

# PENNSYLVANIA COMMUNICATION ANNUAL

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**Journal of the  
Pennsylvania Communication Association**  
*Special Online Issue:  
Black Lives Matter*

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*The Pennsylvania Communication Annual, 77.2, 2021*

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*The Pennsylvania Communication Annual* is dedicated to advancing our undertaking of human communication. Manuscripts should be original and should discuss instructional, theoretical, philosophical, and/or practical aspects of any area of communication. Reviews of recent books and/or videotapes in any area of communication are also considered at the editor's discretion. While articles authored by Pennsylvanians and articles covering Pennsylvania topics are especially welcome, manuscripts on all topics and from all regions, including international submissions, are invited and will receive full consideration for publication.

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**The Pennsylvania Communication Association (PCA)** promotes teaching, scholarship, service, and an ongoing commitment to the discipline of human communication. The Association believes in:

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- Advancing and developing communication curricula
- Responding to student and societal needs
- Attending to and caring for the student inside and outside of the communication classroom

**Scholarship**

- Promoting communication scholarship within the Keystone State
- Providing a disciplinary commitment to Pennsylvania scholars, reaching out to the larger discipline
- Being a dwelling place of Pennsylvania communication scholarship history

**Service**

- Connecting the larger community to the communication discipline
- Supporting efforts to professionalize students in communication fields
- Serving our students inside and outside of formal institutional structures

**Commitment to the Discipline**

- Nurturing the grassroots application of communication in the wider community
- Caring for the discipline on the local academic campus
- Supporting the larger discipline at the regional, national, and international levels

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## Guest Editor's Letter Special Issue: Black Lives Matter

Victoria E. Thomas Ph.D.  
Simon Fraser University

This Special Issue of *Pennsylvania Communication Annual* explores and questions what it means to decry that *individual* Black Lives Matter. The phrase Black Lives Matter first appeared on Twitter in 2013 as a hashtag to advocate and provide awareness about the murder of Trayvon Martin. As a hashtag, the phrase Black Lives Matter marked a moment in which Alicia Garza, a Black cisgender woman, chose to remind Black folks and the world that Black people are valuable (Ransby, 2018). Black Lives Matter has since morphed into a social movement, a mantra for Black liberation, and sadly, an ideology that has become a divisive topic for friends, families, communities, and the nation. The submissions in this journal employ rhetorical and critical methods to examine the Black Lives Matter Movement and the lives of Black folks during the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Holistically, these articles expose how language, identity, and activism are at the center of the lives of systematically oppressed individuals within the United States.

The first contribution by Candice L. Edrington, Ph.D., of the University of South Carolina, "Information, Identification, or Both? A Rhetorical Analysis of How BLM Uses their Official Website," interrogates how identification with the Black Lives Matter movement is communicated via their website. In drawing attention to how social movements use digital tools, this research focuses on how social movements recruit members through rhetorical strategies that provoke emotions, provide appropriate actions to combat grievances, and provide credibility to their social causes. In particular, Edrington argues that visual and textual elements on the website work together to "polarize people who are not Black" and "highlight Black people as potential future victims" of police brutality.

The following article, "Black Trans Lives Matter": Social Activism, Solidarity, and Performances of Black Trans Sisterhood," by guest editor Victoria E. Thomas, Ph.D. of Simon Fraser University, extends the conversation on rhetorical strategies employed to highlight the marginalization of Black trans women within mainstream rhetoric of Black Lives Matter. I highlight social activism by Black trans women that have arisen alongside the Black Lives Matter Movement. Examining the rhetoric of Shea Diamond and Janet Mock, I show how they navigate and speak out against the disproportionate violence against Black trans women.

The third article, by Marcus Johnson, a doctoral candidate at the University of Washington, examines the role of police surveillance on rap artists. Johnson's article, "Rap Music, Activism, and Surveillance in the



*The Pennsylvania Communication Annual, 77.2, 2021*

Age of Black Lives Matter,” situates how racialized forms of surveillance within the Hip-Hop community are being used as a pretext to a continuous presence in Black communities where activism is taking place. Through analyzing historical and contemporary criminal cases against rappers, Johnson shows how artist song lyrics are used as evidence by police departments to incarcerate Black men who use their music to speak out against police brutality.

The final article of this Special Edition on Black Lives Matter is from Ashley Burge, Ph.D. of Augustana College. In her article, “Black. Rage. Matters: Black Rage Praxis in Black Women’s Activism”, Burge analyzes the construction of rage in the writings of Black women activists and scholars. *Black Rage*, Burge asserts, is transformative, empowering, and constructive in the Black Lives Matter Movement. Black Rage as a practical rhetorical strategy to dismantle oppressive systems reaffirms the voices of Black women who are often silenced in society and social movements.

In exploring the diversity of Black lives in this special edition, I desired to illustrate the multitude of ways that Blackness is experienced at the intersections of gender, class, and location. The presented articles speak to that desire and expose the failings of colorblind rhetoric and language choices that maintain oppressive systems. The rhetorical use of emphasizing *Black* within the Black Lives Matter movement and within this Special Edition is a statement of pride and identification that resist dominant power structures. It is with great pleasure that I present you the Special Issue on Black Lives Matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Victoria E. Thomas". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

Victoria E. Thomas, Ph.D.  
Assistant Professor, Simon Fraser University



**Information, Identification, Or Both? A Rhetorical Analysis  
of How BLM Uses Their Official Website**

Candice L. Edrington, Ph.D.  
University of South Carolina

**Introduction**

Containing many textual and visual elements, as well as hyperlinks, websites may be described as comprising a genre in that they share particular features and respond to particular exigences (Baab, 2008). More specifically, the websites of social movements contain a multitude of information housed in one place. This information usually includes but is not limited to the mission of the social movement, upcoming events, as well as contact information for media inquiries. The homepages (also known as landing pages) of these websites are the social movement's first opportunity to interact with a visitor. The homepages of these websites thus provide an overview as well as a level of specificity regarding the image, actions, and goals of the movements, in addition to presenting insights into their overall strategies. The visual structure and organization of the homepage can also serve as an indicator of how these social movements view or articulate their identities. The purpose of this analysis is to examine the rhetorical dimension of the Black Lives Matter's website homepage in an effort to uncover how identification is articulated in and through the website. This rhetorical analysis focuses on the larger issues of how social movements use digital tools to help advance their goals and achieve action.

Hahn and Gonchar (1971) proposed a methodology by which a rhetorical analysis of social movements should be examined. They suggested that "intertwining traditional categories of analysis facilitates insights into the complexity of social movement rhetoric" (p. 47). They maintained that social movements should be studied through the analysis of established classical rhetorical categories: ethos, logos, pathos, and style. According to Hahn and Gonchar (1971), the researcher should be able to discover the movement's ideal participant when analyzing its ethos, understand the premise that unites its members by analyzing logos, understand the emotional appeals of the movement when analyzing pathos, and uncover the attitude (tone) of the movement through its use of style.

Similar to organizations, social movements explicitly articulate

their identity through statements that project their mission, agenda, goals, or vision. Additionally, they “express their identity more indirectly through all their discourse, including visual discourse and links on websites” (Baab, 2008, p. 147). Websites offer social movements many opportunities to identify with current and future participants as they help “to move beyond passive forms of self-presentation” (Esrock and Leichty, 1998, p. 309). Many rhetorical scholars, including Warnick (2001), call for the analysis of organizational websites as they can help highlight how “electronic messages are designed, ordered, and organized to privilege certain ideas and to influence the thinking of their users and readers” (p. 63). Baab (2008) posited that websites help *social movements* make “arguments using verbal and visual texts working together” (p. 151). In a multimodal analysis of Amnesty International, Ochowicz (2018) demonstrated how “reports, visuals, and posts are represented to arouse emotions (pathos), engender authenticity and appropriateness of actions (logos) and boost credibility (ethos)” (p. 38) by analyzing the textual and visual mode of the organization’s website in addition to its color and composition. The framework for this rhetorical analysis utilizes these categories to examine and interpret the textual and visual components of the homepage in addition to the semiotic modes (color and composition).

## Analysis

### Overview

The Black Lives Matter official website ([www.blacklivesmatter.com](http://www.blacklivesmatter.com)) was created on “July 17, 2013—just days after George Zimmerman was acquitted for killing Trayvon Martin,” according to Freelon et al. (2016, p.14). While the conversation threads via hashtags on social media regarding the murder of Trayvon Martin made BLM a topic of discussion, the official website helped to articulate BLM as a movement. On this website, the visitor can find information referencing incidents of police brutality all over the nation, and charges for movement participators to demand accountability for the injustices witnessed by people of color. The analysis begins with a consideration of color and composition, an examination of the visual elements and concludes with interpreting these elements in relation to ethos, pathos, logos and style.

### Color, Composition & Interactivity

Digital rhetorician Douglas Eyman (2015) writes,

*Edrington*

style takes on new importance for digital rhetoric, particularly in terms of visual style: for a digital rhetoric, style is equivalent to ‘design’; thus, digital rhetoric must be concerned with understanding all the available elements of digital document design, including color, font choice, and layout, as well as multimedia design possibilities such as motion, interactivity, and appropriate use of media (p. 70).

BLM’s homepage is inviting and easy to navigate. The website is screen-responsive, which means that it lends itself to being viewed on mobile devices, such as a phone or a tablet, in addition to on a laptop or desktop computer. A screen responsive homepage appears visually the same when viewed on an iPad as when viewed on a full computer screen. Viewing the homepage from a phone, however, is different since the information is condensed as it adapts to the viewer’s device, hiding some information behind a menu tab. Ochowicz (2018) notes that this visual condensation is “a rhetorical strategy of selectivity and minimalist design” (p. 41).

Upon landing on the movement’s homepage, website visitors are immediately introduced to the logo and identifying colors of the social movement. The meanings of colors differ depending on their cultural context; therefore, it is important to note that the analysis of these colors refers to meanings within the U.S. context. Black, white, and yellow are intertwined throughout the homepage via text, backgrounds, and social media widgets. These colors are consciously used throughout the website to remain consistent with the social movement. The logo is a declarative graphic which informs the visitor that “Black lives matter.” Positioned in the upper-left-hand corner of the homepage, these three words are written inside of a white square, in all caps, are bolded in black, and written vertically. Three yellow horizontal lines follow these words. Yellow is also used as a highlighting color. Black, yellow, and white are the primary colors fixated throughout the homepage, with the exception of a blue ‘donate’ button that appears twice and the traditional pink and blue colors associated with specific social media widgets.

The use of the color yellow attracts attention throughout the homepage. Swan (2008) posits that yellow is used as a color of both hope and urgency. Furthermore, she notes that combining yellow and black may imply a sense of danger, work, and energy.

Moreover, these three colors have been used together and individually elsewhere, particularly in other social movements. Sociologists Fine, Montemurro, Semora, Stalp, Claussen, and Sierra (1998) declared that social movements “use conventions of color to represent themselves and their ideologies to the public” (p. 449). They posited that black is a color that often symbolizes the people of the movement (Fine et al., 1998). In other civil rights movements, yellow has been used as a color for justice (the Yellow Vests Movement), and white has been used as a color of peace.

Sans-serif fonts are used throughout the homepage, creating a modern appeal to the website that is both youthful and accessible. These font choices allow the text to be readable on screen (Bernard, Chaparro, Mills, and Halcomb, 2002), appealing, and emphasized. The headings for each section on the homepage use a bolded Sans-serif font, while the text in the body uses a non-bolded Sans-serif font. The color of the text alternates between black, yellow, and white, depending on its location on the homepage, and the background that it is written on (white or yellow text on a black background; black text on a white background).

Visitors to the homepage can find videos, social media widgets, a Twitter timeline, and news stories regarding the movement throughout these columns. In addition to these elements, the homepage provides several outlets for the visitors to get involved with the social movement and to interact on the homepage. The website calls for a response from its visitors by providing links that allow the visitor to get help, find a local BLM chapter, donate, and help fight against disinformation. The homepage of the website is arranged in a table-like format, with columns and rows. The logo and the main tabs at the top of the homepage are presented in a horizontal banner, symbolizing a row. The rest of the information is presented vertically in a column under the banner. Three tabs (“What Matters 2020”, “Get Help”, and “Chapters”) are positioned in the horizontal banner at the top of the homepage. These tabs are bolded and in yellow. This signifies that these three tabs are currently the most important to the movement. Above these three prominent tabs, the visitors of the site will find additional tabs (“News”, “About”, “Programs”, “Global Actions”, “Watch + Listen”, and “Shop”) that invite the visitor to discover what the BLM organization is, what they believe, and how the visitor can help both the organization and cause. When selecting the “About” tab, visitors are presented

*Edrington*

with a dropdown menu where they can then choose to learn more about BLM (“About Black Lives Matter”), discover what the movement organizers and participants believe (“What We Believe”), see how the movement has evolved (“6 Years Strong”), understand how the movement originated (“Herstory), and meet the co-founders of the movement (“Our Co-Founders). The “Programs” tab provides additional tabs as well, “Arts+Culture” and “Black Futures Month”. “Activist Shorts” can be accessed by selecting “Watch+Listen”. The last tab that displays a dropdown menu when selected is the “Get Help” tab. Here, visitors to the website can gain access to the resources such as mental health guides and toolkits (“Resources”), view partners and organizations affiliated with the movement (“Partners”) and get in contact with organizers of the social movement (“Contact”).

At the top of the BLM homepage in the righthand corner are social media widgets for Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Additionally, a search icon signals to visitors that the website is searchable. Given the richness of text and content found on this homepage, it appears that the web designers chose this layout as a way not only to save space but to segment the attention of the visitor. The left-hand column is exclusively dedicated to information, asking the visitor to enlighten themselves on the recent happenings of the movement. The righthand column, on the other hand, demands involvement from the visitor by charging them with some form of action. A scrolling banner is positioned below the header in the left column. Here is where images of victims and pictures of events are displayed. By selecting these images, the visitor will be taken to another part of the website that shares related news stories. Additional news stories and social media feeds are found beneath the slideshow in the left column. Adjacent to the left column, visitors of the homepage can sign up for updates, donate, help the social movement in their fight against disinformation, gain access to quick links, follow the social media pages, and shop for paraphernalia. The logo of the movement is centered at the footer of the homepage. Beneath the logo are five tabs that once again invite users to further explore the website (“About BLM”, “Chapters”, “Contact”, “Donate”, “News”, “Resources”, “Shop”, and “What Matters 2020”). Beneath these tabs, visitors of the site can once again find social media widgets, linking to the social movement’s Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram accounts.

## **Image**

A combination of visual and textual components are displayed on the homepage. While only a few images are sprinkled throughout the homepage, the selection and placement of the images are strategic. These particular images align with the mission of the social movement and grab the attention of the visitors almost immediately upon entering the website. The background of the header is an image of protest. The image presents a combination of faces of some protestors and the hands of others holding signs. Serving as the main image for the website, this image is in grayscale. Although grayed out, the viewer of this image is able to identify the genders of the protestors and, through the visual cues, make assumptions about their race. Deliberate in its composition, this image serves to suggest that every visitor to the website is part of the fight for freedom, liberation, and justice.

The next visuals that are seen on the homepage are those found in the slideshow, situated in the left-hand column directly under the header. Two flyers and three images are arranged throughout the banner, each attached to a different movement-related news story that can be accessed by selecting the designated image. The first visual in the slideshow is a flyer asking visitors for their help in the fight against disinformation. Aligning with the theme colors of the movement, the text written on the flyer is in white with highlights of yellow throughout. The background of the flyer unveils a globe seemingly from a satellite view. The word “news” is wrapped around the globe and repeats. The image is also in grayscale and serves as the background for the text “help us fight disinformation.” As this is the first visual in the slideshow, it could be assumed that ensuring the dissemination of only accurate information surrounding the social movement is currently one of the main goals.

