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Cotton Framed Revolutionaries: T-shirt Culture and the Black Protest Tradition

By

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Committee in charge:

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my beloved sister, Chérē.

Introduction

Cotton Frames: Familial Ties and T-shirt Histories

Silk Screen t-shirt, 1998. Courtesy of The T-shirt Museum.

I grew up in the shadow of the Hampton Shirt Factory. Its grounds took up a city block, and it was one of three textile and apparel factories where my mother worked when I was a child.[1] Growing up in eastern North Carolina, black t-shirt culture (t-shirts produced for, by, and about African Americans) included a common variety of family reunion, black history and Afrocentric, and Rest In Peace (R.I.P.) t-shirts. The t-shirt was a canvas and a walking testimony to one's family origin, community history, and lived experience. Family reunion t-shirts were an assertion of heritage, legitimacy, and familial foundation, keeping in mind that many of the ancestors present on these t-shirts had no marital or parental rights and some buried in unmarked graves without acknowledgement of name, origin, or belonging. In the early and mid 1990s the popularity of t-shirts (like the one pictured above) with iconized leaders like Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr., athletes like Michael Jordan or Shaquille O'Neal, and even the *Cross Colours* clothing line and African American slogan t-shirts (e.g. "It's a Black Thing, You Wouldn't Understand") were incorporated into the wardrobes of many of my schoolmates and friends.[2] However, the t-shirts encountered in the early 2000s featured individuals who had intricate roles in radical United States and Third World liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s. What intrigued me most were the wearers of these t-shirts – teenagers and twentysomethings, the "conscious" community on campus.[3]

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[1] a.) "Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities – Kinston, North Carolina," *Goldring-Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life*, 2014; b.) *International Directory of Company Histories*, Vol. 20. St. James Press, 1998. Also known as the Kinston Shirt Company or Hampton Shirt Company, founded by Sam Fuchs (a.k.a. L. Hampton) in New York, NY (1925) and relocated to Kinston, NC (1935). In the mid-1990s, the company (as Hampton's Industries) began moving many jobs to Central America, the Caribbean, and East Asia. The factory building located on Tiffany St. (now MLK Blvd.) and King St. in Kinston, NC was demolished in 2008.

[2] a. *Cross Colours*, Inc. is a clothing brand used to broadcast political and social meaning, with black youth as its key demographic. It was founded in 1989 by Carl Jones, around the theme "clothing without prejudice," and emerged as a leading outfitter of early and mid-nineties Hip Hop artists. See also: crosscoloursla.com.
b. T-Shirt: "It's a Black Thing, Marcus, Malcolm, Martin, Marley, Mandela, and ME, you wouldn't understand," Property of The T-Shirt Museum (http://tshirtmuseum.com/); Silk Screen, 1988.

[3] The black "conscious" community is a colloquial term and euphemism that can best be described as a segment of the African American population that is politically, culturally, and racially knowledgeable of the African origins and contributions to civilization and the relations of power that are the foundation to understanding race. Also, known as

These t-shirts provided my first encounter with millennial west coast activism.[4] I arrived from the southeast to Los Angeles, to study at UCLA in 2004. There was no sign more indicative of the political leanings of radicalized students than the prevalence of t-shirts featuring Che Guevara, Angela Davis, John Carlos and Tommie Smith at the 1968 Olympic Games, Assata Shakur, Fred Hampton, and other images from third world movements of the mid twentieth century. As a first year master's student in Afro-American Studies, my initial observations were influenced by personal bias due to familiarity with these images and an intellectual curiosity and political affinity for the events that produced them. This affinity can best be described as a form of "fictive kinship" to those individuals whose legacy had first attracted me to Black Studies in my youth. I was both attracted to and unsettled by how these t-shirts engendered feelings of familial inclusion and generational exclusivity. The wearing of these protest t-shirts illustrated a cross generational relationship. As an observer, I interpreted these t-shirts as evidence of a handing down of inheritance and embracing of the period of 1960s black power militancy and political resistance. This was an invitation to investigate my attraction and hesitance as an empirical study of the events that formed black t-shirt culture.

When I first started this project, I specifically questioned the generational connections and disconnections between the Civil Rights and Black Power generations and the Hip Hop and millennial generations.[5] I wondered if t-shirt culture was merely a recent trend, or if this was the continuation of a longer clothing practice among politically engaged youth. The declining years of the modern Civil Rights Movement are both idealized by the generations that followed and iconized in mass media through collectable memorabilia, documentary film, newsreel, and popular press.[6] I use as a point of origin the black power era which deployed to militant direct action among youth led organizations like the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, the Black Panther Party for Self Defense, the Black Liberation Army, All African Peoples Revolutionary Party, the Black United Front, and others who engaged with the media in new and complex ways. My investigation into the subject of t-shirts and the African American protest tradition explores the stories t-shirts tell, their intervention in political rhetoric and discourse, why the t-shirt is specifically suited for this form of communication, and the stories of movement participants and martyrs left out of popular history and memory. I am interested in the role of the t-shirt, in articulations (performances) of memory and identity at various historical moments during and after the black power era.

"hoteps" due to a reliance on Egyptology and East Africa thought as the origin of civilization, science, and technology. (Defined by KThMc).

[4] a.) I use the term millennial to designate both the age group (i.e. those born between 1980 and 2000) and the temporal delineation of the term of the 21st century. b.) Pew Research Center. *The Millennials: Confident, Connected, and Open to Change* (2010); Pew Research Center. *Young, Underemployed and Optimistic* (2012).

[5] Note: I use the designations "civil rights and black power generations" for those who came of age during and participated in the modern Civil Rights Movement from *Brown v. Board of Education* to the mid and late 1970s. The Hip Hop generation (Generation X) identifies those born during the later civil rights and Black Power Movements (mid sixties) who came of age during the dawn of the Hip Hop as a culture and global youth movement. The Millennial Generation (or Generation Y) has no set date of origin, though birth years are usually estimated between the early 1980s and 2000s. For the purpose of this project, I use the *Pew Research Center's* definition of the Millennial Generation as those born after 1980 and between the ages of 18 and 35 who came of age in the new millennium. Another factor in determining lines of delineations are those born in the decade before or the decade after the inception and emergence of the Internet as a medium and communicative tool. Therefore, my research acknowledges her membership within this demographic.

[6] Sam Polland; Sheila C Bernard; Julian Bond; Henry Hampton (1989); n.b. Rap groups Arrested Development and Public Enemy and the renewal of protest music in Hip Hop (1989 – 1993).

The T-shirt in African American Visual Material History

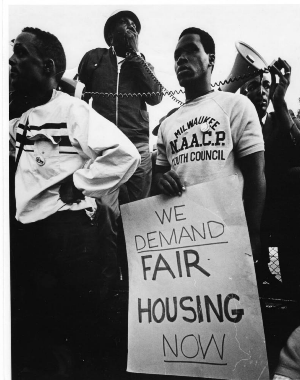
T-shirts offer an index and link to specific moments in African American History through the twentieth and twenty-first centuries as objects that evolved through the pre-industrial, mass-manufacturing, and postmodern eras. They represent the slave economy that birthed the industrial revolution from the cotton fields of the Carolinas and Georgia to the factories of the Northeast.[7] The t-shirt is a significant artifact of not only American fashion but also of the African American experience. In the mid to late 1800s, precursors to the t-shirt were made by hand. For most African Americans, this luxury meant having access to tailoring which most slaves and the recently emancipated did not. However, in the early twentieth century during the Jim Crow era, manufactured cotton became available to the masses. Textile factories whose cotton was supplied by sharecroppers and former field hands made this possible. Shirts became a mass produced commodity item available through mail order in the 1930s as an undergarment.[8] It wasn't until the 1950s that the t-shirt became a visible outer garment.

During the period of African enslavement in the United States, clothing options for the majority of enslaved African American field hands consisted of burlap and coarse cotton under and outerwear.[9] Comfort and utility was a driving necessity for clothing options in every labor sector. The onset of international political conflict created the opportunity for innovation and the design of a new item of clothing – the t-shirt. During both World Wars, segregated colored units shared many commonalities with the fields and factories abandoned by African American draftees.[10] They were given menial jobs for the most part; and therefore, the practicality of the t-shirt for these men, as an undergarment worn as an outer garment to alleviate perspiration while working, was its greatest characteristic. By the late 1930s the t-shirt was picked up by mail order catalogues like Hanes and Sears, Roebuck & Co. and made available to farmers and laborers across the country as an undershirt.[11] For African Americans, their availability in mail order

[7] Rivoli, Pietra. *The Travels of a T-shirt in the Global Economy*. Wiley, 2008.
[8] Cullum-Swan and Manning (1994); 419.
[9] Shaw, Madelyn. "Slave Cloth and Clothing Slaves: Craftsmanship, Commerce, and Industry." Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts, 2012.; White, Graham; White, Shane. "Slave Clothing and African-American Culture in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries." Past & Present, No. 148 (August 1995), pp. 149 - 186.; Harris (1996); 167, "The History of the T-shirt," Dressed.So, July 23, 2014. Web. Note: a.) It is unclear, what access if any the average field hand had in obtaining Long Johns (a one piece garment for men, made of knit cotton or wool) and union suits (a one piece garment for women, the precursor to "bloomers," made of knit cotton or wool) that had been popular since the Victorian era. b.) Union suits were an innovation of Victorian "dress reform," a proto-feminist movement to make women's clothing more comfortable, practical, sanitary, and all-around sensible. c.) By the mid-1800s, "frame-knit" undershirts were not uncommon but the light weigh t-shirt had yet to replace the heavier bulky undergarments for both men and women. d.)African American workers and their white counterparts wore long sleeved plain color collared shirts. The sleeves were rolled up to relieve workers from the heat. Heavier flannel shirts were worn during cold months and lighter linen cotton shirts were worn during warmer months.
[10] Note: The t-shirt was introduced to African Americans as a standard issued item of clothing in the armed forces, first issued during the Spanish American War.[#] In 1913 the U.S. Navy adopted the crew-necked, short-sleeved, white cotton undershirt (or Navy "Gob-style" shirt), to be worn under a jumper, in part to cover sailor's chests. Domestically, in the 1930s the sleeveless singlet (the Army "B-shirt"), also known as the tank top, was a staple of the male wardrobe.
[11] a.) Reed, J.D.; Atkinson, J. "Hail to the T: the shirt that speaks volumes." *Smithsonian*, Vol. 23 Issue 1, April 1992. b.) Reed, J.D.; Atkinson, J.; (1992), Pg. 2-3. n.b. "[T]he T-shirt came to serve as a proletarian symbol, a kind of sartorial pickup truck." Note: After the U.S. Armed Forces were desegregated in 1948 the t-shirt was cross culturally embraced as an American icon upon veterans return home. Being "as American as the pickup truck" – or

catalogues replaced the need to order through retail stores and was a welcomed change to their denial of service at store counters. These items were dropped off by mail carriers, or picked up at local general stores. These catalogues met the needs of African Americans who were isolated (socially and often locally) and unable to shop in segregated department stores directly. There was an indiscriminate nature to mail order patronage, which enabled blacks to participate in pre-civil rights era consumer culture.[12]

In the 1950s, the t-shirt was also used to fashion black entertainers, and challenge racist stereotypes that existed in film, television, and popular music. It became cool to wear t-shirts as an outer-garment, and even black actors like Harry Belafonte wore t-shirts in some of his early popular films as costume and extension of a character's emotion.[13] For Belafonte, an actor, recording artist and emerging activist in the Civil Rights Movement, the t-shirt had crossover appeal. It was fashionable, edgy, and had the ability to illustrate sex appeal - illustrated by the onscreen chemistry between him and Dorothy Dandridge in *Carmen Jones* (1954).[14]



Fair housing demonstration, Milwaukee, 1967. Photo by Ben Fernandez. James Groppi Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society.

In the early 1960s, established black political organizations employed the t-shirt for means of protest and propaganda. This was due in part to technology made available for the mass production of t-shirts and their growing popularity as outer garments. African American servicemen returned home to rejoin their families across the country and were met by threats of racial violence and lack of job opportunities. Civil rights activists such as Martin Luther King, protested against the economic and political disfranchisement of African Americans coupled with the battle for school integration (from *Brown v. Board*, 1954 to the passing of the Voting Rights Act, 1965), the death of Emmett Till (Money, MS, 1955), and the bombing of the

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"as American as the mule and plow" – the t-shirt signified the working class, in an age of the expanding manufacturing industry and agricultural traditions of the U.S. More specifically, in the American south sharecroppers traded their lightweight long sleeve collared shirts for t-shirts now worn as outerwear. c.) Kelly, Marjorie. "Projecting and Image and Expressing Identity: T-shirts in Hawaii." *Fashion Theory*, Vol 7 Issue 2, pp. 191 – 212 (2003). Note: T-shirts were inexpensive and easy to clean, and as a "working class" garment it was preferred clothing for those working in factory, agricultural, and menial labor industries hotter climates.

[12] Reference: Lueverna M. Thomas, grandmother, March 2013.

[13] Harris, Alice. *The White T.* HarperStyle, 1996. Note: In the post-cold war years t-shirts shifted from an article of functional clothing to fashion item, becoming an iconic staple of the American wardrobe through placement in photography, film, and popular culture. The popularity of the t-shirt grew with the release of films like *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951) starring Marlon Brando. By the time *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) starring James Dean hit theaters the t-shirt had became cinematic icon of youth and gang culture and a symbol of masculinity. The iconic t-shirt was blank, an undergarment being exposed. The 1960s ushered in a counter culture that transformed this exposed and blank surface of the chest into a platform for varied expression.

[14] Referenced stills from courtesy of Carlyle Productions; *Carmen Jones*, Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation

Sixteenth Street Baptist Church (Birmingham, AL, 1963) that killed four young girls.[15] Since the mid 1960s, souvenir t-shirts for sports events and music concerts flooded the market. In step with the cultural zeitgeist, organizations like the Black Panther Party and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People adopted the use of constant repetition as a tool and began circulating t-shirts among membership as wearable billboards at marches and rallies. Sharecroppers and domestics in the south and urban youth in major cities like Oakland, Philadelphia, and Los Angeles donned t-shirts that communicated their political stances and reflected a changing tide in black political participation.

The 1970s emerged as the Golden Age of the t-shirt through innovation in design, printing technology as well as the fashion industry's drive toward promoting individual expression in clothing and style. Artists like Diana Ross and Marvin Gaye incorporated the t-shirt into their public persona onstage and off. Ross' appropriation of the t-shirt was perhaps more influenced by recent fashion trends and elements of an urban edge than inner city turmoil. Her self-titled debut solo album, *Diana Ross* (1970), featured the artist on the album cover wearing a simple white t-shirt, a wig in a "pixie" cut, and cut-off (raveled) shorts.[16] For the 1973 album *Lets Get It On,* Gaye traded in his tailored suits for Army green, and dressed down his wardroom from the glitz of Motown to the everyday working class t-shirt as seen in publicity photos.[17] This sartorial gesture mirrored his evolution in songwriting and music, as well as the political currents of the time among black youth and disenfranchised communities.

This visual history is necessary to gage how the archive of images in history and popular culture influence the ways we interpret the past, and make sense of the present. The way we come to know the t-shirt and African Americans relationship to this item is to look at it as an ephemeral artifact. Black style in the first half of the twentieth century did not occur in a vacuum, and the onset of military expansion abroad, the growth of cinema and television, and popular music existed in a reciprocal relationship to clothing practices and regulations for everyday African Americans. Analysis of the long history of t-shirts in the African American wardrobe hinges upon technologies (i.e. photography, film, news media, popular press). These technologies influence the ways we interpret popular and everyday modes of dress. By examining African Americans' relationship to these media in addition to their clothing practices we can understand the creation and wearing of the protest t-shirt as discursive activism. This mode of media discourse responds to both the criminalization of black people and their various protest traditions.

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[15] The four girls killed in the 1963 bombing were Addie Mae Collins, Cynthia Wesley, Carole Robertson and Carol Denise McNair.

[16] a.) Referenced *Diana Ross*, 1970 album cover. Image source: Motown Record Corp. and *Jet* Magazine. *Diana Ross* (1970) is also known as *Ain't No Mountain High Enough*; b.) She's svelte, bare foot, with an androgynous or boyish figure (much like Twiggy the internationally known and imitated model from the 1960s); c.) Lesley "Twiggy" Lawson was a well known British teenage model, initially known for her thin build and her androgynous look consisting of large eyes, long eyelashes, and short hair. Reference: *"Twiggy," Biography on Bio*, Thebiochannel.co.uk.

[17] Referenced *Marvin Gaye*, 1973 album cover. Image source: Motown Record Corp.

Acknowledgements

My work is dedicated to women like my mother, Edna Thomas, who took pride in each stitch of every garment she produced in the shirt factories of Kinston, North Carolina. Thank you Mama, for always being there and for lighting my first sparks of imagination and intellectual curiosity. I pray that this achievement will complete the dream you had for me all those years ago when you worked and sacrificed to give Chérē and I the best life that you could. I would also like to thank my entire Thomas & McNair family for all of their support over the years.

Thank you Ericka, Billy, Uncle Bobby, Randi, and Damon, and all of my interviewees for your generosity, encouragement, and for affirming that my "curiosity about black activists and t-shirts" went beyond the superficial and illustrates our desire to remember and honor those who are, far too often, forgotten.

Thank you Professor Brandi Catanese, for shepherding me through the program since day one and for being a wonderful mentor and friend. Thank you, Ula Taylor, for being a mentor and light for me and so many others. You both personify what a black woman scholar should strive to be. Thank you professors Abigail De Kosnik, Ricky Vincent, Keith Feldman, Waldo Martin, Robert L. Allen, Hardy Frye, and Nikki Jones as well as Cara Stanley and Nzingha Dugas who offered feedback on my work over the years, and also lent an ear and words of encouragement along the way.

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advocacy Project for lending space to continue my community based research and commitment to the broader campus community throughout my time at UC Berkeley.

All of these individuals and experiences have sustained my personal investment and professional engagement with my research and teaching, and will surely influence my contributions to the field of African American Studies and African Diaspora Studies for years to come.

Chapter One

Framing Revolutionaries: Myth, Memory, and Appeals for Recognition

Members of the Black Panther Party for Self Defense, marching through West Philadelphia, Stephen Shames photograph, 1971. Origin of photograph used for "Bobby Seale" t-shirt, unknown.[1]

In 1971, a squad of eleven members of the Black Panther Party for Self Defense (pictured above) marched through West Philadelphia in protest of the New Haven Panther Trials. The squad of marching Panthers included women and men and was led by a squad leader calling cadence - keeping each in step with one another. The two Panthers in front of the formation wore t-shirts (visible to onlookers) with an image of the National Party Chairman Bobby Seale, who had been incarcerated and put on trial with Ericka Huggins, the founder of the New Haven Chapter. The t-shirts worn during their procession through the mostly black working class neighborhood served as an alternate to the Panther uniform made famous in earlier Panther rallies and staged protests. I discovered this Stephen Shames photograph while combing through the Steven Kasher Gallery digital collection. When first encountering the image, I was interested in not only the t-shirts they wore but also by both the Panther's performance of "military parade" drill (a marching formation reserved for basic drill and ceremony) and the ordinarity of their clothing and their surroundings. However, what intrigued me most was the little girl alongside the marching Panthers. Her witness to this event inspired questions: Who was she? Was she marching in step with the Panthers or just passing by? Perhaps she's running an errand (which would explain the paper bag in her hands)? What did she think about the Panthers or the man pictured on their chests? Did she wear "Bobby Seale" t-shirts? Would she tell her children about this

[1] Shames, Stephen; Jones, Charles E. *The Black Panthers: Photographs by Stephen Shames.* Aperture, 2006. I was unable to interview Khalid Raheem (marching in front) to find out the origin of the t-shirt. Billy "X" Jennings described it as the "Bobby Seale, KIDNAPPED" t-shirt; and Stephen Shames was unable to offer details.

moment? And how would this transfer of memory influence the ways they "look back" on this shared history?

………

The t-shirt helped refashion the politics of dress and foster African American identity in the later years of the modern Civil Rights Movement through the waning years of the Black Power Movement in the United States. From roughly 1965 to 1980, African American political t-shirts featuring movement symbols, slogans, and photographs not only illustrated black identity but were instrumental in creating a new black political identity among young people.[2] Though there are many organizations that existed during the Black Power Movement, I have chosen to profile the Black Panther Party for Self Defense in particular. Mainstream media and independent press heavily documented images of this organization, more than others. The Panthers also found ways to creatively employ the media in service of movement goals and propaganda. In the pages that follow, I also incorporate the voices of movement participants to illuminate the history behind popular images and their impact on t-shirt culture today. Key foci in this chapter are: 1.) How t-shirts communicated political beliefs and collective identity during the Black Power Movement; 2.) How organizations incorporated t-shirts into staged demonstrations and performances (acts) of resistance; 3.) And how t-shirts serve as memory objects in the present day. I use interviews to investigate what archives tell us about public memory and implications in the history of black radicalism.

The economic narrative of the t-shirt as a global object has already been explored, and the popular history of political t-shirts has also begun to emerge as a topic within critical scholarship.[3] However, my intervention is to explore the political t-shirt as a vehicle for embodied activism, and how this changed African American political participation. At stake in the production and consumption of political t-shirts as a medium is a contestation over history, meaning, and memory. To advance my argument, I employ a conceptual framework that allows for an analysis that bridges the material to the symbolic to help unpack the changing meaning of the t-shirt: the technology used to produced the shirt; where the shirt was made and by whom; the function, purpose, and social value of the t-shirt; it's practical uses and rhetorical claims; the style of the garment; and the t-shirt's representational themes. [4] The analysis in this chapter unfolds as follows. First, I will explicate the terms and major concepts that anchor the project. Next, I will discuss a brief history of the evolution of the t-shirt within the Panther uniform and clothing practices. I will undertake a discussion of the evolution of style within youth movements of the black power era, looking briefly at the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and more deeply at clothing practices and iconography of the Black Panther Party for Self Defense. Then, I will look at two case

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[2] Clemente, Deirdre. *Dress Casual: How College Students Redefined American Style.* University of North Carolina Press, 2014.

[3] Wells (2008); Rivoli (2005; 2008); Harris (1996); Tolbert (2012); Cullum-Swan and Manning (1994); Tulloch and Shelton (2008); Penny (2013); Clemente (2014).

[4] Adapted from a series of questions first introduced by scholars Betsy Cullum-Swan and Peter K. Manning, in their anthology essay "What is a t-shirt? Codes, chronotypes, and everyday objects" from Riggins, Stephen Harold. *The Socialness of Things: Essays on the Socio-Semiotics of Objects*. De Gruyter Mouton (1994); 418.

studies that illustrate the ways "we look back" at the archive, and the role t-shirts play in (re)memory. I do this through conversations with two interviewees who discuss the real lives of Party members versus the constructed images appropriated on t-shirts today as well as reunion t-shirts and practices of remembering fellow Panthers. Lastly, I will focus on one example of how the imagery and iconography of the Black Panther Party continues in current day circulation through individual t-shirt production. The final example illustrates the lasting effects these performances of protest have had on proceeding generations and their implications regarding millennial "protest chic" clothing. Here, new generations - twice removed from the black power generation - are using t-shirts to both honor and rejoin a shared history and struggle. The aim is to outline a temporal change in African Americans relationship to the t-shirt as a clothing item, a medium for protest, and memory object.

Why the T-shirt?

In the late 1960s, the utilitarian character of the t-shirt as a symbol of the working class would prove to be a practical alternative to the famed Panther uniform seen in national news reports in print and televised media. By 1968, the Party had incorporated a graphic t-shirt as an alternative to the collared powder blue buttoned down shirt that was often accompanied by the iconic black leather jacket, black dress pants and shoes, and the black beret. This is definitely worth noting since the t-shirt had recently evolved from undergarment to outerwear around the same time the Black Panthers started wearing t-shirts for outreach purposes. As an increasingly ubiquitous item of clothing, it helped Panthers shed their "chic" (i.e. read fashionable within the mainstream media) image and embrace an image that reflected a class-consciousness and desire to not set themselves apart from the community they served. As mass produced items they were more affordable than black leather jackets; and the circulation and purchase of these t-shirts by non-members also illustrated the growing number of Party supporters in black communities nationwide. They represented both community membership and affinity for the Panther organization (whether you were rank and file or not).

In the fashion system, according to Roland Barthes, there are two common elements that directly relate to t-shirts. Those elements are the manufacture of clothing (technological) and the aesthetic language of clothing.[5] Fashion is understood here as an element of "high culture," the brand names and status symbols of high fashion and style. However, in this project I am concerned with "low culture" and in particular the ways the t-shirt served as a medium that both signifies and performs meaning when worn. The focus is on political clothing practices within a market were niche and mass consumption happens simultaneously. These political clothing practices are circulated in mass political organizing as a strategic use of imagery. Thinking systemically — one clothing item's relationship to others — encompasses not only an analysis of industry and the process of production but also design and consumption trends. In the case of black protest t-shirts, this helps explain what the object (the t-shirt) means on an individual level as well as the implications on a macro level within ideological systems of racial oppression and liberation.[6] When analyzing

[5] Barthes, Roland. *The Fashion System*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1983.

[6] Cullum-Swan, Betsy; Manning, Peter K. (1994); 432.

black power iconography of the Black Panther Party for Self Defense, I seek not to identify a point of origin for the black protest t-shirt but to identify shifts in the sign functions of the t- shirt and indicate evolutions in both technology and political engagement.

The iconic Panther t-shirt - which depicts the Party's emblem and symbol, "the snarling black panther" - and its twenty-first century reproduction illustrate the evolution of the Panther t-shirt as a physical object and material into an interprétant.[7] During the counterculture era of the mid and late 1960s, the t-shirt developed into a "publicly displayed physical sign vehicle carrying representations and representations of representations."[8] Like other media, t-shirts are context dependent and their content [what is visually represented] carries multiple meanings. The t-shirt is a referent to the material reality of the Panthers, and is itself embedded with ideological meaning.[9] The race of black wearers signified a history of racial conflict and communicated to viewers (black and white) a self-determination birthed out of black power ideology. The t-shirts not only express the politics and societal status of the wearer but also refer to the time in which the t-shirt existed. The images have obtained iconic status for those who were not present for the original events yet venture into Internet archives for images to replicate such t-shirts. In this way t-shirts become memory objects that graphically depict and reimagine the Black Power Movement for audiences during the Internet era.[10]

Protest t-shirts of the Black Power Movement illustrate Erving Goffman's concept of dramaturgy, were the performance of self (selves) is managed to produce political effects.[11] Here the self is inseparable from public displays of one's political belief and aspirational selves (black, beautiful, and free/liberated). In regards to race, the phenomenon of Du Bois' double consciousness is inherently connected to the staging of protests during the Black Power Movement. Goffman's idea of "the front" or the public persona (performed on the front stage) as a social actor to see and accept as their authentic self is useful in understanding how black dress served as a sign vehicle for black power ideology. In these moments, captured first through the medium of photography and then transferred onto t-shirts, we see how one's blackness is accented through the aesthetic language of the t-shirt. Understanding how the white general public viewed black people (ideologically and literally via media) as oppositional to the ways black people saw themselves allowed blacks to manipulate spectacle toward political use. The images featured in the chapter are visual constructions, they demonstrate that the performative codes of dress are there to be used and (re)invented.[12]

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[7] Cullum-Swan and Manning (1994); 430.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Meant in terms of one's social environment, one's racialized body, and one's racialized position in U.S. society. This differs from one's spiritual substance (discussed in chapters three and four).
[10] 1.) Schult, Tanja; Popescu, Diana I. (Eds.) "Memory and Imagination in the post witness era" in *Revisiting Holocaust Representation in the Post-Witness Era.* 2.) *n.b.* Connor, Michael. "What's Postinternet Got to do with New Art?" *Rhizome*, November 1st, 2013.
[11] Fuentes, Marcela A. "Performance, Politics, and Protest;" in *What Is Performance Studies?* edited by Diana Taylor and Marcos Steuernagel. Duke University Press, 2015.
[12] Hebdige, Dick. Subculture: the Meaning of Style. London: Methuen, 1979. Page 100 - 107.

According to Erving Goffman, "framing" is the process through which media defines an event, be it spectacular or mundane. Framing is also used to present and represent social movements to the public.[13] These frames allow us to garner a sense of "what happened" but cannot encompass the whole story nor prevent parts of the story from misinterpretation. Frames are akin to narratives - the images from the Black Power Movement communicate a specific narrative and t-shirts also enable wearers to "speak through [their] clothes."[14] Umberto Eco introduced the concept of "semiological guerrilla warfare" (also understood as semiotic disobedience) to identify performances of dissent that relied on the resignification of (giving a new meaning to) various signs.[15] Here, I want to posit framing and guerilla semiotics as elements within 1960s and 1970s black protest t-shirt culture. Through this lens, I consider how the t-shirt is a product of its particular historical situation and also recapitulates the historical conditions of the period. The protest t-shirt as an iconic text, like the narratives it reproduces, is a contested site and battleground for racial discourses. T-shirts produced by the Black Panther Party and replicated by the generations that followed, were a direct response to what Fredric Jameson, observes as "the informational function of the media," which was to, "help us to forget" our history, and thus "little by little [society] lose[s] its capacity to retain its own past." In this context, t-shirts are not only media and artifacts but also memory objects.

African Americans are racialized subjects, and clothing the black body (i.e. getting dressed) and black clothing practices (i.e. style as a political strategy) are always within the context of historical formations in the United States. Therefore, these otherwise typical "dry drip" and silk screen t-shirts, went against the grain of mainstream political t-shirts by re-contextualizing the commodity as a tool to promote party ideals founded on the belief that "black is beautiful" and powerful. Furthermore, the Panthers employed the concept of "semiotic guerilla warfare" beneath the level of consciousness, using t-shirts as one terrain to wage this struggle (among many). More than simply clothing people, t-shirts as black casual dress and aesthetic device opened up ways for African Americans to lay claim to their own bodies and their right to occupy or even control public space and influence public opinion dominated by white mainstream media.

In the context of American history, one's clothing style was not without consequence when considering race and societal boundaries.[16] The visibly expressed freedom of appearance is for African Americans an act of resistance even in its most mundane forms.[17] The Black Power era protest t-shirt illustrated a transition in the purpose and function of the t-shirt from clothing item to provocation. In this way, both the physical and embodied

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[13] 1.) Goffman, Erving. *Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience.* Northeastern University Press, 1986; 2.) Nelson, T.E., Oxley, Z.M. & Clawson, R.A. *Political Behavior* (1997) 19: 221. 3.) Ferguson, Robert. Representing Race: Ideology Identity and the Media (London, New York: Arnold; New York: Co-published in the United States of America by Oxford University Press 1998).

