimmerman Trial: Critical Phone Calls,” Famous Trials by UMKC School of Law, accessed January 27, 2023, <http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/PROJECTS/FTRIALS/zimmerman1/zimcalls.html>.

down, but so that they can keep them safe from the dangers of the outside world, mainly, from the police. Coates says:

To be black and beautiful was not a matter for gloating. Being black did not immunize us from history's logic...my body, breakable at will, endangered in the streets, fearful in schools, was not closest to a queen's but to her adviser's, who'd been broken down into a chair so that a queen, heir to everything she'd ever seen, could sit.<sup>74</sup>

The act of dreaming is oftentimes perceived as a mistake, because the act of dreaming is connected to the need for escape, and "the invention of race craft."<sup>75</sup> Coates furthermore explains how he himself in particular, but black people in general, are robbed of certain experiences because of the trauma they have experienced. He says: "I felt that I had missed part of the experience because of my eyes, because my eyes were made in Baltimore, because my eyes were blindfolded by fear."<sup>76</sup> Black people are robbed of certain experiences in life because they were brought up to always behave in a safe way. James Baldwin describes a similar experience in his essay *Down at the Cross*, where he describes how his father always warned him from reaching too high, from challenging the ways of the white society. He says: "It was another fear, a fear that the child, in challenging the white world's assumptions, was putting himself in the path of destruction."<sup>77</sup>

There seems to be a sort of shift in thinking about race and protests that aim to end racism that happened after the murder of George Floyd. George Floyd, a forty-six year old African-American man, was killed during an arrest after Derek Chauvin, an officer with the Minneapolis Police Department, knelt on Floyd's neck for 9 minutes and 29 seconds while three other officers watched and prevented bystanders from intervening.<sup>78</sup> It was followed by civil unrest and protests that started as part of the international responses to Floyd's death.

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<sup>74</sup> Coates, *Between the World and Me*, 53-54.

<sup>75</sup> Coates, *Between the World and Me*, 56.

<sup>76</sup> Coates, *Between the World and Me*, 126.

<sup>77</sup> James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (London: Penguin Random House, 2017), 31.

<sup>78</sup> The Telegraph, "Derek Chauvin's bodycam footage shown for first time at his trial," *YouTube*, April 1, 2021, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Apuhj\\_G90QQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Apuhj_G90QQ).

Then, Chauvin and the other three participating cops were taken into custody.<sup>79</sup> The George Floyd protests were a series of non-violent demonstrations and rioting against racism and police brutality that started on May 26<sup>th</sup>, 2020 in Minneapolis, and lasted for the most part of 2020. Ta-Nehisi Coates says:

Our current politics tell you that should you fall victim to such an assault and lose your body, it somehow must be your fault. Trayvon Martin's hoodie got him killed. Jordan Davis's loud music got him killed...Should assaulting an officer be a capital offence, rendered without trial, with the officer as judge and executioner? ...when 8 percent of world's prisoners are black men, our bodies have refinanced the Dream of being white.<sup>80</sup>

The quote highlights the fact that police always finds a way to blame BIPOC for their deaths. After the death of George Floyd and the many protests that have risen following it, a claim started to circulate about a police reform, which includes diversity, sensitivity training and body cameras. The public has been pushed to see this positively, but all it really means is that they view black people, or people of color, as different from the white people in such extent that they have to undergo a training. According to James Baldwin, white people "had the judges, the juries, the shotguns, the law – in a word, power. But it was a criminal power, to be feared and not respected, and to be outwitted in any way whatever. And those virtues preached but not practiced by the white world were merely another means of holding Negroes in subjection."<sup>81</sup> The underlying issues of this are fear and power. It is much easier to put a black person in prison because they are generally seen as someone of lesser value, as someone seen through stereotypes and villainized in the media. It is therefore no coincidence that prisons are filled with people of color.

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<sup>79</sup> Ian Price, "Historical Reflections on the George Floyd Protests," *UCLA History: Public History Initiative*, June 2020, <https://phi.history.ucla.edu/historical-reflections-on-the-george-floyd-protests-by-ian-price/>.

<sup>80</sup> Coates, *Between the World and Me*, 130-32.

<sup>81</sup> Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, 28.

## The Gender Perspective

If we talk about oppression and police brutality, we should keep in mind that black women have been generally doubly oppressed, as they are usually believed to be both sexually and racially inferior. This, in turn, gave rise to intersectionality and queer theory. The term “intersectionality” was first used in 1989 by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, a lawyer, civil rights activist, and eminent scholar of critical race theory – as was mentioned before – to describe how overlapping identities, particularly marginalized identities, relate to oppressive systems. Because of their many racial, gender, and sexual identities, black women in particular are made socially vulnerable, and the phrase helped express this.<sup>82</sup>

There is a certain moral panic when it comes to black women and girls, however not regarding their supposed criminality or sexual aberrance. They have been viewed in very specific ways that are reflected in the society. African American women and girls’ lives are permanently made different by the identities constructed by white American society and the generally accepted narratives about them, rendering them vulnerable to inhumane treatment, such as the Jim Crow, police brutality and violence in general. The perception of whiteness is built upon the idea of blackness, “the cultural fabric of American whiteness—a whiteness that was steeped in the ideologies of white supremacy and stripped away lack of citizenship and humanity.”<sup>83</sup> Additionally, they were exposed to coercive state surveillance and involvement, judicial punishment and incarceration, and forceful policing.<sup>84</sup> Sadly, this is what still keeps happening even today.

As already mentioned in the previous chapter, the cases of police brutality that mostly get publicized are usually those related to men. Many people recognize the names of Freddie Gray, Tamir Rice, Oscar Grant, Trayvon Martin, Antwon Rose, Eric Gardner or George Floyd, all the way to Emmet Till. Despite the fact that not only men are victims of police abuse, far

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<sup>82</sup> Rebekah Barber, “Say Her Name Campaign Targets Police Killings of Black Women and Girls,” *Facing South*, July 15, 2020, <https://www.facingsouth.org/2020/07/say-her-name-campaign-targets-police-killings-black-women-and-girls>.