The second visual to appear in the slideshow is also a flyer. This flyer, however, displays four images in total: three of victims and an image of protest. Images of Sandra Bland, Tamir Rice, and AJ Weber, all of whom were victims of police brutality and who sparked movement protests, are front and center on the flyer. An image of a protest serves as the background image to this flyer. Again, the main colors of the social movement are present (black, yellow, and white). This flyer invites its viewer to watch the September 19, 2019 oversight hearing on the country’s current policing practices and to demand accountability of police officers who unjustly exert excessive force on Black and Brown bodies.



*Edrington*

Hashtags that are commonly used on social media following the dialogue of BLM are included. These include: #blacklivesmatter, #whatmatters2020, #policeoversighthearing (January, 2020). The background image in this flyer does not show the faces of protesters. However, it displays people marching along the street with protest signs raised.

The third visual in this slideshow is an image of an adult male and four children (three boys and one girl). From the interactions shown in this image, the adult male can be assigned a paternal role with the children being assumed as *his* children. His face is not shown as he looks down at the little girl, but he is seen with one arm wrapped around the two older boys (approximately middle-school-aged) and one hand placed on the head of the younger boy. The younger boy is embracing the small girl as she so endearingly lays her head on his chest. Text does not appear in this image, and a graffiti wall is the backdrop for this image. While there is no textual commentary on this image, this image is attached to the news story of “what matters in 2020”. By opting not to show the face of the father in this image, this visual image projects the children to the center, alluding to them as being what matters in 2020. This particular image works in a way that culturally projects Black culture to dominant groups. The image of the father and children particularly work to make visible the realities of Black fatherhood. Given the stereotypes about Black fathers, this image humanizes Black men and pushes the narrative that Black men have children whose lives they are actively present in and that Black men are the protectors of the Black family.

The fourth visual of this slideshow is an image of protestors. This time, they are not grayed out, and their faces are clearly visible. While there are many of them, six women who *appear* to be Black hold a banner that reads “#BLACKLIVESMATTER. This too is attached to the “what matters in 2020” news story. Many other people are shown in this image, but it is the women holding the banner who take center stage. These women embody/visually reference the three women who co-founded the movement by proclaiming that Black lives are valuable, that they do, in fact, matter.

As the slideshow continuously rolls, an image of two women appears. Neither woman is directly engaged with the viewer. They appear to be looking off at something or someone else. As a result of their positioning, they are best understood as having an offer gaze, rather than, say, a demand gaze. According to Kress

and van Leeuwen (2006), an image that takes the form of a demand gaze “demands that the viewer enter into some kind of imaginary relation with him or her” (p. 118) while an offer gaze “offers the represented participants to the viewer as items of information, objects of contemplation, impersonally, as though they were specimens in a display case” (p. 119). These women offer information to the visitor of the homepage as they represent activists who participate in their local chapters of BLM. This image is linked to the “Activist Shorts” section of the website where members of the Black Lives Matter global network community share more about their activism and work within the movement. The logo of the movement is placed in the bottom right-hand corner of the image. The two women are dressed in a relaxed nature; one is wearing a t-shirt and cardigan while the other is wearing a white t-shirt with an image of rapper Eazy-E on the chest.

Scrolling down the homepage, viewers see images that are primarily placed in the left-hand column, the same column that presents the visitor with information about the movement’s efforts. Three news stories are positioned vertically with an image attached to each of these. The designer of the website once again uses the same images that were in the slideshow; the two flyers and the father and children. The flyer about disinformation is attached to the corresponding news story. The flyer urging the visitor of the site to watch, listen, and demand accountability is attached to the corresponding news story as well. However, the images used in the flyer are different this time. This time, the images are those of victims of police brutality Michael Brown, Eric Garner, and Michelle Shirley, while the victims are different, they are all *still/also* victims of police brutality. It is also interesting to note that in each flyer regarding the police oversight hearing, only one woman is represented while there are two men. This is consistent with data on police violence, showing that while both Black men and women experience police brutality, Black men experience it at a higher rate (Edwards, Lee & Esposito, 2019). Upon reaching the last news story on the website, you see the little girl that was in the family image in the slideshow. This time, we only see her, as she is hugging her father, his back turned towards us. The child’s eyes gaze directly at the viewer, at us, and thus demand that we look at her as she is what matters in 2020. At the same time, the viewer is clear, based on the relationship of the image to the text indicated that it is not just her, specifically and singly that matters, but her as a representative of all children, particularly all Black children. Quite naturally, this image is attached to the news story about what matters in 2020. The

*Edrington*

last images that are seen in the left-hand column of the homepage are not those that were a part of the website design. These are images that were uploaded to the social media outlets of BLM, particularly Twitter, and are thus represented in the social media feed. Some of these images include photographs of the late author Toni Morrison, victims Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, and Emmitt Till, and rapper LL Cool J. While there are not any images located on the right-hand column of the homepage, visitors can find the designs of the t-shirts that are for sale near the bottom of the page.

### **Ethos**

In Hahn and Gonchar's (1971) rhetorical methodology for studying social movements, they propose a closer examination of ethos, logos, and pathos. By analyzing these classic modes of persuasion, scholars can get a sense of the movement's ideal participant, the premise that unites the members, and its emotional appeal. Considering that this analysis only focuses on the homepage of BLM's website, the amount of text to analyze is limited. However, the text that is found on the homepage provides important insight into the movement's ideology. The use of persuasion is very prevalent in terms of ethos, logos, and pathos. Additionally, as scholarship in the area of visual rhetoric indicates, these modes of persuasion are also central to the impact of images and photographs such as those described on the website and analyzed below.

In identifying the ethos of a movement, Hahn and Gonchar (1971) posit that scholars discover who the movement considers to be an ideal participant. Given that ethos concerns both ethics and credibility, this can be done by researching speakers of the movement and/or the way that these speakers are introduced (p. 48). On the homepage, there is no explicit mention of the creators of the movement. In order to research these founders, one must select the "our co-founders" tab, which is located under the main "About" tab at the top of the page. Be that as it may, information regarding activists and their local work within the movement can be accessed from an image in the slideshow that scrolls at the top of the homepage. Other information that alludes to the social movement's ethical values and credibility can be found under the "About" tab as well. This includes the mission statement, philosophy, and values, and its founding. The movement positions itself as a leader in the fight to end injustices of Black people by providing resources such as healing toolkits. Showcasing the

global actions of the movement shines a light on how the movement cares for all people of color, and not just those in the United States. Lastly, they add credence to their status as a leader in the fight for equality by highlighting the partnerships with similar organizations.

In addition to researching the movement's speaker, Hahn and Gonchar (1971) suggest analyzing "the kinds of antagonists they choose to vilify, for many movements define themselves in terms of their opposition" (p. 48) as another way to identify the ideal participant of a movement. There are two key messages on the homepage that identify the ideals which BLM opposes. The first is disinformation regarding the movement. The phrase "help us fight disinformation" is seen repeatedly (three times) throughout the homepage. The first encounter that the visitor of the website has with this phrase is in the slideshow. The call to help fight disinformation is the first image in a series of other pictures. Upon scrolling down, the fight against disinformation is the very first news story found in the news section. The third time that this phrase appears is in the middle of the page, next to a "help us" button. The repetition of this phrase solidifies the movement's strong opposition to the false discourse that circulates around the movement. The second point of opposition for the movement is state-sanctioned violence (violence imparted and accepted by state, local, and federal governmental agencies and/or institutions) towards Black people. There are two instances on the homepage that directly mention the end to state-sanctioned violence. Both of these instances seek involvement from the visitor by petitioning them to act in some way. The first call to action for the visitor regarding state-sanctioned violence is to demand accountability by way of the police oversight hearing. This call is shared once in the slideshow and once again in the news story section of the website. The second call to action for the visitor regarding state-sanctioned violence appears in the "Donate Today" section of the website. In this section, donors are thanked for their support in the continued fight against state-sanctioned violence. This rhetoric makes it clear that BLM is opposed to disinformation and state-sanctioned violence, thus illuminating their ideal participant; someone dedicated to accurate information, non-violence, honesty, equality, and justice.

The visual images and text/placement of messages found on the homepage work together to reinforce the ethos of the social movement. The rhetoric found on this page highlight accuracy, non-violence, honesty, equality, and justice-seeking as values of

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the movement's ideal participant. The visuals found on this page also illustrate these same values. Beginning with the header image of the homepage, the value of equality is present. Seeing both men and women, old and young, and all of different races (assumed) assembled in protest to fight against the police brutality of people of color reflects equality; everyone should have the same rights. Not only does this image show a sense of equality, it also shows non-violence and unity, different people coming together for one common goal. The flyers that promote the police oversight hearing and urge viewers to demand accountability make visible justice. These flyers also serve to promote non-violence in the seeking of justice. When scrolling through the slideshow that is on the left-hand side of the homepage towards the top, there is an image of two activists. Their image connects with the value of accurate information as their image is situated with the "Activist Shorts" news story, a news story that highlights the work that these activists do in their community. By having them tell their own stories, there is little room for disinformation, something that the movement is fighting hard to eradicate. Lastly, the images of children reinforce the value of honesty. Children possess a sweet innocence. They are also known to be brutally honest. The image that fixates on the big, bright eyes of the little girl holding onto her father makes one think of pureness, innocence, and honesty. Her gaze, demand, visually takes on a form of address by directly acknowledging the viewer of the image and addressing them as 'you' (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006). In this way, she is demanding a relationship with the viewer, visually asking them to help her by participating in the movement because, as a child, she matters, and she cannot save herself.

### **Pathos**

Pathos is the mode of persuasion that seeks to appeal to the emotions of others. Some examples of pathos include personal connections, testimonials, and/or figurative language that provoke an emotional response from the reader. Hahn and Gonchar (1971) assert that when analyzing pathos, a scholar of social movements will be able to "discover which emotions the movement appeals to, which it ignores, and the target audience of the emotional appeals" (p. 50). Furthermore, they note that the emotions that the movement seeks to appeal to could be determined by the belief systems of the movement (p. 50). There are several instances on the homepage of the Black Lives Matter website where pathos may be clearly identified.

Once the homepage of the website loads, the logo of the social movement catches your attention. This is not only because of the juxtaposition of the white and black backgrounds on the page, but because of the logo itself. The logo *is* the name of the movement, Black Lives Matter. These three words together can appeal to the emotions of its readers both positively and negatively. Chances are, viewers of the BLM website are supporters of the movement who seek information about the movement, wish to stay up to date with the latest news and events, want to donate or purchase paraphernalia, or are interested in joining their local chapter. For these viewers, the words Black Lives Matter could evoke a positive emotional appeal. Supporters of the movement may feel a sense of solidarity or pride in being Black. These same words could also evoke a negative appeal in the same group of viewers. Emotions such as anger, fear, and sadness could also arise. Supporters of the movement who view these words could be angry or sad that there is a need for this proclamation in the first place, and/or fearful of their Black lives.

While there is a high probability that the viewers of this website are supporters of the movement, there is also a chance that some are not. These viewers could be actively opposed to the movement. For these viewers, the words Black Lives Matter could result in a negative emotion. Emotions such as repugnance and exclusion may appear. Viewers of this website who are not supporters of the movement may feel intense disgust when reading these words because they may feel that these words are divisive. Additionally, viewers who are not supporters of the movement may not be supporters due to the fact that they feel excluded from the movement if they do not identify themselves as Black.

The phrases “help us”, “take action”, and “demand change” are the next instances of pathos that are displayed on the homepage in an effort to persuade viewers. Help us is seen in the first image on the slideshow that appears in the top left column of the homepage. Take action is the header of the first section in the right-hand column. Under this section, viewers can find other verbs such as donate, join, and help. Demand accountability is written on the second image seen in the slideshow. Help, take, demand, join, and donate are all verbs that may appeal positively to the viewers of this homepage. Viewers may feel needed, as if they personally are an integral part of helping this movement succeed, appreciated for their involvement with the movement, motivated and empowered to participate on multiple levels, and hopeful that their actions in addition to the actions of the movement

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will one day end the state-sanctioned violence that Black people are subjected to.

Similar to ethos, the visual images work with the text/placement of messages to reinforce and strengthen the emotional appeals found on the homepage of this website. The images of the victims whose faces appear on the flyer promoting the viewing of the police oversight hearing and demanding accountability for their actions could elicit emotions such as anger, fear, and sadness. Anger could be felt by two different groups of people. The first group of people who could experience the feeling of anger could be supporters of the movement. These supporters would include, but are not limited to, families of the victims, participants and allies of the movement, and people of color. This feeling of anger could arise from the actual killings of the victims shown, or from the lack of justice served to these victims. The second group of people who could experience anger from viewing this flyer could be opposers of the movement, those people who identify with the counter-movement Blue Lives Matter (Condevillamar, 2020). This group of people could become angry from viewing this flyer due to the demand of punishing the police officers who contributed to the killings of the victims shown. People of color who visit this homepage and see these images could experience fear, fear that they too could be victims of state-sanctioned violence. If not a fear for themselves, they could experience fear for their loved ones or other people of color. This same fear and sadness could be experienced when viewing the image of the children with their father, *Black* children with their *Black* father. Lastly, sadness could be experienced from viewers of this flyer as they remember not only the victims shown on the flyer, but many others who have succumbed to the same fate. When viewing the image of women standing on the front lines of the march during a protest, some viewers may experience a feeling of pride, pride in the sense that they were all Black women taking a stance. Similarly, the header image that shows a variety of people engaged in protest may help in creating a sense of joy in viewers of the homepage. This joy could possibly come from witnessing different genders, age groups, and races working together to fight injustice.

### **Logos**

As the third mode of persuasion, logos seeks to appeal to the cognition of the readers by using logic, rationale, and critical reasoning to persuade. Some examples of logos include the use of facts,

statistics, logical reasons, explanations, and appeals to the reader's mind. Hahn and Gonchar (1971) suggest exploring all arguments that the movement employs. Thus, they note that "the underlying premises of any social movement provide the worldview which unites the members" (p. 49). Throughout the homepage, there are several occurrences that seek to appeal to the reader's cognition. Again, the logo and name of the movement itself, Black Lives Matter, is the main premise that unites its members. Although the mission statement of the social movement is not explicitly found on the homepage (it can be found by accessing the "What We Believe" tab under the main "About" tab), language such as "join the fight for freedom, liberation, and justice", and "end white supremacy forever" provide insight into the views of the movement. Other language found on the homepage, such as "central target" provides rationale for why the movement is requesting the help of its members in the fight against disinformation. Lastly, words such as "demand accountability" regarding police brutality highlight the reasoning behind the movement's creation. Facts and statistics are not found on the homepage of this website. However, they may appear throughout the website.

There is one prominent image on the homepage that reinforces the logical appeal of the Black Lives Matter movement. In addition to the text/placement of messages, this visual image helps to explore the arguments that the movement employs. The main image that reinforces the logic behind this movement is the flyer referencing the police oversight hearing. This image is important in that it shows photographs of multiple victims of state-sanctioned violence. Although this flyer appears twice on the homepage, each occurrence of this flyer features images of different victims. By displaying multiple people who have actually been killed by members of law enforcement, the designers of this website are providing justification as to why the movement was first created.

### **Evaluation and Interpretation**

Given this analysis of BLM's homepage, it is evident that their identification is articulated in and through their website. The usage of the social movement's primary colors create a brand identity that is clear and easily translated across their communication channels. This is shown through the social media feeds that are displayed at the bottom of the homepage. Displaying images of protests as well as victims of police brutality serve to address the exigence of the social movement by implicitly declaring its mis-



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sion. The text that corresponds with these images use ethos, pathos, and logos to explicitly state the mission and values of the movement, and to draw participants in. Additionally, the homepage of this website does a great job in vilifying those that in some fashion created the exigence – police brutality – that in turn led to the creation of this social movement. In doing so, the homepage of the website almost immediately presents an us vs. them, for or against, ideology. This ideology helps to build identification with the visitors of the website.