[14] Umberto Eco (1973) quoted in Hebdige, Dick. Subculture: the Meaning of Style. London: Methuen, 1979. Page 100.

[15] Ibid.

[16] White, Graham; White, Shane. *Stylin': African American Expressive Culture, from Its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit.* Cornell University Press, 1998.

[17] Miller, Monica. *Slaves to Fashion: Black Dandyism and the Styling of Black Diasporic Identity.* Duke University Press, 2009; White and White (1998).

aesthetics of the wearer expressed a pride in self and community. T-shirts worn during Panther protests (then) were not ambiguous items open to misinterpretation they were intentional communication adorned on black bodies.[18]

As Marshall McLuhan declared, “the medium is the message,” and t-shirts serve as yet another medium that challenged dominant media by making innovations in 1960s media culture and graphic design as a whole.[19] Taking the lessons learned from the radical press and print culture of the 1960s and 1970s t-shirt printing transformed mass communication in form as well as subject matter with simple slogans and imagery designed by hundreds of independent and established artists. First created with fabric paint and dye, mass production of t-shirts began after the invention of Plastisol in 1959 (which couldn’t be washed out of fabric), plastic transfers, and spray paint. Silkscreen printing, the successor to the independent printing press, and iron-on transfers became the most popular method for producing customized t-shirts. These independent (amateur) producers altered the ways t-shirts were produced and distributed by taking advantage of newly accessible and inexpensive technologies that democratized the t-shirt making process and the use of images and fashion by black activists and organizations.

T-shirts as an activist medium positioned wearers as agents who signified their subjugation, called for justice, and performed their identity in the context of black liberation. The t-shirt had social, cultural, political and economic use and the embodied (intersectional) narratives of race, class, gender, and ethnicity informed and were informed by the discourses offered on different t-shirts that individuals chose to wear. This chapter draws attention to t-shirts as not only clothing that covers the body, but as keepsakes (souvenirs) that encourage individual memory and affiliation to specific events, political affinity, and racial identification. This political t-shirt genre illustrates the shaping of black identity through dress and consumption as a strategy of both adornment and survival.

Black Power Style and the Media

Much has been noted about the style aesthetic of the Black Power Movement; whether dashiki clad poets of the Black Arts Movement or the uniform of the Black Panther Party for Self Defense (BPPFSD), it is evident that style mattered.[20] When looking back on the visual history of the Black Power Movement, the appropriation of black clothing practices as “fashion” beyond the movement indicates the disconnect between movement participants and the majority of the white public. “Culture as resistance” gained commercial prominence during this era; and artists and leaders within the movement and supporters of the movement viewed the visual representations of black radicalism and culture as an expression of political struggle and black pride.[21] African American cultural producers used expressive art forms, social movement photography, and film to illustrate the tensions that existed between agents of the state and their communities. The resulting images featured

[18] Hebdige (1979), 100.
[19] Kaplan, Geoff. *Power to the People: The Graphic Design of the Radical Press and the Rise of the Counter Culture, 1964-1974.* University of Chicago Press, 2013.
[20] Jones (1998); Durant (2006); Raiford (2011); Ford (2015).
[21] Neal, Larry. "The Black Arts Movement." Drama Review, Summer 1968.

what scholars Fred Moten and Larry Neal term the "black radical aesthetic."[22] Photographs, filmed protest footage, posters, and newsletters were circulated within the media to garner awareness for legal campaigns and fundraising and were by extension absorbed into the popular realm. The manipulation of the media and the usage of black art, vernacular, and aesthetics gained political and economic influence.

The marriage of art and politics was essential to the members of the Black Arts Movement (BAM), the cultural arm of the larger Black Power Movement led by Amiri Baraka (Leroi Jones), who believed that only through engaging the intersection of politics, economics, art, and culture can Black people become empowered. This popular aesthetic, made popular by BAM inspired art, poetry, literature, and film, illustrated the progressively influential role blacks began to play in mass culture. Blacks were working within mainstream culture, rather than on the periphery as in previous years, to create opportunities for Black cultural products to spread the philosophies of Black power to their intended audiences, and consumable popular culture to the white majority.[23]

A useful comparative to the clothing style coming out of the Black Power Movement is the style aesthetic among earlier groups, most notably the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). SNCC style was more about functionality and practicality, the desire to organize across class, gender, and racial lines, and to relate to blacks in the rural and agricultural south than as "fashion" writ large.[24] As author Tanisha Ford has stated, "SNCC emerged at a time when discussions about the efficacy of the politics of respectability were at their peak."[25] While, there are many overlaps in political ideology and practice between these two groups, one of the most glaring would be their use of clothing as a tool in political organizing. The clothing choices of SNCC represented a progression away from the politics of respectability ingrained in the mostly collegiate participants hailing from many Historical Black Colleges and Universities. Members of SNCC incorporated agricultural dress to appeal to the masses of the sharecroppers and farmers they outreached to in Alabama and Mississippi. They wore denim overalls, powder blue collared shirts (representing blue collar labor), and natural hairstyles as a way to resist black bourgeoisie and middle class politics of dress, and to connect with the black rural poor in the south. The incorporation of the t-shirt for SNCC members was also cost effective. SNCC members worked in hot climates and t-shirts wear cheap to make and purchase. The larger change in wardrobe and aesthetic for SNCC came in their wearing of denim and natural hairstyles. However, t-shirts and sweaters became increasingly important in the later years of the Civil Rights Movement when organizations like SNCC became more militant and established chapters outside of the south in urban cities in the northeast, Midwest, and west coast.

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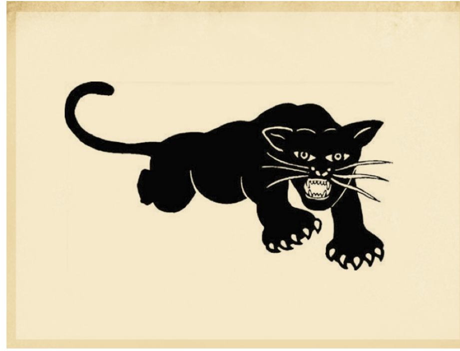
[22] The "Black aesthetic" was stylized by the hyper-masculine personas, afro hairstyles, dashikis, medallions, black leather, black berets, and the military decorum of protest rallies; Moten, Fred. In the Break: the Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition. University of Minnesota Press, 2003.
[23] Ongiri, Amy Abugo. Spectacular Blackness: The Cultural Politics of the Black Power Movement and the Search for a Black Aesthetic. University of Virginia Press, 2010.
[24] Ford, Tanisha. "SNCC Women, Denim, and the Politics of Dress," *Journal of Southern History*, Vol 79 No. 3, August 2013.
[25] Ibid., 628.



(Left: Pictured, Stokely (Kwame Toure) Carmichael, wearing a printed sweater, c. 1965. Source of image Unknown.[26])
(Right: Emory Douglas' "black panther" symbol, c. 1967. Courtesy of Emory Douglas' digital archive.)

In 1965, SNCC, led by Stokely Carmichael, began using the panther image created by the Lowndes County Freedom Organization (LCFO) in Alabama on pamphlets, posters, and t-shirts and sweaters. The LCFO was required by electoral law to have a symbol represent the organization, so they called the organization the "Black Panther Party." In a speech delivered at the 1966 "Black Power and Change" conference sponsored by Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) at the University of California, Berkeley, Carmichael said:

> In Lowndes County, we developed something called the Lowndes County Freedom Organization. It is a political party… We chose for the emblem a black panther, a beautiful black animal which symbolizes the strength and dignity of black people, an animal that never strikes back until he's back so far into the wall, he's got nothing to do but spring out… And when he springs he does not stop.[27]

This is significant because, as was the case in LCFO, since many impoverished people (black and white) were illiterate, the image of the snarling black panther communicated what words could not. There was no formal organizational relationship between LCFO Black Panther Party and Black Panther Party for Self Defense (BPPFSD) later formed in Oakland, California. However, Carmichael helped connect these organizations at a September 1966 conference on Black Power held at the University of California, Berkeley and convened by the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). At this conference Carmichael was accompanied by member of the LCFO Black Panther Party who wore shirts displaying the panther emblem, and began organizing nationally under this symbol the same month.[28] Pamphlets were distributed widely, and a Northern California chapter of the LCFO Black Panther Party was formed that year. Huey Newton later recalled seeing one of these pamphlets and being inspired by this powerful image. Newton suggested to Bobby Seale

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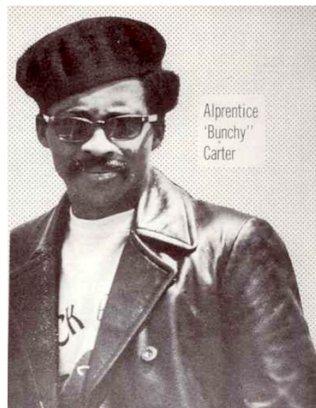
[26] Pictured: Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Toure), eventual chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, first a local organizer in the Mississippi Delta and Alabama, is credited with coining the phrase "Black Power" in Greenwood, Mississippi in 1966. He was a local field organizer in Washington D.C. while at Howard University and collegiate and student dress influenced SNCC. Before long the shirts became a trend among student casual wear.

[27] Carmichael, Stokely, "Speech at University of California, Berkley," October 29, 1966, http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/sayitplain/scarmichael.html Retrieved January 26, 2007 from *American RadioWorks* "Say It Plain: A Century of Great African American Speeches." Audio tape.

[28] Martin, Waldo; Bloom, Joshua. Black Against Empire. University of California Press, 2012, p. 43.

that they take on the snarling panther as their symbol for the Black Panther Party for Self Defense (BPPFSD).[29] This image was later drawn by artist and graphic designer Emory Douglas, the Black Panther Party's Minister of Culture from 1967 to 1980, and distributed nationally and internationally as a poster through the *Black Panther Newsletter, which* turned this image into commodity and opportunity to spread their message and to fund their various campaigns and initiatives.[30]

Black Panther style can also be understood as one of functionality and practicality. The t-shirt intervenes at the ideological crossroads of proletariat politics and mass appeal. The t-shirt emerged at the height of Panther popularity and media circulation of their images and the images of mass protests (both peaceful and violent) nation wide opposing the Vietnam War and racial injustice in the United States. By 1968, the image of the snarling panther, taken from the Lowndes Co. Panther Party and incorporated into SNCC paraphernalia, had made its way to a t-shirt worn by Alprentice "Bunchy" Carter, chair of the Los Angeles chapter of the BPPFSD, featuring Douglas' design.[31]



(Pictured: Alprentice "Bunchy" Carter, c. 1969. Courtesy of It's About Time digital archive.)

As a political strategy utilized in the broader Black Power Movement, the Black Panthers were both visible and visual. The snarling black panther symbol Douglas produced played a large role in the shaping of the Panther image, then and now, and was produced for political propaganda and popular consumption.[32] Not only was this image and the Black

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[29] H.K. Yuen archive, UC Berkeley. Bloom and Martin, 2013, pp. 39-44.

[30] Martin and Bloom (2012).

[31] There is perhaps a connection between street gang (and prison) culture and t-shirts at that time, stemming from biker gangs of the 40s and 50s and youth culture. However, I've been unable to determine a concrete connection (or image) of 50s and 60s black gangs (and prisoners) and their use of t-shirts for affiliation. Clothing attire which preceded the t-shirt would include gang jackets, vests, banners, and designated gang colors as gang members aimed to dress well in the post-50s "cool" trend (included: "dapper" styling with open collared shirts, sport coats, shirts or jackets with embroidery, and casual slacks rather than a suit).

[32] a.) The print collection *Black Panther: The Revolutionary Art of Emory Douglas* edited by Sam Durant chronicles the posters and storyboards found on the back of each weekly newsletter. b.) To capitalize on the use of the print media as a tactic, they used Emory Douglas, their Minister of Culture, to produce provocative images in each printing of the *Black Panther* newsletter. Douglas' densely layered images told detailed stories about African American life and struggle, and were used as Panther propaganda. Douglas aimed to depict the

Panther "mystique" (i.e. a combination of their uniform, guns, and rhetoric) shaped in the Panther newsletter, but also in local and national print and televised news. Author Jane Rhodes suggests that "the Black Panther Party and the news media engaged in a dialogical relationship that shaped public [perception and] representations of Black Nationalism and black radicalism" for decades.[33] The group rose in prominence through their utilization by and utilization of the mass media.[34] The coverage of the Black Panthers reinforced mainstream "Americans' fears and disdain for their politics and style yet over time these frames shifted to include a desire to elevate the Black Panther Party to celebrity status."[35] There are three recurring "frames" in the national media coverage of the Panthers – fear, condemnation, and celebrity – and these frames exposed the contradictions in the national response to the BPP's demand for (and stylistic practice of) self-representation. Apprehension about these Black militants gave way to fascination and notoriety, and the aesthetic and political rhetoric of the BPP spread throughout the public sphere and beyond their interpretive control.[36]

Black Panther Party founders Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale, developed a uniform for Party members: a powder blue collared shirt, black leather jacket, black pants, black shoes, black beret, and optional black gloves. Women in the Party often altered the Panther uniform to include feminine attire (e.g. black dress or skirt, stockings, and shoes). Newton and Seale felt that the uniform illustrated their militancy, discipline, and their blackness.[37] For Newton, "The Party's uniforms, the guns, the street action all added up to an image of strength."[38] And as scholar Erika Doss has observed, "With their black berets and leather jackets, their Afros, dark glasses, raised fists, and military drill formation, the Panthers made great visual copy."[39] In the early days of the Party many wore Kente cloth but due to increased commercialization and features in fashion magazines as well as the growing tension between the Panthers and the southern California cultural nationalist organization Us, Kente was forbidden to wear.[40] Many feared the movement would be commercialized, and much to the disapproval of party leaders and rank and file members, the image of the uniform started to overshadow the work of the Black Panther Party.

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realities of urban life and the plight of the black proletariat. The goal was to galvanize the lower-class blacks of the inner city into political awareness and action.

[33] Rhodes, Jane. "Fanning the Flames of Racial Discord: The National Press and the Black Panther Party," *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, January 1999.

[34] Ibid; Rhodes, Jane. *Framing the Black Panthers: the Spectacular Rise of a Black Power Icon*. New Press, 2007, 6.

[35] Ibid., 5 and 9.

[36] Ibid., 117, 240-246.

[37] Ogbar, Jeffrey. *Black Power: Radical Politics and African American Identity*. Johns Hopkins University Press 2005, page 118.

[38] Newton, Huey P. *Revolutionary Suicide*. Penguin, 1973; Penguin Classics; Reprint edition, 2009; page 152.

[39] a. Ib. Doss, Erika. "Revolutionary Art Is a Tool for Liberation': Emory Douglas and Protest Aesthetics at the Black Panther," Page 177-178.

b. Phu, T.N. "Shooting the Movement: Black Panther Party Photography and African American Protest Traditions," *Canadian Review of American Studies*, Vo. 38, No. 1, 2008, Page 3.

[40] Ford (2015).

The point here is not to overemphasize the ways the Panthers were positioned by the media but how the Panthers also chose to position themselves within the media and the historical ramifications this had on the archive of images available in print and digital form. One consequence of increased accessibility to these images was the cultural appropriation of the protest aesthetic generated from the left. Commoditization and sensationalism were the consequences of the new accessibility to ethnic cultural forms by white consumers.[41] Writer Tom Wolfe described the tendency of people to support causes based on pop cultural appeal as "radical chic" and the misconceptions that defined what was practical attire as fashion, would linger in public memory for decades to come.[42] The symbols of armed, radical, resistance – the Black berets, leather jackets, buttons, patches, and iron-ons, boots, cargo belts, and the afros and Black power fist – are viewed from very distinct perspectives depending on whose memory we reference.[43] The public archive of images from the Black Power Movement – now digitized from newsreels, photographs, posters, and print media mentioned above – helped form "the ways in which we continue to understand Black identity, Black community and Black cultural production" in the post-civil rights era.[44] The memory of the Panthers and the Black Power Movement is influenced by the media constructed images of the "black radical," and the ways cultural producers continue to represent that history in the twenty-first century.[45]

Appeals for Recognition

Incorporation of elements of the Panther uniform (e.g. jackets, boots, and all black attire) by urban youth was prevalent throughout the later 1960s and 1970s. Once incorporated into the Panther uniform, the graphic t-shirt worn above by Bunchy Carter gained popularity at Panther rallies. The Party did not create the style of the Black Power Movement or time period. Style was reciprocal and young people influenced and were influenced by the style of the communities they came from.[46] However, the clothing worn by Panthers had a lasting effect on the community and public imagination. Emory Douglas has stated: "Of course, [style] was present throughout the whole movement. But that's a level of consciousness that can be raised to another level of consciousness."[47] Like Douglas, many rank-and-file members and Party leaders viewed this superficial support (or aspirational affiliation through purchase or dress) represented an opportunity to "inform, enlighten, and perhaps inspire."[48]

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[41] Martin (1996). n.b. John Fiske (1989), distinction between mass culture and popular culture.
[42] Wolfe, Tom. "Radical Chic & Mau-Mauing the Flak Catchers." Farrar, Straus & Giroux; *New York* Magazine; 1970.
[43] Rhodes, Jane (2007), Page 313, 319; includes a distinction between the 'official memory' and the 'critical memory' of the BPP legacy.
[44] Ongiri (2010), page 27.
[45] Ericka Huggins interview, October 21, 2015.
[46] Ericka Huggins interview, October 21, 2015.
[47] Marks (2013). Note: I replaced "that" with "style" to specify the topic addressed in the quote.
[48] Marks (2013).

Panthers Marching c. 1968. Image courtesy of It's About Time digital archive; Stephen Shames original.[49]

These images of Panthers marching appear several years removed and miles away from the brutality of southern white mobs that enacted violence upon student activists earlier in the decade. Though there were violent clashes with the police, there are no visible police dogs and military force to juxtapose the uniformed women and men of the Black Panther party during these demonstrations famously photographed by Stephen Shames in 1968, only the Alameda county police and the ominous presence of the Alameda courthouse. Gone were the days of conservative middle class politics of respectability, replaced by urban working class respectability – galvanized into mainstream popular culture. For the BPPFSD this represented a different form of respectability politics, one that mirrored the sartorial practices of whom they termed the lumpen. To appeal to these dispossessed and disfranchised youth and adults, the Panthers employed a working class politics of respectability illustrated through the fashion of black militancy. Since the 1950s the older civil rights organizations employed middle-class respectability as a political tool. As Ford explains, "The student activist 'projected a safe, middle-class image that played well before the news cameras.'… Because African Americans were supposed to be at the bottom of the social order, dressing nicer than whites was an act of defiance."[50] Organizations like the SNCC used this tactic best because of the drastic contrast between blacks and whites for the camera during physical altercations at non-violent demonstrations. However, the Black Panther Party's "respectable body" politics illustrated a style aesthetic more akin to popular dress in urban industrial metropoles. The strategic use of t-shirts as a part of Panther regalia was not a casual turn but a double iteration of Panther symbolism and political ideals. According to Ericka Huggins, former leader of the Los Angeles Panthers and former political prisoner, both men and women wore t-shirts.

> Everybody had t-shirts, even those who were in support of the movement. [W]e dropped the uniform [after the first couple years] because it separated us from the very community we served… because people said they didn't want to feel separate from us… This was after people realized who we were and what we intended...

[49] Image also included Howard L. Bingham's *Black Panthers 1968* photo collection.
[50] Ibid.

> [T]he t-shirt was the way we recognized each other and that we needed to do something. For me it was apart of the African oral tradition, and we recognized our selves...
> Maybe they make money, but not much. Maybe we make them so we can see ourselves.[51]

Pictured: Kathleen Cleaver, Communications Secretary of the Black Panthers with women members.
Source: *Black Panthers 1968*, Photographer: Stephen Shames.

The women's adoption of the t-shirt in this image warrants a gendered reading of the Panther t-shirt as a women's clothing item. This moment offers implications into how women used the t-shirt to challenge the politics of dress and gender norms in the broader black power and Civil Rights Movements. For the Panthers, like other established organizations, there existed a "complicated body politics for young women activists."[52] As seen in the picture of marching Panthers above, along with the male-centric military drill there was also a gender dynamic illustrated through the placement of women along side male comrades. As evident in photographs of Panther women framing the squadrons of marching Panther men, these women developed a shared aesthetic that included hairstyle, denim jeans, and casual attire that differed from the more formally dressed at the rally. At first glance, it may appear the women pictured above were on the periphery of demonstrations and espoused a desexualized look in drastic contrast to some of their peers who adopted a feminine propriety that reestablished traditional gender roles in the hyper-masculinized Panther image. However, looks can be deceiving and this researcher is careful to not take the decades long reproduced images of Panther women, especially leaders like Kathleen Cleaver (communications secretary and press secretary, and wife of Eldridge Cleaver, the minister of information) and affiliates like Angela Davis, rarely featured in the media without fashionable attire, as representative of all women in rank and file membership.

[51] Ibid.
[52] Ford (2015), 632.

The proliferation and usage of these images served as a vehicle to galvanize the movement in the public eye, and to create an image of Black manhood and Black womanhood that would prove to linger in the public memory. For example, Kathleen Cleaver as shotgun toting militant and Angela Davis and the afro as representative of the "black is beautiful" ideal, came to symbolize the gendered politics of representation. Much of the Black Panthers legacy in particular is laden with their use of imagery in the promotion of both their political agenda and "revolutionary style" as the personification of Black resistance.[53] However, the images of Cleaver and Huggins were important for the integration of black women into the BPPFSD, which began as a male and often chauvinistic organization.[54] After the Cleaver's home was raided in 1968, the party responded with propaganda like the notorious image of Kathleen dressed in a long black leather jacket, holding a shotgun, standing in the doorway of their apartment, with the phrase "Shoot Your Shot!" that helped solidify the belief that armed self-defense was the responsibility of both women and men. It also added to the feminine side of the Panther mystique.

I spoke with Huggins, an educator, activist, and former leading member of the Black Panther Party, to talk specifically about the gendered politics of dress within the Party and the lack of representation of rank and file women in the archive of images from that period. Huggins' life with the Black Panther Party is significant in that, like most Panthers, she began as a rank and file member, and became a leader in the Los Angeles chapter. She moved from Connecticut with her friend John Huggins, whom she later married, to Los Angeles in 1969 at the age of eighteen. She later founded the New Haven, Connecticut chapter and is also a former political prisoner. Our conversations centered on the question: What's at stake in the production and reproduction of these images on t-shirts as a medium? However, our conversations took a more meaningful turn to the question of archives and looking back to move forward.

Before addressing the implications for today's t-shirt culture or the answer to this question, I needed to first understand how t-shirts were understood back then. A lack of representation of women in t-shirts today, I assumed, meant a lack of representation then. Both men and women in the Black Panther Party incorporated the t-shirt into their daily clothing and the Black Panther uniform. Yet, only a few emerged as subjects whose images were reproduced on t-shirts. I wanted to know why, and how this held implications on the iconization of women in political movements today. When searching the vast digital archive for available images of movement participants and the t-shirts worn and circulated at that time, I came across an image of women wearing the same Party t-shirt (worn by Bunchy Carter, the Panthers in the 1968 demonstration, and the women pictured with Kathleen Cleaver, all above).

When I asked Huggins to addresses some common misunderstandings about women Party members in particular, she replied: "I encourage you to step into the shoes of a woman or man of the 1960s. Step into those shows and walk around awhile. It wasn't about the business of t-shirts then, as it is about the business of t-shirts now."[55] Like Huggins, other

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[53] Wolfe (1970), Hilliard (1993), Ongiri (2010), and Raiford (2011).
[54] Wallace, Michele. *Black Macho and the Myth of the Black Superwoman*. Verso Books, 1978.
[55] Ericka Huggins interview, October 21, 2015.

participants in the Black Power Movement have “insist[ed] that we distinguish between the imaging of the Black Panther Party and the content of its politics.”[56] Angela Davis, one of the most notable women of that era, has articulated her apprehension around “a politics reduced to fashion” because of its mainstream incorporation.[57] ‘‘It is both humiliating and humbling,’’ she confesses, “ humiliating because it reduces a politics of liberation to a politics of fashion; it is humbling because such encounters with the younger generation demonstrate the fragility and mutability of historical images, particularly those associated with African American history.’’[58] This “politics of fashion” that saturated mainstream media outlets during the Black Power Movement proved to be a two-edged sword. It both enabled Panthers and supporters to perform blackness through aesthetics, therefore challenging racist beauty standards and ideology. Yet, it also proved to be an image that was hard to escape, venturing toward a stereotyping of movement participants as superficial youths. Though t-shirts were an extension of the ways the Black Panther Party imagined themselves, for cultural critics like Tom Wolfe, it illustrated what he sarcastically called “radical chic” — a term dismissive of affluent whites who were infatuated with Panthers and the growing movement.[59] Black fashion and black politics, in the tradition of “spectacular” expressive culture, was unfortunately dismissed as sensationalist.[60]

Still from documentary film: *Black Panthers 1968 (France). J. Tarika Lewis pictured at center, other individuals unknown.*[61]

The t-shirt represents a shift in clothing practice for both men and women in the formidable years of the Black Power Movement. The t-shirt signified group belonging and represented the alliances many members hoped to foster toward inter- and intra- racial justice across gender, class, sexual, and regional lines. However, the wearing of t-shirts is not without prior precedence in terms of sartorial practice in the Black Power Movement. As

[56] Phu (2008), Pg. 3.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Davis, Angela Y. “Afro Images: Politics, Fashion, and Nostalgia,” *Soul: Black Power, Politics, and Pleasure* edited by Monique Guillory, Richard C. Green; NYU Press, 1994, Page 171.
[59] Wolfe, Tom. *Radical Chic & Mau-Mauing the Flak Catchers*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, (1970).
[60] Phu (2008), Pg. 3.
[61] Paul Aratow, Agnès Varda, David Myers, John Schofill. *Black Panthers 1968 (France)*.

the incorporation of the Panther uniform (and earlier Kente cloth and blue jeans) illustrate, fashion was a cultural and political tool in the civil rights and Black Power Movements, deployed as a "performance of affinity" within black communities.[62] Fashion was the embodiment of the Black Panther Party platform and program.

Not only was the t-shirt affordable, it was also "unisex". Though, t-shirts were understood as unisex articles of clothing in the late 1960s, women's dressing standards for official rallies and photographs often feminized the Panther uniform. They wore dresses with combat boots and women of color from various backgrounds and levels of political participation embraced the afro.[63] The t-shirt represented another element of uniformity within the Party ranks, and created rhetorical entry into militant political participation for many women. I asked Huggins about images of women (other than Davis, Cleaver, and herself) that were captured on t-shirts and circulated among local and national offices. I wanted to know if any of these t-shirts survived. This would give an even greater insight into how women were received within Party ranks beyond mainstream media interpretation and fandom. However, Huggins insisted:

> Mass media chose two of us - Kathleen Cleaver and Angela Davis. Why? How do I know, but I know where ever you looked there were t-shirts. That you can't find them says if you can buy a t-shirt for like 50 cents, who knows where they went. They may not exist in form anymore…[64]

My search for women (as subjects) in t-shirt culture of the past lies in the need to trace black political iconography - a protest tradition in itself - more broadly and the incorporation of women at the center of those practices. The need to determine black women's iconography in t-shirt culture is part of that aim. Huggins challenged the assumption that since most women were not venerated and iconized on t-shirts, then it must have been a result of an inner privileging of black men. Even though in my research I have encountered many personal and scholarly accounts of physical and sexual abuse in the Black Panther Party as well as the well documented tradition of propaganda images that projected a militant image of black masculinity (in particular) and images of black womanhood and motherhood; I was encouraged to understand the evidence (the t-shirts, posters, and popular photographs which were produced then and those that survive in the archive) from the position of the party membership. In this way, when we look back, we bridle our tendencies to read from the perspective of an interloper and instead as one who accepts and understands the experiences of the women of the party as knowledge and expertise. Many women who were in party leadership shared her opinion. When we adopt their perspective we understand the historical misrecognition of the roles women played in the party. This misrecognition may very well stem from the accepted societal norms for women within the context of the growing feminist movement of that time.[65] Her comments reminded me of words from Kathleen Cleaver in her essay, "Women, Power, and Revolution," where she explained,

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[62] Kente cloth was most notably recognized with Panthers in southern California, not northern California or nationally.
[63] Ericka Huggins interviews, October 21, 2015.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Johnson, Lakesia. *Iconic. Decoding Images of the Revolutionary Black Woman*. BayloUniversity Press, 2012, pp. 35 - 36.

> At times, during the question and answer session following a speech I'd given, someone would ask, "What is the woman's role in the Black Panther Party?" I never liked that question. I'd give a short answer: "It's the same as men." We are revolutionaries, I'd explain. Back then, I didn't understand why they wanted to think of what men were doing and what women were doing as separate. It's taken me years, literally about 25 years, to understand that what I really didn't like was the underlying assumption motivating the question. The assumption held that being part of a revolutionary movement was in conflict with what the questioner had been socialized to believe was appropriate conduct for a woman. That convoluted concept never entered my head, although I am certain it was far more widely accepted than I ever realized.[66]

The misrecognition, it would seem, is a contention around "who is iconized and why" versus "how and 'that' we remember" the rank and file members of the Party. Iconicity is a different variable in that rank and file membership rarely gets noticed for the day-to-day operations of the Party. For the most part, members of the Black Panther Party were recognized for their charisma or infamy. The wider discourse around images of Panther women, especially icons such as Cleaver and Angela Davis, includes the contradiction between the black radical as solely politically motivated instead of shedding light on the many programs offered by the Black Panther Party. Women were leaders in many of those programs, yet their work was seldom recognized outside of the community. For example, Davis spent most of her time working for prison reform upon release and in a 1974 interview with Jet Magazine's Robert A. DeLeon, she commented on her depiction in the mainstream media:

> The problem is that before and during the trial, the white press projected an image of a raving militant talking about burning and violence; there were pictures of me with my mouth wide open all of the time. Well, now they are finding trouble justifying that image through the work we're doing so they just don't cover the activities of our organization.[67]

T-shirts as products of the circuit of culture also illustrate the convolution around who the Party was and the image created. For many scholars and observers, the style and image of the Panthers casts a larger shadow than what they saw as their larger purpose.[68] Other than the Panther t-shirt included above, most of the popular images of the Party show women who are - from my perspective - "well dressed" or more specifically, dressed in "Soul era chic."[69] However, I also understand the gendered politics of dress as part of the Panther strategy in the media as well as part of the function and necessity of the Panther uniform. For Huggins, the former director of the Panther's Community School in Oakland cautioned that in the telling and retelling of Pather history, reality is less glamorous than what's reflected in popular images. Huggins further explained:

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[66] Neal Cleaver, Kathleen. "Women, Power and Revolution," New Political Science 21, no. 2 (1999), p. 233.
[67] DeLeon, Robert. "Angela Davis Works to Bring Change in Prison System," Jet, May 16, 1974, 12.
[68] Ford (2015).
[69] Ibid; Neal (2001).