<sup>83</sup> Kali Gross, “Policing Black Women’s and Black Girl’s Bodies in the Carceral United States,” *Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture, and Society*, 20 (Jan.-March 2018), 2, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10999949.2018.1520058?journalCode=usou20>.

<sup>84</sup> Lashawn Harris, “Say Her Name: Black Women, State Sanctioned Violence and Resistance,” *Organization of American Historians*, accessed March 8, 2023, <https://www.oah.org/tah/issues/2020/history-for-black-lives/sayhername-black-women-state-sanctioned-violence-resistance/#fn6>.

fewer know the names of Tanisha Anderson, Miriam Carey, Darnisha Harris, and Michelle Cusseaux, or Sandra Bland, the names that do not appear in the media much, or at least not as often as the names of the male victims, are the names of Black women victims of police violence.

According to Barber, “black women are 17 percent more likely than their white counterparts to be stopped by police and 1.4 times more likely to be killed, yet their deaths are less likely to incite as much outrage as male victims, and their names and stories tend to be more quickly forgotten.”<sup>85</sup> They simply do not get enough media coverage and public reactions are not as visible. One case that stands out among the cases of male assassinations, is the case of Sandra Bland. Following an aggressive arrest for failing to signal a lane change, Sandra Bland's body was discovered in a Texas jail cell. Controversially, this death has been ruled a suicide.<sup>86</sup>

Black women have been continually subjected to abuse and brutality at the hands of law enforcement. If we take into account that black women were considered property and as such could not have or maintain any rights under slavery, and the fact that the US legal system did not even recognize rape as a potential crime against black women, it is very unsurprising although terrible that black women are still being overlooked. The police employed institutionalized rape as a tool of terror and social control over black communities during the Jim Crow era, and they also permitted white mobs to break into jails and assault and beat African American women. Black women of all ages, particularly the impoverished, those who are mentally ill, transgender, or gender non-conforming, continue to suffer at the hands of police enforcement in contemporary American society.<sup>87</sup> Women and girls were compelled to negotiate the unpredictable landscape of American life due to the pervasive phenomena of police violence. State and federal lawmakers and enforcers mounted mocking attacks against women and girls, labeling them as noncitizens, pathological and hypersexual, and as moral and legal threats to American civilization, drawing on racist and sexist caricatures from the

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<sup>85</sup> Rebekah Barber, “Say Her Name campaign targets police killings of Black Women and Girls,” *Facing South*, July 15, 2020, <https://www.facingsouth.org/2020/07/say-her-name-campaign-targets-police-killings-black-women-and-girls>.

<sup>86</sup> Barber, “Say Her Name Campaign.”

<sup>87</sup> “State Sanctioned Violence Against Black Women,” Women’s Leadership and Resource Center, University of Illinois, Chicago, accessed February 9, 2023, <https://wlrc.uic.edu/state-sanctioned-violence-against-black-women/>.

turn of the twentieth century and black crime statistics.<sup>88</sup> As Audre Lorde said, “Black women are said to invite rape and murder and abuse by not being submissive enough, or by being too seductive, or too...”<sup>89</sup> The quote is left open, suggesting that the police always finds a narrative in which they are able to blame the victims for what happened to them.

There is a long-standing issue of black girls being prematurely seen as adults, of black girls being overlooked, or dismissed. Mikki Kendall, an activist and cultural critic, mentions in her book *Hood Feminism: Notes from the women that a movement forgot*, how black girls are often left to rely on their own instincts and street smarts in order to survive. She talks about how easy it is for black girls to go missing without anyone looking for them.<sup>90</sup> It is my opinion that this is precisely the reason why black women and girls often become the victims of violent crimes, such as rape, kidnapping or murder. It may not be prompted racially, it may very well just be because no one will notice, and because of the institutionalized racism, it is also unlikely that the police would make their case a priority in solving such crimes. As Kendall herself says:

Sometimes that means someone has been murdered and no one knows what happened, because the trail was cold from the start. As a result of Missing White Woman Syndrome, a phenomenon where media coverage of white women who have gone missing blankets the airwaves (sometimes on and off for decades), it’s no surprise that when women disappear from marginalized communities, the issue does not always get a lot of attention. Excuses are made about drugs, risky behavior or simply that the missing person in question is an adult who likely moved on to someone else or somewhere else. Even when the bodies pile up, it is entirely possible that the police will ignore them because of their race.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Harris, “Say Her Name: Black Women,” <https://www.oah.org/tah/issues/2020/history-for-black-lives/sayhername-black-women-state-sanctioned-violence-resistance/>.

<sup>89</sup> Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2019), 52.

<sup>90</sup> Mikki Kendal, *Hood Feminism: Notes From the Women That a Movement Forgot*, (Penguin Publishing: New York), 148.

<sup>91</sup> Mikki Kendall, *Hood Feminism*, 148.

An example of this would be the 2009 case of the West Mesa serial killer, who has been nicknamed the Bone Collector. He was responsible for the murder of at least 11 women of color between the years 2001-2005, some of which were reported missing but their cases were never given much attention and therefore remained unsolved.<sup>92</sup> In contrast to this stands the case of Madeline McCann, a Scottish girl, who was kidnapped when on family vacation in Portugal, whose case remains open until this day, and is still being actively investigated. In the chapter of her book *Hood Feminism* called “Missing and Murdered”, Kendall says: “According to the FBI’s national information center, despite being only 13 percent of the total population, Black Americans account for average of 34 percent of missing persons every year.”<sup>93</sup> Another example can be found in Leila Mottley’s novel *Nightcrawling*, based on a true crime, which happened in 2015.<sup>94</sup> In the acknowledgements, Mottley explains her motivation for writing the book:

This case developed over months and years and, even as the news cycle moved on, I continued to wonder about this event, about this girl, and about the other girls who did not receive headlines, but nonetheless experienced the cruelty of what policing can do to a person’s body, mind and spirit. For this one case that entered the media, there were and are dozens of other cases of sex workers and young women who experience violence at the hands of police and do not have their stories told, do not see court and do not escape these situations at all.<sup>95</sup>

In general, it can be considered a peak into the lives of black people, or rather black women and black members of the LGBTQIA+ community in the United States. The novel talks about the frustration and pressure that women feel to keep their families afloat. It talks about how the social system and social standing in the US forced a minor into prostitution, as it was the

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<sup>92</sup> Nicole Perez and Robert Browman, “West Mesa Murders,” *Albuquerque Journal*, accessed April 19, 2023, <https://www.abqjournal.com/community-data/west-mesa-murders>.