Both the images and text that seek financial support, demand change, and solicit help fighting disinformation serve as calls to action for the visitors of the site. In addition to charging visitors with the tasks of getting involved with the movement via several capacities, the social movement gives back to its visitors by offering up resources. These resources work to connect visitors of the website to the social movement. Furthermore, these resources suggest that the social movement *understands* what the visitor is experiencing as if they too are (or have) experienced similar situations and circumstances. Consequently, these resources require a level of interactivity from the visitor; actually navigating beyond the homepage and downloading the sought after material. The images of victims and text calling for the accountability of their murders provide an unspoken connection between the visitors of the website and the social movement, seemingly suggesting that an injustice to one is an injustice to all.

Official organization websites are typically used for the purposes of disseminating important organizational information to stakeholders. Moreover, social movement websites serve an additional purpose, the purpose of recruiting participants. The BLM website does a great job in both disseminating important information as well as using identification to recruit participants. In particular, the homepage of this website articulates the mission, participants, and origin of the movement. This is productive in that it aids in the advancement of the movement and its efforts by making visible those doing the work, and articulating why the work is being done. However, there are additional elements that are currently not featured on the homepage of this website. Adding these elements to the homepage could potentially make it even more productive.

Specifically, the *who* or *who else* is doing the work is a key component missing from the homepage. While BLM is a movement fighting for freedom, justice, and liberation for all Black people,

Black people are not the only ones in this fight. The image that serves as the header image for the homepage does appear to show different races. However, these races are ambiguous due to the composition of the image. It is grayed out and obscure in nature. At first glance, visitors of the website may not recognize the faces that appear in the image. It is not until you look for the faces that you actually see them. Partnerships of the movement could be found by selecting other tabs on the main menu; however, this information is not presented on the homepage. Information regarding allies, sponsors, or how to become a partner of the movement are all missing. Although all are welcomed to join this fight, the strategic choice to only feature Black people on the homepage could turn others away. This has the potential to create cultural polarization as it inadvertently excludes others from being a part of the movement on the homepage. Nevertheless, people of other races could be featured throughout the website.

Secondly, the work that is being done takes a backseat to why said work is actually needed. Fighting disinformation appears to be at the top of the agenda for BLM as it is mentioned several times throughout the homepage. The developers of the website include the visitors in this effort by asking them to help share their knowledge about the disinformation that is circulating surrounding the movement. This text is the only actionable one displayed on the homepage. Images that show protest do show activists in action; however, these images are not connected to text that confirms current actions taken on behalf of the movement. Besides the images of previous protests and the fight for disinformation, the homepage of this website does not provide any indication of current actions that the movement is taking in the fight for justice, freedom, and liberation for all Black people.

The *how* the work is being done is the third element missing from the homepage and should very well be present. The homepage does a great job of asking visitors to support the movement by taking action and donating to the cause. The homepage fails, however, to show how these actions will actually help the movement. Sharing with visitors of the website as well as supporters how their funds and efforts are being used to advance the movement has the potential to increase donorship. In addition to transparency of donations, the homepage does not explicitly share its plans on how to end state-sanctioned violence and White supremacy forever. The movement's claim to end state-sanctioned violence is politically charged. While this is a widely known goal of the movement, the homepage does not direct the visitor to any

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grassroots efforts such as signing petitions nor does it share any information about partnerships with state or local government agencies. Although the homepage does mention demanding accountability, it does not explicitly outline what this would look like for a movement participant.

The last element missing from the homepage of the website that could potentially advance the movement is updates. The most recent updates made on the BLM homepage dates back to three months. This includes the updates made to the news stories and the social media feeds. In doing a quick search, all of the social media accounts have more recent information than what is displayed on the homepage of the website. This could deter future participants or supporters of the movement from joining if they view it as inactive.

### **Conclusion**

The rhetorical analysis of the homepage for BLM alludes to how the movement used digital platforms, such as websites, to help promote their goals and actions. It becomes clear that BLM's homepage effectively articulates the identity of the movement either through text, visual elements, or both. The textual and visual elements featured define the movement's mission, whether implicitly or explicitly. This is both strategic and effective as it helps build identification (either through known or unknown similarities and/or a common enemy) with visitors of the website. The logo and colors associated with the movement are prominently placed throughout the homepage, which works to promote the identity of the movement. Similarly, points of action, such as donate now, join now, and contact us, are featured. These are also effective in that they provide a pathway to interactivity for the visitors of the sites, calling them to action on behalf of the respective cause. Additionally, the homepage is easy to navigate and can be accessed via other mobile devices such as mobile phones or tablets. The name of the movement is declarative in that it articulates the rhetorical situation, the exigence, audience, and constraints of the movements (Bitzer, 1968). Information (related to the movement and about the victims) was a prominent theme that emerged from this analysis.

The theme of information is evident as the homepage is comprised of information about and relating to the movement. This information includes but is not limited to the victims of police brutality, goals of the movement, and reasons for the movement's

existence. Images of victims are continuously displayed throughout the homepage. By displaying images of the victims in multiple locations, BLM portrays/illuminates the victim as the center of the movement. Almost as if it is a designated digital place of memorialization, the homepage serves to portray the victims more so than depicting the target (state-sanctioned violence). By making the victims visible, this renders the target of the movement somewhat *invisible*, although still implied. This type of memorialization brings forth the concept of memory work in contemporary digital activism by allowing for affective commemorative engagement, contextualizing the victims as part of continued systematic injustice, using the past to legitimize the current actions of the movement, and creating recognizable markers as symbols for future references (Smit, Heinrich, & Broersma, 2018). In the beginning stages of BLM, making the target visible had consequences, specifically the creation of the counter-movement Blue Lives Matter. Choosing to make the target explicitly invisible on the homepage of the official website could be a strategic choice.

The textual and visual components of the homepage use identification in a way that calls the viewer to visualize themselves as future victims. Consequently, this creates a community of witness which presents agency in two ways. By choosing to portray victims throughout the homepage more than the target (opponent) of the movement, the visual and textual elements depict how agency has been taken away from Black people. In other words, the effects of state-sanctioned violence and White supremacy have taken away the power Black people have to shape their experiences and life trajectories (Cole, 2020). The second way that agency is shown throughout the homepage is by calling visitors to act, inviting them to be participants of the movement. In this way, movement participants can regain their agency by helping to end state-sanctioned violence and White supremacy.

The various elements of the homepage, in addition to the words “Black lives matter,” identify the rhetorical situation of the movement: the exigence, audience, and constraints. Working in conjunction with the textual elements found on the homepage, the visuals displayed help visitors understand police brutality as the main reason behind the creation of the movement. Subsequently, these textual and visual elements highlight Black people – potential future victims – as the audience of the movement. Consequently, this illumination doubles as a constraint to the movement as it works to polarize people who are not Black, as

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mentioned previously. In reiterating the dual power of the movement's identity, BLM as a movement and mantra work to create identification within future participants of the Black population but particularly for those that are not members of this same community. The findings from the rhetorical analysis suggest that the homepage effectively articulates the identity of the movement either through text, visual elements, or both. In articulating their identity, the social movement is building identification with the visitors of the website either through known or unknown similarities and a common enemy.

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**“Black Trans Lives Matter:” Social Activism, Solidarity, and Performances of Black Trans Sisterhood**

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**Introduction**

In August 2020, Google Trends Data released a short film titled “Black Trans Lives Matter” to illustrate that search terms such as “trans women are women,” “black trans people killed,” and “trans activist” were searched more in 2020 than in any other previous year (Google, 2020). The film features search terms as well as videos and images of Black trans women and men marching in the streets, creating art, and shouting that their lives matter (Google, 2020). This search data reveals that the general public is not only becoming more and more aware of Black trans individuals, but they are also increasingly concerned about the ways in which individual and institutional violence impact the lives of Black trans individuals. In particular, the search terms “Laverne Cox,” “Raquel Willis,” “Shea Diamond,” and “Andrea Jenkins” reveal that the public is specifically interested in the lives of Black trans women. Search results for these four individuals reveal their trans activism, Diamond’s musical talents, and Jenkins’ historical election win to become the first openly Black trans woman elected to public office in the United States (City of Minneapolis, 2020). The search terms also reveal the disproportionate amount of violence that Black trans women experience compared to any other demographic of trans individuals (Google, 2020; Mock, 2014). So much so, the American Medical Association declared that the violence that Black trans women face is an *epidemic* (Ennis, 2019).

Epidemic as a description of the violence that Black trans women face accentuates how widespread the recurrences of these acts are throughout the United States. The hashtag Black Trans Lives Matter appeared on Twitter in August 2013 by Twitter user @PrernaSays in a tweet about Islan Nettles’ vigil. Islan Nettles was beaten to death and died at the age of twenty-one. Her death at the hands of a Black cisgender man highlights the unbalanced standards in which Black lives are valued by mainstream social movements (Sanders, 2020). This became evident when Iyanna Dior was attacked by a group of mostly Black cis men during June 2020, while others filmed the incident but did nothing to intervene (Sanders, 2020). These two incidents show examples

of Black cisgender men devaluing Black trans women in much the same ways that White supremacy and violence have devalued Black cis men. The violence against Black trans women by Black cis men replicate the same systems of domination that have devalued Black cisgender men, essentially erasing their lives from the world and the Black Lives Matter movement.

The Black Lives Matter Movement began as a hashtag on social media following the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the murder of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin (Garza, 2014). The acquittal of George Zimmerman in July 2013 was a devastating blow to Black folks and reproduced historical traumas of injustice within our judicial system that year. As a result, Black folks and their allies marched in the streets to protest the disproportionate rates of Black people's deaths by police officers in the United States. Although the Black Lives Matter organization was started by three Black cisgender women Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi, the mainstream movement predominantly marches and protests the deaths of Black cisgender boys and men. For instance, Lourdes Ashley Hunter (2015), the founder and National Director of the Trans Women of Color Collective, justly proclaims that "We'll know Black Lives Matter when Black folk 'SHUT SHIT DOWN' for the Black Trans Woman" (Hunter, 2015). Erasure from Black politics and mainstream queer politics prompts the necessity for a movement and community that centers the needs of Black trans-identified individuals.

Community is central to thriving for Black folks; historically, the Black community has banded together to battle social justice issues such as poverty, racism, inadequate healthcare, state-sponsored violence, and detrimental living conditions. The implications of the marginalization that Black transgender women face leave very few spaces for them to belong. As a result, many Black trans women, such as Lourdes Ashly Hunter and Janet Mock, have carved out spaces such as the Trans Women of Color Collective and the Girls Like Us Campaign that provide solidarity and kinship with other trans women of color (Jackson et al., 2018). In highlighting social activism by Black trans women that has arisen alongside the Black Lives Matter Movement, this article examines the ways Shea Diamond and Janet Mock perpetually circumvent the flood of intra-racial violence, state-sanctioned violence, and violent media representations. Through a focus on what I define as *performances of Black sisterhood*, I examine how Black trans women create spaces of solidarity for their trans and nonbinary siblings to survive. I theorize performances of



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Black sisterhood as a deliberate commitment and conscious performance of solidarity. Solidarity is an embodied action in which you carry your literal being from one point to another while simultaneously creating spaces for others to move so that we are all liberated. Black sisterhood performances move beyond a mere commitment to liberation but are a source of pleasure and delight in each other's triumphs. Performances of Black sisterhood that are inclusive of trans women demonstrate that all Black lives matter.

### **Performances of Black Sisterhood**

Performance as an epistemology guides my theorizing in this article. As an epistemology, performance attends to the dynamic nature of the body as material evidence and the senses (taste, touch, sight, sound, and smell) as valid to cultural knowledge construction. As a medium, the body is uniquely able to communicate acceptable behaviors, cultural taboos, and social resistance via transgressing or adhering to boundaries (Fusco, 1995). Sights, sounds, smells, and touch intertwine in a moment of time to solidify a performance that is both physical and ethereal. The body as an epistemological site evokes active rituals of movement to create diverse and divergent forms of knowledge. In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Erving Goffman (1956) claims that humans employ the techniques of performance daily. According to Goffman (1956), these performances are integral to our identity formation and social interactions with others. As a result, performances intertwine with historical markers of race, gender, sexuality, oppression, and privilege to structure our social interactions. For marginalized individuals, performance is a ritual art of survival in daily interactions with dominant groups. Black performances of survival are dynamic and fluid; they transcend gender, sexuality, and racial boundaries. Survival for Black people is a highly expressive art form. bell hooks (1995), in her critique on Black performance, asserts that "African-American performance has been a site for the imagination of future possibilities" (p. 220). Due to the intertwining of oppression in the matrix of domination, tactics of resistance must consciously be reimagined into new performances of survival to be effective. Performance, in this iteration, is a medium for constructing the self and critiquing current societal circumstances. Performances of Blackness are vignettes of historical markers illustrating our continued survival in a world that dehumanizes Black people.

Everyday performances for survival produce knowledge of re-

sistance to oppressive circumstances within societal institutions. In his study on ballroom culture, Marlon M. Bailey (2013) asks: “What can be learned from everyday Black LGBT lives in Ballroom culture, particularly those who are largely ignored in dominant academic and sociopolitical discourse?” (p. 4). Illuminating the actions of various Houses within Detroit Ball culture, Bailey (2013) demonstrates the world-making possibilities inherent in kinship performances. Building upon Jose Muñoz (1999) concept of world-making as a practice of freedom, Bailey (2013) asserts that Ballroom culture effectively creates subjects that take on “work of family and community that the larger Black society falls to do.” (p. 19). Bailey’s assertion references a homogenized Black culture that fails to perform labor for individuals that do not conform to dominant ideologies of family, gender, and sexuality. The examination of Ballroom culture teaches us that physical, emotional, and financial labor is a performance that contributes to kinship among Black individuals in LGBTQ cultures of performances. Kinship is an action of interpersonal labor. Bailey uses performance as a method and analytic to frame his life and that of his research participants as doing kinship, rather than being in kinship. His ethnographic study of Ballroom Culture in Detroit defines community labor as acts of service that structure individuals into normalized family structures. For example, many house mothers provide emotional support and guidance for their house children, while siblings provide labor through social assistance navigating the house structure and rules. These acts of service are currency; it virtually is the only way to belong to a family. Kinship as a verb, rather than a noun supersedes normalized White ideologies of family structures. The labor inherent in solidarity is a physical embodiment of service to your chosen family. The labor of kinship within queer Ballroom communities is analogous to Black Sisterhood.

Black Sisterhood, as a cultural practice of solidarity, is fundamentally rooted in Black women’s love for each other and their communities. I deliberately use the language of *sisterhood* because Black women developed sisterhood during enslavement as a survival strategy. The Transatlantic slave trade displaced biological families from their home countries, and while enslaved in the U.S., biological separation of biological kin occurred through being sold at auctions (Collins, 1991; White, 1999). Surviving these conditions meant seeking resources outside of normative family structures. For instance, during enslavement, it was better for Black women to find sanctuary and support with each other than to directly challenge their White owners or the overall sys-

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tem of slavery. In *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*, Saidya Hartman (1997) examines the everyday lives of enslaved individuals to explore strategies of resistance. Hartman (1997) asserts that community is “best understood in terms of the possibilities of resistance conditioned by relations of power and the very purposeful and self-conscious effort to build community” (p. 59). Utilizing the only resource they had -- each other -- enslaved Black women’s cultural practices of sisterhood included helping each other escape from enslavement, sharing childcare responsibilities, and providing each other with medical care (White, 1999). This epistemological position asserts that the dismantling of systems of oppression can only occur through collective action. With community, enslaved individuals could relax, find joy in their lives, and make plans for the liberation of all enslaved individuals (Collins, 1991). The social and material conditions of enslavement fueled Black women’s need to survive and progress together, rather than separately.