We did not go shopping. Women of the BPP shared everything: food, clothing, shoes, partners, and [caring for] children… We shopped in each other's closets mostly, donations were given to us… We wore the first piece of clothing we could step into. We cared about how we appeared. We were rebels, however, were practical. We worked 18 hour days… Quite often we wore black because we went to so many funerals. Mass media made it radical chic. For many Black Panther Party members [fashion] was the last thing on our minds… We were not documenting things. We were trying to stay alive.[70]

With these revelations in mind, I want to consider the ways misrecognition haunts the images, impeding and undermining attempts at intergenerational transferal of memory through shared history. Meaning, the interpretation of the protest t-shirt depends heavily on its context - the who, when, and how viewers encounter the object. The images in digital space reused in contemporary t-shirt culture have survived due to various modes that privilege some figures over others. Namely, those iconized leaders (dominated by charismatic male figures) who receive more scholarly attention over rank and file members. Unfortunately, these roles are positioned as mutually exclusive in graphic t-shirt culture. Furthermore, when we think of representation of gender and standards of beauty, certain icons emerge at the forefront of public memory (e.g. Huey Newton, Fred Hampton, and Angela Davis and Kathleen Cleaver mentioned above.) These images both romanticized the idea of Black manhood as a revolutionary ideal and mythologized a hyper-masculine revolutionary leader – an image that proved to be incompatible with the actual nature of the organization.[71] As scholars such as Amy Ongiri and Matthew Hughey have suggested, after four decades of the reproduction of movement images, the survival of Panther rhetoric and masculine image illustrates the myth and appeal of their iconography. Furthermore, the mirrored threat of cooptation and appropriation is unavoidable regardless of the intended use of the images produced.

Temporal circumstances affect the way t-shirts and their existence or absence in the archive are interpreted. When I began this project the initial thought was not only how t-shirts help us remember but also how they represent who gets to be remembered. However, again, Huggins cautioned:

It wasn't about the business of t-shirts then, as it is about t-shirts now... I wish I had a t-shirt with John Huggins on it. *[Your husband?]* Yes. *[Understood.]* I don't feel good that we don't promote the lives and the brutal deaths of the women. But, I don't like to look at someone we are trying to remember and say 'well why aren't we remembering this one?' Because the moment we do that, I'm not remembering the person I'm looking at… I saw a picture of John Huggins the other day I hadn't seen in years, and I thought wow, I wish I had that picture to remind me…[72]

[70] Ericka Huggins Interview, 10.21.15; n.b. KThMc changed Huggins use of the word "dress" to "fashion" in order to emphasize Huggins' distinction between these two concepts.
[71] Hughey, Matthew W. "Black Aesthetics and Panther Rhetoric: A Critical Decoding of Black Masculinity in The Black Panther, 1967 –80," *Critical Sociology*, 2009.
[72] Ericka Huggins interview, 10.21.15. Italicized bracketed comments mine.

It occurred to me that absences can tell us many things. I recalled, that not only were most rank and file women not iconized on t-shirts in the same way as the leadership but many rank and file men went acknowledged for their contributions to Panther history as well. As a community based organization, the Black Panthers (especially those involved in community programs such as Huggins) focused on the collective and not outer imposed celebrity.[73] For the many Fred Hampton t-shirts I have encountered, I never come across a Mark Clark t-shirt who was murdered by Chicago Police while guarding Hampton that same early morning in 1969. There are multiple Eldridge Cleaver t-shirts in circulation today and available via popular web based distributors; however, in all of my research, I've only come across two Little Bobby Hutton t-shirts.[74] And for every Huey Newton inspired t-shirt, I have yet to discover a t-shirt of Denzil Dowell, whose 1967 death in North Richmond, California was the first campaign against police brutality that brought national attention to the Black Panther Party. The same systems of representation that governed the ways some individuals were accepted into mainstream media (through fame or infamy) are the same systems of representation that affect which images are available today. These t-shirts represent a specific moment in time, but cannot tell the whole story.

Private Collections and Public Memory

Featured: Mr. Billy X Jennings, t-shirt designed by Billy X Jennings, image courtesy of Kimberly McNair, 2015.[75]

To intervene in the way the Black Panther Party has been understood and mostly defined through mass media, former members of the Party's rank and file have dedicated

[73] Billy X Jennings interview, 5.7.15. In my conversation with Jennings, he made it clear that much of what he does with his collection is "about the rank and file, the heart of the Party, not the leadership." From this, I inferred that he wanted me to see the broader picture, the day to day relationship and programs they built as the real legacy.

[74] As of 2015, there is one Bobby Hutton t-shirt available on CafePress.com and another available on Redbubble.com.

[75] Billy X Jennings interview, 5.7.15.

themselves to protecting and preserving their legacy. To further investigate what t-shirts existed then, I had to first venture into existing physical archives to engage with those who wore and produced these t-shirts. This led me to archivist and Black Panther Historian Billy X Jennings. Jennings, the founder and lead organizer of the Black Panther Party alumni group *It's About Time* based in Northern California and member of the National Alumni Association of the Black Panther Party (NAABPP), is a Panther historian, private collector and archivist of Panther paraphernalia, ephemera, photographs, newsletters, and artwork. He has also designed and produced Panther t-shirts since the early 1980s. Jennings was Huey Newton's personal assistant and bodyguard and has collected photographs from photographers and Black Panther paraphernalia for five decades. Upon visiting his home in Sacramento, CA one quickly realizes that Jennings collects everything. He started collecting when he was a child (i.e. newspapers, scrap books, MLK and Kennedy paraphernalia etc.)

In a May 2015 interview, when asked about his method for categorizing his archive he insisted that, "One picture can mean three things, so [I have] no separation or collection organized by category."[76] He first began collecting at garage sales or at events. When seeking Black Panther memorabilia of any kind, he believes you should "go directly to the source" meaning the members, Panther scholars, libraries, or archives by relation, and researchers. Jennings confessed that he only became aware of t-shirts around the late 1970s, but mostly for concerts and souvenirs.[77] Regarding Panther or black power specific t-shirts he didn't notice t-shirts for the most part until after 1979, when the Do It Yourself (DIY) method was on the rise and people began printing and silk screening their own t-shirts in their homes or small shops. He explained that Black Panther Party programs, pamphlets, and event tickets were more popular keepsakes than t-shirts. He recalled that the first Black Panther Party t-shirts he's seen came from Los Angeles chapter (commissioned by Bunchy Carter) in the late 1960s; and the first time he'd seen the panther symbol on a Lowndes Co. Freedom Organization shirt was worn by Stokely Carmichael (pictured earlier).

While discussing the importance of dress in the Party, he explained that the Panther uniform consisted of "black slacks, a blue shirt, and a leather jacket, because everyone had that."[78] However, Jennings explained, the standards were different for women. In Huey Newton's book *Revolutionary Suicide* (1973), Newton explained that the uniform was established because the leadership didn't want young men to look like thugs or street youth. The uniform was both a practical and respectful way to attract youth participation and in some ways "anti-fashion" that was contrary to the bourgeoisie clothing styles of the day.[79] Not to alienate street youth, but to show an elevated (or emerging) consciousness among black youth who were criminalized by authorities and the media. The Party wanted to connect with others and be on common ground with the community. This in fact attracted more young people to the organization. However, when considering the practicality of the uniform, Jennings revealed:

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[76] Ibid.

[77] Here Jennings mentioned the relationship between Black Panther Party t-shirts, concert souvenirs, and artists like Chaka Khan who was a member of the Chicago Panthers and a friend of Fred Hampton.

[78] Ibid.

[79] Barnard, Malcolm. *Fashion as communication*, Routledge, 2002; pp. 12–19.

> Some of these outfits cost members (most of whom were inner-city youth and not wealthy) a lot of money, and Panthers stopped dressing like that in 1969 because it was expensive. By 1970 we were ordered to stop wearing the uniform, because we were being stopped and kidnapped by government agencies and the police. We didn't wear the Panther uniform unless at a funeral or important event. We didn't want to be easily identified, so we evolved and adapted.[80]

When remarking further on the role of image, clothing, and memory Jennings explained that there was something Huey Newton told him years ago that still resonates with him today: "not one thing is revolutionary, it's the context you put into it."[81] In his experience he's seen the word "revolution" overused and exploited (e.g. the New Black Panther Party). He insists that, "the function of It's About Time is to keep the legacy of the Party, and rank and file. The 'panther' itself is an international symbol of the rank and file. It doesn't glorify the leadership – it's about Panthers! And it's the same thing with the t-shirt."[82] For Jennings, the cross and intra generational recognition of t-shirts and the time period, reminds people about what the Black Panther Party was and the good things Panthers did.

Jennings started making t-shirts for many reasons. He first made t-shirts to commemorate Panther Alumni events and he's also a collector of Black Panther t-shirts, art, and other memorabilia. He felt a need for a Panther reunion years before initiating it, and the t-shirts were the beginning. He contemplated using the t-shirts as a way to gain momentum for the Panther reunions and frequented flea markets and other memorial events over the years. Since the late 1970s he'd noticed that people buy t-shirts to support a movement or cause. When asked why he started producing t-shirts, he explained: "imaging is important, it helps get the word out, it sends a subliminal message to observers… People buy them, and it's easy turn-over… and it represented a special time or situation… it's a way to bombard the masses with a message and information."[83]

Like others, Jennings is an observer, designer, and producer but also a consumer of t-shirts. Even today Jennings gets recognized in public when wearing t-shirts because, as he says, "not everyone wears a Panther t-shirt. Where can you buy a Panther t-shirt? Nowhere, except Oakland, or directly from an organization… If I wear a t-shirt it's by design (e.g. a favorite Richard Aioki T-shirt)." He is recognized by people who were fed through the free breakfast program; and older people in the airport from his generation, "who remember those days."[84] Elaborating on the broad impact t-shirts and his t-shirt collection has on collective memory among Panther alums, Jennings remarked that the t-shirts also mean a lot to former movement participants and Panther alums that are imprisoned or in exile, such as Pete O'Neal, former chair of the Kansas City Black Panther Party, in exile in Tanzania for over 40 years. Pictures are taken of alumni groups wearing t-shirts featuring Pete and Charlotte (his wife) in their youth and those pictures are sent to Pete – "to make him feel

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[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid.

good, lets him know that people remember him. Lets him know that, 'we ain't forgot you brother.'"[85]

As a collector and historian, Jennings' archive serves the purpose of keeping and preserving memorabilia, photographs, paintings, books, magazines, film, audio records, and paraphernalia and the Panther legacy. The rarity of his collection speaks to his commitment.[86] In contrast to other popular apparel cultures this is an anti-materialistic endeavor.[87] The crates filled with NAABBP Reunion t-shirts, t-shirts from past political campaigns involving Panthers, and black protest t-shirts from throughout the diaspora hold invaluable contributions to Panther history. In fact, the power of this archive lies not only in Jennings' longevity but in the fact that his collection is well known by scholars and museums. In this way, he contributes to the passing down of Panther history and lore to younger generations; and more importantly, ensures that Panthers are not forgotten and that they tell their own stories.[88]

Jennings' interview helped me understand the practicality of the uniform but also the incorporation of t-shirts within it. He gave me material to help understand the network of relationships that t-shirts (reunion or original) emerge out of, and it helped me to understand the stories and human experiences that connected the present object to past memory. The t-shirts featured in photographs from the Black Power Movement and those available today as reunion souvenirs or reproductions of original designs provide a contemporary narrative on this pivotal moment in black activist history. However, these t-shirts are less about a regurgitated retelling of history and more about reverence. The wearing of the t-shirt by millennial generationers suggests affinity and connection to not only the person or organization but the history and lived experiences these individuals and symbols represent. This performative revisiting of history cannot be disconnected from the ways technology has influenced the post black power era. My point here is to suggest a reading of the performative elements of the t-shirt at protests, alumni events, conferences or cultural events. The technology has been incorporated into the performance (the replication) made possible through the digital afterlives of the original images.[89]

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[85] Ibid.

[86] Belk, Russell. "Collections and Collecting" in *The Handbook of Material Culture*, edited by Christopher Tilley, Webb Keane, Patricia Spyer, and Mike Rowlands pp. 384 – 401; p. 534. SAGE Publications, 2006.

[87] I'm specifically speaking of things like sneaker culture that includes a mass accumulation of expensive athletic sneakers by consumer fanatics, because they're expensive, for the purpose of accumulating, curating, and sometimes trading or reselling them. Though t-shirts are also accumulated, curated, and sometimes traded and resold, this is usually for the purpose of exhibitions in galleries, museums, or institutions' material archives.

[88] Guillory, M., & Green, R. (Eds.). *Soul: Black Power, politics, and pleasure*. New York, NY: New York University Press, 1998.

[89] Nyong'o, Tavia. "Performance and Technology" in *What is Performance Studies?* edited by Diana Taylor and Marcos Steuernagel. Duke University Press, 2012. Digital book published in collaboration with the Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics at New York University and HemiPress.

T-shirt designed by and image courtesy of Dominic Thomas, 2016.

Because of the mythic status the Black Panther Party occupies in the collective memory of those African Americans who identify with their legacy, the t-shirt has proven to also be a complicated icon and artifact. Those who are generations removed from the events that produced these images can build relationships with that time period through the photographs and symbols that are readily available online. The photographs and t-shirts are employed as surrogates and claims to membership in an organization and desire to associate with an idealized past. As I will discuss in chapter two, replicas or retro t-shirts featuring images, photographs, and symbols from the Black Power Movement extend media mythologies associated with these images. These self-referential items have indexical political meanings and social implications and their appeal in the contemporary moment stems from a need to honor and rejoin history.

Today's generation, like the black power generation, use symbolic elements and embodied actions as political statement. The salience of these t-shirts is evidenced by the current use of images from the Black Power Movement and the production and selling of black power retro t-shirts and t-shirt reproductions on Internet websites. T-shirts are another communicative technique that builds on the established repertoire of non-verbal/linguistic protest strategies. Returning to the first image discussed in this chapter, of the marching Panthers and the little girl alongside them, questions remain as to who the child grows up to be; how she and her children make sense of this history and her memory; and how this passed down history and memory is illustrated in their acts of protest. This intergenerational inclination to revisit history through mimesis is an example of "post-witness".[90] This involves the use of imagination (partly created out of shared trauma and abjection) to recreate elements of past events and moments in shared racial history.[91] These creative reproductions produced by post-witness generations act as re-representations of the "living memory" of those who watched the Black Power Movement and modern Civil Rights Movements unfold first hand. Though this illustrates both connections and disconnects between interpretations of what the images mean and the reality of that time, these t-shirts

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[90] Schult, Tanja; Popescu, Diana I. (Eds.) "Memory and Imagination in the post witness era" in *Revisiting Holocaust Representation in the Post-Witness Era.* Palgrave:MacMillan, 2015. Page 3.
[91] Ibid.

also allow wearers and observers to interpret absences in popular history and account for untold histories.

As one case in point, I interviewed Dominic "Dom" Thomas, a 26-year-old Seattle, Washington native and admirer of the Black Panther Party. I met Thomas at the Black Panther Party 50th Anniversary Celebration and Conference in Oakland, California. His infatuation stems from an interest in Aaron Dixon, the former Captain of the Seattle Chapter of the Black Panther Party. He's produced several replicas of Black Panther t-shirts, sweatshirts, and other items over the past few years. He is not a traditional vendor or entrepreneur, he simply makes t-shirts "out of respect" for the legacy of the organization. "These are my heroes," he said, "and I just wanted to honor them in someway. And people asking who it is that's my way of starting a conversation about them." In my four years of undertaking this project, Thomas represents the quintessential millennial t-shirt maker. He is quintessential in the sense of anonymity and lack of organizational ties or monetary motives, and also as an individual not interested in mass production. The replication of the 1968 Black Panther t-shirt (seen above) represents one of the sincerest examples of honoring the past through sartorial performance. Thomas does not sell any of his reproductions and they are mostly for his personal use. He gives them away for free and produces them by request. The two t-shirts pictured above are among only a handful (5 total) he produced. When describing why he made Black Panther t-shirt replicas, Thomas explained:

> Seattle is a small market for t-shirts. I don't own a company; I personally just do it for myself and for my friends. I take pictures based off of Google, and I use the kiosk at Northgate Mall in Seattle. I go to the kiosk and tell them "I want this" but I try to incorporate some kind of language around them for our people – black & proud – I try to incorporate our history.[92]

Reading the photographed t-shirts (within the context of Black Panther staged protests and rallies) and then venturing into Jennings' physical archive and encountering t-shirt makers like Thomas allowed me to analyze the phenomenon of black protest t-shirts with recognizable (reused and digitally available) iconography as both a language and an aesthetic. What is offered is an exploration of what Marianne Hirsch has termed "post-memory," and what scholar Joan Gibbons defines as, "the inheritance of past events that are still being worked through."[93] And for Hirsch:

> At stake is precisely the "guardianship" of a traumatic personal and generational past with which some of us have a "living connection" and that past's passing into history… Postmemorial work... strives to *reactivate* and *reembody* more distant social/national and archival/cultural memorial structures by reinvesting them with resonant individual and familial forms of mediation and aesthetic expression.[94]

What is evident is the care that Thomas takes in producing these reproductions. The shirts have the same historic colors and cut used by the Panthers some fifty years ago. Though he is not affiliated with any political organization, and does not consider himself an

[92] Interview with Dominic Thomas, November 6, 2016.

[93] Hirsch (1993); Gibbons (2007), 73.

[94] Hirsch, Marianne. *The Generation of Postmemory.* Columbia University Press, 2008, p. 2 - 9.

activist, he is intensely invested in political education. He insisted that, "It's important for us to know our history. It's not taught to us. Whether it's t-shirts, posters, whatever, we need to have our leaders known… That could change some of the things we're seeing today."[95] For Thomas, wearing t-shirts is not a performance of an imagined relationship with the organization; it is a way to embody their ideas. In this way, Thomas' t-shirts represent an intertextual double-referentiality, both the embodied politics of the Black Panther Party and the representation/reproduction of the Panther image.[96] Thomas is one among many millennials and hip hop generationers who participate in t-shirt culture through their investment in the story's of organization like the Black Panther Party. The making and wearing of t-shirts as a political practice continues the black protest tradition through wearable history.

<u>Conclusion:</u>

(Pictured: Brenda Presley and Shelly Bursey, National Headquarters staff, 1969;
T-shirt designed by Billy X Jennings; image courtesy of Kimberly McNair, 2015)

T-shirt culture is yet another medium through which Black identity and representation have been contested. The prominence of this particular t-shirt genre among African American collectors, designers, and distributors also illustrates how Black cultural production is not free of appropriation or resistant to commercialization and misinterpretation. Huggins, Jennings, and Thomas' stories are examples of how the t-shirt is a memory object that offers a connection to the past and has implications within the present. This chapter has illuminated themes regarding archives and the making of public memory. Reading images of individuals wearing t-shirts enabled me to trace the performance of black resistance through aesthetic language. Though I was unable to find existing t-shirts produced during the black power moment, this helped me understand not examine the ephemeral nature of t-shirts but to also determine the archives, where they are, and who the archivists are. Some people were iconized but Party Alumni intentionally produced t-shirts to remember people like Brenda Presley and Shelly Bursey (pictured above) who were not leaders of the party but were profound members of the party. T-shirts featuring Brenda and Shelly were produced back then, but only on the local level. Billy X Jennings created the reunion t-shirt featured above, as a way of remembering the rank and file membership who

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[95] Interview with Dominic Thomas, November 6, 2016.
[96] Cullum-Swan and Manning (1994); 427.

often go unrecognized. In doing so, he added to his now vast collection of Panther memorabilia and the archive of Panther history.

Several themes emerged while undertaking research on the visual and material history of the protest t-shirt in Black Panther Party clothing practice. The archive shapes what we know of past political beliefs, respectability politics and its evolution, and how we come to interpret gender dynamics at specific historical moments. I first viewed archives as institutions, a physical space, and the images used in this chapter as part of a record controlled by powerful entities (i.e. universities, corporations, government agencies) and private collectors who themselves retained a certain level of privilege. Public and private archivists have the power to determine what we know of the past. Certain stories can be privileged over others, and archivists play an intricate role in telling a story. In deciding how and where to keep items, how to catalogue items (or not), what items to include, and in the description and preservation of collections, archivists (re)shape, (re)interpret, and (re)invent the archive.[97] Therefore, archivists shape public memory and identity by preserving evidence of the past: who we were/are, what we believe/d, where we are from, and where we are going.[98] Social power is therefore negotiated, contested, and defined within the archive.[99]

This chapter illustrates how one's race, gender, engagement with popular culture, political leanings, and one's status as witness or post-witness (among other variables) can influence their interpretation of a t-shirt. Our understanding of the image at the center is anchored in place through clothing stitched with memories. Huggins and Jennings are surviving members of the Black Panther Party, and the subject relations they embody are less complicated than Dom's and my own. They are insiders, and this researcher was left feeling like a bit of an interloper, almost fifty years removed from the events that produced these t-shirts. However, with this in mind, my goal in this project is to address how t-shirts illustrate and speak (back) to relations of power and the institutional relationships that shape those experiences. I also labor to put the communal and familial ties within the community at the center of my project. This specific commitment, is motivated by one of Huggins' reflections, on the role of t-shirts in the movement and today. She suggested:

> [T-shirts] are a visual and cognitive reminder of what is important in the realities of our communities. The movements are continuous, unbroken flow of people uplifting community. Harriet to Denmark to Marcus to Malcolm to Yuri to Ella to Rosa to Huey to Bobby to Tarika and Ericka and Shelly and Brenda to Kimberly. At one point quilts and carvings told the story, now the wearable story…
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> People wore the t-shirts because of love. They came from love that's why people wore the t-shirts.[100]

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[97] Schwartz, Joan M. "Archives, Records, and Power: The Making of Modern Memory." *Archival Science* 2: 1–19, 2002.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Ibid.

The t-shirt emerges out of the interplay between its everyday utilitarian reception and its theatrical appropriation during "acts of protest," wherein the later transforms the former.[101] Here, the black bodies "performing protest" and the sidewalks, courthouse steps, streets, and highways that have become "stages" for protest empowers the t-shirt as body-text, artifact, and memory object. These t-shirts not only symbolize and illustrate meaning, they are meaningful subjects themselves. As body-text the performance is accomplished through the black bodies wearing the t-shirts. As artifact, t-shirts are not just objects but agents in a network of interrelated people, objects, and events. And as memory objects these t-shirts (and their reproductions) retain meaning after the original performance(s) of protest have ended.[102] Upon reflection on the interviews featured in the chapter, I have one certainty - it's not *who* we remember but *how* we remember. This can account for the absences in the archive of images used and in t-shirt culture as a practice of resistance. Interpersonal provocation, made possible through t-shirts, can make space for those who are forgotten and demand that we not forget. Setting the tone for the remainder of this project, chapter two will focus on the multiple ways the legacy of the Black Power Movement is evidenced in contemporary t-shirt culture. In the chapters that follow, I examine the ways t-shirts can be analyzed in terms of production, circulation, and consumption and how the popularity of the protest t-shirt genre correlates to shared political ideologies, socio-cultural values, and relations of power. I also interpret black protest t-shirts as a mobile archive that continue to shape public memory and black identity in the millennial age.[103]

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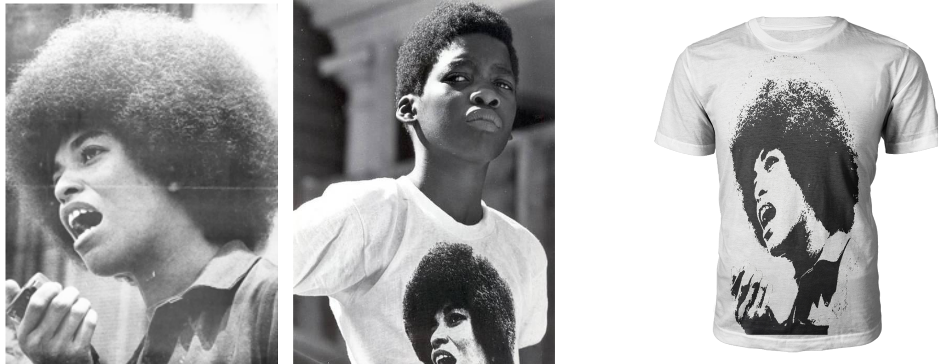
[101] Mitchell, Jon P. "Performance." In "The Handbook of Material Culture" Edited by Christopher Tilley, Webb Keane, Patricia Spyer, and Mike Rowlands, 384 - 401. SAGE Publications, 2006. p. 284.
[102] Ibid.
[103] KThMc "mobile archive" terminology.

Chapter Two

Remixing History: Retro T-shirts and the rise of Grassroots T-shirt Production



Left: Angela Davis c. 1970. Unidentified photographer.
Photographs and Prints Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library.
Center: Oakland youth wearing Angela Davis T-shirt. Image by Stephen Shames, 1970.
Right: Image courtesy of weblackspirit.com © 2016.

The black and white image on the left, is one of the most reproduced images of educator, activist, and former FBI's most wanted - Angela Davis. She is pictured at a Los Angeles rally in the spring of 1970, wearing a collared shirt and holding a microphone near her mouth mid-exclamation. Though the original photographer is unknown, this image was reproduced in *LIFE* Magazine for an article titled "The Making of a Fugitive."[104] The photograph, like many movement images of the time, was then appropriated on posters circulated through the Black Panther Newsletter and on t-shirts like the one worn by a young boy photographed above by Stephen Shames that same year.[105] This continued the cause célèbre surrounding Davis as a former fugitive and political prisoner and began a long history of appropriating Davis' image on movement paraphernalia and in popular culture. Imitations of this iconic image have an over 40-year history of appropriation within grassroots and mainstream t-shirt culture. The context of the Stephen Shames photograph at center is 1970s Oakland, California, birthplace of the Black Panther Party for Self Defense and the scene of many of Davis political rallies and coalition work with the Panthers like George Jackson. The image captures the boy, silent with eyes fixed on something outside of the frame. His facial expression gives a significant contrast to that of Davis on the t-shirt, worn in support of the activist who was pursued by the FBI and incarcerated at the time of the photograph. Wearing the t-shirt illustrates not only the boy's affinity and support of Davis and all political prisoners, but also a change in the way his community saw themselves. To revisit what Ericka Huggins poignantly stated, "Seeing these t-shirts let us know that there was work to be done. We knew we had work to do." The visual work done by the t-shirt with Davis's image, illustrates the boy's political awareness and the evolving race consciousness of his community. As seen in the image below, t-shirt stencils, decals, and iron transfers made Davis' image one of the most popular, especially as an image of a

[104] Photographer unknown.
[105] Marks (2013); *LIFE* Magazine, p. 24, Vol. 69 No. 11, September 11, 1970. Copyright © 1970 Time, Inc.

woman and leader in the movement, of that time. The t-shirt featured above on the right, seemingly identical to the 1970 t-shirt depicted at center, can be found and purchased online from *WeBlackSpirit* and similar shirts can also be found at vending booths around the country. The t-shirt facilitates a conversation about black history and political tradition "beyond time and space."

Angela Davis iron transfer "decal", front and back, images courtesy of the Lisbet Tellefsen collection.

In order to understand contemporary black t-shirt culture, it is necessary to trace the cultural development of protest t-shirt culture over the past five decades. However, instead of chronicling the material history of this vast archive of t-shirts, representations of the genre will be explored. There are two necessary elements to examine: how the popular images from the Black Power Movement used in protest t-shirts have changed over time through design strategies enabled by digital and new media; and the relationship between subjects (people) and object (the t-shirt) reflected in protest culture and the t-shirt industry. For this reason, this chapter will use *remix* as a theoretical framework. As a tool of popular culture, remix (i.e. the cut-and-mix function in music production) emerged at the same time as the massified production of graphic t-shirts and the cut-and-paste function in both t-shirt making and computer technology. This analysis will be done in three parts. The first consists of a discussion about "retro-ing" in black t-shirt culture and how it connects the black power generation to the hip hop generation. The aim is to understand how the images used change over time and how hip hop politics evolved to make space for both political affinity and commodity fashion through t-shirt culture. Next, I link this to the elements of remix in black t-shirt culture, to show how sampling in music and t-shirt production informed racial identity and political practice. Then, I discuss specific examples of how the retro t-shirt industry fostered a new relationship between t-shirt (object) and observers in the post-Internet era.[106] The Internet as an archive made images and information about past political movements readily available for the millennial generation. In turn, activists at the dawn of

[106] Connor, Michael. "What's Postinternet Got to do with New Art?" *Rhizome*, November 1st, 2013. The term Postinternet or "Post-Internet" is accredited to the *Rhizome* "Net Aesthetics 2.0" panel, organized by Lauren Cornell with participants Cory Arcangel, Michael Bell-Smith, Caitlin Jones, Wolfgang Staehle, and Michael Connor.

the 21st century used grassroots political strategies to market the t-shirt in a way that focuses on ideas emerging in movement culture rather than the t-shirt as a commodity.

The relationship between mass media infatuation and community support for the Black Power Movement illustrates the differences and intersections of popular fandom and racial affinity. Retro t-shirts featuring individuals like Angela Davis and Huey Newton and the symbolic gesture from John Carlos and Tommie Smith from the 1968 Mexico Olympic Games as popular items and other images from third world movements of the mid-20th century gained popularity and reemerged in the early 2000s. However, this phenomenon of past images represented in art or clothing is not new. Since Jim Fitzpatrick's 1968 iconic Che Guevara t-shirt, graphic tees have been a staple of both movement clothing and popular culture. This reflects the continued popularity of these images and products within mainstream culture, and the continued interest in the Black Power era as it relates to contemporary issues.