<sup>93</sup> Mikki Kendall, *Hood Feminism*, 149.

<sup>94</sup> Kit Fan, “Nightcrawling by Leila Mottley review – a dazzling debut,” *The Guardian*, June 2, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2022/jun/02/nightcrawling-by-leila-mottley-review-a-dazzling-debut>.

<sup>95</sup> Leila Mottley, *Nightcrawling* (Vintage Books: New York, 2022), 273.

only means for her to make money and keep her family from being homeless. When this gets discovered by the police, instead of helping her, they only further exploit her:

They take turns and sex feels no different from an insistent punch to my gut. The cops believe they are invincible. They want me only to show themselves they can have me, that there will be no consequence to putting a gun to my head, to taking me. They want me to feel small so they can feel big and, in this moment, they have succeeded.<sup>96</sup>

This scene perfectly depicts how black women are used to live out some sort of fantasy, and the system works in their favor so the women rarely get any justice. Especially, as already mentioned, black women are usually overlooked by the media. The main protagonist in *Nightcrawling*, Kiara, says:

A few blocks down the road, hundreds, if not thousands of people march toward the building, their voices a thick chorus, a call-and-response with Freddie Gray's name sharp in the center...I wonder if they'll ever chant about the women too, and not just the ones murdered, but the particular brutality of gun barrel to a head.<sup>97</sup>

On March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2020 it was three years since Breonna Taylor was murdered. Justice for Breonna Taylor's murder has still not been served. The sexist and racist remarks made in response to Taylor's passing were appalling. Malcolm X once said that, "the most disrespected person in America is the black woman. The most unprotected person in America is the Black Woman. The most neglected person in America is the Black woman."<sup>98</sup> These words continue to resonate until this day. Furthermore, in this way it has been demonstrated that not only black women, but all women of color will have their needs disregarded and their bodies will be abused.

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<sup>96</sup> Leila Mottley, *Nightcrawling*, 99.

<sup>97</sup> Leila Mottley, *Nightcrawling*, 148.

<sup>98</sup> Christine Emba, "Opinion: Black Women Deserve Better," *The Washington Post*, January 9, 2019, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/black-women-deserve-better-will-2019-be-the-year-of-change/2019/01/09/fc40e842-1439-11e9-803c-4ef28312c8b9\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/black-women-deserve-better-will-2019-be-the-year-of-change/2019/01/09/fc40e842-1439-11e9-803c-4ef28312c8b9_story.html).



Another example of people from underrepresented communities that has been marginalized when it comes to the attention to their cases, are the LGBTQIA+ people, especially trans people. Nearly 90 percent of trans people who have been killed were people of color. While more murders and fatalities of trans persons are documented now than at any other time in history, trans people in the United States are experiencing rising rates of violence. Any figures are at best a small sample of individuals who have been lost because of problems with how gender is recorded in statistics surrounding violence and because transphobic families are occasionally unwilling to declare a gender identification that differs from the identity that is assigned at birth.<sup>99</sup> This, in turn, only further complicates the investigation, and it is a proof that sometimes shame is stronger than urge and need for justice.

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<sup>99</sup> Mikki Kendall, *Hood Feminism*, 153.

## White Fragility

In this chapter I want to discuss the importance of dismantling the belief in white supremacy, and the harm it causes. Many people believe that racism has ended along with the abolition of slavery in 1865, some would even go to such extent as to say that the white people are the oppressed group now, because, unlike them, BIPOC have all sorts of reliefs and benefits. This is what frequently leads them to oppose any form of affirmative action and resentment of people of color. There are some ingrained biases regarding race. Many people still believe in white supremacy in spite of all evidence to the contrary, and they find comfort in the concept that America's grandeur was founded in the Jim Crow era.

According to Robin DiAngelo, white people feel entitled to more than people of color.<sup>100</sup> Whiteness, in general, has been portrayed as superior to all other races. According to Toni Morrison, at the same time, whiteness could not exist without blackness. Morrison says: "What became transparent were the self-evident ways that Americans choose to talk about themselves through and within a sometimes allegorical, sometimes metaphorical, but always choked representation of an Africanist presence."<sup>101</sup> Americans tend to demonize African Americans, yet they are unable to define themselves without it.

In my view, this superiority has been promoted mainly in order to maintain the caste system and delusional beliefs of the patriarchal society. It can be said that whiteness was transformed from a privileged identity to a vested interest when it was given genuine legal status, turning one part of identity into an external value. The legal definition of whiteness described and confirmed important facets of privilege, property, and identity, or in other words, who is white, what advantages come from being white and what legal entitlements arise from that status. Whiteness has many connotations and is used to denote identity, status, and property in different eras.<sup>102</sup> This sort of othering inevitably maintains the dismissive approach towards BIPOC and supports the "us" versus "them" mentality, as I already mentioned, which was postulated by the cultural anthropologist Franz Boas.

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<sup>100</sup> DiAngelo, *White Fragility*, 3.

<sup>101</sup> Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 16–17.

<sup>102</sup> Zeus Leonardo, "The Color of Supremacy: Beyond the Discourse of 'White Privilege'" *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 36, no. 2 (2004):137-52.