In her research on enslaved women and their gendered experiences, Deborah Gray White (1999) emphasizes that “the supportive atmosphere of the female community was buffer enough against the depersonalizing regime of plantation work and the general dehumanizing nature of slavery” (p. 131). The Black women’s network constructed during enslavement is a demonstration of ingenuity and worldmaking. Scholarship on Black cisgender women often refers to sisterhood through Black feminism. The language of sisters and mothers invokes kinship among Black cisgender women, suggesting that our experiences of Black oppression create a connection and loyalty to one another. My commitment to my Black cis and trans sisters and our survival compels me to highlight the benefit of an inclusive Black sisterhood that includes trans and cis women. As trans women are often denied the authenticity of their gender identity as women, embracing Black trans women as sisters is an essential act of solidarity. The exclusion of Black trans women from Black sisterhood limits collective resources and severely diminishes Black trans women’s chances of liberation from the matrix of domination. A Black sisterhood that is all-inclusive embraces the diversity of Black womanhood and does not silence its sisters that deviate from normative ideologies of gender and sexuality. The Crunk Feminist Collective (2017) asserts that: “Sisterhood is deliberate love and solidarity in action. Sisterhood is showing up and showing out for your friends. Sisterhood is saying what you mean and meaning what you say. Sisterhood is trans, gender nonconform-

ing, nonbinary, and cis” (Cooper et al., 2017). In moments of exclusion from sisterhood with Black cisgender women, the protection and support that Black transgender women deserve are nonexistent.

In highlighting the social activism of Shea Diamond and Janet Mock, I show how their performances of sisterhood show out for their trans siblings. Black trans women want to live without the fear of violence, job discrimination, homelessness, and rejection from their families (Hunter, 2015). Fifty percent of Black trans women surveyed in the Human Rights Campaign 2018 Anti-Trans Violence Report were homeless at one point in their life (Lee, 2018). These disproportionate rates of homelessness, tied to job discrimination, lead to most Black trans women engaging in survivor sex work, increasing their rates of violence and criminalization. I know that trans women, such as Janet Mock, are vulnerable to sexual abuse due to their feminine gender presentation (Mock, 2014). In addition, I know that trans women, like Shea Diamond, end up homeless as youths because their Black cisgender mothers refuse to accept them as women (Billboard, 2018). A Black trans feminist politic of liberation concerns itself with the racial aspects of subjectivity and provides a framework for embracing myriad expressions of Black sexuality, class positions, and gender identities. The denial of transgender women as sisters within formations of solidarity replicates the devaluing of Black cis women’s contributions in white cis feminist and Black civil rights social movements. Black sisterhood that includes trans women, rather than isolates them, posits new ways to care for and love one another.

### **I Am Her: Anti-Trans Ideologies as Violence**

*“If you had to wear my shoes,  
you’d probably take them off too.”*  
(Shea Diamond, “I Am Her,” 2016)

In October 2016, Shea (pronounced “She-ah”) Diamond released her first music video, “I Am Her” on YouTube. In our contemporary climate of anti-transgender legislation and anti-Black racism, many trans women of color never live to see their dreams come to fruition. Trans women of color have an average life span of thirty-five years (Hale, 2018). To produce multiple music videos as a Black trans woman artist is no small feat, especially in a world that suggests that trans people should not exist. Diamond wrote her first single, “I Am Her” while incarcerated in a men’s

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penitentiary in Michigan, perhaps never imagining she would record and produce a music video for her song years later (Diamond, 2016). The Black and White music video set on New York City streets gives a glimpse into her lived experiences as a formerly incarcerated Black trans woman. The moment her soprano voice sings the first lyrics, “There’s an outcast in everybody’s life, and I am her. I Am Her.” Shea Diamond directly engages with her positionality as marginalized. Although Diamond claims the pronoun of “her,” she acknowledges that the identity of a woman is fraught with exclusion from many communities. Shea Diamond’s transgender standpoint illuminates the unique oppressions she faces as a Black trans woman and highlights the consequences of anti-trans sentiment for those who do not easily pass as cisgender. Diamond’s music illustrates the hostility Black trans women experience from communities due to anti-trans ideologies that isolate them from communities.

When Diamond bellows out the chorus, “There’s an outcast in everybody’s life, and I am her,” she references the common transphobic practice of misgendering and the stigma attached to her gender identity as a trans woman. Through claiming the pronoun of *her*, Shea rejects the common practice of misgendering trans women. Misgendering, as defined by Kapusta (2016), “includes the use of gender terms that exclude transgender women from the category woman, or that hierarchize that category in a way that marginalizes transgender women,” (p. 502). Susan (Stryker, 2008) also asserts that “ignorance or misinformation about a less common way of being in the world can perpetuate harmful stereotypes and mischaracterizations” (Stryker, 2008, p. 5). Likewise, Communication scholar Gayle (Salamon, 2010), in *Assuming a Body: Transgender and Rhetorics of Materiality*, explains that “the importance of self-definition for trans people must already recognize the power of language and a name in the process of subject formation.” As discourse functions to gain and maintain power, the use of language to devalue and marginalize transgender identities is a powerful tool of domination (Hall, 2000). The practice of misgendering transgender women occurs in a variety of societal institutions and during interpersonal interactions with cisgender people. As an everyday experience, misgendering shapes how transgender people feel and evaluate their social identity and self-esteem (McLemore, 2015). Using her music as activism, Shea Diamond not only brings herself into existence but frames trans womanhood as authentic (Enke, 2012).

As the camera rushes from one location to another, it mimics the

quick process in which we formulate perceptions. The cisgender gaze as the dominant way of seeing produces a constant negotiating of gender behaviors as authentic or inauthentic, natural or unnatural, and acceptable or deviant. In the second verse, Shea Diamond knowingly sings, “Don’t look at me immediately and whisper behind my back, thinking I’m naïve. That’s my southern hospitality; tolerates more BS than even I can believe,” referencing the hegemonic gaze and the piercing voices of cisgender privilege (“I Am Her,” 2018). Cisgender privilege, much like white privilege and male privilege, often is invisible (Mock, 2014; Spade, 2015). However, the hyper-focus of the cisgender gaze on determining the gender identity of transgender folks labels them as the other. As cisgender Black women, we set the normative standard for Black womanhood. Black trans women who do not conform or pass as cisgender women in their physical appearance are often gawked at and face danger while in public places (McDonald, 2015). The cisgender gaze is most salient in the video when three Black children glare at Shea Diamond as she walks down the street; their faces immediately turn to confusion, fear, and disgust when they see her. As the kids visually witness Diamond’s embodiment of womanhood, they inadvertently begin questioning their limited understanding of gender roles and norms. These questions will be directed at the adults in their lives, Black cisgender women and men, who often are reluctant to have complex and controversial discussions with youth about gender and sexual identities that deviate from the norm. Through representing neighborhood children as the protagonist of the cisgender gaze, we are given a glimpse into the process through which cisgender privilege remains in place. The hegemonic cisgender gaze is representative of our communities’ childlike understanding of trans identities who have yet to learn a gaze rooted outside of oppression.

Shea Diamond’s “southern hospitality,” or respectability politics, is a generational survival tactic for Black women (Collins, 2006; Higginbotham, 1993). Black cis women “act like ladies” to dispel rampant myths of sexual deviance through performances of respectability. Patricia Hill Collins (2006) asserts that “by claiming respectability through their manners and morals, poor and working-class Black women might define themselves outside the parameters of prevailing racist discourse” (p. 71). Diamond’s respectability politics differ from that of cisgender Black middle-class cis women, in that her use of respectability is directed primarily at Black community members in an attempt to be protected and valued by her community. However, this tactic is not an

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adequate resistance strategy to dismantle transphobia in societal institutions, public spaces, or the Black community. According to Bettcher (2014), transphobia “systematically disadvantages trans people and promotes and rewards anti-trans sentiment” (p. 249). The collective gawking at Diamond illustrates our hegemonic gaze of trans identities and our failure as Black cisgender women to teach our children not to stare at our trans sisters who do not pass as cisgender. If we cognitively are only capable of selecting the most salient things to recall about individuals and communities, then it is imperative that we restructure the gaze through which we interpret identities. As the primary caregivers of Black children and youth, Black cisgender women are in a unique position to resist passing on generational ideologies that support patriarchy and devalue sisterhood between cis and trans women. However, many Black cisgender women fail to use their position and privilege to support their Black trans sisters.

Through her personal-is-political activism, Diamond makes salient the difficulties in organizing across differences within mainstream queer and feminist movements as well as within Black communities. Shortly after singing the line: “All that glitters isn’t gold. At least that’s what I’ve been told”, the screen cuts to people of multiple races marching together with signs that read: “Abolish Police” and “Stop Police Terror.” Protestors marching with both hands directly above their heads, with their palms open wide (hands up gesture), appear in the video referencing “Hands Up, Don’t Shoot.” The “hands up” gesture became a symbol of protest for Black Lives Matters following Michael Brown’s death in Ferguson, Michigan (Garza, 2014). A posture of surrender, the “hands up” gesture, is appropriated in anti-police brutality protests to highlight how police brutality occurs even when Black individuals are surrendering or living their everyday lives. Diamond’s assertion that things are not what they first seem asks us to look carefully at the things that divide us. Many Black cisgender women remain motionless when it is time to march for our trans sisters and remain voiceless during verbal attacks and jokes that devalue their womanhood. During these times, the gold within our formations of sisterhood and community becomes shams of glitter cascading all around us. Gender and sexual politics, such as cisgender privilege and transphobia, divide our coalition building and are “the master’s tools” (Lorde, 1984, p. 123). Our silence is violence, and without the embodied support of Black cis women, Black trans women are more susceptible to violence.

Erasure from early moments of coalition building is the catalyst for a Black feminist theoretical standpoint for critiquing monolithic notions of social constructions of race, gender, sexuality, class, and nationality (Crenshaw, 1991). For example, the Stonewall Riots of the late 1960s, held as an important event contributing to the Gay liberation and Gay Pride, was pioneered by Black transgender woman activist Marsha P. Johnson (Hunter & Robinson, 2018). However, much of the literature and media accounts of Gay liberation fails to mention Johnson and her contributions to dismantling oppression for the LGBTQ community. Marsha P. Johnson was a trans activist who spent her life walking the streets of New York in an attempt to make life better for her communities through feeding, clothing and giving resources to others needier than her (Hunter & Robinson, 2018). Johnson later went on to co-found the “Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries” with Sylvia Rivera, where they both “worked to end homelessness among young queens, trans, and gay people, organizing for space, advocacy, and survival” (Hunter & Robinson, 2018, p. 70). Diamond references Johnson in her music through her lyrics and paying homage figurately through footage of marches for liberation. As Diamond walks the streets of New York, the steps symbolize solidarity to walk the same path that Johnson and all Black trans women walk daily. Shea Diamond chooses imagery that explicitly illustrates her political allegiances. There are three protest scenes in the music video, representing police and prison abolition, anti-Black racism, and anti-transgender bias. “I Am Her” features footage from Black Lives Matter (BLM) Marches and Trans Lives Matter (TLM) protests in the music video. Each of these protests occurs separately, although the oppressions that each movement is seeking to dismantle are intertwined. The separation of each movement is counter-productive to political and social progress; as a coalition, each movement would benefit from shared resources and be better equipped to succeed.

As a transgender anthem and political statement, Diamond’s lyrics highlight the distinct ways in which cisgender people negate the authenticity of transgender identities within everyday life and political movements for social justice. Having to choose between one oppression prevents Diamond and other Black transgender women from adequately addressing their needs and desires in all of their communities. As Diamond sings in “I Am Her,” “Your ignorance leaves a hell of a stench. The aroma lingers on generations have known. Ain’t it ironic, the smarter we get, the less we understand ‘bout the simplest shit,”” (Diamond, 2018). For all the



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technological, medical, and scientific progress that we have made as a society, anti-trans ideologies remain dehumanizing to trans, queer, Black, and incarcerated individuals. Generational transphobia will end only if we as Black cisgender folks join Shea Diamond and be both visible and vocal in our activism and individual actions. “I Am Her” begins a discussion in which Diamond illustrates the ideologies that prevent her from flourishing as a Black trans woman. To undermine ideologies of transphobia, Black cisgender women must be the loudest voices asserting, “We are Sisters.” In the next section, I examine how Janet Mock performs sisterhood to provide a Black sisterhood model that adequately cares for Black cis and Black trans women.

### **My Sister’s Keeper: Intersectional and Inclusive Performances of Sisterhood**

*“Our approach to freedom need not be identical,  
but it must be intersectional and inclusive.  
It must extend beyond ourselves.”*  
Janet Mock, 2017

Janet Mock spoke at the *National Women’s March on Washington*, January 21, 2017, the day after Donald Trump was sworn in as the 45<sup>th</sup> president of the United States to highlight Mock’s commitment to standing alongside both cis and trans women in the face of extreme oppression. At the beginning of her speech, she proudly proclaims: “I stand here today as the daughter of a native Hawaiian woman and a Black veteran from Texas. I stand here as the first person in my family to go to college.” Janet Mock’s ability to stand on the stage, as a representative of trans women of color, is tied to her identity as a mixed-race Black woman. In her critical analysis of narratives of passing for mixed-race Black women, Smith (1988) asserts that “people pass primarily in order to partake of the wider opportunities available to those in power” (p. 36). Mock’s access to a platform such as the *National Women’s March on Washington* highlights the privilege of passing for transgender women, who often face disproportionate discrimination and violence in society. As a mixed-race woman, Mock’s lighter skin tone presents her as less of a threat to the status quo than darker skin trans women such as Shea Diamond. Mock (2017) utilizes her new-found class privilege and narrative of exceptionalism to work in the service of critiquing the myriad ways societal institutions of education, law, health, capitalism, and gentrification have worked together to disadvantage all people. As her sister’s keeper, Mock illustrates what it means to

show up and show out for both your cis and trans sisters.

In her speech, Mock is explicit about her political commitments that move beyond her mediated narrative of exceptionalism: “I stand here today most of all because I am my sister’s keeper. My sisters and siblings are being beaten and brutalized, neglected, and invisibilized, extinguished, and exiled.” Black cisgender and transgender women face a disproportionate amount of violence and discrimination due to our racialized gender under the Trump administration; this oppression is experienced differently by white cis and trans women (Lee, 2018). Mock’s speech highlights the material conditions of hegemonic ideologies that specifically oppress the most marginalized folks. In a world where Black trans women live in extreme poverty with incomes of less than \$10,000, frequently face discrimination in housing accommodations, health care, and legal employment, their voices should center our collaborative efforts. Outlining her vision for a sisterhood that acknowledges the difficulty of moving forward during the Trump Era. Mock (2017) declares,

And our movements, our movements require us to do more than just show up and say the right words. It requires us to break out of our comfort zones and be confrontational. It requires us to defend one another when it is difficult and dangerous. It requires us to truly see ourselves and one another.

“It” in this interaction references the idealized performances of sisterhood that trans women desperately need from their cisgender sisters. Mock’s rhetoric is direct and challenging, forcing her and her audience to grapple with how we remain comfortable in our silence and safety.