My curiosity surrounding these t-shirts lay in the familiarity and affinity with the individuals and events that produced the cotton framed images, best described as a form of "fictive kinship" to those individuals whose legacies were now prominently featured on the chests of wearers. These images have a "living presence," as bell hooks describes, serving as mediation between past and present. The images from the beginning and latter half of the modern Civil Rights Movement were essential elements of political and cultural understanding. The repetition of these images in the media, history books, and personal collections "provided a necessary narrative, a way for us to enter history without words."[107] hooks suggested that when African Americans use images "we connect ourselves to a recuperative, redemptive memory that enables us to construct radical identities, images of ourselves that transcend the limits of the colonizing eyes."[108] She makes this point while discussing the powerful influence photographs have on the lives of Blacks as a way to accumulate an archive of portraits that humanize and challenge those racial images produced, controlled, and interpreted by Whites through photography, mainstream press, and other mediums.[109]

The retro t-shirt genre plays upon the nostalgia for the past as well as the desire to reconnect with historic moments. These retro t-shirts are not vintage but derivatives that represent the time a specific social movement began. Vintage t-shirts are originals, which naturally age over time. In t-shirt retro-ing there are varied methods for ageing cloth, from pre-faded, distressed, or stonewash techniques. Mimicking the deterioration process illustrates the indexicality of clothing and how it constitutes social identities and illicit public memories.[110] This technique connects those who were and were not there, to that time period. As Aaron Glass argues, "through the performative act of wearing, the wearer becomes the type of person who would be identified by the shirt's message."[111] T-shirts are

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[107] hooks, bell. "In Our Glory: Photography and Black Life," *Picturing Us: African American Identity in Photography*, edited by Deborah Willis. The New Press: New York, 1994.
[108] hooks; Willis (1994), 53.
[109] From KThMc Prospectus, 3.21.2013.
[110] Glass, Aaron. "Crests on Cotton: 'Souvenir' T-Shirts and the Materiality of Remembrance." Museum Anthropology, Volume 31, Issue 1, Spring 2008. Pg. 3.
[111] Ib., Pg. 3.

a popular method for the display of one's life experiences, their travels, their fandom, and also one's recalling of past identities.

If we look at the current prevalence of Black power t-shirts within youth and popular culture, along with the recognition of these individuals as connected to the historical plight of African Americans, these products signify (or perform) political affiliation. As both Saidiya Hartman and Nicole Fleetwood have suggested, blackness carries with it an "extra" appendage of historical subjugation and abjection. However, many t-shirts within this genre lack this extra context — often provided as a named, dates, or paragraph of information included on the t-shirt — or more specifically they lack the acknowledgement of the particularity of the lived experience of these Black people featured on the t-shirts as racialized subjects.[112] By promoting identification with protest culture t-shirt designs also risk emptying these images of historical context and valuable political content. These interpretations can make the reincarnated images seem radical, the historical images seem less political, and strips the products they influence (i.e. clothing, music, posters, etc.) of any radical/political relevance at all.[113]

However, for this researcher the difference lies in whether there is a "political mission" (i.e. stated on a company or organization's website or at public vending) and how these products are put to use in various spaces. Aaron Glass' "Crests on Cotton: 'Souvenir' T-Shirts and the Materiality of Remembrance," serves as a useful model for my purposes here. In it the author examines t-shirts worn by the Kwakwaka'wakw people of British Columbia. For Glass:

> To speak of T-shirts produced… is to track the indigenization of this technology of mass production and consumption, to trace its legacy and legitimacy within communities that have long been objectified by outsiders and that have witnessed their own art forms appropriated… Like other forms of visual display… T-shirts play a mnemonic role, prompting the recollection and discursive recounting of the events marked by the shirt's graphics or text."[114]

Similar to the tribe reunion t-shirts Glass discussed, these retro t-shirts are a print medium composed of specific signs (e.g. afros, fists, recognizable Black faces, etc.) that transmit cultural and political meanings, through the depiction of these historical events and iconic figures. Therefore, public memory and understanding of Black radicalism is reconstituted each time it is enacted through these products. The focus on the everyday t-shirt is significant as a link to various organizations and historical events. The power of the t-shirt is that it is ubiquitous to daily life and therefore, as Glass asserts, "… the material artifact is simply an indexical vehicle for relations of belonging and affiliation; what is publicly displayed is not so much the shirt but the objective basis for claims about personhood and kinship."[115]

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[112] From KThMc Prospectus, 3.21.2013.
[113] From KThMc M.A. Thesis, June 2006.
[114] Glass (2008); p. 1.
[115] Ibid, p. 3.

Angela Davis: A Case Study in Public Memory and the Online Market

Left: a.) 1971 original "Libertad Para Angela Davis" Freedom for Angela Davis,
by Felix Beltran for the propaganda department of the Communist Party of Cuba.[116]
b.) Angela Davis Screen Print, OBEY: Shepard Fairey Poster 9/18/09 – 1/17/10
Right: Design by Otis Porritt. Courtesy of redbubble.com

The first image on the left is a poster for Angela Davis created by the Community party of Cuba while she was incarcerated. It reads: “Libertad para Angela Davis” / “Freedom for Angela Davis”. The second image on the left (a poster created by graffiti artist Shepard Fairey) and the t-shirt on the right are in circulation more than thirty years later and available for purchase in online markets. These are testaments to the commoditization of her image and the continued interest in images of black protest. Davis gained notoriety through her involvement in the case of George Jackson and W. L. Nolen, who had established a chapter of the Black Panther Party for Self Defense at California’s Soledad State Prison in 1969. She became the third woman to appear on the FBI’s Ten Most Wanted Fugitives List when she was charged with conspiracy, kidnapping, and homicide, due to her alleged participation in Jackson’s escape attempt in 1970. After eluding authorities for two months, she was arrested and acquitted of all charges. Angela Davis has stated: “It is both humiliating and humbling to discover that a single generation after the events that constructed me as a public personality, I am remembered as a hairdo.”[117]

However, over the past four decades Davis has had influence well surpassing her infamy as a one time fugitive and political prisoner. As scholars like Cynthia Young have noted, Davis implicitly reframed civil rights disobedience as an act of resistance to the nation-state that went beyond the challenging of Jim Crow segregation.[118] She was a scholar who achieved international consciousness by combining elements of Marxism, feminism, antiracism, and anticolonialism to formulate a revolutionary internationalism which included: theoretical consideration of the intersectionality of class, gender, race, and national oppression and how they produce and reproduce one another; and a focus on state violence and incarceration as tools for consolidating racial oppression in the First World.[119] Davis

[116] Vallenj, Mark. “Obey Plagiarist Shepard Fairey”. Art for a change, December 1, 2007; Image courtesy of www.art-for-a-change.com.
[117] "Afro Images: Politics, Fashion, and Nostalgia. *Critical Inquiry*. Vol. 21, No. 1 (Autumn, 1994), pp. 37-39, 41-43 and 45.
[118] Young, Cynthia A. *Soul Power: Culture, Radicalism, and the Making of the U.S. Third World Left.* Duke University Press: Durham and London, 2006; Pg. 184, 207.
[119] Ibid, p. 188.

makes an important point in her essay "Afro Images: Politics, Fashion, and Nostalgia" where she examines how photography affects one's image and the way he/she is viewed by the public. Her photographs were seen as instruments that "reduced a politics of liberation to a politics of fashion."[120] She changed the way she looked, and discovered that "glamour was the only look that might create the likelihood of being perceived as a revolutionary."[121]

In the past, Davis has expressed how powerful a photograph can be in establishing one's historical significance in society and in the public imagination. When these images are resurrected on t-shirts (as shown above), they have the power to re-define historical actions, relevance, and personal identity.[122] Forty years after Davis' image has come to signify the defiant 1960s, many of the social movement photographs depicting her and others continue to be recycled and re-contextualized in ways that are both attractive and disturbing. For Davis: "What is also lost in [these] nostalgic surrogates[s] for historical memory – in these 'arrested moments,' to use John Berger's words – [are] the activist involvement of vast numbers of Black women in the movements that are now represented with even greater masculinist contours than they actually exhibited at the time."[123] For Davis this use of "Photography as a technology of surveillance" was a justification for the racial-gender profiling of hundreds of black women.

For art critic John Berger, "An image is a sight which has been recreated or reproduced…which has been detached from the place and time in which it first made its appearance…"[124] He believes that images were first made to represent what was not there, the symbolic, and later acquired extra meaning by having a longer lifespan than the original subject(s).

> "When we see art from the past, we have the opportunity to place ourselves in history. The mystification is an attempt to prevent us from really seeing the image and so deprives us of our history…because privileged minority is striving to invent a history which can retrospectively justify the role of the ruling classes…"[125]

The cropped photos of Angela Davis reveals the extent to which their legacy has been appropriated and make a statement about their peculiar position within the global corporate capitalist culture and popular culture as a whole. An original piece of art has a presence in time and space and is physically marked by the artist and its provenance that contributes to it emanating an *aura*. Once photography was developed aura also referred to the human shadow projected onto the photographic plate. Aura of a work of art, as defined by Benjamin, is linked to uniqueness and originality. The aura is said to decrease each time a work of art has been reproduced, it lacks authenticity but the image is able to reach a broader audience. When a subject is decontextualized and abstracted to become just another vessel for reproduction (a stencil, a replica, or customized airbrushed imaged), it can be

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[120] *The Angela Y. Davis Reader* 1998 pp. 276-277, Articles by Angela Y. Davis, Edited by Joy James, Black Well Publishing Ltd., 1998.
[121] Davis (1998), pp. 273-274.
[122] Davis (1989, 1998)
[123] Davis, 1994
[124] Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*. Penguin Books, 1972. Page 9.
[125] Berger, 1972. Page 11.

manipulated to become a comedy of it's former self (the original). By strategically cropping the shots, keeping out prominent figures in the background (a palm tree and house) and deleting the profile of others, photographs enabled the images to avoid any periodization or the specifics of time and place. This "separation" is what Walter Benjamin noted in his well-known essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." Benjamin's understanding of the possibility of decontextualization through reproducibility is understood and utilized (often exploited) in contemporary popular culture; taking something out of its original culture with the potential of infinite appropriation by others for diverse purposes is a natural act for the average consumer.[126]

With this legacy in mind, one must note the inherent contradictions associated with the proliferation of both Davis' image and the "Afro" image and it's resurgence in contemporary t-shirt culture. Now in her seventies, she has accomplished much more in the areas of education and the prison abolition movement, and has continued to speak on intersecting issues as a 21st century public intellectual. However, the image of her iconized signature coiffed afro is still hard to escape. In a 2013 web interview she was again asked how she felt about her position both in history and as pop culture icon, admitting that her relationship to the image is "complicated." "It took me quite a long time to feel comfortable in my relationship with that image, because I always insisted, 'Well, it's really not me. It's an image that's been produced and that circulates in a certain way,'" she said. "But I'm not all that is ascribed to that image."[127] In a specific example, Davis describes a time she noticed a high school girl wearing a t-shirt with her image on it:

> She was wearing a t-shirt with my image on it. And I used to sort of really feel embarrassed and shy away. And people would even give me t-shirts and I'd say 'why are you giving it to me? I'm never gonna wear this.' *[Laughing]* So this young woman knew very little about the history. But I ask her 'why are you wearing this t-shirt?' And she said, 'because it makes me feel empowered. Because it makes me feel as if I can do anything I want to do.' And so at that point I reconciled myself to the work that the image performs and at the same time I have to recognize that it is not me, it is a constructed and created image that does has an enormous amount of power.[128]

<u>The Bridge: T-shirt Culture from Black Power to Hip Hop</u>

In his "Theses on the Concept of History," the Jewish-German Marxist Walter Benjamin, wrote that "for the oppressed, the memory of their defeated and slain ancestors is a deep source of inspiration for revolutionary action." This is why several iconized figures from the Black Power Movement were resurrected in protest t-shirt culture in the waning years of the 20th century. Hip Hop was the specific site of cultural production through which these retro t-shirts reached a new audience of consumers and influenced the political

[126] Navas, Eduardo. "Che: Recontextualization of an [a]historical Figure" Published at RemixTheory.net. April 21, 2009. *Remix Theory* is an online resource by Eduardo Navas that offers some of his research on Remix.
[127] "Angela Davis has 'Complicated Relationship' with Her Pop Culture Image," Credited to: EUR Publisher 02. *Lee Bailey's Electronic Urban Report*, April 5, 2013. Web. Italicized emphasis mine.
[128] Ibid.

participation of the millennial generation.[129] Music has long been a major site of black protest culture and has influenced the American public and black resistance in the United States. The interest in music in particular, beyond other avenues of performance such as in education (aptitude), labor/employment (production), athletics (physical prowess), or stage and film is useful because race is codified visually and sonically through music video and vernacular in a way that equates Hip Hop with Blackness, as jazz, the blues and soul did in past decades. Richard Iton delivers a compelling argument about the emergence of the Black super-public of the new millennia as opposed to the Black counterpublic that existed prior to the late 1960s. In his book, *In Search of the Black Fantastic*, Iton described the metamorphosis of Black culture into pop-culture, and the historical conflicts that brought the Black fantastic, into existence. The "fantastic" Iton speaks of is the in-between, the third space, the "break" (to borrow from Paul Gilroy and Fred Moten) through which Blacks in the diaspora maneuver through political terrain. Blackness *is* itself, a political formation; it is a "moving target" that does not always present a challenge to the state. For Iton, even though there are no guarantees in regard to shared experience or "collective" consciousness – there is yet no way to remove Blackness from its dialectic relationship with cultural hegemony because there is no cultural production outside of the political.[130] Another scholar, Patricia Hill Collins in her collection *From Black Power to Hip Hop: Racism, Nationalism, and Feminism*, looks at connections between cultural production, power relations, and political participation as a response to trends in structural inequalities.[131] For Collins, Hip Hop carries on in the tradition of other movements such as Black Nationalism, Afrocentrism, and black feminism as political responses to racism and new terrains to negotiate meanings around representations of race in social and political spaces. More specifically, she makes a useful intervention in addressing the Hip Hop generation's position of both invisibility and hypervisibility.[132] She points out:

> [T]his population has benefited from the Civil Rights Movement to make democracy work for African Americans… Yet as a group, Black American youth have also routinely been denied structural opportunities to exercise their citizenship rights and to achieve personal goals. In this sense, the status of Black American youth serves as a barometer for the status of American democracy itself.[133]

The structural invisibility that globalization produced, is experienced by black youth and is relational to their hypervisibility in mass media and cultural producers. Hip Hop then is black youth culture's response to this contradiction and the fact that established black political organizations seem incapable of addressing the issues that disproportionately affect them (i.e. unemployment, education, healthcare, and housing inequalities).

[129] "Hip Hop" capitalized is used to denote the broader culture and "hip hop" or "hip hop music" to denote the music genre.
[130] Iton, Richard. *In Search of the Black Fantastic: Politics & Popular Culture in the Post-Civil Rights Era*. Oxford University Press, 2008.
[131] Hill Collins, Patricia. *From Black Power to Hip Hop: Racism, Nationalism, and Feminism*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006.
[132] Ibid, p. 4.
[133] Ibid, p. 5.

Iton and Collins are useful in situating protest culture in general, and Black protest culture in particular in relation to both the formally and informally political. Formally political meaning the established organizations like the NAACP who work within the inner frameworks of the United States government traditional institutional structure; in contrast to those covert, nontraditional, political forms that people of color developed as cultural institutions like jazz, bebop, zoot suit culture, mural art, low-rider culture, Soul, Funk, graffiti, b-boy/b-girl-ing, Emcee-ing, DJ-ing, free-styling, remix, spoken word, and t-shirt culture to name a few. For Iton, something peculiar occurred in the time elapsed between the social movement era of the mid-20th century and the current "post-racial / colorblind / neoliberal" era. This is what Iton considers the deterioration of the Black *counterpublic* space occupied by people of color as political agents during the civil rights and black power eras, and the emergence of the Black *super-public* entity that dominates popular culture today.[134] Today black culture, in the form of Hip Hop culture, *is* popular culture and has been incorporated into the broader mass culture. Taking into consideration Iton's examples of public infatuation with black culture, T-shirts as objects help us examine the circulation and commoditization of Black cultural production and the radical tradition in mainstream market culture. The question of Black resistance and identity and what it means to be American and Black in the contemporary imagination must be analyzed historically and is best illustrated in cultural forms visual and performative.

The racial solidarity expressed by hip hop performers in the 1980s and early 1990s reach back into the archive of imagery from the black nationalist, Afrocentric, and Black Power Movement specifically to construct a racial identity (or Civil Religion) to combat new racism of that period. Like the Civil Rights Movement, Hip hop culture has been used to address racism, oppression, and poverty. With artist like "Chuck D", Sistah Souljah, Mos Def, Talib Kwali and the formation of the hip hop Summit Action Network in 2001, the social impact and possibilities of political movement seemed fruitful. Hip Hop evolved after legal integration and the end of de jure segregation. Hip hop, like the Black Arts Movement, used art as a tool of activism with protest anthems such as Public Enemy's "Fight the Power" (channeling/sampling via the Isley Brother's "Fight the Power"). Hip hop represented the underclass and poor urban youth of the United States.[135] These artists cared enough about common racial struggles and articulated them in their music and clothing. In the book *Hip Hop America*, Nelson George writes:

> "Now we know that rap music, and hip hop style as a whole, has utterly broken through from its ghetto roots to assert a lasting influence on American clothing, magazine publishing, television, language, sexuality, and social policy as well as its obvious presence in records and movies…advertisers, magazines, MTV, fashion companies, beer and soft drink manufacturers, and multimedia conglomerates like Time-Warner have embraced hip hop as a way to reach not just black young people, but all young people."

Hip Hop as a cultural movement began in inner-city communities of color in the Bronx, Queens, and Brooklyn boroughs of New York City in the early 1970s. Bakari Kitwana, in

[134] Read counterculture by the mass media; Ibid.
[135] "Hip hop as Culture" by Efrem Smith printed in *Youth Specialties* 2004.

his book *The Hip Hop Generation: Young Black and the Crisis in African American Culture* defines the hip hop generation as those born after the Civil Rights Movement (post - 1965). In this delineation, the hip hop generation includes mostly generation x and generation y millennials born before the introduction of the Internet. Though in the early 1980s it gained little notoriety in the mainstream, by the 1990s, Hip Hop culture was international and considered *the* mainstream, with no need to "crossover." The four "elements" of Hip Hop culture are Emceeing (rapping), DJing, graffiti, and b-boying (breakdancing). Others might add fashion, street vernacular, political activism, or other elements as important components of hip hop. However, the focus here is on clothing. Style, like music, allows individuals to tell a semi-autobiographical story, often relating to both personal experiences, and aspirational self / persona.

In cultural movements of the past, fashion has been one of the most prominent forms of protest, as evident in the flappers of the 1920s, the zoot-suits of the 1930s-40s, and the bebop fashions of the 1950s. Hip Hop fashion in the early 2000s had a new niche – "militant chic" – which borrowed several elements from the 1960s and 1970s countercultural fashion. To understand "fashion as resistance," we first need to examine the evolution of fashion within hip hop culture. Hip hop fashion is, according to KRS One (hip hop legend and intellectual "Knowledge Reigns Supreme Over Nearly Everyone"), one of the "extended elements of the culture."[136] Nineteen eighties hip hop fashion is remembered as one of the most important elements of "old school hip hop." These entertainers, spray can artists such as the Shirt Kings, and those who participated in hip hop culture appropriated American iconography via graffiti on t-shirts, jeans, and jackets as wearable art.[137]

Hip Hop culture is situated in a unique position between the nostalgia of the social struggles of the 1960s and 1970s [counter-public] and the popularization and commercialization of ethnic/cultural forms today [super-public].[138] Typically, the most prominent aspect of hip hop is rap music. However, *remix culture* in art, music, and fashion is an important aspect used to identify others and define individuals according to hip hop cultural signifiers. The beats that accompany rappers are often created using a "sample" of the percussion breaks of other songs, usually a 1960s or 1970s funk, rock, or soul recording. I would argue that within this protest t-shirt genre, there is a "sampling of history" within the fashion and the cultural rituals associated with hip hop.[139]

The art of the *remix* is a key component and influence relevant to the commoditization of iconic images and the iconicity of everyday clothing. Remix culture is defined as "the global activity consisting of the creative and efficient exchange of information made possible by digital technologies that is supported by the practice of cut/copy and paste, or simply remix is the act of taking samples from pre-existing materials to combine them into new forms according to audio and visual aesthetic taste."[140] The

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[136] Ibid.

[137] Sacasa, Edwin Phade. *Shirt Kings: Pioneers of Hip Hop Fashion*. Dokument Press, 2013.

[138] Iton (2008); discussed later in the chapter.

[139] Light, Alan. *The VIBE History of hip hop*. New York: Three Rivers Press (1999).

[140] Brewster, Bill and Frank Broughton. Last Night a DJ Saved My Life: The History of the Disc Jockey, Grove Press, 2000; Pg. 178-179.

concept derives from music produced around the Black Power and Vietnam War era late in New York City, an activity with roots in Jamaican music.[141]
In music, a general remix is a reinterpretation of a pre-existing song, meaning that the aura of the original will be dominant and recognizable in the remixed version.[142] For the purposes of my analysis, remix is also a reinterpretation of pre-existing historical images. However, "recognition" is not certain and some of the most innovative (advanced) remixes can challenge this premise.[143]

Left: Seated, Rapper Nas, origin of the Image is Unknown.
Right: Seated, Chuck D of Public Enemy, Spine magazine October 1992, photograph by Jesse Frohman.

Nostalgia and the Fashion of Resistance

Dick Hebdige (1979) argues that a credible image of social cohesion is only maintained through appropriation and redefinition of cultures of resistance. As visual narratives, the widespread re-appropriation of images stands as a testament to both the political empowerment and disempowerment of the individuals who embrace these images with a desire to connect to that history. Hip Hop culture has always been political – it illustrates the experiences of a marginalized and disadvantaged generation of urban youth. However, Hebdige also insists that mainstream culture absorbs all forms of protest and it

[141] Ibid.
[142] Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," 1936.
[143] Remix is discussed in further detail in the following pages. There are three types of remixes: The first remix is *extended*, that is a longer version of the original song containing long instrumental sections making it more mixable for the club DJ. The second remix is *selective*; it consists of adding or subtracting material from the original song. The selective mix is what's called the "commercial" edit, which is most popular on national radio. The selective remix in political art often takes multiple perspectives upon the same theme. An artist takes an original work of art and ads their own style to the piece creating something completely different while still leaving traces of the original work. It is essentially a reworked abstraction of the original while still keeping the original meaning intact. The third remix is *reflexive*; it allegorizes and extends the aesthetic of sampling, where the remixed version challenges the aura of the original and claims autonomy even when it carries the name of the original; material is added or deleted, but the original tracks are largely left intact to be recognizable. In culture at large, the reflexive remix takes parts from different sources and mixes them aiming for autonomy. The aura (essence) of the original, whether recognizable or not must remain a vital part of the remix if it is to find a cultural niche. Other types of reflexive remixes are parodies, and are created to mock, comment on, or make fun of an original piece by means of humorous, satiric or ironic imitation.

therefore creates and perpetuates stereotypes by making previous historically significant images into pervasive media imagery.[144]

In the 1990s and 2000s mainstream media outlets, corporations, and advertisers sought to appeal to the social dissent of the hip hop generation by offering popular alternatives.[145] To capitalize on the idle nature of youth culture, after cuts in Education took away invaluable afterschool programming and the lack of job opportunities for work age adolescents, many trends contributed to the feeling of alienation amidst young people even though at that time the nation was experiencing economic surplus and rapid growth in tech industries and products. In response to the everyday oppressions they experienced, young black artists enlisted to drive the "ever accelerating wheels of consumption" found ways to symbolically come to terms with this contradiction between their role as consumers and their role as the producers of cultural trends.[146]

At the turn of the millennium it became popular for celebrities to periodically champion a cause (for example Sean Combs 2004 "Vote or Die" campaign) – as long as their efforts were not seen as too radical and certainly not too early in their careers.[147] With the influence of pop-culture aside, the gains of the civil rights and black power generation were so large and transformative that the period has come to define (for some) what activism is and looks like – with its martyred leaders at the center of how movements came to be remembered.[148] Perhaps the physical and psychological blows of the FBI's COINTELPRO,[149] and the deaths, false imprisonments, and exiles of many civil rights leaders (i.e. Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, Assata Shakur, Geronimo Ji Jaga, etc.) discouraged a new generation of activists and led some to choose careers over activism.[150] Consumer culture in the 1990s and 2000s influenced some artists to pursue financial security through careers as moguls in music, and fashion, film, and alcohol, and other investments. And many times their "activism" was part of their celebrity persona. Some entertainers of the hip hop generation, such as Nas (featured above and below), Talib Kwali, Mos Def, dead prez, and the Coup were and are activist minded and tuned into activists' concerns. However as political as their messages may be, few were directly connected to political movements.[151]

Members of the hip hop generation may be aware of the previous generation's grassroots efforts and mainstream civil rights success, "but they aren't locked exclusively into an old-school civil rights agenda."[152] But when it becomes a positive financial interest for some young public figures and their marketing/talent agencies, their mainstream image is radicalized and the "radical" moves farther into the mainstream. Though the 1950s and 1960s brought about changes in laws, and the 1970s introduced Black elected officials, the

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[144] Hebdige 1988, Fiske, John. *Understanding Popular Culture*. Unwin Hyman, Inc., (1989).
[145] Chapter: "You Remind me of Something", *Soul Babies: Black Popular Culture and the Post-Soul movement* 2002 by Mark Anthony Neal.
[146] Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool* 1974, University of Chicago Press, 1997, p. 54.
[147] Kitwana, Bakari. *The hip hop Generation: Young Blacks and the Crisis in African American Culture.* Basic Civitas Books, 2002.
[148] Edwards (2012).
[149] The Federal Bureau of Investigation's "Counter Intelligence Program".
[150] Kitwana (2002).
[151] Ibid.
[152] Ibid.

1980s and 1990s (when many hip hop “generationers” came of age) lacked a significant movement around which inner-city youth led political work on a national level.[153] Hip Hop fashion became less based in actual street wear and more in an idealization of such. Rocawear’s use of high-fashion models, like Naomi Campbell in their advertisements with Black Power aesthetic, allowed them to tailor their ads towards those urban consumers who both aspire to have the wealth and status of both hip hop and pop-cultural icons as well as the radical edge of political icons portrayed. Therefore, tapping into the dual desire of the hip hop generation to be glamorized – falling into the allure of mainstream luxuries and materialism, and on the extreme – adhering to the edginess and “non-conformity” present in street culture.

Left: Rapper Nas as Huey Newton, courtesy of msonghelita.tumblr.com;
photograph by Robert Maxwell, Copyright © 2003 Vibe Ventures, Inc.
Right: Naomi Campbell Rocawear Advertisement, from the November 2003 issue of *VIBE* magazine.
Copyright © 2003 Vibe Ventures, Inc.

Because of her status as a fashion icon, Naomi Campbell was chosen to headline the Rocawear 2003 fashion campaign in a series of advertisements featured in the Hip Hop magazine, *VIBE*. In the Campbell ad, do we think of her as “Naomi Campbell the glamorous fashion model” and what does she as a figure represent in terms of being a potential inheritor of “the afro”? Why has Rocawear appropriated this aesthetic? The shotgun and spear are noticeably absent from the “reincarnated” Campbell ad, however these objects are replaced by a raised black power fist, which signifies the Black Panther mystique and is a “throwback” to the 1960s, the Black Power Movement, and the iconic image of Newton. Also, omitted from the ad are the black beret and black leather jacket. A form fitting brown leather coat trimmed in fur replaces them. This styling of Campbell’s black female body illustrates how today’s urban fashion ads made use of revolutionary symbolism, by citing Newton’s political legacy. Campbell’s crossed legs, fitted jacket, and reclined arm on the wicker chair indicate a sophisticated demeanor. The viewer knows (from historical recollection) that the Black Power fist signifies authority. Campbell is looking directly into the lens – acknowledging the 4th wall and connecting with the viewer. We know that she is

[153] The point of departure here is my use of Kitwana’s discussion on page 153 of *Hip Hop Generation*, which speaks to the lack of political activism among the mainstream entertainers of the hip hop generation.

in charge because of the photograph the image imitates. The wicker chair is a thrown and "the afro" is Campbell's crown.

Nas the rapper (above, left) is no stranger to wearing intentionally provocative t-shirts. In February 2008 he and his the wife, recording artist Kelis, arrived at the Grammy Awards wearing t-shirts and jackets emblazon with the word "NIGGER," the title of his album produced that year. His admiration for Huey Newton has been illustrated over the years through t-shirts, in song, and reenactment of the same 1967 photograph. Pictured here in a 2003 VIBE Magazine photo shoot, he's seated in a wicker chair. Yet, unlike Campbell he's armed, seated with a pistol in his lap wearing a plain white tee with blue jeans. He is slouched, and doesn't appear to be concerned with fashion. This differs from Nas' nearly identical restaging of the Newton photograph (included above, beside Chuck D's omage to the image). His throne is not as regal as Campbell's, and perhaps was not intended to be. Here, Nas is emblematic of the millennial hustler, a character that he's played before in feature films.[154] The revolution being signified is one of street economy and black capitalism.

Brian McKnight R&B artist photograph for 2002 Album and *VIBE* Magazine interview. Copyright © 2001 Vibe Ventures, Inc.

Another image originating in VIBE was a publicity still for Brian McKnight's 2002 album, which coincided with the emergence of images of Black female submissiveness within hip hop magazines. This image suggests, like the Newton 1967 photograph, that the poses were carefully contrived by those who knowingly manipulated aspects of the image to attract a particular segment of the market – those young consumers who find a connection (however vague) to the image. The black and white photo (which accompanied an article featuring McKnight) has a clear connection with both Smith and Carlos' symbolic protest at the Olympic games of 1968 in Mexico City and so-called "Pimp" culture. Again, like other recreation of civil rights photos' this photo cites the original photo to invoke nostalgia and to communicate resistance and coolness. Notice how the model (whose ethnicity is ambiguous) is elevated on a white pedestal with raised fist and bowed head. She is wearing only two articles of clothing: a single black leather glove on

[154] Nas was featured in films such as *Belly* (1998) *In Too Deep* (1999).

her right hand (like Smith in the original photo) and black leather underwear. The model has yet to emancipate herself from McKnight (the 'pimp' seated at the foot of the pedestal). The male subject is lower in position, than the female subject. The female seems be in a position of power above the male because she is on a pedestal. However, here the pedestal symbolizes status without power. Her power is diminished by her semi-nudity and bowed head. There are many things happening; and race, gender, clothing (or the lack of clothing), dark skin vs. light skin, standing vs. sitting, and the choice of a black/white colored depiction are all factors in the way in which this ad is perceived by viewers. The lowered head of the female subject is almost childlike in its submissiveness. She is looking away from the lens, while he looks directly to the audience and acknowledges the fourth wall. The hip hop cultural indicators of the "pimp" jacket and suit signify that the male subject is a "hustler" of women. This is one of the few photos, where there are two subjects that exemplify the male/female binary. However, they do not interact in frame. Therefore, they are both solitary figures.