Whiteness, and additionally white identity, is generally construed in opposition to blackness. If we look at the issue from historical point of view, this idea of whiteness unified the white settlers, because they can connect through what they were not, which is enslaved black people. Thus, blackness is usually portrayed as the opposite of everything that represents whiteness. In this sense, it could be said that the American identity defines itself “against the blackness”. Whiteness is associated with knowledge, elegance, and civilization, whereas blackness is usually associated with instinct, the primitive, savage. In this chapter I want to discuss the importance of realizing the privileges that come with being white that most people do not even perceive or do not realize, and how that as a matter of course negatively impacts the BIPOC. Some activists claim that this colorblindness or racial unconsciousness is one of the factors that hinders the battle for equality even more than racism itself. However, we cannot perceive race as only black and white, because it is a much more complex issue, and many people of mixed race suffer the consequences of this dichotomy. James Baldwin, wrote in his essay:

I was icily determined – more determined, really, than I knew – never to make my peace with the ghetto but to die and go to Hell before I would let any white man spit on me, before I would accept my ‘place’ in this republic. I did not intend to allow white people of this country to tell me who I was, and limit me that way, and polish me off that way. And yet, of course, at the same time, I was being spat on and defined and described and limited, and could have been polished off with no effort whatever.<sup>103</sup>

We are still in the period of time, where generations that lived through the Jim Crow and the blatant forms of racism are still alive. One such example of that is described in Ta-Nehisi Coates’s book *Between the World and Me*. Coates says that “in 1957, the white residents of Levittown, Pennsylvania, argued for their right to keep their town segregated: As a moral, religious, and law-abiding citizens, we feel that we are unprejudiced and undiscriminating in our wish to keep our community a closed community.”<sup>104</sup> When things like this were, and in

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<sup>103</sup> James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, 29.

<sup>104</sup> Coates, *Between the World and Me*, 98.

some cases still are, considered normal, it is unsurprising that some people consider the equality of BIPOC irrelevant. Particularly those, who still profit from such inequality.

Private companies, such as the G4S, have since long recognized the profitability of private prisons and immigrant detention and deportation.<sup>105</sup> It is no coincidence that the majority of the people incarcerated are people of color. Furthermore, the fastest growing rate of incarceration is of trans people of color. The G4S “owns and operates prisons all over the world.”<sup>106</sup> Furthermore, they are trying to blur the lines between prisons and education facilities. Davis claims:

In the US schools in poor communities of color are thoroughly entangled with the security state, so much so that sometimes we have a hard time distinguishing between schools and jails. Schools look like jails; schools use the same technologies of detections as jails and they sometimes use the same law enforcement officials. In the US some elementary schools are actually patrolled by armed officers...a recent trend among school districts that cannot afford security companies like G4S has been to offer guns and target practice to teachers.<sup>107</sup>

If we treat teachers, the very people the children should trust, as the police, the very people the children have been taught and sometimes even experienced it first-hand that they cannot ever trust, they will stop going to schools altogether. This will only lead to another barrier in their journey to equality.

Geographically speaking, there is a stereotype that white neighborhoods are considered good, safe and clean, whereas spaces, which are not white are considered bad, dangerous and dirty. This then leads to further geographical segregation, for example, the area east of the Anacostia River, Chicago, or Detroit.<sup>108</sup> Michael Bader, assistant professor of sociology at John Hopkins University, says:

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<sup>105</sup> Davis, *Freedom is a Constant Struggle*, 59.

<sup>106</sup> Davis, *Freedom is a Constant Struggle*, 60.

<sup>107</sup> Davis, *Freedom is a Constant Struggle*, 58.

<sup>108</sup> Aaron Williams and Armand Emamdjomeh, “America is more diverse than ever – but still segregated,” *The Washington Post*, May 10, 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2018/national/segregation-us-cities/>.

Persistent and deep segregation is somewhat unique to African Americans, for several reasons: the legacy of segregated neighborhoods created during the era of Reconstruction and Jim Crow; enduring racial preferences among whites who choose to live near other white people; and significant Latino and Asian immigration after fair housing laws were in place.<sup>109</sup>

It can occasionally be challenging for us to detect these problems since we were not raised to think of ourselves in racial terms or to consider white space to be racialized space. Logically, the more time we spend associating with these white spaces, the more limited our thinking and ability to effectively engage across racial lines is going to be. If we turn this logic around, how safe are white spaces for black people? Not very much, if we consider the case of Trayvon Martin, who was shot in a white gated community, or Antwon Rose, who was shot in North Braddock, a town that boasts to be “a great place to live and raise a family.”<sup>110</sup> Both boys were seventeen years old at the time of their death. Another, more recent case, is the case of Ahmaud Arbery - while quietly jogging close to his Georgia home, he was pursued, shot, and killed by three white men who thought he “looked like” a burglar. About three months after the contemporary lynching, it wasn't until a graphic video<sup>111</sup> of the murder sparked international outrage and demands for justice that the police finally detained these individuals and the Georgia District Attorney filed murder charges against them. Even more horrifying is the case of Breonna Taylor. Police raided her home in the middle of the night and shot her eight times, killing the EMT who had been fighting the coronavirus outbreak on the front lines. They were not residents, and the person the authorities were looking for was ostensibly already in custody. The outcome of the investigation will determine whether Breonna will receive justice.<sup>112</sup> However, in 2023, three years since the killing, Taylor has still received none.

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<sup>109</sup> Williams and Emamdjomeh, “America is more diverse than ever – but still segregated,”

<sup>110</sup> “North Braddock,” North Braddock Borough, accessed March 8, 2023, <https://northbraddockborough.com/>.

<sup>111</sup> WSB-TV, “Raw video: Ahmaud Arbery Shooting in Georgia” YouTube, May 12, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wLN4PAJEYc8>.

<sup>112</sup> “Institutionalized Racism and State-Sanctioned Violence: The Killings of Ahmad Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd,” Legal Action Centre, May 27, 2020, <https://www.lac.org/news/institutionalized-racism-and-state-sanctioned-violence-the-killings-of-ahmaud-arbery-breonna-taylor-and-george-floyd>.