Confronting oppression is not comfortable, but it is a necessary step for our collective liberation. Mock’s comfort ended when she publically identified as a Black trans woman, rather than passing as a Black cisgender woman. Mock’s access to cisgender privilege while living stealth allowed her to “wear the clock of normality” and hide her authentic self (Mock, 2017, p. xx). Living stealth or passing is a term for blending in as cisgender and purposefully not being open about their transgender identity (Beauchamp, 2019). Janet Mock’s ability to pass as a cisgender woman provided her comfort from ignorance, judgment, and exclusion; however, it does not confront the oppression that trans

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women face daily. As a result, Janet's access to a more privileged life is at the expense of being distinct physically and remaining separate from trans women. In outing herself as a trans woman, Mock not only reclaims her roots to stand in solidarity with her communities but works to dismantle the systems that privilege her. As her sister's keeper, Janet Mock performs kinship outside of biology and *keeps* her sisters that are disadvantaged at the forefront of her performances for liberation. Mock's performance of solidarity at the *National Women's March on Washington* is a model of kinship through showing up and using her platform to advocate for the most marginalized folks in your communities.

Throughout her speech, Mock (2017) utilizes rhetoric that emphasizes body movements such as "stand," "march," "hold," and "push" to call our physical bodies into action. Mock proudly proclaims, "I stand here today because of the work of my forebears, from Sojourner to Sylvia, from Ella to Audre, from Harriet to Marsha. I stand here today, most of all, because I am my sister's keeper." Mock repeats, "I stand here" a total of five times, as she emphasizes her lineage, her political commitments, and mission for the forward progress of her sisters under the Trump administration. The repeated use of "I stand here" throughout her speech rhetorically references Mock's embodiment of remaining stagnant or moving, and subsequently remaining stagnant in accepting narratives of exceptionalism or moving away from exceptionalism. In the face of extreme oppression, collective action, rather than exceptionalism, is a formidable survivor strategy for marginalized people. Janet Mock evokes the name of her forebears, her elder siblings, as a sign of reverence for the women who paved the way for her to speak at the *Women's March on Washington*. Each woman's name that she speaks: Sojourner, Sylvia, Ella, Audre, Harriet, and Marsha are evoked without last names, with the understanding that they all descend from the same family. Mock also pays homage to her Native Hawaiian roots as her practice of speaking each woman's name mirrors formal ceremonies and traditions (Mock, 2014). As a rhetorical device in her speech at the *2017 Women's March on Washington*, the language of kinship honors her communities and generates performances that are not bound by biology or stagnant roles of a hegemonic family structure.

Historically kinship for Black and trans communities has moved beyond biological connections (Giddings, 1984; Handy & Pukui, 1950). Through deliberately using the language of *sisters* and *siblings* to denote *kinship* as a mode of collective survival, Mock

illustrates how siblings should perform solidarity through emotional, physical, and financial labor for each other. Mock's ideology of sisterhood is a verb rather than a noun and supersedes normalized ideologies of kinship structures to dismantle oppressive systems. Much like voluntary kin systems utilized by Black individuals during enslavement and queer individuals, Black sisterhood as a support system includes deliberate and intentional acts of solidarity even in the face of difficult conversations. Her speech is a blueprint of her past, present, and future commitments to her community, a script to perform until we are all free. She makes a stand to *gather* and to *move* transversely, evoking her ancestors to forge her ahead. To forge ahead, we must dismantle ideologies such as transphobia, patriarchy, respectability politics, and homophobia that separate us.

Transphobia, homophobia, and respectability politics in feminist movements and with Black communities are not a new phenomenon. In particular, Mock's reference to Audre Lorde link her intersectional identity and political commitments to those expressed in Lorde's 1988 speech "I Am Your Sister: Women Organizing Across Sexualities." Throughout her speech, Lorde (1988) provides evidence of homophobia and heterosexism within Black feminist organizations. Expressing her interest in being more than just tolerated by her Black sisters Lorde (1988) declares:

I am not your enemy. We do not have to become each other's unique experiences and insights in order to share what we have learned through our particular battles for survival as Black women. I am a Black lesbian, and I *am* your sister.

Lorde's sexual identity as a lesbian exposes the limits of a sisterhood that prioritizes heterosexual practices and systems. Lorde is an example of how the inclusion of the voices of lesbians in Black feminist spaces provides a more comprehensive understanding of Black womanhood and the inner workings of the matrix of domination. As a result, dismantling the inherent power structures in our kinships, communities, and social movements is essential to our collective liberation. To get *us* free, Janet Mock evokes the language of kinship, mirroring Lorde's rhetorical choices, in her speech to delineate a practice that forges commitments of solidarity. To consider each woman she names as kin, rather than political advocates, Janet Mock's rhetoric takes accountability for all her sisters, irrespective of their performances

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of womanhood, citizenship status, sexuality, or occupation.

As expressed in the epithet of this section, “intersectional” and “inclusive” as crucial components of Mock’s sisterhood “illuminate (instead of mute) the machinations of power” within our language use and social movements (Joseph, 2017, p. 3308). The use of intersectional and inclusive directly link Mock’s ideologies to theories and praxis of Black feminism. To extend freedom beyond ourselves, Mock advocates that our path to liberation must be intersectional and inclusive to dismantle the matrix of domination. Bearing witness to her siblings’ struggles, Janet Mock (2017) pays homage to their lives while upholding her commitment to collectively forging bonds across difference. As she emphasizes each word, Mock (2017) confidently states:

I know with surpassing certainty that my liberation is directly linked to the liberation of the undocumented trans-Latina yearning for refuge.  
The disabled student seeking unequivocal access.  
The sex worker fighting to make her living safely.

Mock deliberately confronts ideologies of exclusion and exceptionalism via referencing other women who are systemically oppressed by U.S. and state institutions. Undocumented women, women with disabilities, and women who engage in sex work are impacted disproportionately by U.S. legislation and policies. For example, during his 2016 campaign Donald Trump advocated to build a wall along the Mexican border, and while in office, he proposed a merit-based immigration selection criteria that favor applicants who earn higher wages, have a valuable skill and plan to create jobs for American citizens (Chishti & Bolter, 2019). The proposed policies disadvantage refugees, individuals from impoverished nations, and individuals without access to Western education. Mock’s use of theories of intersectionality as an ideal way to freedom and inclusive sisterhood moves closer to survival for all her cis and trans sisters. It is imperative that cisgender women learn from Janet Mock and denounce narratives of “authentic womanhood” and confront transphobia in our social movements and communities.

As emphasized in Mock’s speech, performances of kinship are a prototype for flights of liberation via collective vigilance, emotional support, the practice of concern for the welfare of one another, and mutual risk-taking. Towards the end of her speech,

Mock states that:

Collective liberation and solidarity is difficult work. It is work that will find us struggling together and struggling with one another. Just because we are oppressed does not mean that we do not ourselves fall victim to enacting the same unconscious policing, shaming, and erasing. We must return to one another with greater accountability and commitment to the work today.

Work or labor is fundamental to sisterhood and social movements, and it will always be difficult. The circumstances that led people to gather at the *2017 Women's March on Washington* compelled them into action. For Mock, that action includes working within our movements and communities to eliminate oppressive systems.

Through standing and speaking on the stage at the *National Women's March on Washington*, Mock uses her platform as a template for how to model kinship. Mock theorizes her sisterhood as an analytic, a vessel that nurtures, mentors, protects, and struggles for her sisters' continued physical and mental survival. Kinship is about surviving and struggling together through the best and worst of times. Belonging to a community brings many benefits to one's life, but it also brings many challenges and conflicts. Mock's "My Sister's Keeper" is a proclamation advocating for an "integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking" (Combahee River Collective, 1977). For far too long, hierarchical ideologies of womanhood exclude rather than include the diversity of all women. A homogenized movement or sisterhood that fails to perform labor for individuals that do not conform to dominant ideologies of family, gender, and sexuality directly contributes to violence and discrimination that trans women face. Black cisgender women must confront our unconscious and conscious rejection of trans women from Black sisterhood to resist enacting oppression. Black cisgender women must see Black trans women as we see Black cisgender women, like our sisters.

All women, cis and trans, deserve to be fully themselves within our movements and communities. Trans women are women, and without the support and acknowledgment of Black cis women, our trans sisters have less of a chance of surviving the matrix of domination. Mock's performances of sisterhood speak truth to

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power and center the plights of her marginalized sisters at the forefront of her activism. The characters and stories that unfold on POSE (2018) highlight a multitude of atrocities that trans women experience daily; with the largest casts of trans women of color in television history, POSE (2018) moves beyond the single trans character of color in a predominantly cisgender world as represented in *Orange Is the New Black* (2013) and *Star* (2016) to highlight a community of trans women of color. As Barbara Christian (1987) states, “How else have we managed to survive with such *spiritedness* the assault on our bodies, social institutions, countries, our very humanity?” (p. 52). For example, one of the lead characters on the show, Blanca Rodriguez-Evangelista, played by a mixed-race Black and Puerto Rican trans woman’s (MJ Rodriguez) storyline predominantly focuses on community building in the Ballroom scene and mothering the queer youth of color whom their cisgender families have abandoned. POSE’s (2018) focus on the Ballroom scene is a spotlight on queer family structures created to survive a world that seeks to dehumanize their identities. In working on the series POSE (2018), Mock can and does tell stories that diversify the experiences of trans womanhood and advocate for the lives of all trans women of color.

### **Conclusion: Sustaining Actions of Solidarity**

Tony Blackshaw (2010) asserts that community offers us both the possibility of “personal transcendence” and a connection to “one another through the felt presence of their shared humanity, (p. 17). Community, in this iteration, encompasses more than biological kin; community expands to include individuals who perform tasks that are traditionally carried out by biological kin (Bailey, 2013). Our community not only helps to solidify our identity but helps to support and protect our present and future identities. The support of her communities is a primary reason Janet Mock is no longer living in poverty or engaging in sex work. Many transgender individuals are not accepted in their communities, leading them to believe that their own lives do not matter (Mock, 2014). An overwhelming number of trans individuals, 41% surveyed in the 2011 National Transgender Discrimination Survey reported: “attempting suicide compared to 1.6% of the general population” (Grant et al., 2011, p. 2). The community support and resources Janet received from the Black cisgender women in her extended family and her trans sisters in Hawaii provided Mock a space to celebrate and grow into her Black trans womanhood.

Black cis and trans women's interpellation into womanhood mirrors a struggle of multiple identities, oppressions, and ideologies of being. Communication theorists Marsha Houston and Olga Davis (2001) describe this state of Black womanhood as "being simultaneously like and different from other groups" (p. 5.). Likewise, Patricia Hill Collins (1991) describes Black womanhood as "simultaneously a member of a group and yet standing outside it" (p. 207). In moments of invisibility, Black cis and trans women must recognize that our struggle is not unique to us individually, but that being a Black cis and trans woman comes with a legacy of surviving through the worst of times and celebrating our shared and individual victories. Black womanhood and Black sisterhood are not about being static; it is about witnessing how our work will transform our lives collectively. Sustained solidarity is a commitment, an action of continuous movement through everyday occurrences of cultural labor for the survival of a people and way of life. Diamond and Mock's strategy of uplifting their communities has contributed to more opportunities for Black trans women, providing a model for how Black cis women can and should show up to support our trans sisters. Sisterhood informed by a Black trans feminist perspective depends on collective resistance between Black cis and trans women.

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**Rap Music, Activism, and Surveillance  
in the Age of Black Lives Matter**

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*“Bill Clinton admitted that he had smoked marijuana at one time, insisting, though, that he did not inhale. However, acknowledged disparities in the intensity of police surveillance- as indicated by the present-day currency of the term “racial profiling” which ought to cover far more territory than “driving while black or brown” -account in part for racial and class-based disparities in arrest and imprisonment rates.”*

—Angela Y. Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?*

As Los Angeles burned in April 1992, another fire was brewing as the Hip-Hop community responded to the Rodney King beating and the failure of the judicial system to convict the officers involved. Never before in the history of music had assaults on artist’s freedom of expression been so vicious. However, politicians, retailers, religious leaders, pro-censorship crusaders, and law enforcement ramped up attacks, calling for rap artists and the companies that supported them to cease and desist. In 1992 at a fundraising dinner hosted by the Rainbow Coalition, Presidential candidate Bill Clinton publicly criticized Sista Soulja’s lyrics, referring to them as “hateful” and citing her lyrics out of context of their original meaning on the King beating and LA riots. Similarly, presidential candidate Dan Quale and political commentator Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North publicly supported a lawsuit launched by the widow of state trooper Bill Davidson, claiming that Tupac’s song “Soulja’s Story” drove 19-year-old Ronald Ray Howard to kill her husband. In addition, a national ban was called for Ice T’s song “Cop Killer,” which enraged officers enough to threaten violence and attempted legislation in Washington state aimed to categorize some rap music as “potentially harmful to children” (Thompson, 2017). Rap music is a contemporary conduit for expressing the dispositions and views of the powerless. By speaking truth to power, rappers play out transpositions of class hierarchies, share different narratives of interactions with police and the learning process of managing violence, and they construct images of contact with dominant groups. In a push to delegitimize and undermine rap music, it has been labeled as violent and treated with suspicion, reflecting Blacks’ mistreatment by law enforcement.

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Today, many rap artists are being arrested and imprisoned using laws such as the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act (RICO), a federal law designed to combat organized crime in the United States. Rap artists Ackquille “Bobby Smurda” Pollard, McKinley “Mac” Phipps, Adetokunbo “Trapstar Toxic” Ajibola, Daniel “Tekashi 69” Hernandez, Rayshawn “YFN Luci” Bennett, Caswell “Casanova” Senior, and Kentrell “NBA YoungBoy” DeSean were all arrested and charged with RICO or organized crime mirrored crimes. In each case, rap lyrics and informants are used as probable cause to arrest or convict these artists. In the case of Ackquille Pollard, prosecutors examined his lyrics and implicated him and his two co-defendants in a murder and attempted murder. “His viral hit song, “Hot N\*ggas, (2014)” includes lyrics stating, “and Monte keep it on him, he done dropped n\*ggas” and “Mitch caught a body about a week ago.” Both of Pollard’s co-defendants were sentenced to a total of 130 years on the conspiracy charges, and the Hot N\*ggas lyrics definitely played a role in the conviction. In many of these cases and as Ackquille Pollard argues on his 2020 appearance on NPR’s Louder Than A Riot show, “he notes, “it’s bullshit. That’s why they always put conspiracy on you. So, if they can’t get you on one, they can get you on one charge. And when they get you on one, they going to give you the max. That’s what they do. So they put a whole bunch of bullshit charges, so you could just blow to at least one. And they give you the max” (Madden & Carmichael, 2020).

On February 25, 2021, rap artist Ackquille Jean Pollard (Bobby Smurda) was released from prison after serving 6-years for conspiracy and weapons possession (Kaufman, 2021, p. 1). Pollard’s release was long-awaited by friends, family, and fans who watched his vibrant music career abruptly end. Coincidentally, Pollard was arrested outside Quad Studios on the twentieth anniversary of the notorious 1994 shooting of the late rapper Tupac Shakur. The Shakur shooting sparked the East Coast vs. West Coast Hip-Hop rivalry resulting in the deaths of Christopher Notorious B.I.G Wallace (1997) and Tupac Shakur (1996). The alleged East vs. West Hip-Hop rivalry that ensued would have dire consequences that moved beyond the deaths of these two Hip-Hop legends. For example, Pollard’s arrest and charges of being a leader in GS9 — or G Stone Crips — a violent street gang in East Flatbush, Brooklyn are connected to the rivalry that took place two decades prior. As noted in a New York Times report, “evidence compiled by law enforcement alleged that GS9 was responsible for one murder and several shootings. Fourteen other

reputed members of the gang were arrested in sweeps that day or later in the month” (McKinley, 2016). Other charges alleged in the 101-indictment stated GS9 murdered a rival gang member, came close to killing an innocent bystander during a drive-by shooting, and was also involved in the distribution of drugs and shooting outside a Miami nightclub.