Remix Culture and Historical Memory

Eduardo Navas defines remix culture as, "a global activity consisting of the creative and efficient exchange of information made possible by digital technologies. Remix is supported by the practice of cut/copy and paste… [and is] the activity of taking samples from pre-existing materials to combine them into new forms according to personal taste…"[155] For Navas, remix is "ubiquitous in art and music; it plays a vital role in mass communication, especially in new media."[156] "Remixing history" is a blending of fact and fiction, the sampling of images from the past help recontextualize the present. To illustrate this in t-shirt culture, I apply the ways Navas conceptualizes contemporary remixes to engage how iconic photographs from the Black Power Movement are also "a conceptual and formal collage of previous ideologies, critical philosophies, and formal artistic investigations extended to new media."[157] For the purpose of the examples used and my analysis, what I term "remixing history" depends on the ways technology (the tools of mechanical reproduction) allows for the recontextualization and reconceptualization of history.[158] To consider this, I chose works from two different media: photography and t-shirts. My examples include: first (above) the aforementioned 1970 photograph of Angela Davis and a 1970 Stephen Shames photograph of an Angela Davis t-shirt wearer; second, the John Dominis photograph of Tommie Smith and John Carlos at the 1968 Mexico Olympic Games and parodied t-shirts featuring their likeness; and lastly, hip hop reenactments of the iconic 1967 photograph of Huey Newton (attributed to Blair Stapp and composed by Eldridge Cleaver) and one of the many t-shirts bearing this image. I use these specific photographs to compare/contrast them to contemporary interpretations that reincarnate (i.e. sample) these

[155] This is Navas' definition extending Lawrence Lessig's definition of remix culture based on the activity of "Rip, Mix and Burn." Lessig is concerned with copyright issues; my definition of Remix is concerned with aesthetics and its role in political economy. See Lawrence Lessig, *The Future of Ideas* (New York: Vintage, 2001), 12-15.
[156] Ibid, 15.
[157] Ibid, 67.
[158] Ibid, 111.

moments in time.

The emergence of the home computer in the late 1970s gave way to another form of sampling and communication technique - that is, the commands "cut, copy, and paste."[159] These allow one to sample and transfer text through the interactive process of creating a document. The origins of remix in black popular culture emerged from a crucible of new technologies, political currents, and cultural movements. The first stage of Remix took place in the late 1960s. Taking the medium of photography and incorporating this into graphic t-shirts through silk screening became a way for 1960s radicals to propagandize their causes. With the invention of the heat press and computer graphic design applications, democratized t-shirt making for businesses and individual vendors in the late 1970s and 1980s. Therefore, in the stages of photographic reproduction from medium to medium, printing, reprinting, cropping, cutting, and pasting an image onto a t-shirt acted as a kind of "remix."

Similar to the computer, during the second stage of Remix, technologies in music (vinyl records, the turntable, and the drum machine) merged in the form of "cutting and mixing" different songs and genres together.[160] This second stage of Remix also saw "cutting and mixing" in t-shirt designs, evidenced by the emergence of Afrocentric t-shirts that used both graphic designs and images.[161] Though many African Americans and other people of color did not have access to computers in the 1970s and 1980s, by the 1990s home computers became increasingly available for most households in the United States. The third stage of Remix saw incorporation of "cutting and mixing" techniques in mainstream music and music video production in the 1990s, when the underground style and aesthetic of black music was commercialized and put to use in the developing hip hop consumer industry.[162] The mid-1990s also saw the birth of the Internet (i.e. web 1.0; e.g. search engines and chat rooms), and an increase in home computer use. With the invention of Photoshop and digital musical platforms, remix culture further influenced new media producers in the area of art, fashion, and musical composition.[163]

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[159] Ibid, 15.
[160] Ibid, 20.
[161] See example on the first page of the Introduction.
[162] Navas, Eduardo. *Remix Theory: The Aesthetics of Sampling.* Springer Wein New York Press, 2012, p. 20. Web.
[163] Basu, Dipannita; Lemelle, Sidney. *The Vinyl Ain't Final: Hip Hop and the Globalization of Black Popular Culture.* Pluto Press, 2006.

Right: Design by Otis Porritt. Courtesy of redbubble.com

The 1990s is when the appropriation of social movement photography becomes most salient within post civil rights t-shirt culture, and according to Navas, we are currently living through the fourth stage of remix which began in the late 1990s. At the dawn of the new millennium and birth of web 2.0 (i.e. user generated content; e.g. YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter), Navas argues that, "Remix becomes and aesthetic to validate activities based on appropriation."[164] Here Remix serves not only to describe appropriated music but also appropriations in fashion, imagery, and other cultural practices. For this scholar, this is the point where "remixing" history in t-shirt culture begins. I will use as an example the image of Angela Davis, taken from the 1971 "Libertad Para Angela Davis" Freedom for Angela Davis, created by Felix Beltran for the propaganda department of the Communist Party of Cuba and remixed by Otis Porritt. The designer's background and political affiliation is unknown but his image both carries cultural value and is autological (i.e. it references itself).[165] The digital access to the iconic poster of Davis and the ability to edit the image through Photoshop editing makes it susceptible not only to remix but appropriation by young consumers who may not know the origin of the image.[166] This regression is what Theodor Adorno theorized would control what individuals would consume in the culture industry. The question of whether this can be extended to "regressive viewership" and consumption is a necessary consideration; however, that may lead to an unnecessary qualifier that one must know or recognize the origin of an image, which, according to my observation, is not a criterion for consumption or purchase. Attraction to the image is necessary, and what attracts one to the image depends on the referent (i.e. the afro).

The Davis photograph is a "slice of time" that captures a moment that can be repeated in the imaginations of viewers. However, the repetition of the image in popular mediums (now a t-shirt) undermines the original representation (the poster), which also "stands in for" a point in time (her capture, trial, and acquittal). As a result, the Photoshopped image stands in for an expanded point in time - the 1970s; and an idea - black radicalism. Here Davis's image connects the first and last stages of remix culture - the copy and aesthetic appropriation. Websites like Redbubble, Zazzle, and CafePress blur the lines between mainstream and street economy, by giving laymen designers and entrepreneurs a space to produce commodities. Navas contends:

[164] Navas (2012), 22.
[165] Ibid, 27.
[166] Ibid, 27.

> "Remix in new media blurs the line between high and low culture… allowing average people and the elite to produce work with the very same tools. Choice and intention, then, become the crucial defining elements in new media; digital tools can be used to support all types of agendas—which fall between commerce and culture.[167]

Appropriation then, can also illustrate a change in ideological strategy over time. Using the Huey P. Newton Foundation as another example, their appropriation of Newton's image recontextualizes the original image and subject for a new object. To recontextualize, instead of to decontextualize, meaning is to take advantage of the contextual difference between the photograph as a historical text and the t-shirt as a contemporary text.

Left: Huey P. Newton, Minister of Defense of the Black Panther Party. Photographed by Blair Stapp in 1967. Featured on the cover of *The Black Panther* Vol. 4 No. 11 in 1970. Copyright © 1970 Oakland, CA. Black Panther Party Ministry of Information.[168]
Right: Image courtesy of CafePress.com/blackpanther, The Dr. Huey Newton Foundation, © 1999 - 2013.

For example, we can examine the progression of the 1967 photograph of Huey P. Newton, which was photographed by Blair Stapp and staged by Eldridge Cleaver, and depicted Newton in a "wicker throne" with a spear, shield, and rifle. This image both romanticized the idea of Black manhood as a revolutionary ideal and branded Newton as a hyper-masculine revolutionary leader. Newton had been arrested in 1967 after a confrontation with the Oakland Police that left one officer dead, one shot, and Newton wounded. During Newton's imprisonment while awaiting trial Eldridge Cleaver, the Black Panther's Minister of Information, framed the case as an example of racial oppression and the "Free Huey!" campaign was born.[169] The photograph was then made into a poster and featured in The Black Panther newsletter and on the walls of Panther Headquarters throughout the nation. During Newton's incarceration this image both garnered support for

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[167] Ibid, 31.
[168] Photography attributed to Blair Stapp; Composition by Eldridge Cleaver 1967. From the collection of New-York Historical Society. Poster with black and white photo of Newton seated on wicker chair holding a rifle in one hand and a spear in the other, flanked by hide shields, on a zebra skin rug. Newton quote in lower proper right corner, central Black Panther logo and address in proper left corner in black text. "The racist dog policemen must withdraw immediately from our communities, cease their wanton murder and brutality and torture of black people, or face the wrath of the armed people." – Huey P. Newton, Minister of Defense
[169] Newton, Huey P and J. Herman Blake, *Revolutionary Suicide.* Writers & Readers Publishing; Reprint edition (April 1995) p. 207.

his legal case and as propaganda it attracted white allies and supporters of the Party. The Huey P. Newton Foundation, Inc. (directed by Panthers alumni David Hilliard, former leader of the Oakland chapter, and Huey's widow Fredrika Newton) garnered a copyright for the image and reproduced it on t-shirts and other materials (tote bags, mouse pads, and mugs).[170] For Navas, "Remix… is meant to take pre-existing material and make it different while also trying to keep the spectacular aura of the original in order to attain allegorical legitimation."[171] Newton was the inspirational leader of the Black Panther Party and this photo was used as the cover to the "Happy Birthday Huey" edition of the Black Panther Newsletter, and was heavily distributed and recognized throughout black households.[172] The above t-shirt is one of many images of Newton that has since been reincarnated (i.e. remixed) into an image on t-shirts.

Left: Tommie Smith and John Carlos's Olympic Protest in the 1968 Mexico City games. Photograph courtesy of The Associated Press. Right: "Black Power Rangers" t-shirt image, designed by Crock Tees. Image courtesy of redbubble.com.

The landscape of the archive shifted as images become continually digitized. The archive (i.e. the photographic record curated by artists, activists, and historians) served as a testament to the preserved history of the Black Power Movement and radical print media. As a case in point, the image of John Carlos and Tommie Smith at the 1968 Mexico Olympic Games, illustrates not only a lack of concern for the archive and what it represents but also how technologies such as Photoshop, make it easier to, as Navas argues, "to sample, to take, "to borrow," and to steal from pre-existing works, while disregarding with greater ease the work's history."[173] This sampling, can also lead to a loss of historical content through constant parody and decontextualization. The time period when the remixes below were produced is significant in that the dawn of web 2.0 initiated a new era of user generated content and online exchange via websites such as eBay, Zazzle, Redbubble, and CafePress. Sprinters Tommie Smith and John Carlos (Left) helped to bring the Civil Rights Movement

[170] From KThMc Prospectus, 3.21.2013.
[171] Ibid, 116.
[172] Sweed, Cicely J. "The Search for Angela Davis: A Meditation On Revolutionary Commodities and Neo-Hoodoo Advertising." *Sight Lines Thesis Projects*, 2004. Web.
[173] Ibid, 119.

and Black Power Movement to the international stage when they raised their black gloved fists and lowered their heads as they stood on the medal stand during the playing of the national anthem. Much has been made of this controversial moment in history, but few people know the actual significance of the particular way Smith and Carlos chose to express their outrage against black oppression in the U.S. They were wearing one glove from the same pair of gloves on Smith's right and Carlos' left hands – bonding them in this united symbolic action. The two men were stirred by their involvement with the Olympic Project for Human Rights. In the 200-meter race, Smith won the gold medal and Carlos the bronze, but their actions were met with such outrage that their medals were revoked.

The image at right (above), the "Black Power Rangers" t-shirt design, is dependent on this pre-existing moment, "the salute," at the 1968 Mexico Olympic Games. The ability for the viewer to understand the remixed content which combines two elements of remix (selective and reflexive) depends on its reference to the original photograph and moment. A selective remix takes specific elements of the original (the award podium, a single raised fist) and a reflective remix is commonly a parody of the original. This image, designed by Crock Tees, attests to the age of a "raceless" cyberspace.[174] The erasure of the historical significance of "the salute" has racial implications and challenges the idea that an online t-shirt hub can be an unbiased and race neutral space. It also mixes the pop culture histories of both black power and the live action television series, The Power Ranger. When a subject is abstracted to become just another vessel for reproduction, just another appropriation, it can be manipulated to mean anything. Navas suggests that, "Remix, even when used in regressive fashion, with a short history span, still demands that people recognize some trace of history."[175] Another popular incarnation is the t-shirt that completely inverts the image of the 1968 salute and represents it as a silhouette. The concern here is not with authorship, as it feels it is limiting and calls into question one's "legitimate" use of an image or slogan. This takes us away from how the image comes to mean different things for different "readers" and in this lays the potential for discursive intervention. However, what I am concerned with is the fact that if you take an idea and abstract it to its farthest extent - if it can be maliated to mean anything than it means nothing. The same is true for the black power salute, and the public's understanding of that moment in 1968.

Selling Nostalgia and The Emergence of Collective Authorship

By the mid-1970s the resurgence of African American ethnic pride and the acknowledgement of the political struggles associated with race in the U.S., encompassed a cultural alternative to assimilation and political alternatives to traditional American individualism.[176] For author Marilyn Halter, cultural commodification is inherent in the capitalist system and is an inevitable outcome.[177] She suggests that, "After decades in which assimilation was the leading model for the incorporation of diverse populations, cultural

[174] Nakamura, Lisa. *Cybertypes: Race, Ethnicity, and Identity on the Internet*. Psychology Press, 2002.
[175] Ibid, 28.
[176] Halter, Marian. Shopping for Identity: The Marketing of Ethnicity. Schocken Books, 2000
[177] Ibid.

pluralism emerged to take its place as the reigning paradigm."[178] But the reemergence of politically charged imagery from the Black Power Movement (though performed) is unique in the sense that it somehow bridges the ideologies and experiences of both the civil rights and hip hop generations in a way that illustrates the paradox that exists in the relationship between ethnic celebration (i.e. Black Power) as a political statement, and consumerism. The complex relationship that exists between capitalism and protest culture (demonstrated through "consumer activism" and activism against consumerism and corporate interests) creates the impulse for consumers to look to popular culture to revive and re-identify with themselves – their cultural, political, and ethnic heritage. If the motivation is to reclaim roots – the nostalgia – the impulse often stems from contempt for commercialism, and consumers may rather rely on the street economy and private producers.[179]

The search for authenticity is very much related to nostalgia for an idealized and fixed point in time like the 1960s and 1970s. The counterculture of this time attracts many young people today, because this era in American history was supposedly untouched by the corruption of the establishment and commercial development. Therefore, the more artificiality is apparent in contemporary America, the more people long to feel connected to authentic experiences.[180] The irony is that the corporate entities and the consumers themselves rigorously impose specifications of authenticity. My point here is not simply to focus on the commodification of icons, images, and symbols, but rather to make connections to the broader, deeper struggles that are simultaneously taking place beneath the surface.

T-shirts are the quintessential postmodern objects. They emphasize the visual and elevate the individual. Fredric Jameson argued: "[F]or whatever peculiar reasons, we seem condemned to seek the historical past through our own pop images and stereotypes about that past, which itself remains forever out of reach."[181] Using his framework of postmodern cultural logic (i.e. late capitalism or neoliberalism) opens a discussion around the dominance of the visual and t-shirts as a filter for a history that is reduced to recirculated images. The appeal for these t-shirts lie in nostalgia derived mostly from images in television, documentary film, and popular culture (i.e. history as text). Because many of the t-shirt designers and wearers were born during and after the onset of the Internet, these t-shirts represent Fredric Jameson's idea of a past that is retrievable only through images.[182]

Through the photographs used, the past is material artifact mediated in the form of a t-shirt. T-shirt producers, wearers, and observers have to contend with the dialectical relationship of our mediated past and our actual past. Because of the ways the Internet and other media have changed the archive and saturated the present, access to both our mediated past and actual past are readily available. Within a postmodern framework, the past has currency and one can purchase it as a commodity.[183] The past (in the form of a t-shirt) is presented as discourse, the way we come to know and make meaning of the Black Power

[178] Ibid, 5.
[179] Halter (2000).
[180] Ibid.
[181] Jameson, Frederick. "Postmodernism and Consumer Society." Whitney Museum Lecture, 1982. Page 6.
[182] Jameson, Fredric. 1991. Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism. Durham: Duke University Press.
[183] Ibid.

Movement via their past representations in the present. But this discourse is presented as equivalent to our mediated realities in the present day, one where black power fashion is one of many equivalent style choices. Under neoliberalism, people are individuals independent of social categories like race, gender, rich, poor, advantaged, or disadvantaged. The neoliberal model (late capitalism) resists considering these hierarchical categories, or of acting collectively for a political change.

Though the above examples illustrate one side of the postmodern condition; other individuals have used new media to subvert the neoliberal tendency to commodify the past. To be clear, from the Black Power Movement to hip hop and the millennial moment these t-shirts have told the same story (autobiographical retellings of the personal histories of iconized leaders and notable figures), presented in gaps. As a media form, the photograph is a language the story uses and as a media channel the t-shirt is another avenue to reproduce the photograph.[184] Therefore, the t-shirt reproduces the story told in the same incomplete same way. For this reason, t-shirts can be considered cross-media because they tell a story about the past (represented as a photograph) across many channels (t-shirts).[185] I use the term cross-media because of the performative dimension of t-shirts. Similar to Henry Jenkins' concept of transmedia, t-shirts enable the photo as text "to not simply dispense information [but] provide a set of roles and goals which readers can assume as they enact aspects of the story."[186] That aspect being the act of protest and the practice of activism.

Although photographs have an indexical capability, on t-shirts the history is depicted in unavoidable fragments. As a "slice" or sample of one moment in time, even as artifacts these photographs cause readers "to have a strong incentive to elaborate on story elements, speculate, until the images take on a life of their own."[187] The issue here is how then, do the hip hop and millennial generations "fill in the gap" in time and memory and what ideological shifts does this necessitate? There is a possibility that through these t-shirts meaning can be expanded and put to use toward political change. When done through collective political organizing, t-shirts help activists to recontextualize the images and challenge the notion of "selling nostalgia." The contradictory forces of legal disputes around authorship (who owns or has rights to the images and designs used), and conflicting goals of consumers, producers, and gatekeepers produced grassroots t-shirt production.[188] In grassroots protest t-shirt culture co-creation and collaboration is encouraged. As Jenkins' points out: "Most media franchises are governed by licensing (where the story originates in one media and subsequent media remain subordinate to the original master text)."[189] Through this process of production, activists create a collective identity and political ideology by working together and using creativity to solve problems, like funding a movement outside of the non-profit industrial complex.

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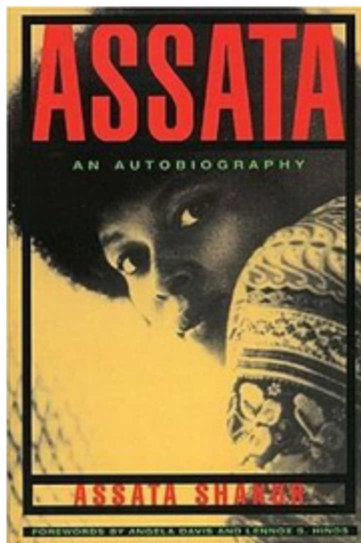
[184] Moloney, Kevin. "Mixed-Media, Cross-Media, and Transmedia… What's in a Name?" *Transmedia Journalism: Porting Transmedia Storytelling to the News Business*. April 21, 2014. Web.
[185] Ibid.
[186] Jenkins, Henry. "Transmedia Storytelling 101." March 22, 2007. Web.
[187] Ibid.
[188] Jenkins, Henry. "Convergence Culture": Where old and new media collide. NYU Press, 2006.
[189] Jenkins (2007).

John Fiske argues that popular culture in industrial societies is fundamentally contradictory.[190] Society is faced with the duality of industrialization – commodities are produced and distributed on one hand by a profit-motivated industry that follows only its own economic interests; and on the other hand the people – whose interests are not always shared by the industry. Popular culture does not equal consumption - it is culture.[191] He argues that culture, however industrialized, can never be adequately described in terms of the buying and selling of commodities. "Culture is a living, active process: it can be developed only from within, it cannot be imposed from without or above."[192] Therefore, texts within popular culture must contain both the forces of domination and the opportunities to resist against them, the opportunities to free individuals from subordinated, but not totally disempowered, positions. When applying Fiske's proposition and thinking again about the idea of retro-ing and appropriating political ideology and causes in black t-shirt culture, as Billy X Jennings insisted in chapter one, perhaps the goal is: "as long as people want to know about that time period, it's good. You gotta reach people where they are."[193]

Consumerism, Opposition, and Resistance



Left: Photo of activist Assata Shakur on the cover of her 1987 autobiography by Seth Newton Patel.
Right: The author, wearing T-shirt with design by Emunah Yuka Edinburgh, Liberation Ink.

Liberation Ink was one of the first organizations researched for this project. The Bay Area t-shirt project was incorporated into the grassroots organization Causa Justa::Just Cause (CJJC) as an in-house fundraising project back in 2011 and just ended at CJJC in the fall of 2016. The organization focuses on racial justice, housing and tenant rights, immigrant rights, and employment rights and other social justice initiatives for communities of color in

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[190] Fiske, John. *Understanding Popular Culture*. Unwin Hyman, 1989
[191] Ibid. p. 23. Defined by Fiske as the active process of generating and circulating meanings and pleasure within a social system, in chapter 2: "Commodities and Culture – Formations of the People.".
[192] Ibid.
[193] Billy X Jennings interview, May 7, 2015.

San Francisco and Oakland.[194] Liberation Ink started as an all volunteer printing and design collective, which produced t-shirts for social justice organizations as early as 2007. Those artists allowed CJJC to use their designs to print onto t-shirts as a fundraising project for the organization. The project is not black owned, but is operated by a rainbow of all volunteer worker-owners.

The Liberation Ink Collective and CJJC insisted on partnering with local organizations like the Graphic Alliance and the San Francisco Print Collective a printmaking collective that makes graphic art to support social justice movements.[195] These t-shirts help fundraisers to make inroads on a person-to-person basis. Some of their subjects include: Ella Baker, Malcolm X, Richard Aioki, James Baldwin, Assata Shakur and a collection of slogan t-shirts. This project is not only about commodifying the people featured on the t-shirts as the icons we know from history, but also about how t-shirts are being used in this moment by people who don't have control of major news outlets or media coverage to garner support for causes they care about. In an 2011 interview Le Tim Ly, one of Liberation Ink's worker owners, noted:

> Liberation Ink started when one of us took a group of youth to a fair in San Francisco's Mission District. Juan Fuentes, from Mission Grafica, was there with a simple screen and t-shirt printing operation. We thought, "Wow, we can do that!" At the time, some of us had just gotten back from the "Beyond the Non Profit Industrial Complex" conference put on by Incite. We were excited to find ways to fund our movement from within! And to look for additional revenue streams for our work -- to diversify. Juan gave us an intro workshop at Mission Grafica and we took it from there. We made our first 1-color press with $50 of supplies and our first silkscreen we made in a bathtub with a make-shift photo light contraption.[196]

Liberation Ink fundraised for organizations such as POWER: People Organized to Win Employment Rights, St. Peter's Housing Committee, and Just Cause Oakland. By 2015, these three organizations merged to become Causa Justa::Just Cause. In the early days of Liberation Ink, Le Tim Ly also felt that art and fashion played a crucial role in movements by making political messages accessible to observers. She insisted:

> Art plays a crucial role to bring life to our movements, to inspire ourselves and each other, to show and see beauty, and to educate by accessible means. Fashion can be used as a powerful medium to express one's belief system in a public way - everyday. To wear a message on our body (especially a message that's an underdog in mainstream society) can feel like a small protest and can even build community-- when we spot each other through the crowd! At Liberation Ink we try to put out

[194] From Causa Justa::Just Cause website: cjjc.org

[195] From SF Print Collective website: sfprintcollective.com

[196] Le Tim Ly November 25, 2011 interview with The Ella Baker Center for Human Rights web series: "Use Your Money." The Ella Baker Center for Human Rights is located in Oakland California and is named after civil rights organizer Ella Jo Baker. Their work focuses on prison divestment and community uplift. Website: ellabakercenter.org. The Beyond the Non Profit Industrial Complex conference, organized by the INCITE!: Women, Gender Non-Conforming, and Trans people of Color* Against Violence, was a two day conference that focused on alternative funding models outside of 501c3 status and non-profit government organizations. INCITE! Website: http://www.incite-national.org/page/revolution-will-not-be-funded-conference.

social justice messages with artistry, originality, and wearability - the more money we can bring in the more we can give away![197]

Lorraine Guzman is the in-house coordinator for Liberation Ink at CJJC, and managed the day-to-day operations for the project. Lorraine describes the t-shirts as "social justice t-shirts that had a connection to our vision, mission, people and staff" and the project as "an experiment, in a way."[198] Lorraine has worked with organizations as a fundraiser for seven years, and has been with CJJC for four years. "Organizations always want the organization shirt. So they can wear it and everyone can know about their organization," she explained.[199] The first shirt fundraiser she'd participating in started as a community art project which started with a group of eight CJJC members and six former clients from the housing rights clinic. She talked about the importance of collaboration as an integral part of their business and design model:

> "[A] committee created a logo for a campaign to increase tenant protections in Oakland. As part of the campaign we wanted to create a shirt. It was a five to six week process were members sketched out a design. It was the first shirt created by our members not artists through Liberation Ink. The logo on the shirt was "Gentrification Stops Here" and pointed to the actual person wearing the shirt, meaning gentrification stops at the people working in the fight to end gentrification… [T]o celebrate, there was a screen printing party in our office with the SF Print Collective. They screen printed the shirt live at the block party celebration. It was a way to create art with our members and art can be a way our members could engage in organizing work.[200]

For Lorraine, the t-shirt can facilitate conversations that are sometimes hard to broach intergenerationally or among strangers. She said that some of her most memorable moments include tabling events that attract "the #1 fans of the shirts," like the Malcolm X Jazz Arts Festival in Oakland, a June-Teenth celebration, a Chicano Moratorium event, and the "Teaching for Social Justice" conference in San Francisco.[201] This event brings together educators, activists, organizers, and social justice educators and is held in San Francisco every year. Lorraine described how attendees would approach them at their vending table:

> [They] would come up to table and talk about how they'd followed our project for years [and] how it impacted their students [who also] loved our t-shirts. Those are my favorite moments... When people would talk about our t-shirts and how it helped them connect with other people and how it helped them talk about certain issues… How they thought it was a visual tool to wear and how they felt personally strong and empowered when they wore the shirts… You get to look at their personal relationship and something happening through the shirt.[202]
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[197] Le Tim Ly interview November 25, 2011.
[198] Second Lorraine Guzman interview on September 15, 2016.
[199] Ibid.
[200] Ibid.
[201] First Lorraine Guzman interview, with Felisha Lee, on March 27, 2014.
[202] Ibid.

> We wanted this to be a way that we could do outreach to a wider audience about our work, about our mission about our vision. And that's what (I really saw) happen. The different tabling events, we were able to talk to people who weren't necessarily our base. They weren't the low income tenants that we worked with on a regular but they were actually another kind of supporter. It helped us widen the base of support also for our organization as [not only] a local entity but for a larger movement. It's all about "making the movement look irresistible." You looked good wearing the shirt and excited people to ask questions.[203]

In protest t-shirt culture, the dichotomy between the "subject" (the observer) and the "object" (the observed) is the foundational relationship that guides this study. In this case, the observer(s) may vary from the wearer, the viewer/reader, and to a certain extent those involved in the production and design process. The observed, remains the t-shirt in question. The political agenda of this study is to look at the t-shirt as an object and also at this relationship between the observer and the t-shirt. Daniel Miller conceptualized the different ways people consume things in mass culture, and this helps to understand how companies like Liberation Ink can facilitate movement building while toeing the line between appropriation (through citation) and adaptation (though design).[204] He analyzes culture as "the relationship through which objects are constituted as social forms… [Culture] is always a process and is never reducible to either its object or its subject form."[205] Therefore, to make sense of protest t-shirt culture it is necessary to analyze objects in relation to the movement and activist collectives out of which (the context) they are produced.

The culture and connection Liberation Ink supporters have to the t-shirts illustrate this relationship between the material object and individuals (producers, wearers, and viewers/readers) who are each participants in t-shirt culture. The relationship is completed only after observers interpret the object. For example, after the students respond to the t-shirt and other observers who read the t-shirt are provoked to ask questions - the meaning of the t-shirt is complete. Without interpretation, the t-shirt is just a garment. People have to engage with the medium for the message to be complete. The mission/purpose of the Liberation Ink t-shirts is not to simply "look good" but to also provoke a response. Using Miller's methodology, we can consider t-shirts are artifacts that depict moments in social movement history and their relationship to movement participants and observers. In this way the process of production is not necessarily in conflict or more important than the process of consumption.[206]

Here, the idea of objectification between and within groups is important. T-shirt makers "invest themselves in the act of creating a cultural object," intended to attract consumers inside and outside the activist community.[207] The t-shirts "gain their significance from the social relations which are objectified by the act of exchange, a significance which

[203] Second Lorraine Guzman interview on September 15, 2016.
[204] Miller, Daniel. "Material culture and mass consumption," Oxford: Blackwell, 1987.
[205] Ibid, 11.
[206] Ibid, 49.
[207] Ibid, 61.

therefore could not result entirely from manufacture itself."[208] The activist (or "artivist") and the movement they represent are necessary for this type of "objectification." The t-shirt is the object that allows supporters (consumers) to become a part of (i.e. purchase membership in) the movement. In this way activists and their cause are not objectified or co-opted (i.e. appropriated for sake of commodification not citation of stated political intent). This helps observers understand the t-shirt (produced within a collective) as illustrative of a collective struggle.[209] Objectification is usually understood in terms of one society's hierarchical relationship to another. However, in protest t-shirt culture there is an intra-network of activists that produces t-shirts for both insiders and outsiders. These t-shirts illustrate praxis, bridging ideology to one's political orientation to the everyday. T-shirts like those produced at Liberation Ink, identify the activist (the subject) and are themselves produced out of activism.[210] As activist tools, they transmit meaning from one observer to the next. This function goes beyond the everyday use of the t-shirt as a clothing item and commodity. These t-shirts also represent a particular form of production, a process of particular social relations.[211] This is what Miller considers "recontextualization" of consumed goods. For Miller:

> The term recontextualization implies the concept of text which is itself open to many readings, and several parallels may be drawn with discussions concerning the death of the author (here perhaps the death of the producer)… Just as modern sociological theory has suggested that the meaning of the text is not simply reducible to the intentions, perspectives or interests of the author, so also the emergence of the object from the world of capitalist or state production does not make it of necessity a direct representation of the interests of capital or the state.[212]

Liberation Ink's process is one that illustrates collective vision and purpose. While t-shirts are products of capitalist ways of production, they are also appropriated by activists groups to create their own image, funding, and propaganda. Through remix, t-shirts are easier to recontextualize than other objects. This recontextualization, as opposed to decontextualization and a-historization, is the compromise between objectivism (of icon, worker, movement) and contextualism. But even with recontextualization of the object, the t-shirt is still a product. The circulation of what is created, observed, and sold exists in a sometimes oppositional and contradictory space between activist work that seeks liberation from capitalism and the use of t-shirts to raise "capital" (in the form of money) in the fight against capitalism.