Black people are more often than not pushed back behind the invisible boundaries, stirred back into ghetto blocks, or towards places marked to become ghettos.<sup>113</sup> Even after the passage of civil rights acts in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, African Americans and black people continued to overwhelmingly be relegated to the worst parts of town.<sup>114</sup> Of course there are exceptions, but these exceptions only confirm the rule. Furthermore, this does not apply only to the United States, but Europe as well. As Angela Y. Davis says: “Someone who is of Moroccan or Algerian descent in Paris, they face pretty much the same stereotypes and fabrications as African Americans in USA.”<sup>115</sup> Moreover, the psychological effects of witnessing firsthand the harshness of poverty and neglect are also dismissed and not talked about. Millions of women reside in those “bad” neighborhoods; they raise their families there, grow up on the edge of disaster, and live their lives in its shadow. In my opinion, this is a cyclical problem that is going to repeat itself over and over until someone actually takes the time to focus on this issue. It could be that they refuse to focus on such issues in the view of the fact that they fear that in the process of the affirmative action they will lose their previously privileged positions.<sup>116</sup> This then leads to them voting based on their fear, instead of their better judgement. More than anything else, Americans enjoy the illusion of the meritocracy because it allows them to deny the effects of prejudice.

We may find, in many cases, that there is an assumption that the four hundred-year presence of first Africans and then African Americans in the United States has had no significant impact on or consequence on the origin and development of American literature and culture. This presence, which did shape the body politic, the Constitution, and the entire history of the culture, is also believed to have had no significant impact on the Constitution. It also presumes that the traits of national literature are the result of a unique “Americanness” that is distinct from and unrelated to this presence. It is obvious that this was done in an effort to maintain the dominance of masculine ideas, genius, and power that are unrelated to and divorced from the presence of black people in the US.

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<sup>113</sup> Coates, *Between the World and Me*, 110.

<sup>114</sup> Tia Sherée Gaynor, Seong C. Kang, and Brian N. Williams, “Segregated Spaces and Separated Races: The Relationship Between State-Sanctioned Violence, Place, and Black Identity,” *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences* 7, no. 1 (2021): 51, <https://doi.org/10.7758/rsf.2021.7.1.04>.

<sup>115</sup> Davis, *Freedom is a Constant Struggle*, 36.

<sup>116</sup> Kendall, *Hood Feminism*, 176.

In recent years, it has become more and more common for white people to complain about so called reversed racism, based on the programs intended to mitigate the most basic levels of discrimination. Researchers point to anger and disappointment among some whites as a result of crises like rising suicide, drug, and alcohol-related death rates; the decline in jobs available for those without a college degree; and the persistent myth that affirmative action and other policies that aim to level the playing field for other groups are unfairly treating white people.<sup>117</sup> This sort of behavior is completely delusional and narrow-minded, in my view. Philosopher Charles W. Mills says:

Both globally and within particular nation states, then, white people, Europeans and their descendants, continue to benefit from the Racial Contract, which creates a world in their cultural image, political states differentially favoring their interests, and economy structured around the racial exploitation of others...skewed consciously or unconsciously toward privileging them, taking the status quo of differing entitlement as normatively legitimate, and not to be investigated further.<sup>118</sup>

This is what has been termed the white supremacy. People who are defined or perceived as white have the power to control the economic systems and the “position to protect its own self-image, worldview and interests across entire society.”<sup>119</sup> This shaping of the worldview is done through media representation.

Additionally, these notions about reversed racism are represented by the white nationalists. Derek Black, former key youth leader in the white nationalist movement, says: “My whole talk was the fact that you could run as a Republican, and say things like we need to shut down immigration, we need to fight affirmative action, we need to end globalism, and you could win these positions, maybe as long as you didn’t get outed as a white nationalist.”<sup>120</sup> Politicians therefore have found a way to promote coveted racism. Lee Atwater, advisor to

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<sup>117</sup> Kendall, *Hood Feminism*, 176.

<sup>118</sup> Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 40.

<sup>119</sup> DiAngelo, *White Fragility*, 31.

<sup>120</sup> Derek Black, “The Daily Transcript: Interview with Former White Nationalist Derek Black,” interview by Michael Babaro, *New York Times*, August 22, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/22/podcasts/the-daily-transcript-derek-black.html>.

two former American presidents Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush, founded what was called the “Southern strategy” which allows to appeal to Southern racism voters without being openly racist.<sup>121</sup> Their linguistic wording helps to protect white supremacy by obscuring the mechanisms of racial inequity. Similarly, Trump’s call to ‘Make America Great Again’, which became associated with his presidential campaign was used to racially manipulate the white people, in order to shift the blame away from the elite to various BIPOC people, such as immigrants, undocumented workers, etc. Linguistics has always been a part of the issue – even now, people are avoiding talking about certain things in order to be politically correct, but being politically correct only leads to avoiding talking about race, which seems like a political move in itself.

Another concept that stands as a form of oppression is colorblindness, or the claim that one does not see race. It is based on Dr. Martin Luther King’s famous speech “I Have a Dream” from the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. In particular, it is based on his claim that he hopes to one day be judged by his actions, not by his skin color.<sup>122</sup> Essentially, it stresses that if we do not see race, then there can be no racism, and there can be no belief in white supremacy. As DiAngelo points out that “reducing King’s work to this simplistic idea illustrates how movements for social change are co-opted, stripped of their initial challenge, and used against the very cause from which they originated”<sup>123</sup> - it generates the notion that talking about race is racist. This is very problematic, because if someone claims to be colorblind, they are unable to see or recognize acts of racism, or rather, they choose not to recognize them, to deny them. The concept of being colorblind then prevents the necessary discussions that need to happen in order to dismantle white supremacy. DiAngelo says that: “Racial bias is largely unconscious, and herein lies the deepest challenge – the defensiveness that ensues upon any suggestion of racial bias.”<sup>124</sup> This defensiveness, which maintains our racial prejudice while also reinforcing our identities as open-minded people, is a classic example of white fragility. At the same time, this type of racial talk only strengthens the “us” versus “them” mentality, while placing whites as superior/ reinforcing white supremacy. It goes as far that “41 percent of white millennials believe that government pays too much

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<sup>121</sup> DiAngelo, *White Fragility*, 33.