In Pollard’s case and many others, there was no physical evidence connecting artists directly to a crime. In cases like Pollards, it is usually someone loosely connected to the star rapper or affiliate committing the crimes and law enforcement love to target the star. As his lawyer Howard Greenberg noted in his reasoning for taking the case, “everything to do with his arrest was suspect. So he’s 19. He just signed on for a million - whatever it is - with a record company. The scumbags, who are hangers-on, in and around him did bad things that were all documented.” And he was an easy target for law enforcement. Conspiracy charges allow prosecutors to use a person’s environment against them. In other words, as Bridget G. Brennan, New York City’s Special Narcotics Prosecutor in Pollard’s case, stated, “what’s important about a conspiracy charge, certainly to a jury or to a judge, is that it allows you to put people in the context so that it’s not merely possessing a weapon” (Madden & Carmichael, 2020).

In regard to weaponizing one’s ‘environment’ against them, hip-hop culture is an art form born out of the personal and social experiences of Black people who have lived through racialized policing, racism, exclusion, disproportionate imprisonment, and significant disparities of civil and human rights. The environment as a sense of place, home, refuge, and community becomes a key element of any rap artist. In other contexts, environment can be realized more generally, including the whole community, comprising the whole city where one’s identity is largely invested in, including one’s affiliation and identification with other social identities from that neighborhood. As Murray Foreman suggests, “In hip-hop and rap, the naming of streets and neighborhood locales, cities, and regions of production activity reflects this spatial pattern with impressive consistency. This approach to place and scale returns us to the crucial notion that social relations produce and reproduce our comprehension of spatiality” (Foreman, 2002, p.26). In this sense, it is impossible to understand one’s space or environment that can be constructed in the absence of social processes that poverty, violence, resistance, racism and class difference; in hind side, it is these conditions in which hip-hop culture emerges from and eventually shapes our affiliations

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to sites of resistance. In the case of Bobby Smurda, affiliations and ties to his neighborhood became a central argument for the leading prosecutor.

Regarding Pollard's alleged participation, Brennan suggested that law enforcement caught Pollard with guns and ammunition for GS9's enduring beef. While Pollard was not directly involved in the shootings of Bryan Antoine or innocent onlookers, law enforcement considered him the driving force and implicated in him in those shootings. In the end, Pollard watched two of his close associates get sentenced to life sentences. Pollard recalls, "A-Rod got 53. Rasha got 98. How the law works is when you go to trial and stuff like that, they usually paint pictures. They don't go by the law. Motherfucker talking about some 30 years. I said, 30 years? What the fuck? You talking about 30 years for what? These people crazy" (Madden & Carmichael, 2020). After consideration, his legal team recommended he plead guilty in exchange for a seven-year sentence.

In this article, I argue that the increased surveillance of Rap artists is being used as a pretext to a continuous presence in Black communities where activism is taking place. I define surveillance as a system of technologies that work for the purpose of gathering information about an individual, organization or corporation for the purpose of gaining a strategic upper hand. In addition, surveillance means gathering information with the intention to thwart a criminal act/s or gain a military advantage over an enemy. Surveillance then means to gather information undetected and unnoticed for long periods of time utilizing people and machines as the witness to things that would normally go unseen. Although this definition of surveillance provides some context, it does not go far enough to explain how the "racialization of surveillance" shifts the traditional ways we view the impacts on marginalized groups or, specifically, the targeting of rap artists. In this vein, I will move forward with Simone's Brown's interpretation of "*dark sousveillance*," in which she contends, is an imaginative place from which to mobilize a critique of racializing surveillance, a critique that takes form in anti-surveillance, countersurveillance, and other freedom practices." (Brown, 2015, p. 19). 'Dark sousveillance,' then, exist in a paradox. This reimagined definition helps me situate racialized forms of surveillance within the Hip-Hop community.

### **The Surveillance of Black Popular Culture: Rap Music Under Siege**

Surveillance is being weaponized as a means to arrests Black artists on trumped-up charges. In the age of Black Lives Matter, police surveillance of Black lives reveals the threat technology presents to democracy. As Dunbar (2017) observes, “in courtrooms across the U.S., defendant-authored rap lyrics are being introduced as incriminating evidence. Prosecutors describe these lyrics as an admission of guilt (p. ix).” Surveillance has a deep-rooted legacy in Hip-Hop and has become more intensified in recent years. In response, rap artists and community activists are stepping forward to challenge the ways in which rap lyrics are being used as evidence in criminal investigations. For instance, in April 2012, Jamal Knox was charged with multiple offenses after a routine traffic stop. While charges against Knox were pending, he “wrote and recorded a rap song entitled ‘Fuck the Police’” (Review, 2018, p. 1558). The “F\*ck the Police” lyrics refer to murdering snitches and specifically mentions two of the arresting officers. The Pennsylvania Supreme Court argued that his lyrics contained threats that were not protected by free speech, and Knox was convicted.

In 2019, Chance the Rapper, Killer Mike, Meek Mill & more filed a Supreme Court brief based on Mayhem Mal’s rap 2012 arrest and trial, arguing, “Lyrics in music are protected as free speech. However, the notion that this bedrock principle would depend on the genre is an alarming one, especially for those in the world of rap and Hip-Hop” (Conversations In Advocacy #48). The brief informs Supreme Court Justices, whose ages range from the 50s to 80s, about the artistry involved in Hip-Hop music. Further, “The brief encourages the court to hear the appeal of Knox based on his first amendment rights, while also working “to put rap music, which is a heavily stigmatized form of expression associated with negative stereotypes and often subject to misinterpretation, in the context of the history and conventions of the genre” (Hertweck, 2019, p. 1). Unfortunately, the Pennsylvania state Supreme Court declined to hear Knox’s case and upheld his 2013 conviction. The court’s chief justice cited in his decision, the song “is of a different nature and quality” because it doesn’t “include political, social, or academic commentary, nor are they facially satirical or ironic. Rather, they primarily portray violence toward the police” (de Vogue, 2019, p. 1). The Supreme Court’s decision declining to hear Knox’s case demonstrates longstanding intolerance and misinterpretation of the music gen-



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re. In addition, the judges' decision to decline Knox's case highlights, as Angela Davis notes in *Are Prisons Obsolete*, (Davis, 2003),

an intensity of police surveillance-as indicated by the present-day currency of the term "racial profiling," which ought to cover far more territory than "driving while Black or Brown. Consequently, if we consider taking the penalties of a racist and class-biased judicial system seriously, we will conclude that immense numbers of people are in prison simply because of their Black skin. (p.112)

The challenge to surveillance and violation of free speech in Hip-Hop music is not a new concept. As a backdrop for social movements, Hip-Hop has always challenged the status quo. Groups like Public Enemy, Sister Souljah, and NWA shattered the tinted windows that police brutality hid behind. In contemporary popular culture, rap music more directly than any other form of Black cultural artistry, conveys the break between Black inner-city lived experience and prevailing, "authentic" (e.g., class, race, political) ideologies concerning equal opportunity and systemic violence. In other words, rap provides a stark contrast to the narrative of 'living a wholesome American dream and details the harsh reality of a system that outcasts citizens because of the color of their skin. Over the past four decades, Hip Hop artists have also highlighted the pressure of constant surveillance. Songs such as *F\*ck Tha Police* by NWA (1988) and Ice-T's *Cop Killer* (1992) brought to light the pressures of constantly being harassed, brutalized, and surveilled by law enforcement. More recently, rap artists, J-Cole, Bun B, Trae tha Truth, Nick Cannon, Mysonne, Chance the Rapper, Meek Mill, YG, and TI, are a few of many who took to marching in the streets or writing protest songs in response to the 2020 deaths of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd.

In addition, scholars such as Erik Neilson, Tricia Rose, and Simone Browne all agree that the notion of always being surveilled shapes Hip-Hop itself. In the U.S. historically, Black bodies have constantly been monitored and managed as currency, property, or an imminent threat, considering enslaved Blacks, Black revolutionaries, incarcerated Blacks, Black artists, intellectuals, and activists. In *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness*, Browne (2015) contends:

the FBI kept files on Frantz Fanon, James Baldwin, Lorraine Hansberry, Stokely Carmichael, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, the Freedom Riders, Martin Luther King Jr., Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam, Claudia Jones, Malcolm X, Fred Hampton, William Edward Burghart DuBois, Fannie Lou Hamer, Cyril Lionel Robert James, Mumia Abu-Jamal, Angela Yvonne Davis, Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, Josephine Baker, Billie Holiday, the Black Panther Party, Kathleen Cleaver, Cassius Clay, Jimi Hendrix, and Russell Jones aka Ol' Dirty Bastard of the Wu-Tang Clan (p.3).

Chiefly of this group, Frantz Fanon laid in his death bed hysterical of the thought of being surveilled by the FBI. Fanon's observations of constantly being surveilled reveal the embodied impacts and consequences of surveillance practices and their threat to anyone who attempts to address racially oppressive governing systems. Similar to Fanon laying on his death bed, 2Pac's (aka Makaveli) final album *The Don Killuminati* (1996): *The 7 Day Theory* and the Notorious B.I.G.'s *Life After Death* (1997) carried with them staggering revelations with songs such as *To Live & Die in L.A.* (2Pac) and *My Downfall* (B.I.G.) that allude to their final days of being surveilled by law enforcement, as well as their enemies..

In *The New Jim Crow*, Michelle Alexander describes the "rebirth of caste" and "the new normal, the new racial equilibrium" where Black men are subjected to racial profiling and excluded from access to employment, public assistance, health care, jury duty, and other basic civil needs or rights. Alexander (2012) defines "*The New Jim Crow* as a racial caste system in which Black men and women are denied access to class and social citizenry through legal and political stigmata." (p.3). In this new style of Jim Crow era politics, discrimination is perfectly legal because they possess a criminal record. Several prominent examples of how the new Jim Crow functioned within the Hip-Hop community took place in the years preceding the development of the Hip-Hop Task Force. First was the 1992 arrest of 17-year-old Sacramento rap artist Aerae "X-Raided" Brown, who, along with three other co-defendants, was charged with the murder of Patricia Harris. The killing was said to be in response to an ongoing gang rivalry between Brown's fellow gang-affiliates and the two

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sons of Harris. During the court proceedings, the Judge allowed the lyrics to Brown's first album *Psycho Active* to be used as evidence by the prosecution. Prosecuting attorney Pete Harned argued that Brown's lyrics were a precursor to the murder of Patricia Harris. The album recorded in 1990 and then released in 1992 predated the murder of Harris by almost two years; however, this did not stop the prosecution from claiming Brown's lyrics were an admission to the crime. Harned expressed that when Brown rapped, he would be "kicking down doors" and "killin' mommas" his fate was sealed, and he was sure to get a conviction. It was clear from the outset of Brown's trial that it was not just about Brown's alleged involvement in the shooting but also his rap lyrics. Brown claimed his innocence and never testified during the trial. As the suspected ringleader, Brown was eventually sentenced to 31-years in prison. The irony of Brown's case is that the lyrics used as evidence to convict Brown in 1992 were written by Kevin Danell Mann (Brotha Lynch Hung), who signed Brown to his record label.

In *Can't C Me: Surveillance and Rap Music*, Eric Neilson presents a notable argument suggesting that Hip-Hop/Rap culture has always been influenced by surveillance. Neilson contends, "surveillance has played a crucial role in the emergence of Hip-Hop in general and rap in particular" (Neilson, 2010, p. 1254). Through an analysis of 2Pac's song *Can't C Me*, Neilson draws his readers towards various examples of the enduring distrust Hip-Hop musicians have had for law enforcement and how countless rap songs have noted the watchful eye of the law. More specifically, Neilson highlights *Can't C Me* as one of the most prolific, arguing, the album *All Eyez on Me* in which *Can't C Me* was housed, demonstrates the tension of a returned gaze of being surveilled in several ways. Neilson argues that the spelling/ re-spelling, call-and-response, sampling, multiple personae (Tupac-2pac-Makaveli) utilized by Shakur are all means in which the intersection of presence and absence, along with visibility and invisibility, occurs throughout *All Eyez on Me*, giving lyrical expression to the often-hidden tension between the two that has always defined rap music and its awareness of being surveilled. Neilson concludes in his analysis that he has only captured a small portion of the growing tension between rap music and surveillance; "he also notes that this is an area that is fertile ground for more research and inquiry. Not only is there considerably more to be said about each of the features enumerated here, but when rap is seen through the critical lens of surveillance, several other prominent characteristics emerge that are inextricably

linked to” (Nielson, 2010, p. 1269).

In *The Hood Comes First: Race, Space and Place in Rap and Hip-Hop*, Murray Foreman’s extraordinary work examines the distinct cultural relevancy, racialized difference, and special position Hip-Hop culture has possessed in the 20th-century world of popular culture. Foreman (2020) contends, “the unique position that rap music holds, inscribe a racial and special economy of meanings and values onto the broadcast spectrum in what can be regarded as the segregation of the airwaves” (p. xvii). During the 1980s, 1990s, and present Hip-Hop has always been a soundtrack of “The Struggle” in challenging police violence against Black and Brown communities. Songs performed/written by N.W.A’s “*F\*ck tha Police*” (1988), Main Source’s “*Just a Friendly Game of Baseball*” (1991), KRS-One’s “*Sound of da Police*” (1993) and more recently, as Patrick (2020) explains, “LL Cool J’s “*#BlackLivesMatter Freestyle*,” for instance, graphically details Floyd’s choking death by Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin, while “*Captured on an iPhone*,” by super-producer Dre (of Cool & Dre). These songs illuminate historical moments of resistance such as the 1960’s Watts Riots; the 1990’s Los Angeles Riots; Los Angeles gangs and the emergence of Hip-Hop in the 1970s as “official” politics; the recent deaths of George Floyd, Breanna Taylor and many others; and the fight over vast resources that are influenced, distributed and designated by the State. As Lester K. Spence observes, “we too, can take songs like ‘*Fuck Da Police*’ and examine them as political critiques against the growing surveillance, role police play in the expansion of the American prison industrial complex.” (Spence, 2011, p. 2). What Spence’s argument tells us about rap music, is that although it is a daunting task to look past the unlimited misogyny, demeaning of Black women, reproduction of violence and reaffirmation of hegemonic norms, we may want to look deeper into rap’s political importance.

Two texts pinpointed the targeted and systematic components of surveillance that have led to the detainment and imprisonment of Black rap artists. While these texts do not specifically critique the larger implications of surveillance, they do collectively provide dates, timelines and, more importantly, the intentions behind the surveillance of rap artists. Derrick Parker and Matt Diehl’s book *Notorious C.O.P.* (2006) and Don Sikorski’s documentary *Rap Sheet: Hip-Hop and The Cops* (2006) both provide primary and secondary accounts of the creation of the Hip-Hop Task Force, orders from government officials to follow rap artists, file

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trumped-up charges, and the court cases that ensue. Derrick Parker is credited with creating the Hip-Hop Task Force and compiling the notorious Black binder that was distributed to law enforcement agencies across the U.S. The Black binder consisted of photos, arrest records, names, social security numbers, birthdates, hangouts, records company affiliation, home addresses, and possible gang ties of the biggest names in the rap industry. The growing threat of surveillance includes: the monitoring of social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram, citizen reporting, which is promoted with slogans like “See Something, Say Something,” anonymous crime reporting tools online, red- light traffic cameras, extended periods of probation, ankle monitoring, crime prediction technology, and the GPS tracking systems on cell phones. Journalist Davey D was among the first to bring the use of surveillance by law enforcement to arrest rap artists to light in 2004. Davey D (2004) suggests that “the thing is, the truth of the matter is that the surveillance of Black men and the surveillance of Hip-Hop artists specifically is just a new name for the war on drugs; it is a new name for COINTELPRO,” which is an acronym for Counter Intelligence Program. His assertion suggests that surveillance is utilized by law enforcement to maintain a constant presence in Black communities. According to the 9/11 Commission Final Report, Since President George W. Bush’s administration took office between 2001-2004, the number of secret surveillance warrants sought by the FBI increased 85 percent.