[208] Ibid, 62.
[209] Ibid.
[210] Ibid, 107.
[211] Ibid, 115 – 116.
[212] Ibid, 176.

Image courtesy of Liberation Ink (2012). Model unknown.

The evolution of Liberation Ink and their navigation around this contradiction is worth noting. In the words of former Liberation Ink organizer, Shaw San Liu, “the shirt is not just the artwork but it’s also the idea behind it, which is to fund the movement from within and basically say that grassroots groups and organizing cannot rely on institutional funding and foundation and government we need to start finding alternative ways to fund our movement.”[213] Liberation Ink from its inception was a way to fund movements “from within” while aiming to educate both consumers and those who observed their t-shirts. Because of the capitalist underpinnings of the project, measuring success became an obstacle given the politics of CJJC and workers involved with the project. Lorrain explained:

> Success was measured in terms of shirts sold, what was the profit that remained compared to our expenses. It needed to be that outcome because it also helped us decide it was no longer a profitable way to dedicate our capacity because we were making (money). At the end of the day it was a fundraising project. The people impact was important to me. We use the shirts as a way to say thank you to our donors.
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> ...
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> Liberation Ink was successful in terms of people loving our shirts and wanting to wear the shirts and people being attracted to the shirts because of the images. [But] Liberation Ink was also competing with some of the things we were trying to understand and grapple with like fighting capitalism. And having a project that was a business and still under the capitalist system in a way was difficult.[214]

If the t-shirt (used to fundraise as an alternative to institutional funding) sells because it connects with a sense of nostalgia and as a way to style the present with images and of the past, then conflicts in principle may arise. You come against the idea of people wearing the t-shirt because it looks good, which ties into capitalism and consumerism. Lorraine explained further:

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[213] Shaw San Liu interview, June 29, 2007, at the US Social Forum. Video produced by Demetrio Maguigad at Video Machete. Ida B. Wells Media Justice Center.

[214] Second Lorraine Guzman interview on September 15, 2016.

> Contradictions made it difficult for the project to integrate fully within our organization because it was a business selling things (for example using marketing tactics and trying to understand what it meant to hold a business). It created some tension. We didn't have the skills to really understand what it meant to create a business model that's sustainable (for things like price, purchasing, and profit). And also, it was hard to think about what price to sell it at, purchasing missions, and "how much profit do we want to make?" Even though the profits would go back to our organization and create a housing rights movement, a lot of us felt it was very foreign to how we would normally think of fundraising. We didn't have a capacity to really focus in on it so it was really hard to decipher the different ways we could approach the project.[215]

In the fall of 2016, CJJC decided to end Liberation Ink as an in-house fundraising project. Currently, Lorraine is trying to find them a new home. Though a different business model would mean changing the project and the people so it can have new life, Lorraine seemed hopeful. She talked about going from the CJJC fundraiser model to the new business model, and explained:

> We have one organization in particular who wants to take it on as a business, and donate money back to different orgs. They are actually working within the capitalist system and also subverting it at the same time because the profits are going back to the grassroots. So it's both a contradiction and also addressing the contradiction... It could work, but you have to have a dedicated capacity that works well with that model. It's not about just fashion for the business or for yourself, it's larger.[216]

Conclusion:

The emergence of nostalgia for the Black Power Movement in the 1990s and early 2000s– was used to display a sense of heritage and the celebration of black radicalism.[217] The images of iconized political leaders and figures of the Black Power Movement presented a viable selling strategy that appealed to black youth of the hip hop generation and activists in the millennial era. In the 1990s retro t-shirts were yet another product being offered as a way to express a distinctive identity in the wake of immense social alienation. Artists became more individualized and less concerned with mainstream white-middle-class customers.[218] Art and t-shirts were produced for by and about black youth culture. However, as the parodied 1968 Olympic Games t-shirt illustrates, eventually in a neoliberal market the appropriated image commodified on t-shirts may not be regarded as a temporary substitute for the original, but rather as a permanent replacement. The ability to actually change the photographic image into a parodied version of the original erases the authority of the original source of the image or gesture, essentially forming a new creation out of the original and the open market creates a separation between the consumers and the ideologies that produced these images.

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[215] Second Lorraine Guzman interview on September 15, 2016.
[216] Ibid.
[217] Defined by Renato Rosaldo in *Culture and Truth* – from "Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance" 1992 by bell hooks p. 4.
[218] Halter (2000).

However, the function of media is the production and transformation of ideologies.[219] T-shirts as print media serve the same purpose. Taking Fiske's understanding of the popular, I want to suggest that Remix is a way to contend with the ideological shifts in protest culture among African Americans; and the t-shirt is an object which maps this visual progression. T-shirts as cross-media decentralizes the author and singular authorship and promotes collaboration between creators and readers (observers/viewers). This collaboration happens in two ways: first groups collaborate to create the object; and second readers who interpret the t-shirt then purchase, wear, and converse with makers and others about the t-shirt and its message. In this way, authorship (i.e. of the t-shirt) and by extension authority is extended to the collective. For Roland Barthes, in his essay "Death of the Author," it is the text that speaks to the reader. He writes, "A text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into relations of dialogue, parody and contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author."[220] For Barthes, to have "an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing."[221]

The t-shirt is an "open text" medium; and therefore, by way of its form, functions as a space of ongoing interpretation and changing meaning. The concern here is not with sole authorship, as it is limiting and questions one's legitimate use of an image or slogan. This relies heavily on issues of copyright and reinforces the idea of sole ownership as economic capital and the image as currency. It undervalues how the t-shirts come to mean different things for different readers. In this participatory action of "reading" lies the potential for discursive intervention. Through its performative elements the t-shirt becomes a co-constructed narrative about the past. Perhaps black protest t-shirt culture - the origins, exchange, and transition from reader to wearer - represents the disappearing of authorship predicated upon ownership of an image, slogan, or symbol outside of democratized creative authorship. For another scholar, Michel Foucault: "We can easily imagine a culture where discourse would circulate without any need for an author. Dis- courses, whatever their status, form, or value, and regardless of our manner of handling them, would unfold in a pervasive anonymity."[222] The culture that Foucault predicted was ushered in by the invention of the Internet and web 1.0. In tandem with this emerging culture was a change in political practice, moving away from iconized leader-centered mass organizing toward a new group-centered leadership model. This new model demanded new iconography, where regular people emerge as iconized figures.

In relation to new media practices and Remix, this act of sampling not only cites pre-existing text but is also a remixing of democracy and political engagement. For this researcher, the role of producer, wearer, and reader are not mutually exclusive and interrelated. As departure from the concept of the ready defined by Barthes and Foucault, is the notion that without the reader a t-shirt still has meaning and is also defined by and definitive of the wearer. To revisit Lorrain Guzman's interview, t-shirts are yet another

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[219] Hall (1995).
[220] Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," *Image Music Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 148.
[221] Ibid.
[222] Ibid.

product being offered as a way to express a distinctive political identity, to become more connected with a political practice.[223] When asked whether she had a favorite Liberation Ink t-shirt, Lorraine responded:

> My favorite is the Assata Shakur t-shirt, just because it's an organization tradition to recite the quotation on the back of the shirt. It was a tradition to say the quote after meetings and campaigns as a collective. And even that's what the Black Lives Matter movement recited the quote. I have a personal connection to it.[224]

This illustrates how consumerism is used to support those causes the wearer cares about and to provoke others to do the same. The current marketing and buying trends within this form of political merchandizing illustrate the accomplishments of the civil rights generation to effectively transfer (to the generations that followed) the memory of radical heroes and the their sacrifices. Though the commodification of these radical icons signifies an omission of their historical meaning in a capitalist market – it also signifies a re-emergence of shared political ideals. Within the masses of millennial generation consumers, there are those who use this moment as a catalyst to invoke political action. For today, the images in the final two chapters are utilized in order to mobilize current activist groups and political movement. I use for example, the current movement for black lives as well as the intervention made in framing this as an intersectional movement.

Today's icons are not "radical revolutionaries" or cultural workers but ordinary citizens whose deaths signaled the emerging millennial movement against the criminalization of black youth. The recent cases of extrajudicial murder are indicative of the continuing racialization of the black community in the United States. In this moment, the victims of violence become the martyrs and the icons. The leaders are an amalgamation of faces, a mass movement without the need for one charismatic figure at the center. The murder of Denzil Dowell — the young man shot in Richmond, California in 1967, which helped ignite the Panthers community patrols and campaigns against police brutality – is a fit comparison to "Oscar Grant" or "Trayvon Martin." Technological advances in the age of the Internet and the advent of web 2.0 and social media platforms have influenced their posthumous cause célèbre and this makes the phenomenon of martyr iconography and its proliferation very effective. These visually striking commemorations immortalize ordinary individuals, making them symbols of a broader movement. The use of martyr iconography in contemporary social movements, enabled through the use of social media and advances in the visual arts, creates a space to communicate both inter and intra racially across national borders. The issue here is "how do you build a movement" using anti-racist, anti-exploitive, pro-immigrant, pro-people of color, democratic socialist ideals? My answer would be, "one should meet people where they are." As Eduardo Navas insisted: "Remix is meta - always unoriginal."[225] T-shirts as media signify a remixing of old and new ideas and practices in activist culture. In this age of mass communication and technology, every aspect of past and present black protest culture is accessible within global networks. The following pages illustrate how the legacy of individuals like Angela Davis, Huey Newton, John Carlos and

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[223] Halter (2000).
[224] Second Lorraine Guzman interview on September 15, 2016.
[225] Navas (2012), 127.

Tommie Smith, and Assata Shakur continue to inspire generations of young people – not as t-shirt wearers (or passive consumers) but as political agents.

Origin of Image and model are unknown. The t-shirt reads:
“It is our duty to fight for our freedom. It is our duty to win.
We must love each other and support each other.
We have nothing to lose but our chains.”
- Assata Shakur, *Assata: An Autobiography* (1987), p. 52

Chapter Three

"I Am..." : Millennial Martyrdom, Mourning, and Memorial

"I am black, therefore I am."[226]
- Kwame (Stokely Carmichael) Toure,
"Black Power" Speech, Berkeley, CA, 1966

Image courtesy of Amazon.com[227]

The image of slain Florida teen Trayvon Martin on t-shirts has become one of the most reproduced images in recent years. Trayvon Martin became a symbol of both the Black Lives Matter movement and the African American millennial generation. The design featured above was taken from the initial #ForTrayvonMartin t-shirt campaign initiated by Jason Lee of the "WE ARE READY" youth group. The image depicts an ambiguous figure on a simple black t-shirt. Trayvon's hoodie underwent a progression from personal item to black-and-white graphic silhouette. The blunt impact font of the black and white color scheme serves as its own form of iconography, as it follows in a history of slogan t-shirts with simple black or white lettering on black or white tees (e.g. the "Choose Life" anti-drug t-shirts made popular by Katherine Hamnet in the 1983). Below the faceless figure in

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[226] The above quote comes from the 1966 Kwame (Stokely Carmichael) Toure "Black Power" Speech, given in Berkeley, CA. The full quote reads as follows: ".. I am black. I know that. I also know that while I am black I am a human being, and therefore I have the right to go into any public place… The question is, How can white society begin to move to see black people as human beings? I am black, therefore I am; not that I am black and I must go to college to prove myself. I am black, therefore I am. And don't deprive me of anything and say to me that you must go to college before you gain access to X, Y, and Z. It is only a rationalization for one's oppression." Though this quote is not contextually related to the chapter, I felt it was a good way to center the sentiment of the t-shirt. However, I see the potential to incorporate Toure and black power ideology in black educational thought in a future version of this chapter.

[227] The t-shirt available on Amazon.com was submitted by an unknown vender. The company name was listed as "Custom Shirts". There was no information available on the company. The shirt is offered in various colors. The vender added wording to the already popular image from the Trayvon Martin Foundation #IAmTrayvonMartin campaign. There is no way to determine if the foundation received any of the money the "Custom Shirts" profits. However, given the reviews, most customers are satisfied about their purchase and no one questioned the origin of the shirt.

silhouette is the proclamation “I Am,” which suggests a claiming of Trayvon’s story as the wearer’s own and identification with the experience of racialization and criminalization.

As a semiotic tool, the t-shirt holds both embodied and sartorial meaning. They are canvases for illustrating internal and external identification. As in the case of Trayvon Martin, the stories of individual heartbreak and tragedy fuel t-shirt culture as a practice of remembering, continued individual and collective mourning, and the desire to redress suffering. In the statement below the image: the “I” is declarative; the “Am” is assertive; and taken together, “I Am” [without punctuation] suggests defiance in the form of a question and response. This recursive statement, “I Am”, has an implied ellipsis suggesting provocation and incompletion. It is the rhetorical extension of the t-shirt and brings attention to the personhood of the wearer. The “I Am…” t-shirt illustrates the complex relationship between form and content, by making reference to the anatomy (i.e. the person) it covers. The hoodie personifies the departed, Trayvon Martin, and this signifier alludes to the uniqueness of Trayvon as a person and the now iconic hoodie he wore that fateful night when confronted by neighborhood watchman George Zimmerman. However, it also illustrates the ordinary nature of the hoodie as the faceless image could also represent the unknown victims of police murder.

Using organizations and companies like the Trayvon Martin Foundation, G.R.E.E.D.Y. City, Stolen Outfitters, in this chapter I examine how t-shirts help facilitate identification with millennial victims as objects of mourning ritual and costume for protest. Organizationally this chapter unfolds as follows. First, I explore black martyrdom, martyred icons, iconic millennial victims, and why their iconicity is historically significant. I examine the progression from public figures as icons to the cause célèbre surrounding private citizens as icons. I also discuss slogan t-shirts, their symbolism, print technique, and performative elements. Then, I examine a key rhetorical device, the recitation “I am…” and its significance in both civil rights and black power rhetoric and its adoption into the lexicon of the Hip Hop and millennial generations. Next, I examine the industry surrounding the merchandise produced out of these tragedies. I interview t-shirt makers to investigate the commodity of black death, capitalism as a form of self-determination, and grassroots organizing. Lastly, I examine the Trayvon Martin Foundation to understand how the commercialization of t-shirts as commodities and *branding* an image (and by extension a person’s likeness and name) may shed light on the circuit of culture within which these representations of martyrdom emanate. This chapter draws upon both digitally archived materials (websites and images of inventory) and interviews with contemporary t-shirt makers (who are also wearers) to understand what role they believe t-shirts play as a medium of visual communication and embodied activism in movement work.

Memorial t-shirts function as mobile murals that memorialize millennial victims of police murder. They are instruments of both continual mourning and protest for wearers. This chapter argues that the circulation of new iconography (i.e. familial images, “selfies”, and slogans) on t-shirts is performative of resurrection, recuperation, and reclaiming of the departed. This emergence of memorial t-shirts and protest slogan t-shirts results from free access to images, design software, and the technological advances in the printing industry made possible in the digital age.

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In previous chapters I have examined t-shirts as tools, used to indict injustices and incite thought and at times (re)action. As discursive activism, t-shirts and the images and/or phrases framed at the center challenge dominant narratives. They lend voice and agency to wearers and how the public engages the subject of anti-blackness and the killing of unarmed black people. The commemoration t-shirts genre discussed below emerges while the nation is in a moment of reflection, amidst tensions arising from the spectacle(s) of institutional practices and policies that disproportionately impact the black community. These media event(s) illustrate the four hundred year tradition of how not only black suffering is made spectacle of, but also how the attempts to redress this suffering are then misappropriated, parodied, and branded as trademark.[228]

T-shirt culture can function as a passive form of resistance that can nevertheless influence those who interpret the material as rhetorical device. The image of Trayvon Martin on t-shirts, as political expression of marginality, went on to become one of the most reproduced images in recent years.[229] Trayvon Martin became a symbol of the Black Lives Matter movement and an era, which then became commodified as posters, artwork, and most importantly for the purpose of my project – t-shirts, which have both commemorated and parodied the significance of his death. These t-shirts are oppositional aesthetics that do not necessarily reject acceptable sartorial (or political protest) practices nor do they upset the systems of inequalities wearers are situated and implicated within. Meaning, they are stylish and produced within a system based on consumption.

Trayvon Martin: Millennial Iconic Victim

In early Christianity, the "icon" was an image venerated among worshipers. Holy martyrs were those who died for the faith (murdered by non-believers). They were commemorated in song and iconized in religious art. Upon hearing the news of slain Florida teen Trayvon martin, artists such as Amaryllis De Jesus Moleski created a drawing of Martin with familiar imagery that was later muralized by spray can and graphic artists.

[228] a.) Dockerman, Eliana. "Illinois Woman Files Trademark Application for 'I Can't Breathe'" TIME Magazine, 12.19.14. b.) Howell, Kellan. "'I can breathe - thanks to the NYPD' shirts flood pro-police NYC rally," *The Washington Times*, 12.20.14.

[229] Fleetwood, Nicole. *On Racial Icons: Blackness and the Public Imagination,* Chapter One: "I Am Trayvon Martin: The Boy Who Became an Icon." Rutgers University Press, 2015.

Image Courtesy of Amaryllis De Jesus Moleski, 2012.

Like the iconography associated with Christian martyrs, the digital mural of Martin includes the key elements of the color red (which signifies spilled blood) and white veil (the hoodie). In martyr iconography the white veil indicates virginity (i.e. youth and innocence) especially when it is of prominent importance in the story of their martyrdom. Here Martin is also crowned with a nimbus (or halo), a symbol of holiness.

Martin Kemp, the author of *From Christ to Coke: How Image Becomes Icon* (2012) and renaissance art expert, defines icon as an image "that has achieved wholly exceptional levels of widespread recognizability and has come to carry a rich series of varied associations for very large numbers of people across time and cultures, such that it has to a greater or lesser degree transgressed the parameters of its initial making, function, context, and meaning."[230] Using Kemp's definition, I contend that the cultural meaning of "a" Trayvon Martin began decades before the series of events that brought about his death. He is not a "martyr" in the traditional sense but is representative of "iconized black death" in the public sphere. The iconography of Trayvon Martin is a product of the post-Obama Election/post-HOPE America, in that it is artifactual proof of a non-post-racial America.[231] Martin's was the latest in a series of iconic images of black men murdered by vigilantes or police in recent United States history. In the aftermath of Martin's death we saw several incarnations of his image in social media, broadcast news segments, and on streets across the country.

Like family pictures of Oscar Grant, Sean Bell, and other victims, Trayvon Martin's self-taken photograph (a "selfie") rapidly progressed into an image that transcended his likeness. Trayvon was embraced by individuals who identified with his victimization and believed he personified the systemic inequalities faced by black males. These individuals donned hoodies in their social media profile pictures and also took to the streets in protest (e.g. The Million Hoodie March 2012). Martin's story and image embodied the quintessential "unarmed black male" victim narrative, and was malleable in several mediums without the risk of undergoing historical decontextualizing. The drama was not

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[230] Kemp, Martin. *Christ to Coke: How Image Becomes Icon.* Oxford University Press, 2012.

[231] I use the phrase "post-HOPE" in reference to the Shepard Fairey "HOPE" portrait (a now iconic image in it's own right) of then senator and presidential candidate Barak Obama during the 2008 election.

decades removed like previous icons, and unfolded in a moment full of instances of recurring narratives surrounding police violence. The fraternity of victims, which now included Trayvon Martin, encompassed a history of vigilante and state sanctioned lynching in the United States. Unlike iconic political martyrs like Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr. or Fred Hampton and Huey P. Newton the cause célèbre associated with the Martin case resulted from his status as a private citizen not a public figure.

Because of his status as a private citizen, the efforts of Martin's parents, Sybrina Fulton and Tracy Martin, were bolstered by the virality and strategic circulation of their family photographs. Martin's black and white Facebook profile picture was accessed by millions of users, shared on different social media platforms by "Friends of Friends" and "Followers of Followers," and pictorially imitated in acts of solidarity. This selfie, defined by Fleetwood as "a contemporary form of vernacular photography, the most widely practiced genre of photography since its inception," was embraced as evidence of his teenage normality and the familiar narrative of lynching (as context) now associated with the image.[232] The narrative of the "black male as menace" seemed all too familiar to many in the public. In the selfie, viewers observed the emergence of another iconic form – the hoodie. This article of clothing has become associated with black urban youth, athleticism, and criminality in popular culture. As the events of the night of February 26, 2012 unfolded in the media we discover that, for Zimmerman, Martin's race, clothing, and demeanor identified him as a threat to his community.

The wearing of t-shirts featuring Martin's profile picture or likeness illustrate a performative kinship and shared suffering. When thinking of the t-shirt, as a medium for embodied activism, the image of Trayvon in his hoodie serves as a compelling device for recuperating the narrative of his life and death. The hoodie as halo and Trayvon as innocent victims mirrored the sentiments of a community in mourning. This is significant in that the wearers are not the deceased young man featured on their shirts. They live on and so does the essence of Trayvon Martin through this clothing practice. It's a way to resurrect his slain body through familiar imagery. After his death, an image of his slain body began to circulate the Internet. His body laid lifeless on the grass, a testament to the violence enacted upon him that night. The cruelty of this image and its circulation dehumanized Martin, a posthumous act of brutality against his flesh. However, the proliferation of the t-shirt(s) mended community wounds as they mourned publicly.

For the purposes of my analysis here, I want to consider this memorial slogan t-shirt as a relationship between the historical past and present, illustrative of the meaning wearers and observers attach to the millennial iconic victim.[233] Nicole Fleetwood has noted, "[i]n visual theory, the icon is an image, like a photographic representation, imbued with significant social and symbolic meaning, so much so that it needs little explication for the cultural reader to decode it."[234] However, the meaning of millennial victims icons like Trayvon Martin need further analysis to unpack the significance of t-shirts as instruments of resurrection in mourning and why that resurrection is important. For Fleetwood, the

[232] Ibid, p. 16 – 17.
[233] Fleetwood, Nicole. *On Racial Icons: Blackness and the Public Imagination*. Rutgers University Press, 2015.
[234] Ibid, pp. 7 – 8.

iconicity of victims such as Trayvon Martin "hinges on a relationship between veneration and denigration" and "serves a resonating function as a visual embodiment of American history."[235]

Race is indexical of history and relations of power. W. J. T. Mitchell has argued that, "race is not merely a content to be mediated, an object to be represented visually or verbally, or a thing to be depicted in a likeness or image, but that race is itself a medium and an iconic form—not simply something to be seen, but itself a framework for seeing through or (as Wittgenstein would put it) seeing *as."*[236] T-shirts featuring Trayvon Martin (and his likeness) expose the public nature of black suffering – the slave market, lynching photography, Jim Crow paraphernalia, news reel of brutality against civil rights protesters, and the countless ways blacks have been demonized in mainstream news outlets – as twice-accented iconicity. In memorial and slogan t-shirts history, image, and embodiment conspire to mourn and resurrect millennial iconic victims.

Public Mourning as an Act of Protest

For many, the story of Trayvon Martin (age 17) bore comparison to that of Emmett Till (age 14) and the legacy of his image. Till is an antecedent who was a private citizen, not a public figure. Returning to the idea of private citizens becoming icons, here we see distinction in images of black death circulated in the public sphere. Images circulated online, at protests, and featured on t-shirts bearing the image and likeness of Martin (in life) challenged the discourse surrounding his death. However, posthumous mimesis of Martin's selfie differed from the display and circulation of Till's image (in death) over 60 years ago. Both of these cases transformed the legacy of lynching through mourning as an act of protest. For Fred Moten, the funeral photographs of Till post mortem "alchemize a legacy of lynching."[237] Through t-shirts, Martin is memorialized in clothing practice; allowing for the public mourning of another that is performative of one's individual abject suffering.

Moten argues that the photographs of Emmett Till, their reproduction and dissemination, broke the hegemony of the visual. Meaning, these photographs were indexical of past lynching photography circulated as trophies and keepsakes for white racists. These images, Till's mutilated body laying in a casket and a community in despair (some wailing in grief), differed greatly from the unclaimed and nameless bodies pictured hanging and smoldering from the trees. Moten then suggests that these photographs – and photographs in general – possess a "phonic substance."[238] Furthermore, the author contends that, "[t]he meaning of a photograph is cut and augmented by a sound or noise that surrounds it and pierces its frame."[239] The material resistance [documenting a disfigured body in a funeral procession as opposed to rehabilitating his flesh to maintain dignity in death] amplifies mourning through moaning.[240] By "exhibiting kinship's wounds" Till is

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[235] Ibid, p. 8.
[236] W. J.T. Mitchell, *Seeing through Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 13.
[237] Moten, Fred. *In the Break: the Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*. University of Minnesota Press, 2003; 194.
[238] Ibid, p. 197.
[239] Ibid, p. 205.
[240] Ibid, p. 198.

resurrected through the open casket – an act of defiant remembering and a "disappearance of the disappearance" of his slain body. To look at what happened to Mamie Till Moseley's baby, was to hear the sound of wailing women, repeated in households, church congregations, and public gatherings nationwide.

I want to suggest here, that memorial t-shirts – and the "I Am…" genre in particular – is also a performance of "kinship's wounds." I mean to also take up Moten's reading of Roland Barthes' assertion that death is the meaning of the "that-has-been of the photographic object," with a variation to suggest that performance – through mourning dress and the refrain "I Am…" – "disturbs the object in the interest of resurrection."[241] The shouts of protesters are akin to that of those wailing congregants, and their rallying cry "I Am…" reanimates Martin's image. For Moten:

> The ways black mo'nin' improvises through the opposition of mourning and melancholia, disrupts the temporal framework that buttresses that opposition such that an extended, lingering look at—aesthetic response to—the photograph manifests itself as political action.[242]

This disruption of time (the temporal framework) is the rejection of the finality of death in the chant, "I Am…" The choice in image of Martin for commemorative t-shirts are different than Mrs. Till-Mobley selection of images for the funeral in that the former obliges viewers to connect and engage, while the latter induces viewers to moan and look away. The wearing of t-shirts then is an ongoing performance of black life (against death).[243]

This self affirmation, "I Am…" has been useful in black political movements across time, from the Memphis Sanitation Worker's "I am a Man" campaign (1968), to Fred Hampton's "I am a Revolutionary" and the children of Chicago's "I am Fred Hampton"(1969), to the present day refrain, "I am..." seen on countless t-shirts for years, now including the Trayvon Martin Foundation "#ForTrayvonMartin" apparel merchandise campaign. The symbolic chant is performative of the affirmation of black humanity. It is a protest tradition that has been carried on by the hip hop generation into the millennial era. African American protest and acts of resistance are performed, reimagined, re-articulated, and re-appropriated over the past 500 years. Trayvon Martin (Sanford, FL, 2012), Oscar Grant (Oakland, CA, 2009) Alan Blueford (Oakland, CA, 2012), Jonathan Farrell (Charlotte, NC, 2013), Michael Brown (Ferguson, MO, 2014), Eric Garner (New York, NY, 2014), these names represent a cadre of iconic male victims and there are names added to this list almost daily. Individual names are second only to the citation of incident, an all too familiar scenario of events – unarmed black male, shot dead by police, vigilante, or citizen in fear of their life.[244] These African Americans come from multiple communities and regions, with varying cultural practices, yet the t-shirt culture emanating from the deaths of unarmed black people holds key signifiers that unite masses of wearers.

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[241] Ibid, p. 205.
[242] Ibid, p. 209.
[243] Ibid.
[244] Butler, Paul. "Black Male Exceptionalism?: The Problems and Potential of Black Male-Focused Interventions." Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race 10, no. 2 (2013): 485-511; n.b. black women and queer victims will be discussed in the proceeding chapter.

"I Am…" t-shirts are performative symbols of celebration, commemoration, and continual grieving. It's not the material, but the context in which we find these objects that tells us about connections and disconnects in mourning practices today. What's below the surface yet primary and beyond academic inquiry is the need and desire to *remember* the departed. There is one sense that black t-shirt culture serves as a memorial for the dead and a form of continual grieving for the living; it's one of the varied ways we choose to honor the deceased. As evidenced above, the "I Am…" t-shirts presented a way to create solidarity among supporters and to progress the public debate surrounding Martin's death. To this end, t-shirts influenced the broader project of amplifying the visibility of families like Trayvon Martin's in the public. They helped transform the political terrain and rhetoric surrounding summary executions of black victims at the hands of the police, vigilantes, or other agents of the state. "Visibility," it would seem, is an ironic objective in that black boys and men are excessively watched and surveilled. Images of grieving black parents have become common in media coverage of incidents involving police murder, with an iconicity all their own. Martin's criminalization and ultimate death was not only an individual experience of alienation but illustrative of the criminalization of communities of color. The circulation of Martin's image worked to make visible his humanity and life as an "ordinary" black teenager.[245] To this end, t-shirts as another form of activism serve a broader mission of increasing the visibility of collective mourning in the public sphere.

The popularity and frequency of these t-shirts magnifies the efficacy of clothing practices as political participation in the current moment.[246] This clothing practice illustrates how visual and embodied modes of activism keep community voices in the public sphere. According to Joel Penny, the space t-shirts create occurs between what he terms inward-facing communication and outward-facing communication. In this way, t-shirts help build inter-communal identification and affinity for political causes and are also used as "strategic public rhetoric" to intervene in public discourse throughout broader society.[247] Penny's study of the role of t-shirts in the gay and lesbian advocacy movements explores how political messages on printed t-shirts, "traverse the boundaries between subculture and mainstream, public and counterpublic."[248] It is because of the form of t-shirts, worn as popular everyday leisurewear, which makes them medium suited for self-definition and the minority voice. For Penny:

> The graphic printed T-shirt, a widely popular cultural form since the 1970s, is one of the most inexpensive and accessible communication technologies available for groups looking to gain entrance into public discourse. Graphic T-shirts can cost only a few dollars to create, and can be exhibited to literally thousands of people in public space as wearers transform themselves into exhibition screens for the words and images stretched across their chests.[249]

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[245] a) Yancy, George. *Black Bodies, White Gazes: The Continuing Significance of Race*. Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc. (2008), Pg. 75. b) Fleetwood (2015), Pg. 15.
[246] Penney, Joel. "Eminently Visible: The Role of T-Shirts in Gay and Lesbian Public Advocacy and Community Building." *Popular Communication*, 11:4, p. 289 (2013).
[247] Ibid., p. 290.
[248] Ibid.
[249] Ibid., p. 290.

Therefore, keeping Penny's analysis in mind, t-shirts allow wearers to articulate counter narratives and images as opposed to victims being defined by mainstream media. Memorial and black political slogan t-shirts expose this relationship between public and community rhetorical strategies to expose the issue of extrajudicial murder, and make the humanity of victims and community mourning visible in the public sphere.