<sup>122</sup> DiAngelo, *White Fragility*, 41.

<sup>123</sup> DiAngelo, *White Fragility*, 41.

<sup>124</sup> DiAngelo, *White Fragility*, 42.



attention to minorities, and 48 percent believe that discrimination against whites is as big as discrimination against people of color.”<sup>125</sup> Mikki Kendall mentions, “we ignore the very real harm done not only to inner-city communities of color, but to all communities of color here and abroad.”<sup>126</sup> The working class is often seen just as white people in rural areas, whose political decisions are affected by the economic anxieties. BIPOC communities are frequently overlooked, or dismissed in decision making, which in turn causes them great harm.

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<sup>125</sup> DiAngelo, *White Fragility*, 47.

<sup>126</sup> Kendall, *Hood Feminism*, 175.

## The Feminist Perspective

Ever since African women were brought to the US, they have faced a great many prejudices regarding race, gender and class, they were oppressed, denied citizenship rights. To this day, black women are still the lowest paid group within the US by race and gender.<sup>127</sup> Their lack of legal rights made them an easy target for all kinds of abuse. In this chapter, I will offer perspectives on this topic from prominent feminist thinkers such as Audre Lorde, bell hooks, Toni Morrison and the most contemporary one, Mikki Kendall. I will also discuss how the patriarchal ideology continues to impact and influence the way in which feminist theory is developing as well as the interpersonal relationships between women.

African American people in the US are sometimes viewed as a way to explore forbidden or taboo subjects, such as sex and desire. Especially black women and girls were, and still are, often sexualized as exotic and mysterious. In this way, they are doubly oppressed – they are viewed as both sexually and racially inferior. As Toni Morrison suggests, feminism is a key aspect in reading race in literature.<sup>128</sup> However, feminism is failing oppressed groups by placing too much emphasis on middle-class white women's needs and wants, while neglecting to defend the rights of everyone else.<sup>129</sup> According to bell hooks, there is an idea of gender solidarity, which is based on the assumption of similarity, which is backed by the notion that women are all under the oppression of patriarchy. Hooks says: “The idea of ‘common oppression’ was a false and corrupt platform disguising and mystifying the true nature of women’s varied and complex social reality.”<sup>130</sup> Hooks then also goes to express her disappointment with the feminist movement in regards to the focus on race, instead of the real issue which is oppression:

Within the feminist movement racial conflict between white women and women of color continues to be one area of struggle. Often these conflicts

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<sup>127</sup> Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2019), 51.

<sup>128</sup> Karina Jakubowtiz and Adam Perchard, “Macat Analysis of Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark*, A: Whiteness and the American Literary Imagination,” Macat Audio, June 15, 2016. <https://www.scribd.com/audiobook/363626181/Macat-Analysis-of-Toni-Morrison-s-Playing-in-the-Dark-A-Whiteness-and-the-American-Literary-Imagination>

<sup>129</sup> Kendall, *Hood Feminism*, 182.

<sup>130</sup> hooks, bell, “Sisterhood: Political Solidarity between Women,” *Feminist Review*, no. 23 (1986): 127, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1394725>.

are so overwhelming that they cause us to despair that we can ever live and work together in social spaces that are not irrevocably tainted by politics of domination.<sup>131</sup>

The patriarchal ideology leads women to believe that other women are their enemies and that we have to fight against them, instead of building a bond based on solidarity and shared experience. The original base for the feminist movement was the idea of sisterhood, which was then divided by race, because white feminists refused to go beyond their political needs. This is where the need for intersectionality arises because, in actuality, granting white women the ability to vote has helped to keep much of their privilege. Because there have always been white supremacist women who have no loyalty to anything but racism. This is also pictured in Coates's book *Between the World and Me*, where he talks about the experience one of his female friends had: "Perhaps it was because people who thought they were white told her she was smart and followed this up by telling her she was not really black, meaning it as a compliment."<sup>132</sup> This gives us the idea that there is a general assumption that black people cannot be intelligent or clever, which is problematic on two levels – one because it is blatant racism, and two because it often happens that Black people do not have access to good education, or as it happens, any education. Additionally, it was not until June 2023 when the Supreme Court ruled the affirmative action regarding colleges and universities unconstitutional, meaning they will no longer be able to use race as a factor in the admissions process, citing the Fourteenth Amendment,<sup>133</sup> which prohibits discrimination based on race. However, the Fourteenth amendment was adopted on July 9<sup>th</sup>, 1868<sup>134</sup>, whereas the affirmative action has been justified since 1978, more than hundred years later. Ironically enough, the point of this affirmative action was not to repair injustices against race, such as Jim Crow, or systemic racism, but to support educational diversity, and many viewed it as reversed discrimination, which brings us back to Robin DiAngelo's claim that many white

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<sup>131</sup> hooks, "Sisterhood: Political Solidarity between Women," 125.

<sup>132</sup> Coates, *Between the World and Me*, 116.

<sup>133</sup> German Lopez, "The End of Affirmative Action," *The New York Times*, June 30, 2023,

<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/06/30/briefing/affirmative-action-supreme-court-decision.html>

<sup>134</sup> "Fourteenth Amendment, Equal Protection and Other Rights" Constitution Annotated, accessed July 3, 2023, <https://constitution.congress.gov/browse/amendment-14/#:~:text=No%20State%20shall%20make%20or,equal%20protection%20of%20the%20laws.>

people think that they are the oppressed group now.<sup>135</sup> It is obvious that race is a strong factor in all areas and that it inevitably continues to affect lives of BIPOC all around the United States.