### **All Eyez on Me: My Mind is Playing Tricks on Me, Or Not?**

More than any other rap artist in the history of rap music, Tupac Shakur was obsessed with the idea of being surveilled by law enforcement. Although conflicted at times, Shakur was one of the most influential theorists, artists, activists, and key figures targeted by the FBI and other law enforcement agencies. This section is not an essay about Shakur, but it critically analyzes his role as the bridge between free speech and surveillance in the rap industry. Specifically, the *East Coast-West Coast Hip Hop* rivalry that led to the formation of the *Hip-Hop Task Force* and eventually the “Hip-Hop to prison pipeline.” One could argue that Tupac’s family legacy of Black Panther revolutionaries such as his mother Afeni Shakur, stepfather, Mutulu Shakur and aunt and godmother Assata Shakur made him an easy target for government agencies. Tupac’s outspoken distaste for police brutality, government corruption, U.S. involvement in worldwide military campaigns, mass incarceration, poverty and racist policymakers also did not

help clear his reputation as a threat to the U.S. State.

As Erik Nielson (2010) asserts, “in particular the song “*Can’t C Me*” “embodies this tension in several ways, both structurally and lyrically; beyond Shakur, the rap community has voiced a keen awareness of the U.S. as a surveillance state, particularly the monitoring of Black bodies” (p. 1259). For example, on their controversial song, *Louder Than a Bomb*, debuting on the *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back* (1998), Public Enemy proclaimed, “So I care where you at, Black. And at home I got a call from Tony Rome. The FBI was tappin’ my telephone. I never live alone; I never walk alone.” In 1997 The Firm feat. Dr. Dre - released “*Phone Tap*,” which explicitly highlights the growing concern of being tracked through cellphone and satellite technology, government informants, surveillance cameras, FBI stakeouts, canvassing, listening devices, and interrogation tactics. More recently, rapper 2 Chainz’s (2013) release of *Fedz Watching* discusses coming to terms with being constantly watched. The culmination of these artists being surveilled comes with the territory. In fact, as I have argued and others such as Erik Nielson and Patricia Rose, the Hip-Hop community has been deeply influenced by surveillance.

Today and much like the Hip-Hop forbearers before them, activists, and artists such as Lil Baby, Kendrick Lamar, H.E.R, Anderson Paak are using their voices to challenge the current state of policing in the United States. The recent killings of Manuel Ellis (2020), Breanna Taylor (2020), Charleena Lyles (2017), and George Floyd (2020) have sparked international outrage, and grave concern of a “shoot first, ask questions later” mentality in police departments across the United States. In calls to “Defund the Police,” people are concerned with the rapid militarization of police departments and enhanced capabilities to surveillance activists’ groups such as *#Blacklivesmatter*. Some activists/artists such as the ACLU (2021, p. 1) have called for the abolishment of police departments altogether, arguing that “our government’s shameful practice of using surveillance as a weapon against racial justice activism was wrong in the past and has no place in our present.” In her song titled *This Is Not A Drill* (2013), Chicago rapper and police abolition activist Jessica Disu (also known as FM Supreme) has publicly called for the abolishment of police. Yet, this targeting of Black leaders and activists continues today, with more advanced technology and updated methods. Developing state-powered surveillance as a reaction to democratic protest from rap artists, Black organizations, and activists sets a danger-

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ous precedent for the 21st century and future generations. As highlighted by the ACLU in 2020, the infringement on free speech and lawful assembly is especially true in the case of Black Lives Matter, which provided a purported indication of US law enforcement organizations' intrusion by white supremacist groups. One prominent example of the attack on free speech and the right to peaceful protests is Florida Governor Ron DeSantis' proposal of the anti-protest bill (HB 1/SB 484), which states "any person who participates in a peaceful protest that turns violent (through no fault of their own) could be arrested and charged with a third-degree felony" (Gross & Azis, 2021). If convicted, a protestor could lose their right to vote and be incarcerated for up to five years for attending a protest where some violence took place. This hazardous bill provides police power to target free speech and protestors, contributing to systemic violence that will have long-lasting impacts on freedom and assembly.

In the end, this type of legislation and present state of surveillance allows Black communities to be targeted with technology such as PredPol (The Predictive Policing Program), which predetermines where possible crimes might take place and allow law enforcement to surveil those locations without warrants or as Jon Fasman highlights, "persistent surveillance drones which are usually dispatched to high crime areas by a private corporation." These few examples are just scratching the surface of how this technology is and can be utilized. As highlighted in the cases of Ackquille Jean Pollard (Bobby Smurda), Tupac Shakur, Shawn Thomas, Jamal Knox (Mayhem Mal), and Anerae Brown (X-Raided), the push to silence Black voices has been an ongoing process that continues to grow in its complexity. There needs to be more transparency on how various forms of surveillance are being used. For instance, technology such as the Stingray allows law enforcement agencies to collect and store cell phone data and decode text messages. As Fasman notes, "Stingrays are devices that mimic cellphone towers, tricking all the phones in an area into connecting to them rather than the actual towers" (Fasman, 2021, p. 24). The Stingray allows local law enforcement to single out particular subscribers and monitor their movements without search warrants. The government does not regulate the Stingray, PredPol, and persistent surveillance drones. In turn, this technology lives in a gray area of the law. This information is being collected; however, law enforcement does not have to disclose the reasoning for collecting this information. The fight for justice in the age of Black Lives Matter is in grave danger if this kind of surveillance continues to expand unchecked. Although the prima-

ry focus of this analysis is on the surveillance of Black Lives, this technology is a threat to all of our democracies.

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**Black. Rage. Matters: Black Rage Praxis  
in Black Women's Activism**

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On Friday, July 10, 2015, a Black woman's voice was stifled and her body battered during an unauthorized, unsanctioned traffic stop by a relentless state trooper in Hampstead, Texas. During this traffic stop, state trooper Brian Encinia seized civil rights activist Sandra Bland from her vehicle, verbally demoralized her, and, as observed in video footage from a lone bystander, slammed her onto the ground while he planted his knee on her back, ignoring her cries of pain and anger. "Get out of the car!" he hollers after she demands to know why she is being apprehended. He then threatens her as he brandishes his taser: "I will light you up!" Forced out of her vehicle, cuffed, and body slammed by this unruly white officer, the origins of her screams of pain are apparent in the video. Her anger, however, which slowly builds and fortifies her resistance to the excessive force exerted for this minor traffic violation, seems to derive from a more complex station which not only connects to her singular dehumanizing interaction with this overzealous state trooper, but to her frustrations with systems of oppression that have, once again, accosted her, a Black woman in America. "You doing all of this for a failure to signal!" Bland says irate and incredulous as the officer continues to berate and assault her. Sandra Bland's lived reality epitomized the intersections of oppression that Black women in America have experienced since they were kidnapped from their native African countries and forced to endure dehumanizing labor, traumatizing sexual exploitation, and unbridled physical brutality under the system of American slavery. These systems of patriarchy and white supremacy continue to plague Black women in contemporary society in implicit and explicit ways that Sandra Bland, and other Black women, viscerally experience as they navigate their lives in American society. Whether through economic disenfranchisement in the workforce, which prevents Black women from upward mobility, or blatant systemic policies that hinder Black women from protecting themselves and their families from violence and discrimination in white spaces, systemic oppression has become a tragic mainstay in Black women's lived realities.

Black women intellectuals, theorists, and philosophers have codified the unique vulnerabilities of Black women in America who

are often oppressed because of their social, cultural, and political identities which are intrinsic to their race, gender, and class orientation in American society (hooks, 1984; Crenshaw, 1992). Kimberle Crenshaw (1992), who coined the term “intersectionality,” argues for a reconsideration of the positionality of Black women in America when she posits:

Women of color are differently situated in the economic, social, and political worlds...Because women of color experience racism in ways not always the same as those experienced by men of color, and sexism in ways not always parallel to experiences of white women, dominant conception of antiracism and feminism are limited, even on their own terms (p. 1250).

Brittney Cooper (2018) further elucidates the ramifications of intersectionality when she defines it as, “...the idea that we [Black women] are all integrally formed and multiply impacted by the different ways that systems of white supremacy, capitalism, and patriarchy affect our lives...” (p. 99). These intersections are especially evident in public spaces outside of the Black home and Black community, as is seen in Sandra Bland’s violent encounter with officer Encinia. Bland was arrested near the campus of Prairie View A & M University, which was her alma mater and her future place of employment. She had travelled from Chicago specifically for a job opportunity on the historically Black college campus. However, even though she was mere minutes from her alma mater and had a claim to be in that space at that time, her accessibility to safety, upward mobility, and economic stability were stolen specifically because Black women in America are not afforded the freedom to safely traverse public spaces in the same way as white society. Her vulnerability emerged from her positionality of being Black in a society grounded in anti-Black sentiments, of being a woman in a society dominated by misogyny, and of being underemployed in a society fueled by class hierarchy. Bland’s encounter with Encinia illuminates how Black women’s converging identities are tragically confined by white authority figures who are given political, legal, and cultural power to police the Black female body in public spaces. The stark realities of these strictures in mobility for Black women have pervasively stilted their subjectivity in American society even as Black women have viscerally challenged them. Activist and educator Rosa Parks’ refusal to give up her seat to a white passenger in Montgomery, Alabama in 1955 qualified as

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civil disobedience because Jim Crow laws demanded that the state dictate the physical mobility of Black bodies in ways that affirmed and elevated white supremacy, while divesting Black people of the agency to traverse the “free state” in similar ways as white people. This injustice was also echoed in the less well-known case of activist Claudette Colvin, the fifteen-year-old who also refused to give up her seat on a Montgomery, Alabama bus in 1955 and was promptly arrested. Parks’, Colvin’s, and Bland’s cases point to Black women activists’ difficulty to reclaim bodily subjectivity and agency in American society through traditional means of activism in contemporary society because their physical mobility has been historically dictated by codes and laws that reify them as second-class citizens. This phenomenon necessitates a praxis of activism that both affirms the subjectivity of Black women, while it also effectively resists the multilayered systems of oppression which have historically devalued them and limited their physical mobility in American society. This praxis is not meant to diminish the work already done by Parks and Colvin, instead, it is meant to further elucidate ways to build upon their legacy for contemporary American society. This type of praxis, which I later argue is founded on a distinct form of Black Rage, had already begun to burgeon in Bland’s persona as a public activist who was tragically familiar with multiple forms of oppression.

These multilayered systems of oppression are painfully evident in Bland’s life according to the documentary *Say Her Name: The Life and Death of Sandra Bland* which chronicles her activism in the face of racism, sexism, and socioeconomic disenfranchisement. In the midst of interviews from family, friends, and supporters, Bland’s vlog “Sandy Speaks” is heavily featured throughout the documentary and it foregrounds her resistance and perseverance against systems that have historically oppressed and silenced Black women. Bland began her vlog just a mere six months before her tragic death in 2015, and she anchors each video entry with messages of Black empowerment and Black cultural pride. She also emphasizes the importance of educating Black and white “brothers and sisters” about such controversial issues as Black on Black crime, police brutality, and the detrimental influence of racism on young children. In one particularly compelling “Sandy Speaks” entry featured in the documentary, she directly addresses the camera, bare faced with a Black tank top outlining her body, unadorned and animated, her light ebony skin sharp against the white background behind her. Bland gives history to her early life as the only Black girl in all white spaces,

which forced her to “learn how to deal with white people,” an experience that echoes the consistent realities of W.E.B. Du Bois’s “double consciousness” in Black American’s lived realities (p. 2). As she revisits that particularly difficult time in her adolescence, a picture of her as the lone Black girl on an all-white cheerleading squad overlays her message. This image evokes the “two-ness” conceptualized in Du Bois’s seminal text *The Souls of Black Folks*. Du Bois (1994) posits, “It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (p. 2). Bland illuminates this double consciousness or, more aptly, the often-fragmented identity formations that Black women endure as they negotiate their gendered Blackness in a world that primarily values characteristics customary to white femininity. In Bland’s articulation of “difference” and “otherness” it becomes evident that her form of activism acts as a counter discourse to socially and culturally ingrained narratives that reify social and racial hierarchies and dictate the parameters of Black people’s lived experiences in America. Black women especially have often been denigrated by detrimental narratives used to undermine and disempower them. One of the most enduring images of Black women is the ubiquitous “angry Black woman” trope which has vilified Black women’s agency in social, political, and cultural spheres in American society. Bland establishes the foundations for a Black Rage praxis that reconciles the fissures that inevitably emerge from the realities of double consciousness while also challenging the validity of “controlling images,” as Patricia Hill Collins defines them (p. 68), that stifle Black women’s identity. Instead of passively acquiescing to the fallacy of Black inferiority which has been founded on projections of “otherness,” Bland challenges the foundations of these mythologies which are founded on white supremacy and racism. Further, she affirms Black identity by creating a space for redefinitions of Blackness from her perspective as a Black activist and from the perspective of her Black audience who may seek other iterations of their Blackness which affirm their position in society.

In her vlog, Bland directly addresses racism by way of challenging “All Lives Matters,” a mantra founded on white supremacy and white privilege which has often been chanted as a means to undermine the valid activism of the #blacklivesmatter movement. “I am not a racist,” she says, “Being a Black person in America is hard...And we can’t help but get pissed. The news that we’ve seen as of late, you can stand there, surrender to the cops, and

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still be killed” (Bland, 2018). Bland buttresses her challenge to systemic oppression, white supremacy, and police brutality on being “pissed,” which she presents as a valid response to the intersectional oppressions that she experiences in American society. An American colloquial slang term, “pissed” translates to immense anger and annoyance, emotions that parallel the unnerving rage that many Black people feel as they encounter persistent dehumanizing treatment as a result of white supremacist capitalist patriarchy. Indeed, James Baldwin famously said, “To be a Negro in this country and to be relatively conscious is to be in a state of rage almost, almost all of the time...” (Thepostarchive, 2016). Bland’s unflinching embrace of rage in her “Sandy Speaks” blogs signifies two profound realities that have shaped the Black Lives Matter movement in connection to Black women activists in contemporary society: first, Black women civil rights leaders have founded their activism on a transformative, constructive rage that humanizes Black people while effecting systemic change that values Black lives and Black experiences; second, Black women civil rights leaders have executed rage to reconstruct Black womanhood in terms that validate Black women’s voices and identities in opposition to white supremacist capitalist patriarchy in mainstream white society and misogynoir in patriarchal Black communities.

I position activism that centers rage as a valid premise for dismantling systems of oppression as a distinct mode of resistance that Black women have embraced and transcended in order to carve a pathway into the Black male dominated sphere of civil rights leadership. This type of activism, which I term Black Rage, fortified Sandra Bland’s presence in the Black Lives Matter movement in a way that had not been previously accomplished for any other Black woman in the span of the Black Lives Matter movement history, a fact that testifies to the patriarchal leanings of Black trauma narratives in the Black community. The Black Lives Matter movement was founded in order to commemorate and humanize the victims of senseless police brutality by saying their names. As activists say the names of police brutality victims such as Trayvon Martin, Philando Castille, Tamir Rice, and Michael Brown, their lives, experiences, and humanity are validated. The unfortunate reality of the movement is that the names of female victims are quickly disremembered and disregarded. Bland is a celebrated exception because she is the first Black woman victim of police brutality whose name was solidified in the movement as a life that warranted value, attention, and commemoration. As reverend and activist Hannah Bonner notes,

“When Sandra died, we had not seen a woman’s name have that staying power that we had seen in Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Trayvon Martin. Women had died, but we had not continued to say their names” (Davis & Heilbroner, 2018). Bland’s unflinching activism, which was founded on a form of Black Rage, is one of the primary reasons that her name has become synonymous with radical change in the Black Lives Matter movement. Tragically, Bland’s illuminating rage was extinguished just three days after she was arrested by state trooper Encinia. On Friday, July 10, 2015, after being confined in the Waller County Jail in Hampstead Texas, Bland was found in the early morning hours hanging from a noosed garbage bag that was affixed to a jail partition. Despite a barrage of unanswered questions and theories of foul play from the public and Black Lives Matter members, Bland’s death was ruled a suicide. In an ironic and harrowing shift of events, the activist became the victim of social injustice and police brutality. However, her legacy and her name echoes throughout the movement as her gendered, transformative rage provides a nuanced perspective of the empowering, constructive force of Black Rage in the Black Lives Matter movement.

