

Faculty of Arts
Charles University
Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures

-Ms. Kristýna Marková

-“[The] Development of Civil Right[s] in the United States: Black Lives Matter”

-MA Thesis

-Opponent’s Report

Brief summary of subject:

As the candidate herself succinctly puts the matter, the thesis illumines “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” (6).

Methodology and structure:

The 64 pp. thesis contains an introduction, four principal chapters, a conclusion, and a bibliography. It combines for purposes of elucidation rigorous close reading with socio-historical contextual criticism. It also contains some independent critical accounts of fictional works and activist movements.

Achievements:

The work underscores some crucial matters, such as the idea that “anti-blackness and inequality are fundamental to American society” (10). We also read in a reference to a work from Edward J. Escobar from 2015, “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” (16)[fn.1]. The thesis also emphasizes the importance of continuativeness and so too by extension of autopoiesis: “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” (17). The power of hatred is also effectively underscored, including in the context of the Black Panther Party movement from its inception in 1966 and after. Also, there is a powerful reference here wherein the Chinese American civil rights activist Alex Tom declaims:

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.[fn.1] (27)

A productive mention of the meritocracy too arises when we read, “More than anything else, Americans enjoy the illusion of the meritocracy because it allows them to deny the effects of prejudice” (45). In the Conclusion we learn: “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” (57). A standard lament from those concerned about such matters also is brought forth, which does not diminish its force, “A heteropatriarchal society that treats black people like trash while both fetishizing and profiting from them denies them their fundamental human rights and dignity” (57). Finally, a metaphorical matrix arises when we read, “Racism is so deeply rooted into American society it is like trying to cure cancer that has metastasized throughout one’s whole body” (58–59).

Shortcomings:

As noted in the next section, the language contains some glitches. In addition, there are moments of mild meandering in the investigations, but the object of focus more or less holds water.

Formal features (e.g., language & style, referencing, bibliography, formatting, abstracts):

The language contains some mistakes: e.g. “concentrate” should be “concentrate” (12), “come to mind” should be “comes to mind” (17), “protagonist” should be “protagonists” (17), an empty space on page 22 after the note number 38 in the body of the text should be rectified, “the the” should be “the” (24), “women and have” should be “women have” (26), “these platform” should be “these platforms” (30), “the be guilty” should be “to be guilty” (33), “her murdered” should be “he murdered” (33), “brough” should be “brought” (34), “such extent” should be “such an extent” (42), there is a formatting issue on line 3, p. 44, “tie” should be “time” (44), “be focus” should be “be a focus” (50). Last not least the title of the thesis should use the word “Rights” not “Right”; also, my preference would be for the definite article, “The”, to open the title of the work. The other formal aspects are good.

Questions:

Concerning the overall outlook of the cultural movement Black Lives Matter, does the candidate see that it will be able to incorporate the class and gender concerns that the thesis broaches? How or why would this be so, or not so? The Black Panther Party movement that was founded in 1966 is also engaged by the candidate who argues that however inspiring or informative that was for the tradition of Black Lives Matter, the former movement in the main was too violent. I ask the candidate to articulate more exactly with some specifics why this was so, and how if so can BLM learn from this heritage?

Conclusion:

I recommend the thesis for defense and propose a preliminary grade of 1.

Seattle, 21 viii 23
doc. Erik S. Roraback, D.Phil.
Oxon.