Although black women have experienced distinct instances of police brutality, because of their stories, the intersection of race, gender, class, and sexuality, as well as stereotypes of black women as promiscuous, unfit moms, and superhumans lead to these perceptions that it was their fault in the first place. Black women, for instance, frequently go to the police for help against abusers in their homes or neighborhoods only to be left unprotected or, more tragically, killed by the police. They are especially prone to being sexually assaulted by the police and to being hit too hard, even when they are expecting or taking care of children. The police frequently kill unarmed people who are underrepresented in the criminal justice system, often in the privacy of their own homes or even when they are merely trying to defend a loved one or themselves.<sup>136</sup> This is problematic because frequently there is lack of proof and these cases then go unsolved, no justice achieved.

Feminists over the decades have been stressing the importance of unity when it comes to ending systemic oppression, whether it is racial or gendered oppression. In the case of bell hooks, she puts forth her idea of sisterhood in her essay *Sisterhood: Political Solidarity Between Women*. She emphasizes the significance of challenging the racist and sexist ideas within the feminist movement itself. hooks claims that some white women have adopted the victim mentality, which keeps them from examining precisely these sexist and racist attitudes, insisting that only men can be the enemy, hindering any real progress. In this way, her idea of sisterhood “shields their reality.”<sup>137</sup> Furthermore, she states that white women tend to avoid criticizing one another within their circles, bonding by “excluding and devaluing women outside their circle.”<sup>138</sup> This kind of ‘mean girls’ mentality was conditioned by the patriarchal society and only serves to perpetuate racist and sexist thinking. She claims that, “In the United States, maintaining white supremacy has always been as great if not a greater priority than maintaining strict sex role division.”<sup>139</sup> Maintaining white supremacy serves them, because they make profit of black people, therefore they have little motivation to want to end it. On

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<sup>135</sup> DiAngelo, *White Fragility*, 3.

<sup>136</sup> “State Sanctioned Violence Against Black Women” Women’s Leadership and Resource Center, University of Chicago, Illinois, <https://wlrc.uic.edu/state-sanctioned-violence-against-black-women/>.

<sup>137</sup> hooks, “Sisterhood: Political Solidarity between Women,” 129.

<sup>138</sup> hooks, “Sisterhood: Political Solidarity between Women,” 129.

<sup>139</sup> hooks, “Sisterhood: Political Solidarity between Women,” 131.

the contrary, they feed into the idea of there being a difference between white people and black people. Hooks says, “women do not need to eradicate difference to feel solidarity. We do not need to share common oppression to fight equally to end oppression. We do not need anti-male sentiments to bond us together, so great is the wealth of experience, culture, and ideas we have to share with one another.”<sup>140</sup> She claims that what is important for female solidarity, is experience and ideas, those are the biggest connecting links for solidarity to be achieved.

This goes hand in hand with Kendall’s opinion on mainstream contemporary feminism. Kendall, just like hooks, also mentions the need for solidarity and claims that it is centered around the concerns of middle-class white women at the expense of women of color, which was further confirmed by the #solidarityisforwhitewomen.<sup>141</sup> She mentions that issues such as women being fired for their “unruly” hairstyles or even not hired because of them, or when schools discriminated against girls, and other issues of erasure, are being overlooked. She goes on to say:

Trans women are often derided or erased, while prominent feminist voices parrot words of conservative bigots, framing womanhood as biological and determined at birth instead of as a fluid and often arbitrary social construct. Trans women of color, who are among most likely targets of violence, see statistics that reflect their reality co-opted to bolster the idea that all women are facing the same level of danger.<sup>142</sup>

Even though trans women were not the issue discussed by the second wave feminists, we can still notice that the issues contemporary feminists deal with are similar, if not the same. We need to recognize that universal general approach to feminism can be very harmful for people from underrepresented communities, because it only further isolates people from the community they are a part of, and where they should be accepted, heard and seen.

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<sup>140</sup> Hooks, “Sisterhood: Political Solidarity between Women,” 138.

<sup>141</sup> Kendall, *Hood Feminism*, 1.

<sup>142</sup> Kendall, *Hood Feminism*, 2.

Audre Lorde, on the other hand, looks at the issue from a different perspective. She turns her focus on black men and their lack of effort in helping black women. She talks about the need to be heard and about male rage which is often turned against black women, when it should be focus on those forces that really oppress them, namely capitalism.<sup>143</sup> She says: “Black men’s feelings of cancellation, their grievances, and their fear of vulnerability must be talked about...”<sup>144</sup> Instead of female solidarity she focuses on black solidarity, solidarity with the communities that is more often than not present, because of the way the system is set. Systemic racism works to pit black people against each other, so that there is even smaller chance for them to achieve any type of change. She calls for compassion, stating that: “Black women traditionally have had compassion for everybody else except ourselves...We need to learn to have care and compassion for ourselves, also.”<sup>145</sup> According to her, American society ascribes roles to black men and women, which they are not able to naturally fulfill, so they must bend backwards to be able to cater to such roles in order to survive in said society, and then get blamed for being inadequate anyway. She goes on to say that one of the most used tools American society has is victim blaming for victimization. Perhaps this is precisely the reason why BLM try to avoid the victim blaming narrative, as they do not want to slip into something the racists are waiting for.

In contrast to this stands Toni Morrison who has been criticized by many black feminists for the way she highlights black insecurities in her novels. However, there are those who think that her works pose important feminist questions, and portray a true image of black female experience, for example, in her novel *Sula*, where she criticizes marriage and the nuclear family, as well as heterosexual male/female relationships.<sup>146</sup> Despite Morrison never labeling herself a black feminist, I think her works and her characters helped advance black feminism by telling the true stories and experiences of black women, and that alone makes a huge impact. We can clearly see that all authors that were mentioned, concur on the fact that one of the most important things in fighting

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<sup>143</sup> Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, 52.

<sup>144</sup> Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, 52.

<sup>145</sup> Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, 53.

<sup>146</sup> Barbara Smith, “Toward a Black Feminist Criticism” *The Radical Teacher*, no. 7 (1978): 20–27. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20709102>.

racism is solidarity, and that the necessary step in advancing feminism is dismantling patriarchy and the patterns it imposes on our society.