Black Rage as a concept directly challenges the cultural and systematic silencing of Black women which has established and reinforced their marginalized status in American society. Black women’s voices are pervasively silenced by mainstream narratives which prioritize white patriarchal voices as universally superior and valid in constructions of history, education, and social and cultural policies. These rigid constructs are often reinforced by policies and codes that oppress Black women and limit their accessibility to resources that would allow them to effectively navigate structures that could potentially elevate their marginalized status in American culture. This phenomenon is evident even in political spheres that purportedly challenge gender oppression on behalf of Black women. For instance, though mainstream feminist ideologies supposedly champion gender equality on behalf of all women, historically, feminist leaders have only given voice and agency to middle- and upper-class white women as they advocate for corporate accessibility, equal pay, reproductive rights, and domestic flexibility (hooks, 1984). Though warranted, these gender specific feminist demands have not traditionally included the unique vulnerabilities of Black women in a white supremacist capitalist patriarchal society.

The convergence of race, class, and gender oppressions that mark the realities of Black women’s lives must also consider so-



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cioeconomic disenfranchisement, labor inequalities in the domestic sphere and white dominated workforce, and multifaceted misogyny from both the white community and black community. Indeed, one of the pervasive struggles evident in Sandra Bland's life that limited her accessibilities to safety and economic resources was her constant struggle to maintain steady employment as an educated, Black woman in America. In *Say Her Name* her good friend and youth minister recalls Sandra's constant frustration with not finding gainful employment as an educated Black woman, He says of her struggle, "You spend four years at a university and racked up all this debt and you can't find a darn job in your field. You're not going to be too happy about that" (Davis & Heilbonner, 2018). Bland's lived reality was dictated by the intersectionality of her racialized and gendered status which affected her class positionality in the workforce. Because these unique vulnerabilities are wholly ignored in various political and culture spaces, Black women have been directly and indirectly silenced and rendered powerless against structures that oppress them. As Crenshaw (1991) argues, "...women of color have been sometimes erased within the political contestations between antiracism and racial hierarchy, and between feminism and patriarchy" (p. 1253). It is important to note that Crenshaw emphasizes feminism, racism, and patriarchy as equally responsible for the erasure of Black women because even in the Black community, Black women are victimized by intraracial patriarchal struggles that stifle their voice and their identity. This conundrum is equally true when considering the voice of activism in the struggle for racial equality. bell hooks argues that Black women are primarily silenced in the struggle for racial equity because "race talk" is often seen as a male narrative. hooks (1995) argues:

And if I or any other black woman chooses to speak about race from a standpoint that includes feminism, we are seen as derailing the more political discussion, not adding a necessary dimension. When this sexist silencing occurs, it usually happens with the tacit complicity of audiences who have over time learned to think of race within blackness as male...(p. 2).

The systematic and methodological silencing of Black women in white patriarchal spaces, white feminist spaces, and Black patriarchal spaces all conflate to accomplish one detrimental goal in terms of race, gender, and power dynamics in American society: to divest Black women of power that would enable them to trans-

cent their marginalized status and reclaim the agency and resources that would allow them to protect their identity, their bodies, and their families in the Black community and American society.

The construct of Black Rage in the Black Lives Matter movement has given Black women the platform to reclaim language that validates Black women's trauma while simultaneously challenging constructs that would render them silent and powerless. This reclamation begins with claiming rage and anger as valid responses to the pervasive degradations and dehumanizations that Black women have endured in white society. In Cooper's Black Rage manifesto, *Eloquent Rage: A Black Feminist Discovers her Superpowers*, she revels in the liberation of finally accepting her rage as a rational and logical response to the trauma that she and other Black women have experienced. She undergirds Black women's rage as a right that affirms their humanity in the midst of the extreme trauma and terror that they have experienced. Copper (2018) states:

Black women have the right to be mad as hell... We have been dreaming of freedom and carving out spaces for liberation since we arrived on these shores... We know what it means to face horrific violence and trauma from both our communities and our nation-state and carry on anyway. But we also scream, and cry, and hurt, and mourn, and struggle. We get heartbroken, our feelings get stepped on... We get angry, and we express that anger (p. 4).

The power in Cooper's declaration is naming anger as a valid human emotion that animates her activism while refusing to silence the traumas that evoke that anger. What elevates Cooper's Black Rage from theory to activism is her purposeful and unabashed expression of that rage. She moves from an internal monologue of internal strife to an action driven, vocal expression that could potentially lead to liberation. Cooper joins in the Black female tradition of rage fueled activism that enables constructive change within the Black community and American society. Her predecessor Audre Lorde (2007), in her pivotal text "The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism," founds her narrative on the realization that "Every woman has a well-stocked arsenal of anger potentially useful against those oppressions, personal and institutional, which brought that anger into being" (p. 127). This

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arsenal will not effect change as a dormant entity suppressed by fear which hinders progressive activism. Lorde (2007) poignantly warns her audience, “My fear of anger taught me nothing. Your fear of anger will teach you nothing, also” (p. 126). The underlying message of Lorde’s admonishment points to radical, transformative, action-driven Black Rage that has the capacity to invalidate oppressive constructs that continue to afflict Black women specifically and Black people in general. These are, indeed, the parameters that have enabled the success of the Black Lives Matter movement and continue to fuel its globalized impact on Black, Indigenous, and people of color.

The Black Lives Matter movement as a vocalized, radical platform against social injustice and police brutality emerged as a response from Black women activists to the tragic 2012 death of Trayvon Martin by the vigilante neighborhood watchman George Zimmerman. The contextual origins of the Black Lives Matter movement attests to the rhetorical power of gendered Black Rage in this contemporary age of civil rights activism. Alicia Garza, activist, community organizer, and co-creator of the #blacklivesmatter movement social media movement and subsequent Black Lives Matter movement organization, inadvertently started the movement to express her anger and disillusionment with the American legal system after Zimmerman was acquitted of the murder of teenager Martin. Zimmerman accosted and shot Martin, who attempted to defend himself in a confrontation that Zimmerman incited. Like so many Americans in 2012, Garza followed the developments of the case from start to finish and braced herself for the verdict on July 13, 2013. She captures her initial reactions to the verdict in her memoir, *The Purpose of Power*:

Not guilty?

At first I felt nothing. I stared at the television blankly, and the words and images became a blur. I remember turning around and walking outside, to get away from people, to try to find my breath again.

Not guilty?

Then I felt rage. (Garza, 2020 p. 110)

Garza channels her rage not in grief, not in despair, and not in hopelessness, but in the voice of empowerment and activism through one of the most far reaching and influential mediums contemporary activism has seen to date: social media. “We GOT-

TA get it together y'all. Our lives are hanging in the balance," she posts as a rally cry of hope and encouragement, and then she bookends her post with the hashtag that would define the ethos of the movement:

#blacklivesmatter  
Black people. I love you. I love us. Our lives  
matter. (Garza, 2020 pp. 110-111)

Like Cooper and Lorde, Garza establishes Black Rage as a credible avenue to effect change and validate the inherent humanity of Black bodies that have been deemed disposable by a white supremacist society. Garza (2014) notes in "A Herstory..." of the movement that

Black Lives Matter is an ideological and political intervention in a world where Black lives are systematically and intentionally targeted for demise. It is an affirmation of Black folks' contributions to this society, our humanity, and our resilience in the face of deadly oppression.

Further, Garza uses Black Rage to transcend the limitations of traditional modes of activism by vocalizing Black trauma and affirming Black lives on a social media platform that permeates social and political spaces that would be inaccessible to her as a grounded activist at racially unstable ground zeros across the country. Not only does Garza dismantle the narrative of the silenced and disempowered Black woman, but she also reconfigures modes of communication so that her gendered Black activism becomes more salient in the barrage of voices that attempt to stifle Black women's voices. Like Bland's "Sandy Speaks" vlog, Garza uses her internet presence to weaponize her voice against systemic oppression and the resulting effect is a form of advocacy that cannot be easily diminished by outside forces. Further, these Black women activists use Black Rage praxis as a vehicle to transcend the physical limitations of their Black bodies in the midst of racism in America. Unlike their predecessors, these women are no longer limited by the codified limitations of their Black bodies in American society. They may traverse the digital landscapes of different regions, nation-states, and global villages without fear of bodily violence that will inhibit their campaign for social justice. Indeed, the global success of the #blacklivesmatter movement is due to the far-reaching impact that Garza and her contemporaries have had on digital platforms

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which valorized marginalized communities locally and abroad, while simultaneously garnering empathy in white allies who have supported the movement.

Both Bland's and Garza's Black Rage activism point to a reconceptualized "counter public" as explicated by Catherine R. Squires and Nancy Fraser. Squires measures the efficacy of the counter public, or open public discourse which is not hidden, in contrast to "enclave" discourse, which is private and hidden (p. 460). Squires argues, "Counter publics reject the performance of public transcripts and instead project the hidden transcripts, previously spoken only in enclaves to dominant publics. Counter publics test the reactions of wider publics by stating previously hidden opinions, launching persuasive campaigns to change the minds of dominant publics, or seeking solidarity with other marginal groups" (p. 460). For the foundation of Black Rage praxis, I am more interested in Squire's occupation with "launching persuasive campaigns" and "seeking solidarity" because those have historically been the cornerstone for Black activism in America. Bland and Garza revolutionize their activism by bypassing the obscurity of the "enclave" or "hush harbor," as it was known in antebellum slave society, for another medium that offers an egalitarian platform that promises a wider campaign to effect change. Further, their mode of activism affirms Black identity because as Fraser argues, participation in subaltern counter publics, "means being able to speak in 'one's own voice,' thereby simultaneously constructing and expressing one's cultural identity through idiom and style" (69). In turn, these women offer another avenue to validate Black female identity as a weapon against white supremacist ideologies. As the Black Lives Matter history traverses, Garza continues this mode of Black Rage activism with Patrisse Cullors and Opal Tometi to establish a call to action for the Black community and white allies that would redefine the ways that Black women would engage in political advocacy. This type of Black Rage provides a model of activism that reconciles the tensions intrinsic in social, political, and cultural spaces that reify intersectional oppressions connected to race, gender, and class constructs.

By reconceptualizing activism in ways that affirm the Black female voice and identity, Black women civil rights leaders have effectively used Black Rage to rearticulate the parameters of the Black civil rights movement and reclaim Black women's identity politics. Black women have used notions of Black Rage to exert their influence in the Black Lives Matter movement in ways that

have not been historically possible in Black male dominated civil rights movements. Black men have dominated the racial trauma narrative in America, and, consequently, the exigencies of Black racial uplift have been narrowly focused on the energies of male Black civil rights leaders. Within the Black community, Black women have often been divested of any political or social power within race work because racial uplift has been designated a universally patriarchal endeavor. Even the monumentally impactful civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s rigidly adhered to patriarchal ideologies established by the predominately male dominated Black church which disregarded the efforts of Black women. According to hooks (1984), “When the civil rights movement began in the 50s, black women and men again joined together to struggle for racial equality, yet black female activists did not receive the public acclaim awarded black male leaders” (p. 4). Though the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s flourished with women’s liberation and feminist ideologies, Black women were once again silenced and their endeavors for social justice overlooked or ignored. Though Black women were indeed making strides for racial and gender equality in these dormant years, their work was either appropriated and uncredited or dismissed. However, with the advent of the Black Lives Matter movement, bolstered by Black women and Black Rage, Black women have gained subjectivity and presence in the civil rights movement that has never before been seen. This aligns with major theoretical implications of the construct of Black Rage. For Black women civil rights leaders, Black Rage establishes presence and self-actualization that demands attention in primarily patriarchal environments. By reclaiming the language of racial advocacy and established Black female subjectivity, Black women have used Black Rage praxis through social media and other digital platform to reconfigure patriarchally established parameters of the civil rights movement in America.

Ultimately, Black women’s departure from patriarchally confined modes of racial advocacy engenders a redefinition of Black womanhood that is not mired by misogyny and white supremacy which allows for a more holistic form of liberation. In education, politics, culture, and history, Black women are haunted by denigrating mythologies of Black womanhood established to oppress and silence them. These “controlling images” parody Black women’s identity formations by confining them to one dimensional figures such as the docile, subservient “mammy” or the hypersexualized “jezebel” and the ever present “angry Black woman.” These images thwart Black women’s ability to define

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themselves apart from white supremacist capitalist patriarchy which engenders a form of identity fragmentation. As Collins (1990) argues,

As part of a generalized ideology of domination, these controlling images of Black womanhood take on special meaning because the authority to define these symbols is a major instrument of power...such images prove remarkably tenacious because they not only keep Black women oppressed but are key in maintaining interlocking systems of race, class, and gender oppression. (p. 68)

The power of these symbols, as Collins notes, is their ability to sustain systems of oppression that reinforce Black women's subjugated status in America. This is why the "angry Black woman trope" has been one of the most enduring detrimental images to Black women in America. As with all controlling images, ascribing the angry Black woman trope to the multifaceted identities of Black women dehumanizes and disempowers them for the benefit of mainstream society. If Black women can be confined to the irrational, overemotional angry Black woman trope, their demands for a more equitable society for themselves and their families can be disregarded without guilt. As Cooper (2018) argues:

Angry Black Women get dismissed all the time. We are told we are irrational, crazy, out of touch, entitled, disruptive, and not team players...This is absurd. And it is a lie...The truth is that Angry Black Women are looked upon as entities to be contained, as inconvenient citizen who keep talking about their rights while refusing to do their duty and smile at everyone" (pp. 2-3).

As Cooper brings to the fore, the underlying problem that society has with the angry Black woman is ultimately not her anger but her demand for rights that she is entitled to as an American citizen under the Constitution. Mainstream America portrays Black anger as a pathology in order to disparage attempts for transformative social change. In this vein, the premise of Black Rage as a pathway to racial and social uplift challenges the angry Black woman trope because it portrays rage as a valid and rational response to social, cultural, and economic disenfranchisement in America. Further, it humanizes Black women because through

the lens of Black Rage Black women can challenge one-dimensional controlling images projected onto Black womanhood and define Black women's identities in ways that validate their humanity and contributions to the Black community and American society at a whole.

Black women activists such as Sandra Bland, Alicia Garza, Opal Tometi, and Patrisse Cullors have made a monumental impact on the Black Lives Matter movement because they did not confine their activism to traditional modes of advocacy. Instead of relying on rhetorical strategies that have historically served white mainstream ideologies or Black patriarchal ideologies, they founded their platforms on a constructive, transformative Black rage that validated their trauma under a racially oppressive regime while it simultaneously affirmed their identity as Black women devoted to the work of racial uplift in America. Their departure from conventional strategies of activism has transcended the civil rights era even as it has expanded the role and presence of Black women in the Black Lives Matter movement. These women's methods for social justice provides a model for Black women and other marginalized communities who seek to effect change and challenge systems of oppression that would otherwise continue to subjugate them in American society.

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ISSN 2372-6350