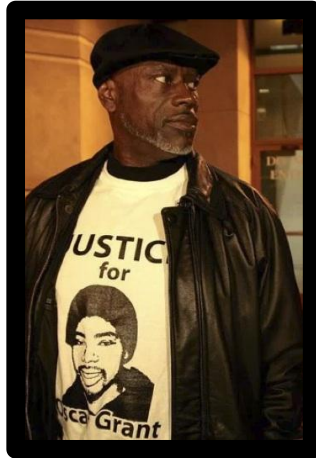

Image Courtesy of UK to US Justice Tour 2015; fergusonsolidaritytour.com 10.22.15.

"If you're interested in justice, here's your shirt": T-shirt wearers and producers

To examine the efficacy of t-shirts in social movements and gain insight into the motivations behind this clothing practice, my qualitative study on black t-shirt culture has combined semi-structured interviews conducted over phone and video conferencing with t-shirt makers, seasoned political activist, and family members of those lost to state sanctioned violence. These interviews further illustrated how bringing the issue of police murder into the public sphere also helped form community bonds and affirm community identity. These interviews showed how t-shirts are put to different use both in and out of the public sphere, with social media playing a key role in the modern day understanding of body rhetoric and discursive activism. Though a small sample, I chose interviewees with the intent to achieve a representative spread from the very active to more peripheral participation styles.

The title of this sections comes from a conversation I had with Mr. Cephus "Uncle Bobby" Johnson; a community activist and the uncle of slain pedestrian Oscar Grant who was murdered by Johannes Mehserle on New Year's Day, 2009. His nephew Oscar's death ignited a national movement against police terror in communities of color, and was the precursor to the Occupy Movement and the Black Lives Matter Movement in northern California. When discussing the significance of t-shirts in activist work, he recalled…

> *When we started going up to NY and other places we made sure we wore a t-shirt of Oscar on the plane… Folks would look at the shirt, some people would look away. We done that for the sole purpose for everybody to know Oscar's name… Those that were curious would come and we'd give them the story.*
> *… We'd always tell them that if you're interested in justice, here's your shirt...*

So it became a tool to bring to the challengers that looked at it, fighting the feeling to turn away… T-shirts became a tool, to let the suffering speak.[250]

Uncle Bobby made it clear that the t-shirt was a tool for wearers; especially white allies who enjoyed social freedom(s) that racialized African Americans do not. These allies could make greater intraracial inroads and hold themselves and other accountable in the systemic murder of black people as inheritors of white privilege. To investigate the connection between the body and the t-shirt, I use Kevin M. DeLuca's idea of "body rhetoric" to help further explain how t-shirts as discursive activism can be understood as a form of media activism beyond the verbal and visual discourse circulating in traditional mainstream media controlled outlets.[251] DeLuca studied coordinated protests (e.g. performances, sit-ins, and "designed disorganization") that were staged media events for the Earth First!, ACT UP, and Queer Nation activists in the 1990s.[252] He observed these protest performances and the performing bodies of activists, and suggested that t-shirts helped enhance their communicative capacity through embodied expression as discursive activism.[253] He believed that graphic slogan t-shirts helped to disseminate the message of gay and lesbian rights into everyday public spaces. They also helped in publicizing queer-positive messages that the gay and lesbian communities could identify with. In this way, the gay and lesbian communities and their allies could identify each other and their political power.

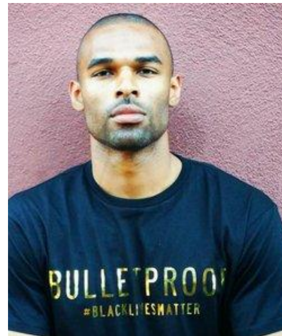

Image courtesy of Worm Sign T-shirts via Twitter embed, originally G.r.e.e.d.y. City Artist collective.

Like the t-shirts analyzed in both the Penny and DeLuca's studies, the history of the above t-shirt is quite compelling. The t-shirt, on a simple black background again represents continual mourning in public as a political intervention. Yet, the statement "Bulletproof" a level of intention even more defiant that the "I Am" t-shirt that preceded it. "Bulletproof" then finishes the statement "I Am," with an inferred declaration "I Am Bulletproof." This signals a declaration of protection beyond the visible eye. Below the definitive "Bulletproof" is the hashtag "#BlackLivesMatter" which further connects this t-shirt and the wearer to the

[250] Interview with Cephus "Uncle Bobby" Johnson, December 15, 2015.
[251] Ibid, p. 291.
[252] DeLuca, K. M. (1999). Unruly arguments: The body rhetoric of Earth First!, ACT UP, and Queer Nation. *Argumentation and Advocacy, 36(1),* p. 10.
[253] Ibid.

broader contemporary movement for black lives. The gold lettering adds the "swag" necessary to both attract consumers and to "blind the cops" if strategically placed on the front lines.[254]

I spoke with the creator Damon Turner, an artist, activist, cultural architect, and entrepreneur. He co-founded the artist collective G.R.E.E.D.Y. City – Generation, Righteously, Enduring, to Eradicate Dying Young – and works with grassroots movements such as Black Lives Matter in Los Angeles, CA. He explained:

> We've been here for hundreds upon hundreds of years on this land, but for thousands of years there've been moments in our history when black folks have been under the thumb of a particular oppressor. But we're still here. And we're still talking about this. And we're still able to laugh, and love on each other, and envision together. So they can't, you can't, kill that. Like, with no amount of artillery can you kill my soul or my spirit…
>
> We had a vision of wearable protest art, how we have this armor that we put on when we go out to protests. It's something that protects us though not physically and emotionally, but spiritually.[255]

This t-shirt references how engagement with social media represents a change in discursive activism in black political movements over time. [For example, the ways mainstream white media frames and has framed black protests historically – as already inherently confrontational, violent, and opportunist – versus the ways organizations employ different mediums to frame themselves. More specifically, a change of medium – i.e. moving from the television news broadcasts of civil rights and black power protests to "live streaming" and video capabilities via smart phone technology in today's movement for black lives – allows for a change in message, frame, and point of view.] I propose that political slogan t-shirts (like the #BlackLivesMatter and "Bulletproof" tees, and like the parade of hashtags emerging and circulating in social media) are a response to a discursive crisis. This *crisis* is the skewed depiction of black victims of police murder and the community uprising that often occur in white mainstream media. These t-shirts represent a point of contention between traditional news outlets (and their function as a space that reproduces racist ideology) and counterhegemonic discourses. And we also see a progression within social (media) constructed communities like Black Twitter from: discursive identity (as a performance of cultural understanding) to "discursive activism" (transforming frequency of use into a currency of use).[256]

The wearing, purchase, and production of protest t-shirts illustrated how, while not always acting with purely political intent, political actions can manifest through the discursive interventions made in response to this crisis. This is why the hashtag is important. In social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram we can recognize activist cultures that exists among black people today. Hashtags (the "#" pound symbol) are used in

[254] Interview with Damon Turner, October 21, 2015.
[255] Ibid.
[256] "[Individuals] engage with and disrupt the discourse of the mainstream media, by responding to political events with alternative perspectives, by criticizing the ideological stances implicit in the media, and sharing information on systemic injustices and issues not given coverage in the press (Bahnisch, 2006)."

logarithms to cluster similar trending (i.e. popular) topics together. This "#" language emanating from social media – such as #ForTrayvon, #WeAreAllSandraBland, #BlackLivesMatter, and #SayHerName – decenters traditional kinds of social action such as established political organizations and parties, and privileges a group-centered style of participation. In the "Bulletproof" t-shirt above, the mutually beneficial relationship between t-shirt culture and social media are both visibly and politically apparent. This matters because both can be controlled outside of white-mainstream news outlets and circulation. By featuring a hashtag slogan at the bottom center of this item, we see the intersection of web culture and black protest culture, manifest in ways that challenge ideas of activist space.

Turner shared that the "Bulletproof" tee, was "designed in a way and created in a why for white folks to wear. With the intention that white folks can wear this, and the conversation still be relevant:

> [I]f a black person wears the t-shirt it's a sign of resilience. When you know people are being killed everyday. It takes insanity, courage, audacity to do this. But a white person wearing the [Bulletproof] t-shirt it's ironic as hell, because your skin has been proven to be so… "BULLETPROOF.™ is not a T-shirt line but rather an art project created to shift the culture of how we engage one another in society… [257]

The t-shirt then, serves as a provocation and intervenes in conversations based on color-blind politics. However, for Turner, it's also about monetizing political consciousness to fundraise for grassroots organizations and to promote a politicized economic model that redirects dollars back into our community.

In my research I've engaged with many t-shirt makers and cultural artists who labor to build more economic engines that support local movements. For example: revenue from the "Bulletproof" t-shirt pays artists and is able to give 15% of its earnings to the movement. Turner, unlike my next interviewee, is a t-shirt producer who does not intend to be like those who want to detach from the system completely. He wants Bulletproof to take off globally, and compete with Hanes and others, to have access to some capital, gain influence and (redistribute) resources into grassroots organizations and the communities they serve. Those are strategies Turner (and the collective) believes the popularization of t-shirts can take.

There are t-shirt makers of this genre, with similar yet ideologically different economic commitments. Donald Wooten, a graphic designer out of Washington D.C., created *Stolen Outfitters* as the anti-*Urban Outfitters*. Wooten, in contrast to Turner, is an artist who's not interested in branding but the t-shirt as a platform for his artwork; and he expressed his desire to encourage "collective economics." "The first shirt I thought about was 'STOLEN'," he explained. Wooten had taken a Ralph Lauren Polo t-shirt and replaced the horse and jockey with his company name and logo. He insisted further:

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[257] Ibid. From the BULLETPROOF™ mission statement… "BULLETPROOF.™ is not a T-shirt line but rather an art project created to shift the culture of how we engage one another in society… From the images of Black women standing in the face of a militarized police force in Ferguson to the Palestinian women lying under military tanks, this line represents the fearlessness found when a people are unafraid of the powers that oppress them."

> We are stolen, and the minute we recognize we are stolen people, and things are continuing to be stolen from us. We have to steal freedom back. And in this particular situation this is how we steal freedom back – through technology.
> We were in the habit of saying like really important things in 140 characters. We were giving this stuff away when in actually we can put this on shirts. This can go so much further than who is tweeting and who is following. We shouldn't be relegated to people who are just online, right now, and what happened in a re-tweet. It should be something that we saw on somebody's back…[258]

For Wooten, "It's something about doing a business that doesn't corrupt your soul."[259] Like Damon Turner and Uncle Bobby, he believes t-shirts are a medium you can control that gives you the chance to adjust the perceptions of other people and have an organic conversation. The t-shirts are billboards for protest, but protest at another level. In this way, t-shirt makers show people on a daily basis that they have the opportunity to create (alternative news sources, platforms for political causes, and innovations in the apparel industry) for themselves.

I contend that t-shirt culture, as a political practice within the black protest tradition, is discursive politics. T-shirts as media activism – like social media activism – are not merely a precondition for activism but rather a form of activism. I propose that black political t-shirt culture (as continual mourning, protest costume, and rhetorical strategy) be understood as a counterhegemonic project that rearticulates racial meaning through an embodied-aesthetic performance of protest, while at the same time constituting the political identity and agency of the participants and wearers.

[258] Interview with Donald Wooten, November 6, 2015.
[259] Ibid.

Image courtesy of the Trayvon Martin Foundation #ForTrayvon t-shirt campaign, 2012.

Trayvon Martin and the Millennial Conscious Consumer Movement

Now I will shift in attention to how purchasers/wearers advance the black protest tradition. This detour is necessary to understand how these objects circulate in consumer culture and within a network of mediums. I use as a case study the Trayvon Martin Foundation's (TMF) merchandise campaign (pictured above), to argue that the "branding" of a movement can illustrate the organic nature of media activism. The TMF is a prime example of how incorporation and appropriation are not necessarily in opposition to black cultural practices of resistance. I will discuss the different modes of circulation for the TMF merchandise campaign as a way to think about how black t-shirt culture enables a community's consumption of products with politics embedded in its meaning as praxis. According to Sarah Banet-Weiser:

> Culture is something, some place, that is made and remade, and therefore depends on individuals in relation to a system of production. In the contemporary moment, branding is part of this making and remaking, and is part of culture that is produced and given meaning by consumers.[260]

The TMF #ForTrayvonMartin t-shirt campaign and the investment in movements surrounding the deaths of young black men like Trayvon Martin illustrate the interrelatedness of individual experience, collective trauma, and cultural production.

[260] Banet-Weiser, Sarah. Authentic TM: The Politics of Ambivalence in a Brand Culture, New York University Press, 2012. Page 9.

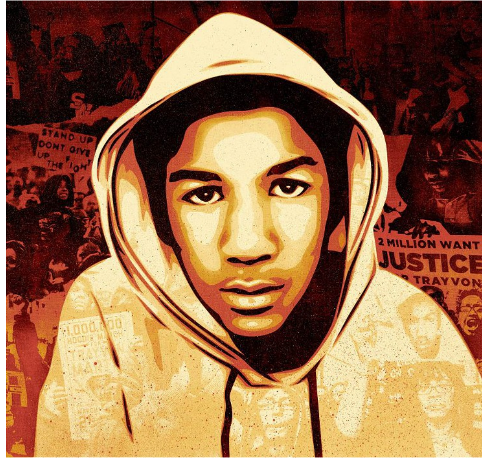

Image Courtesy of *LA Weekly* 2012.

If we look at the use of this iconography across mediums, we can observe a progression of martyrs like Trayvon Martin and individuals made famous by their transmediation (from family photo, to news segment, to poster or mural, to t-shirt, and sometimes to movie or music video). In May 2012, *Ebony* Magazine commissioned graffiti pop artist Shepard Fairey, to produce a portrait of Trayvon Martin (pictured above), the slain Florida teen murdered by neighborhood watchman George Zimmerman. Here Martin's "selfie" image is reincarnated and reinterpreted by Fairey, who has produced portraits of many pop-cultural personalities and political icons (i.e. Angela Davis, Huey Newton, Barack Obama ("HOPE," 2008), Muhammad Ali, and Jean-Michel Basquiat to name a few) but is most famous for his politically charged art influenced by propagandist traditions. Scholars have noted that Fairey's portraits constitute what Fredric Jameson termed pastiche.[261] The malleability of these images of radicalism, much like that of Jim Fitzpatrick's 1968 stylized image of "Guerrillero Heroico" Alberto Korda's famous image of Che Guevara, made popular by Fairey's signature use of red, white, and black, reveals a face of rebellion colored in various shades of gray, beige, and antique white. An idea palatable for a multi-racial audience, but a reality lived by those at the darker end of the palette. A closer reading of Fairey's color scheme in the Martin portrait reveals both an incorporation of martyr iconography (the hoodie as veil/halo and the crimson red) and visual references to social movement iconography of past generations (i.e. Red, used in Socialist propaganda; Black and Gray, which reflects anarchist sentiments; and the *hueism* that colors subjects as if to form one race – one face of oppression). By cropping the photograph, adding prominent figures in the background, mixing Martin's image with the profile of others, and replacing elements of the original image with graphic art (hooded protesters holding posters and marching in mass), Fairey periodized the image to include the specifics of time and place. He therefore transformed the historical moment of the Black Lives Matter movement into a

[261] Jon Fine, in "Pastiche Giant: The Aesthetics of Shepard Fairey," applies Fredric Jameson's description of 'pastiche,' as "historical forms… treated carelessly, appropriated and voided of their contextual content. The resultant work is… an immediate configuration ready for consumption. Pastiche is unconcerned with the primacy of the image's original intent or ideal."

context-full image in the process.[262] The *Ebony* cover came soon after *TIME* Magazine named "The Protester" person of the year, and two years after the emergence of the Occupy Movement on the streets of urban cities in the United States. In the cover story Time magazine's Kurt Andersen argued that "'Massive and effective street protest' was a global oxymoron until — suddenly, shockingly… it became the defining trope of our times. And the protester once again became a maker of history."[263] Technology then, has influenced Trayvon's posthumous cause Celebrex' and this makes the phenomenon of millennial victim iconography and its proliferation very effective. This visually striking commemoration immortalized Trayvon the individual, making him a symbol of a broader movement. The use of martyr iconography in contemporary social movements, enabled through the use of social media and advances in the visual arts, creates a space to communicate intra-racially across national borders. The "digital mural" of Martin was published and shared on various social media sites and seen in protests around the country. The image correlated with the popular use of the mantra "I am Trayvon Martin" among the public. The refrain heard at protests nation-wide presented socio-cultural and political contradictions because the masses are in fact *not* Trayvon Martin but those who identify with the criminalization of black men. This contradiction is useful in that it illustrates the work that t-shirts do to cultivate community identity and announce community outrage to broader society.

The Martin family, and private entrepreneurs, employed this now iconic image for the "#ForTrayvon" merchandise campaign (pictured on page 21) that garnered funds for the legal trial and for the growing movement spurred on by the outrage surrounding his death and others nationally. Returning now to the #ForTrayvon image, we see the original digital mural has been cropped and appropriated for three t-shirts designed for the 2012 merchandise campaign. The Fairey color palate has been replaced by a black and white (image on the left); variations of red, gray scale, and blue (image at the center), and the aforementioned hooded image of Trayvon Martin with a signature "Tray" in red. Gone are the masses of victims in the background, while Trayvon emerges as the sole figure in the foreground. As a branding measure, the individual figure/story is more legible to audiences and readily translatable/transferable for merchandising and fundraising purposes.

In the post-Obama election moment the emergence of the TMF as an organic grassroots movement and *brand* seems even more significant in that today's world is increasingly shaped by cultural exchange via social media and commercial/corporate media outlets. The proliferation of the TMF brand has challenged the nostalgic notion of the separation of a socio-political movement from capitalist enterprise. Instead of concentrating on whether or not this is a fetishization and commodification of black death, I want to further explore whether understanding Trayvon Martin's death as emblematic of the struggles of modern black youth is itself a sort of branding. This is not to call into question the motives of the Martin family. My point here is to illustrate the media savvy nature with which the Martin family has turned tragedy into not only a platform for activism but also as a way to harness the commercial nature of contemporary commemoration products featuring

[262] n.b. the "cultural" relevance of these products remain intact, and is not the issue in question. Therefore, altering the historical context of these images also transforms their political content and relevance.
[263] Andersen, Kurt. "Cover Story: The Protester," *TIME Magazine*, Wednesday, Dec. 14, 2011.

those extrajudicially killed by agents of the state. They entered into this tragedy with the knowledge of how image become icon and how icon becomes commodity because other people were profiting from their son's image and likeness. Martin's family licensed his image to intentionally harness the consumption of his image into a political statement through merchandising.[264]

I position black t-shirt culture and the industry that emanates from and around it, as a space in which the power of definition and agency belong to both producers and consumers. This practice is, in fact, an organic form and continuation of the black protest tradition. This is not a bastardization of the resistance of a bygone era, but a reformation of it. This moment is significant because the era of "change" was ushered in without real elements of what scholars such as Malcolm Gladwell call "high risk activism" (which puts one body/career/well being in danger, i.e. direct action).[265] For Gladwell new technologies like Facebook and Twitter rid contemporary movements of an authentic "movement identity" and suggest that there are levels of activism – such as those employed during the modern Civil Rights Movement – that differ from today's "low risk activism" ("keyboard activism," covert resistance).[266] Robert Weems, Lizabeth Cohen, and others have examined the so-called "consumer movements" of the modern civil rights era.[267] For these scholars campaigns such as the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Greensboro Sit-Ins were largely organized around issues of consumerism to enfranchise African Americans whose buying power indicated and intersected with other forms of enfranchisement.[268] This logic however, obscures the reality that the economic disfranchisement of African Americans was mutually constitutive of their social and political disfranchisement as blacks in the U.S. Returning to a previous example from chapter one: the racial element associated with buying power made it necessary for former field hands to order merchandise from catalogs when department stores would not cater to them. The richest black was still "lower" than the poorest white. Purchasing power in a capitalist system did not trump the lack of access to a quality education, labor options, and freedom from racial attack and bodily harm for black men, women, and children.

Periodization is important in that it challenges the notion of African American "pathological consumption" of products without understanding or making meaning out of their purchase. "Commodity activism" is a term used by Banet-Weiser and others to explain how politics and consumption are not separate but mutually constitutive of each other in the neoliberal moment. Markets change and industries are created and dismantled, therefore, we have to contend with the commodity factor of the black body itself and the reality of African descended peoples' relationship to an ever-changing economic landscape. To reframe

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[264] Jones, Athena; Marrapodi, Eric. "Sabrina Fulton seeks to trademark Trayvon rallying cries." *CNN* website, March 28, 2012.

[265] a. Banet-Weiser (2012); b. n.b. the 2008 Obama election and campaign slogan "Change We Can Believe In."

[266] Gladwell, Malcolm. "Small Change: Why the Revolution Will Not Be Tweeted," *The New Yorker*, October 4, 2010.

[267] Banet-Weiser, Sarah. Authentic TM: The Politics of Ambivalence in a Brand Culture, New York University Press, 2012.

[268] Banet-Weiser (2012), 137.

DuBois' timeless question, "What is (economic) freedom to the Negro?" What does buyer power mean to African Americans in a nation where they've been commodity and entrepreneur, both pathological and patriotic consumers?[269]

Black t-shirt culture emerges within the long history of protest and economic empowerment. There's been a move from directed action to gain access to participate in the economy toward using entrepreneurship as a political strategy in social movements. A closer look at the TMF website will yield evidence of a shift in identity construction, from those who participate in movements on the ground to those who are consumer activists – consuming both products such as t-shirts and new forms of communication such as social media outlets. There is consumption in the idea that "communication = social action," that individual expression and consumer clothing choices is a politic. In the TMF and legal campaign against George Zimmerman we see the shift in modes of what counts as social activism. The rallies and petitions, were a complement to the online and media presence of the Martin family and supporters. These levels of engagement provided a challenge to the discourse that criminalized black youth, however, there are not yet tangible changes made to Florida's "stand your ground law" or similar laws nation wide.

The marriage of commercialism and politics (which produces "progressive" black politics) does not negate the fact that all commercialism is reflective of many intersecting political stances, because, progressive entities like the TMF are not the only entities that produce these shirts. This raises interesting issues around copyright and 'ownership' or 'fair use' of these images as content for t-shirt culture and beyond. "Ownership" of these images is obscured when considering appropriation of images vs. a family's mourning and need for control over the ways an image will be used. Celebrity patrons like Jamie Foxx have illustrated not only the outpouring of support garnered by the initial legal campaign, but also the cross-cultural media appeal of Trayvon's image and the #ForTrayvon t-shirts themselves. The lone image of a dark youth with raised hoodie became a symbol reenacted on the covers of magazines and Facebook profile pictures nationwide. Professional athletes, film directors, and even the president of the United States either posed "as" Trayvon on the covers of *Ebony* Magazine or were made into pro-Trayvon posters via Photoshop and other media graphics. Foxx himself became notorious for arriving at awards shows wearing TMF t-shirts and caused controversy for conservative media personalities like Bill O'Reiley, who questioned his motives for doing so. This embodied political statement was performative of not only Trayvon's victimization but also Foxx's individual connection to the larger issue of racial profiling and police brutality against black men in the United States. However, this and similar gestures became a means to what end? The mobility of Martin's image draped across the torsos of countless celebrities (e.g. director Spike Lee, NBA star Dwayne Wade, actress Megan Good, and performers Chris Brown and Lil' Wayne to name a few) serves to challenge notions of the individual victim and to place it squarely within the current struggle of a broader community. However, the mobility of the bodies wearing the t-shirts privilege a freedom of movement not extended to Martin himself.

A closer examination of the foundation's website yielded useful data. As a visual medium, the format tells us when and where commemoration and RIP t-shirts appear for the

[269] Ibid.

organization. In 2012 to 2013 the TMF enlisted the aid of organizational affiliates ranging from the National Action Network, the National Associate for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Rainbow Push, and the National Urban League that help produce and distribute these t-shirts nationwide. The Martin family have also used the website as a political platform to advance an agenda that incorporates youth engagement, prayer and spirituality, mentoring, and what's most fascinating – an entrepreneurial forum. For the TMF, entrepreneurship and business building community initiatives featured on the website emerge as key factors in uplifting the black community and raising successful children. Not only does the TMF include a TED talk from entrepreneur Cameron Harold, but the foundation is also promoting an FBI Summer Youth Academy at Miami Dade College that is "geared towards educating high school students about the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Miami Dade College's School of Justice degree programs, and other related Law Enforcement Careers."[270] As an organization the Trayvon Martin Foundation has a stated mission to "advocate that crime victims and their families are not ignored in the discussions about violent crime to increase public awareness of all forms of racial ethnic and gender profiling educate youth on conflict resolution techniques and to reduce the incidences where confrontations between strangers turn deadly."[271]

With that being said, one must wonder where all of this is going? Currently the website features individuals from their community initiative. However, in 2014 Foxx is the only celebrity featured on the website and in 2012 – 2013 there were numerous Hollywood celebrities included on the website. Based on the website, the organization has taken a traditional political turn toward a more conservative African American protest/political tradition. The political involvement of both parents, Sybrina Fulton and Tracy Martin, are featured prominently on the homepage. Tracy Martin even helped organize a "conference on 21st century fatherhood" entitled "Circle of Fathers," featuring former NFL player Michael Irvin. This is all to say that the TMF is an enterprise, a brand, and a platform for political organizing. The Martin family has closely considered the sustainability of a movement and the image of their slain son, as a catalyst for broader issues.

For the TMF and numerous other organization founded after the death of a family member, t-shirts play a supportive role in fundraising efforts spearheaded by individual donations and partnerships with established political organization. Institutionalization, that is a formal organizing structure, is a natural progression within local and national movements. The prominence of t-shirts and their visibility in the early establishment of the TMF illustrates the role of t-shirts as commodities within current black political struggle. However, the Trayvon Martin Foundation's continued use of t-shirts as tools to educate and fundraise within a more conservative political tradition indicates that t-shirts can play a role in political movements and organizing at each stage of emerging social movements.[272]

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[270] TrayvonMartinFoundation.org Mission Statement.
[271] TrayvonMartinFoundation.org
[272] a. Christiansen, Jonathan. "Four Stages of a Social Movement." Ebsco Publishing Inc., 2009; b. n.b. Emergence, coalescence, institutionalization, and decline.

Conclusion:

The t-shirts I analyze are not ambiguous; they refer to the victim in form and content, with an inferred context (i.e. police terror and criminalized communities). This context is then further implicated and amplified by the wearers performing body. These t-shirts are confrontational and demand public attention. I focused on how self-display can function as a means for political intervention in the public sphere. I referred to this intervention as discursive activism, which can be defined as "language that incites," or language that intervenes in dominant discourses, and that works on the ground level to change political currents. The individuals interviewed suggest that there are varying reasons for wearing t-shirts: To mourn a loved one, to illustrate shared identity and affinity for a campaign, to voice community concerns via t-shirts as self-referencing medium, or to make once excluded narratives and images visible through body rhetoric as a communicative practice. And likewise, many reasons for the production and circulation of t-shirts: to reflect how popular alternative media outlets (like t-shirts and social media) make community issues known to the masses, to provoke dialogue, to build community support, and to fundraise for legal battles.

As Uncle Bobby recalled… "[T-shirts] are a way to let the suffering speak."[273] The performative utterance, "I Am / Bulletproof," serves as an example of how embodied practice can illustrate contestations of meaning and real life vulnerability. However, the discourse examined in this chapter mirror the dominant narrative around black male exceptionalism and extrajudicial murder. The movement for black lives, initiated by the death of Trayvon Marin, has it's own issues with class, ableism, gender blindness, and the omission of the black LGBTQIA community within the growing fraternity of victims. However, what is examined above does suggest that t-shirts (as a clothing practice) in the public sphere can play an important role in political participation for African Americans.

[273] Interview with Uncle Bobby, December 15, 2015.

Chapter Four

A Calling of Names: Absence, (Re)materiality, and Witness in Black T-shirt Culture

White supremacy is no country for black people. Gender be damned.
- Brittney Cooper, 2013.[274]

#SayHerName Women's T-shirt, designed by The African American Policy Forum (AAPF).
Image Courtesy of feministapparel.com (2017).

The plain black t-shirt above declares: "Black Women are Killed by Police Too." The verb, "killed," highlighted in red amidst the white lettering, represents the bloodshed ignored by mainstream policy initiatives to reform police presence in black communities. The adverb "too" brings closure to the sentence and references those victims "in addition to" the men and boys who are more often recognized in public discourse. Below this statement is a list of names, formatted as justified text in all caps and small font. These are the names of women, girls, and transgender women killed by police, vigilantes, and other state and local agencies. What follows is a question emblazoned in red: "Can You See Them?" The white lettering listing roughly thirty names of victims in small font. Bookmarking the design is the initiative slogan and name of the organization: #SayHerName / African American Policy Forum.[275] The silent petition to, "Say Her Name," suggests a double inflection. Consistent with the African American Policy Forum (AAPF) agenda, are the t-shirts performative elements that insert the names of victims into our line of sight. This t-shirt then, serves as both a visual and rhetorical strategy. The #SayHerName initiative represents yet another example of the blending of social media and political engagement manifested on an object created to raise funds, build awareness, and disrupt the discursive crisis in media

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[274] Cooper, Brittney. "Asking for help while black: How it became a capital offense." *SALON* Magazine, NOvember 12, 2013. Web.
[275] The AAPF is located at the Center for Intersectionality & Social Policy Studies (CISPS) at Columbia Law School.

representation (discussed earlier in chapter three). These names take up, and reclaim, both cyber and physical space.

A rhetorical strategy used in the black millennial protest t-shirt genre includes the simple listing of names, on a plain black (or white) t-shirt.[276] And this particular kind of design may be one of the most culturally significant. The social impact of the shirts in this chapter is linked to the conditions of conceptualization, creation, manufacture, and distribution that these t-shirt makers operate within. The t-shirt makers' intent is almost as important as the wearing of the t-shirt itself, because the efficacy of these shirts - as political tools - are also linked to the historical moment of the shirts' production. Bringing this project to the current day, this chapter will explore further evidence of rhetorical strategy in black t-shirt culture over the past two years. I discuss cultural markers of mourning ritual and resistance in millennial protest t-shirts, and will center on popular memorial and slogan t-shirts that commemorate women, girls, and LGBT victims of extrajudicial violence. I'm interested in how objects and spaces perform, as well as the role of the t-shirt in black women's protest culture. To consider how memorial and slogan t-shirts intervene in public debate as media activism, this chapter also explores: how activists address the absence of women and LGBT victims of police murder and state sanctioned violence in t-shirt culture and mass media; and the concept and practice of "oppositional witness/ing" in black t-shirt culture. In this chapter I use the t-shirt to examine sites of consumption and discursive intervention; and to make a larger criticism of systems of race and gender production.