## Conclusion

In my diploma thesis I analyzed the activist movements for freedom, justice and liberation of African Americans in the United States, specifically the Black Lives Matter movement, and their fight to abolish racism within American society. My thesis was that the progress on achieving racial equality is hindered mainly by the marginalization of female and LGBTQIA+ victims, by white fragility, and by specific cases of systemic racism.

I have shown that activism is undoubtedly an immense part of the American identity; however, it is not the force that is going to do away with inequality within the American society completely. As I already established in this thesis, racism is so deeply seated in American society that the one thing that can disintegrate it, is the self-reflection of those in privileged positions. On the other hand, even though I think that the campaigns of activist movements such as the Black Lives Matter or Say Her Name, and many others, are valuable and have the potential to make a real change within the society, it is yet to happen. Although movements for racial equality have begun to play more important role in the society, and media as well, black voices still struggle to be heard.

Historically, we have seen a very slight shift in the visibility of black people after the Harlem Renaissance and the publication of works by authors such as Zora Neale Hurston, Richard Wright or Langston Hughes. Certainly, African American literature has helped to shape American society but, in my opinion, these texts get only to those who are actually interested in them and put in the effort to read them, because the American government purposely makes an effort to keep people in the dark about the experiences of African Americans by banning books even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. That only goes to show that the experiences of African Americans are rendered irrelevant. As I have talked about in the first chapter, we can see that activism has affected literature, because even contemporary authors such as Angie Thomas mentions important activist personalities like Malcolm X, in their novels. If any change shall be done, the historical context and race need to be talked about and be understood by the masses, rather than feared and therefore whitewashed to keep the general public in the dark about the actual history of the US. It needs to be widely recognized that slavery, lynching, Jim Crow, and other acts of discrimination were based on negative qualities such as greed and disrespect towards other human beings. The negative associations that are so tightly bound with African Americans, and blackness in general are ever present in the society and still



continue to construct the US national identity. Blackness in the past, stood to represent the fear of the unknown, and American identity defined itself against it.

It is fairly obvious that the civil rights movements did not end racism - however, they managed to achieve many small victories, such as the overthrow of racist segregation in the South shortly following the brutal murder of Emmett Till, which manifested that change was indeed possible and served as the engine for a lot of other movements. The movements therefore only continued to grow. More recently, they have managed to achieve the convicting of Derek Chauvin and other police officers, as well as the murderers of Ahmaud Arbery. In my opinion, the spread of the movements and their visibility has been mainly achieved through social media, and this is possibly the way to educate the masses on the African American history and the current matters surrounding it. However, I also think that it is important to engage the allies, and as a whole, Black Lives Matter activists have largely shunned progressive trade unionism and failed to recognize labor as a key ally. From my personal standpoint, it is crucial for these movements to recognize their white allies in order for them to achieve any form of substantial change.

If we look at the actions that activists fighting for racial equality take, we can clearly notice that the goal not only for BLM, but for all activists mentioned in this work is to dismantle white supremacy, end systemic racism, and abolish the private prison system. This idea inspired by the likes of Angela Y. Davis is resonating throughout the whole community of BLM supporters.

Black Lives Matter movement is still unfolding, and growing, it is not yet clear what social or political changes it will bring about. However, with the increase of violence against African Americans, it is needed now, more than ever. Black people have been deliberately rendered powerless by their government and policies. A heteropatriarchal society that treats black people like trash while both fetishizing and profiting from them denies them their fundamental human rights and dignity. We can perceive that political solidarity has the chance to put an end to systemic racism, if we actively work to comprehend our differences and correct mistaken, distorted ideas about race that are inevitably incredibly harmful for the people from underrepresented communities. These ideas make people feel that these underrepresented individuals are irrelevant, that their dreams and aspirations are irrelevant, and leaves many questioning if a healthy, equal society, a society that cares about the people

living in it, a society where people are accepted for who they truly are without having to put on a mask to be accepted, is even a possibility.

In the third chapter, I talked about police brutality, which is a crucial concept for the movements for racial equality, but it is also a relatively recent one in terms of media coverage. Only after black people were able to verify their stories with video recordings and establish beyond any reasonable doubt that such things had been happening, did the topic begin to receive greater attention. Police brutality is more often than not perceived as a systematic issue. Yet, some people regard it as an issue concerning specific individuals. I also focused on the importance of police brutality against women to be brought to the surface. There has long been a problem with black girls being disregarded or dismissed because they are too quickly assumed to be adults. Throughout history, law enforcement has brutally and abusively treated black women. Historically, black women were considered property and as such were not allowed to have or maintain any rights. Plus, as I mentioned, the US legal system did not even recognize rape as a potential crime against black women. It is therefore very problematic that black women continue to be disregarded and criminalized to this day - for that reason, I believe that we cannot claim to be feminists unless we are also anti-racist, and actively fighting to end racial inequity.

In the last chapter, I mentioned the growing phenomenon of white people claiming that they are the oppressed group now, calling it reversed racism. Because of this, they frequently oppose any forms of affirmative action and harbor animosity toward people of color. Despite all evidence to the contrary, a lot of individuals continue to hold the belief in white supremacy – while upholding the inherent prejudices in American society. I focused on the term white fragility postulated by Robin DiAngelo who talks about the fact that white people feel entitled to more than people of color. I have shown in this chapter, that the caste system and the irrational beliefs of the patriarchal society have mostly been maintained through encouraging this sense of entitlement and superiority. Once whiteness received actual legal status, this aspect of identity became an external value, shifting it from a privileged identity to a vested interest. Furthermore, I have manifested that racial ideology is still promoted in order for the white people to maintain social control. In this work, I urge that we must get rid of this white fragility in order for these movements, such as Black Lives Matter and many others to stand a chance. Is that even possible? Racism is so deeply rooted into American society it is like trying to cure cancer that has metastasized throughout one's whole

body. As many of the feminists and activists have said, one of the most important things in fighting racism is solidarity. If we are able to listen and relate to the stories and experiences of African Americans, there might be a hope for a real change.

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