While undertaking research and interviews for this chapter, my theoretical, methodological, and empirical question became: How do I address the issues of "absence" in the project? The t-shirts discussed in previous chapters originated from or were inspired by national campaigns that held charismatic iconic leaders of past movements and millennial iconic victims of present movements as their primary rallying figures. My theory was and is that this occurs because of a perceived black male exceptionalism as victims of state sanctioned racialized violence. However, the t-shirts featured in this chapter came into material form as a way to rhetorically visualize "the lack" of inclusion. These initial thoughts on the subject of black women and t-shirts were continually disrupted by this absence in material. Therefore, to use the terminology developed by scholars such as Daniel Miller (2005) and Severin Fowles (2010), my central challenge in reading these t-shirts was to analyze the immaterial (non-thing) in relation to the material (thing) and t-shirt wearer and producer's relations to both.[277] As Fowles suggests: "Absences push back and resist. They prompt us into action. And like present things, absences also have their distinctive affordances and material consequences."[278] In what follows, I provide three examples of how the growing intersectional "movement within a movement" is a testament to the multiple oppressions faced by the whole of the black community. These t-shirts challenge

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[276] Organizations such as the AAPF and the Love Not Blood Campaign as well as t-shirt companies such as Gloss Rags and Soul Seed Apparel have each designed t-shirts that list the names of victims in assorted graphic designs.

[277] a) Miller, Daniel. *Politics, History, and Culture*. Duke University Press, 2005. b) Fowles, Severin. "People without things." In: Bille M et al. (eds) *An Anthropology of Absence: Materializations of Transcendence and Loss.* Berlin: Springer, 2010.

[278] Fowles (2010), 28.

singular narratives around racial violence by letting us feel, see, and experience absence by confronting the reality of lives lost.

"Screaming Your Own Name"[279]

To offer context for the following case studies, I want to offer reasoning for what may appear to be a comparison between two incomparable realities. Black women and men, cis and trans, adults and children are victims of racialized oppressions and systemic inequalities. However, these social positions shape the form of oppression in their lived experiences. However, for the purpose of this chapter tracing the absence of women, girls, and trans subjects in popular protest t-shirts may shed light on the epidemic against the whole. In the wake of the death of Renisha McBride, scholar Brittney Cooper stated: "White supremacy is no country for black people. Gender be damned. And it remains abundantly clear that black life is still considered a reasonable price to pay for the protection of white property and white life."[280] The fact that the victims listed on the t-shirt above and the circumstances of their deaths are mostly unknown to the public illustrates the extent to which the stories of unarmed black women and girls killed by police and other government agencies go unheard in our homes, congregations, political initiatives, and mass media. There are countless names that we won't remember, that we never knew, who are missing from our condolences. When t-shirts go mainstream, these t-shirts (like their photographs) can both replace and displace collective memory. Therefore, the phenomenon of wearing t-shirts to protest against state sanctioned murder is fraught with contradictions and shows the extent to which major political organizing may be implicated in the erasure of the multitude of black lived experiences.[281]

In Erica R. Edwards' book, *Charisma: and the Fictions of Black Leadership* (2012), the author outlines how charismatic black male leadership, as a foundational element of black politics, establishes a gender hierarchy in African American social and political movements. One of the most insightful metaphors used in this text is Edwards' reading of Erykah Badu's performance at the Millions More March in 2005, which commemorated the 10th anniversary of the Million Man March and occurred in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. For the author, the event exposed the patriarchy and paternalistic visions of black masculinity within dominant political organizing in the figure of Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam. To "act out" and interrupt the ways she and other women were positioned on this occasion (i.e. as demure and relegated to support roles instead of active political agents), Badu gave an impromptu speech – or declaration – during her song "Time's a Wastin." Badu asserted:

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[279] Some of this § is now "dated" as a result of the success of the Black Lives Matter movement and its intervention in intersectional movement work. However, gendered practices of inclusion/exclusion do not change overnight. And the lasting impact of this movement is yet to be seen.
[280] Cooper, Brittney. "Asking for help while Black: How it became a capital offence." *SALON* Magazine, November 12, 2013.
[281] McNair, Kimberly Thomas. "G-d Bless the Dead: A Calling of Names," The Diaspora Newsletter, a special collection: INSURGENCY: The Black Matter(s) Issue, Fall 2014 – Winter 2015 Edition, African American Studies, University of California, Berkeley, Print & Web.

> Y'all can't fool these kids out here… They're already united – they're just waiting for a chance to lead. So, family, today I'ma leave the stage, but I want you to put both hands up in the air. Scream out your own damn name. Scream out your own name.[282]

For Edwards, not only was Badu's artistic protest indicative of her personal contestation of any peripheral feminine consent to the black political order, but she also exposed the "commonsense political value that has accrued to black heterosexual manhood and black patriarchy."[283] This charisma of black male leadership is founded in three forms of violence: the reduction of a heterogeneous black freedom struggle to a top-down narrative of iconic male leadership; performing social change authoritatively and anti-democratically; and the "structuring of knowledge of black political subjectivity and movement within a gendered hierarchy of political value that grants un-interrogated power to normative masculinity."[284] For the author, all of these forms represent "the violence of charisma" that has shaped the narrative of black political engagement.

For my purposes here, I want to extend this charismatic scenario*,* to include its reincarnation in the form of the iconic victim – like Trayvon Martin discussed in chapter three. In a sense, the scenario is the same except today's social movements are not leader centered but centered on collective leadership and necessitates the applicability of the iconic victims narrative to include masses of unnamed victims. Here it is important to note how post-civil rights black culture is both nostalgic for and critical of civil rights era black leadership.[285] This has given birth to an even further contradiction, that is, the trade in twentieth-century black leadership iconography – t-shirts and commodities featuring "soul era" political icons – has birthed a post-soul esthetic market in victim iconography. The most marketable items feature black male victims, both private citizens and public figures. These t-shirts are seen as more marketable because of the notoriety of each victim, also a result of the media's infatuation with black males as both perpetrators of crime and victims of swift justice. For example, Trayvon Martin, Jordan Davis, and Mike Brown's likenesses were each co-opted by individuals without their family's permission. Their deaths garnered condolences and immediate attention within black communities locally and nationally. However, the media and black communities were not compelled to respond in kind for incidents involving black women and LGBT victims.[286]

In *Body as Evidence: Mediating Race, Globalizing Gender (2012)*, scholar Janelle Hobson explores the criminalization of the black body, and argues:

> Because of the moral and legal paradox established by slavery – black resistance to white oppression becomes a criminal offense – the "facts of blackness" constantly

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[282] Edwards, Erica R. *Charisma: and the Fictions of Black Leadership,* University of Minnesota Press, 2012.
[283] Ibid, pages ix – xiv.
[284] Ibid, page xv.
[285] Ibid, page 163.
[286] Stampler, Laura. "Trayvon Martin's Mom Is Trying To Trademark Her Son's Name." Business Insider, March 27, 2012. Web.; Pulliam, Tim; Moore, Adrienne. "Rapper gets flack for Jordan Davis shirts." News 4 JAX, Graham Media Group. February 24, 2014. Web.; Weinreich, Marc. "Michael Brown's mother may face felony armed robbery charges." New York Daily News, November 7, 2014. Web.; Tillet, Salamishah. "Female Visibility Matters." The New York Times Magazine, August 7, 2015. Web.

> grate against the "fictions of whiteness." After all, the white body, by virtue of representing the law and moral authority, legitimates the immoral acts of physical and sexual violence. If the white body perpetrates violence, there is a presumed cause and rationale. The black body is presumed guilty in relation to the presumed innocence of the white body.[287]

This formed the media subtext and public debates surrounding the Trayvon Martin case and others. The broader public and conservative media may have questioned Martin's innocence, however, for African American observers this invoked rhetoric of lynching steeped in the history of black male victimization. However, this victimhood is often denied to black women who, even within black communities, are not easily recognized as victims of state sanctioned violence. The most comparable iconography to apply would involve black women as historical victims of institutional rape on slave ships, at the hands of slave masters and overseers, sexual abuse as domestics, interracial rape, and sexual violence, at the hands of police by other agents of the state. The image of rape and sexual violence against black women's bodies does not invoke public shame – if it even enters public debate at all. This iconography produces a voyeuristic impulse, evident in the cases of Anita Hill, the Duke Lacrosse Rape case, and the numerous cases of sexual violence during the Jim Crow era. Hobson further suggests:

> [I]n the context of the lynched bodies of black males, which was connected to their criminality and "proclivity towards rape"… criminalized black male sexuality is inextricably linked to black female sexuality, insofar as one body poses sexual threat while the other is deemed incapable of being sexually threatened.[288]

This statement aligns with those of scholars like Paula Giddings who has suggested that perhaps the reason why female victimization is to readily dismissed in black politics is that: "The issues of gender and sexuality have been made so painful to us in our history that we have largely hidden them from ourselves."[289] If we consider the humiliation and degrading of black women from Sara Baartman, to Anita Hill, and more recently Janay Rice (the wife of NFL player Ray Rice, whose videotaped assault by her husband was repeatedly circulated in social media and national news outlets) these anecdotes illustrate the public's ability to accept the sight of the "pained/harmed/injured black female body." This is relational to and a repeating of the iconic victim scenario of lynching.

This discourse surrounding the summary execution of unarmed black men exposes how historical sexual violence enacted against both black men and women has produced a culture of silence and omission within mainstream coverage of the extrajudicial murder of unarmed black women and girls.[290] To challenge state-sanctioned racism African American social movements have historically relied heavily upon constructions of suitable victims that adhered to gendered politics of respectability. In the movements produced out of recent events such as the Martin case, black female-bodied victimization may be seen as a queering of (i.e. outside the hetero-normative narrative of) the black racial project. For the most part,

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[287] Hobson, Janell. *Body as Evidence: Mediating Race, Globalizing Gender*, SUNY Press, 2012, Page 71.
[288] Ib, page 72.
[289] Ib, page 414.
[290] Organizations such as the AAPF and Black Lives Matter are using social media to intervene in this omission. Discussed further beginning on page 9.

those who are non-cis-heteronormative or male are left out of the mainstream record. As discussed in chapter three, these images are then put forward to further white supremacist ideology that position black males as savage, and an "endangered species." What is troubling is how the narrative of the black male as "endangered species" and the "war on black men" reiterates this iconic victimology but at the same time reasserts a "fiction of whiteness." My contention is not only with the lack of media coverage or absence of paraphernalia commemorating female victims; but – through omission – it also suggests that this oppression against black females does not exist.

Blacks are five times more likely to be shot and killed by the police; and in 2016 roughly one out of every eleven unarmed black people murdered by police are women or girls.[291] And the total number of female-bodied persons killed (which would include trans-women) is unclear and hard to determine. The government stopped keeping official records of extrajudicial killings in January 2009. Since then, I and other scholars, have been mining media outlets such as *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, their social media accounts and websites as well as online magazines and publications such as *Ebony*, *Gawker*, *Madame Noire*, *SALON*, and *Colorlines* – sifting through articles and comments sections for names of black female victims yet unknown to the broader public.

According to a study from the Center for American Progress, 26.6% of Black women are living in poverty. In 2012, the unemployment rate for Black women was nearly twice that for white women. Even when they can find work, Black women make 70 cents for every dollar that an average man makes. Meanwhile, the same patterns that drive "the new Jim Crow," as described by Michelle Alexander in her now groundbreaking text, also drive factors affecting black women. Black women are the fastest growing segment of the prison population and the only demographic that hasn't seen any job growth in the past decade. Black women heads of household have a median net-worth of $5, with 46% of single black mothers having zero or negative net-worth, and the poverty rate is over 25% for black women.[292] And though black women are among the "most educated" demographics in the United States, they also are less likely to be promoted, are paid the least across demographics, and have the highest student debt.[293] What's at stake is not reckoning with

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[291] *The Washington Post* (2015, 2016); IN 2016 black men and women died at a ratio of 10 to 1.

[292] Researchers at the *Insight Center for Community Economic Development* based in Oakland, Calif., analyzed data from the 2007 Survey of Consumer Finances, a report the Federal Reserve Board issues every three years that examines household finances in this country.

[293] a.) U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2016). *Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups 2016* (NCES 2016-007), Degrees Awarded. Web: nces.ed.gov.; b.) "No black women are not the most educated group in the US", *Family Equity* Wordpress, June 7, 2016. Web. Note: Black women earn 64 cents on the white male dollar. If the wage and gender gap in the US, a Black woman working full time all year could afford another 153 more weeks of food (AAPF, 2015). Black women who graduate from two year, four year, and advanced degree granting institutions are not always retained, if retained they often receive the lowest wages/salaries across (not "within") all racial and gender categories and within most industries. They are less likely to advance to Partner, Chair, CEO, COO, or Presidential roles. They are more often relegated to "coordinate", "direct", and are support staff for those in leadership positions. Not stated in the 2016 study is the fact that black women also earn degrees from for-profit institutions. Which means, black women may also have the highest student loan debt. Black students have the highest burden of repayment. Yet, traditionally, blacks with degrees financially support multiple households. Therefore, this further limits the financial freedom of black women. The Dept. of Education report also doesn't mention the

the ways white supremacy benefits from the policing of black women, girls, and LGBT victims in relation to the policing of black men. This can result in skewed policy initiatives (e.g. President Obama's "My Brother's Keeper" Initiative) that lend needed support to campaigns for one segment of the community, while ignoring those on the periphery who face the same issues.[294]

The point of contention here is not solely the t-shirt as commodity or the iconicity of black male victimhood feeding the marketplace, for these are results of the media circuit of culture, the engine that frames what connotes a media event as "news worthy." My issue is that it handicaps movement success in terms of policy change, through the double silencing of black racialized violence – both male and female. This double silencing renders black male victims and black women victims as nonfamilial. The contemporary legal campaigns centered on slain black men relegates their mothers, partners, and daughters to bystanders that witness the life lost without necessarily placing themselves in the broader narrative of institutional violence. The absence of a black female victim narrative in major media during the post-Internet age illustrates an ordering of importance, or more specifically, an ordering of news worthiness that influences the ways masses of black people and the general public understand the extent to which summary executions and police violence occur within black communities.

Never are black woman regarded as being part of an "endangered species." Women are more likely to be recognized as peripheral casualties (diseased, drug addicted, and catalysts for welfare reform) instead of an "endangered species" (scapegoated in the "wars" on crime and drugs). This rhetoric separates (prioritizes) black men from black women and also implies non-human-ness. To think of a "species" is to classify black men as outside of and different from others in the human species. This simultaneously desensitizes the public to the ways black males are viewed and isolates them from their female counterparts as a problem that is both independent of and definitive of the whole of the black community.[295] This unhelpful hyperbole also implies that black men will someday disappear, as if their existence and survival is not intertwined with the existence and survival of black women (their economic security, health, and well-being included). Both are subjected to systemic racism and obscured through various modes of representation including mass media, community political priority, and popular belief. Speaking to the broader context of the circulation of violent images and incessant replaying of police shooting of black men, scholar, writer, and activist Salamishah Tillet described:

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affect of national Work First programs (initiated during the Bill Clinton administration) and how the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, made it necessary for many women (across race) to attend school to support their families. Effectively becoming the "over-educated poor".

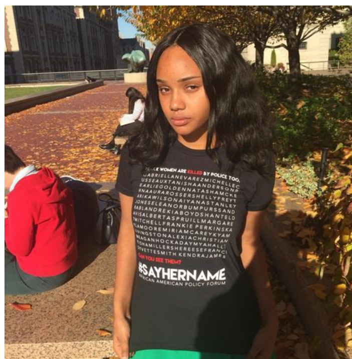
[294] The initiative focuses on education and training for the workforce. From the website via www.whitehouse.gov: "President Obama launched the "My Brother's Keeper" Initiative to address persistent opportunity gaps faced by boys and young men of color and ensure that all young people can reach their full potential. Through this initiative, the Administration is joining with cities and towns, businesses, and foundations who are taking important steps to connect young people to mentoring, support networks, and the skills they need to find a good job or go to college and work their way into the middle class."

[295] Butler (2013).

This disparity... reflects a popular conception that racial discrimination and violence in America, past and present, are almost exclusively aimed at men: When we talk about lynching, police brutality and mass incarceration, we are almost always talking about African--American men, not women. Being a target of racism is seen as patrilineal, a social and political disadvantage that black fathers unwillingly bequeath to their sons but not their daughters. The result is a dyad of vulnerability and invisibility that most African--American women, including me, learn to navigate at an early age.[296]

Because of the magnitude of issues facing black men and media attention, those blacks who are not cis-hetero black men could not prove that what happened to them was just like what happened to black men who were murdered, and went unnoticed by mainstream political movements. Therefore, in an effort to "scream their own names" black women and black queer communities use t-shirts to attest to not only their oppression but to the oppression of others. These t-shirts offer a method to bring invisible black bodies into view.

#SayHerName: Gender, Witness, and Policy Strategy



The #SayHerName Initiative t-shirt from The African American Policy Forum (AAPF).
Image Courtesy of aapf.org/merchandise (2015).

The #SayHerName initiative was developed by the African American Policy Forum, a think tank organization headed by law professor and legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw. The AAPF was established to transform public discourse and policy through initiatives that includes academics, activists, and policy makers focusing on the uplift of black women and girls.[297] The term intersectionality was developed by Crenshaw in her seminal work, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color," to describe the failures of race based and gender based policy initiative to fully grasp the intersections multiple systemic oppression faced by black women. Black women were left out of initiatives that privileged black men because of their gender and white women because of their race. Key examples in terms of public safety and criminal justice are the media's obsession with the "endangered black male" and the "missing white woman" narratives; and initiatives that help address these "public crises." For the purposes of my

[296] Tillet, Salamishah. "Female Visibility Matters." *The New York Times* Magazine, August 7, 2015.
[297] Paraphrased from the mission statement of the African American policy forum, aapf.org/ourmission.

analysis, I use representational (systemic) intersectionality as an analytic to illustrate how media representation (or lack) of instances of police and state violence against black women, girls, and femmes marginalizes women of color as accepted normalized practice (e.g. misogynoir and transmisogynoir). Intersectionality as an analytical tool, considers how the lived experiences of women of color and the systemic issues they face are a result of intersecting patterns.[298] These include but are not limited to: racism, sexism, hetero-normativism, class, ageism, ableism, language, and citizenship. The lack of discursive representation in feminist movements and antiracist movements further marginalizes black women's experiences with structural inequality and their political interests.[299]

The #SayHerName social media campaign began in February 2015 and was inspired by the deaths of Aiyana Stanley-Jones (a 7 year old girl from Detroit, MI, killed at her grandmother's house during a police raid in 2010), Rekia Boyd (a young woman, age 22 of Chicago, IL, killed by an off-duty police officer in 2012), Renisha McBride (the Michigan teenager who was murdered by Theodore Paul Wafer in 2013), and gained momentum after the death of Mya Hall (a transgender woman killed by police in Baltimore, MD in 2015), Sandra Bland (age 28, wrongfully arrested, assaulted by the arresting officer, and found hanged in a jail cell in Waller County, Texas in 2015), and other African American women, girls, and femmes. Their deaths followed a national trend in infamous killings of unarmed black people. The victims ranging from age 7 to 96, represent the economic and educational spectrum, and also illustrate the systemic issues around police interaction with the mentally ill. The AAPF merchandising, hashtag campaigns, and stated initiative exposed the varying ways black women are twice victimized, for their biological sex and race, and often their gender identity and sexual orientations.

I spoke with Kimberlé Crenshaw, the Director and Co-Founder of AAPF and the Center for Intersectionality & Social Policy Studies (CISPS) at Columbia Law School, and other members of the AAPF Leadership Team (Julia Sharpe-Levine, the Associate Director; and Brittany Hazelwood, the Communications Director)) to discuss their social media campaign and how they conceived the t-shirt. The longer backstory to the hashtag and t-shirt campaign began with conversations started as an interface between two events. Those events were the AAPF's "Why We Can't Wait" open letter and campaign, which concerned the exclusion of women and girls from President Obama's "My Brother's Keeper" policy initiative, and the Black Lives Matter Ferguson caravan in 2014. Crenshaw explained,

> [W]e were dealing with some apprehension, concerns, and reservations by some activist allies about how to continue a conversation about gender in the context of racial justice. (With) the first tendencies around dealing with state violence and (racial) justice it would be impossible to do both of these things at the same time… [T]he conversation about women and girls doesn't [disappear] simply because we're talking about state violence. If anything, it is another site where the prevailing ways

[298] Crenshaw, Kimberle Williams. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color." *The Feminist Philosophy Reader*. Eds. Alison Bailey and Chris Cuomo. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008.
[299] Ibid.

of thinking about racial justice that's used to being focused on men and boys are also troubling and narrow.[300]

While participating in the broader movement for black lives, team members continuously tried to remind fellow activists when conversations became gender exclusive. "So #SayHerName came out of that," Crenshaw explained, "it came out of going to the marches… trying to come up with chants and [incorporate] women's names into it."[301] However, Crenshaw admitted:

[T]hat's when it became abundantly clear that some people had no idea that black women and girls were killed by police. Some were responsive, some were shocked. And… some people were negatively disposed when they saw the pictures and heard us talking about it. So for some people, there was an interloping happening… as if women had no place [sic].[302]

The AAPF flooded the media sphere with images of these cis and trans women and girls with the goal of humanizing their stories and those of countless other victims of extrajudicial murder. This hashtag spread on Twitter and Instagram, and when clicked, the hashtag would lead you to the AAPF website. Once there, people could download the "#SayHerName: Resisting Police Brutality Against Black Women" Social Media Guide and Report. The report, that detailed different instances of police violence and murder, gave full attention to the gendered ways African Americans are victimized. This, coupled with the social media guide, seemed particularly effective. Hazelwood recalled that the May 2015 vigil in New York's Union Square [part of the #SayHerName National Day of Action] was "the first instance of the hashtag picking up momentum. It resonated with people it's simple in nature, but lifting up names that don't get lifted under other hashtags."[303] Using family images, short bios, and the bolded hashtag, the guide instructed supporters to publicize the stories of more than forty victims through a list of pre-developed hashtag tweets and images. This method directly engaged social media followers as political actors charged with contributing to a campaign emerging from the margins of the national movement against police terror. Like #BlackLivesMatter and the broader movement for black lives, the AAPF's #SayHerName campaign was – at its core – intersectional, and its policy initiatives were developed from black feminist traditions.

Though the team says a lot of people are familiar with the hashtag and the campaign they admit they don't have many quantitative ways to measure its success.[304] In terms of successful metrics, I was able to obtain Twitter Analytics for the AAPF account. After calculating their averages over a fourteen month period between August 2015 and September 2016, I discovered that the AAPF (at a rate of 105 Tweets per month) had an average of 190, 000 Tweet impressions, 4,471 profile visits, and 207 mentions, and 197 new

[300] Interview with the AAPF Leadership Team (including Kimberlé Crenshaw, the Director and Co-Founder; Julia Sharpe-Levine, the Associate Director; and Brittany Hazelwood, the Communications Director) on June 4, 2016.
[301] Ibid.
[302] Ibid.
[303] Interview with AAPF Team, 6.4.16.
[304] Interview with AAPF, referring to comments made by Kimberlé Crenshaw, 6.4.16.

followers per month.[305] There highest activity occurred during high profile cases and the popularity of “repurposed” #SayHerName hashtags such as #HerDreamDeferred, #Holtzclaw & #BlackWomenMatter, and #AssaultAtSpringValleyHigh & #BlackGirlsMatter. These aforementioned hashtags each stem from social media engagement with three events centered on black women’s experience with systemic violence.[306] All of these were brought to the broader public through social media (i.e. Black Twitter) after having not been given mainstream media attention. To date, their total followers number a little over 6,000 Twitter followers, which is a fraction of other established organizations like the NAACP who have almost 200, 000 followers. However, the AAPF is part of a growing sector within black political organizing whose network includes independent Twitter users, Black Lives Matter chapters, The Organization for Black Struggle, Black Youth Project 100 (BYP 100), The Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, and Color of Change as well as other health, labor, and policy centers.

What is evident is that it’s not the singularity of the AAPF as an organization that makes a difference; it’s the interconnected nature of their social media network that readily translates to actual change in policy and community intervention. People seemed hungry for a “movement within the movement” that was radically inclusive of shared community concerns. Sharpe-Levine then added that, “the hashtag has been repurposed for various struggles for visibility… whether that be in immigrant communities, indigenous communities, when trying to bring light to [issues] around other forms of state violence other than police killings…”[307] Also apparent, is the organization’s emphasis on the varying ways black women are victimized including rape and sexual assault, beating and excessive force, and the economic uncertainty, health disparities, and issues of child welfare steaming from the incarceration of mothers and fathers and it’s affects on their families. Hazelwood insisted that: “[I]n terms of social media success I think that pure numbers are not the only indicator of what’s [sic] the most successful hashtag… I think that it became viral in a sense that it permeated communities that had otherwise not been permeated by intersectional justice… I would say that is the marker of the success of the hashtag.”[308]

The narrative of the endangered black male is all too familiar, and has been emphasized in popular culture and policy that both criminalizes black males and makes them the archetypal “victim” of racial inequality and subjugation. This is problematic not only in terms of re-victimizing black males, but also in the ways it obscures the reality of black female (cis and trans) as well as black queer extrajudicial casualties.[309] Though black men have a greater percentage and probability of death by summary executions among men, the

[305] Excel Worksheet and AAPF analytics included in addendum.
[306] Note: a.) AAPF Annual “Week on the Status of Black Women” which is a series of reports on varying topics from the school to prison pipeline, sexual assault, single mothers, and veterans; b.) The 2016 case of excessive force at Spring Valley High School in Columbia, SC involving Fmr. School Resource Officer Ben Fields; c.) The Daniel Holtzclaw Case, Fmr. Oklahoma City Police Officer found guilty of rape and sexual assault of thirteen black women (one teenage girl) in 2015.
[307] Ibid.
[308] Ibid.
[309] McNair (2014)

percentage of black women is almost identical among women.[310] Black women and girls are 13% of the U.S. population, but account for a third of those shot and killed by police. Black men and women are 2.5 times more likely to be shot and killed by the police than whites.[311] What's at stake is the omission of women's positions as already subjugated victims of racialized and gendered violence, and this impedes systemic change.

What is encouraging is that the intervention made by the AAPF and the broader movement for black lives, is one that inserts black women and LGBT victims back into the narrative of community and kinship ties. Hazelwood suggested that:

> At large protests linked to mass incarceration or police violence in general, I think the hashtag and the #SayHerName movement has really disallowed organizers who are doing a Black Lives Matter protest from no longer mentioning all names of men and boys…
>
> Now, since the hashtag has launched we notice more posters and more posters from other organizations but we also noticed that from a planning perspective that women are more incorporated.

The AAPF facilitated one such intervention in the case of Mya Hall. She was killed in the same city and in the same time period as Freddie Gray. However, Gray's death ignited mass protest throughout the city of Baltimore. The fact that Hall was a trans woman played a role in her relative obscurity in media circulation, as the murders of trans people often go unreported in the national media.[312] For black trans women alienated from their families, there is a generalized and sometimes internalized transphobia that might make the families of some trans victims less inclined to put their grief out there in public and become spokespersons for a cause. One in five trans women experience homelessness at some point, and black trans people represent the largest segment of the trans homeless population at 13%.[313] Therefore, not only are black trans women's gender misidentified as male during autopsy, but there is extended strain on families to find lost relatives and there is often no family member available to claim their bodies.[314] However, AAPF's inclusion of trans women like Hall in their #SayHerName initiative does the work of reestablishing and

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[310] a.) Gabrielson, Ryan; Grochowski Jones, Ryann; and Sagara, Eric. "Deadly Force, in Black and White." ProPublica, Oct. 10, 2014. According to this 2014 ProPublica study, young black men are fatally shot by law enforcement at alarmingly higher rates than their white counterparts. b.) Bui, Quoctrung; and Cox, Amanda. "Surprising New Evidence Shows Bias in Police Use of Force but Not in Shootings. New York Times, JULY 11, 2016. WEb. This articles shows the various ways black men and women are treated with excessive force, other than shooting. c.) Makarechi, Kia. "WHAT THE DATA REALLY SAYS ABOUT POLICE AND RACIAL BIAS: Eighteen academic studies, legal rulings, and media investigations shed light on the issue roiling America." *Vanity Fair*, July 14, 2016. Web. This article summarizes several studies.

[311] a.) AAPF, 2015; b.) Lowery, Wesley. "Aren't more white people than black people killed by police? Yes, but no."*The Washington Post*, July 11, 2016.

[312] a) Blaise, Jordyne. "Addressing the Epidemic of Violence against Black Trans Women." *Essence* Magazine, April 18, 2016; "National Report on Hate Violence Against LGBTQ and HIV Positive Communities," *The National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs* (NCAVP), June 4, 2013; b) Michaels, Samantha. "It's incredibly scary to be a Trans woman of color right now." Mother Jones, June 26, 2015.

[313] Blaise (2016).

[314] Ibid.

recuperating community and kinship ties in ways a sole focus on a cisgendered person could not.

The #SayHerName campaign serves a similar purpose as the Trayvon Martin Foundation, yet, effectively broadening laymen's understanding of how the question of police and state violence is initially posed. The premise – that all the victims (martyrs) are men, and all the women are spared – is proved false and illustrative of black male exceptionalism in the case of extrajudicial murder.[315] A useful example would be the similarities between the Renisha McBride case and the Trayvon Martin case. These teens were both killed by private citizens and their cases are explicit examples of race-based crimes, with different outcomes in conviction. Here again, the proximity to "home" is significant in that Trayvon was in route to his home while approached by Zimmerman while Renisha was seeking assistance at Wafer's residence. No matter "who approached whom" both of these young people were seen as threats so severe as to warrant their murder.

Another measure of the success of the #SayHerName initiative is that the t-shirt and other popular merchandise have been sold out from some time to time. The t-shirt was a collaboration between Crenshaw, Sharpe-Levine, and Hazelwood who each envisioned the t-shirts as another platform to promote an idea of a racial justice agenda that would be gender inclusive. Crenshaw described how they wanted to encourage an ongoing effort to try and search for the names of the women and girls who'd been killed by police: [T]he idea was to create a t-shirt that actually replicated somewhat symbolically what we were hoping people were prepared to do, which is to look underneath what's actually there and unpack and find the women and girls who have also lost their lives to police violence.[316] Sharpe-Levine noticed that, "While there were a plethora of options for uplifting the names of men there weren't really any shirts out there [for women]. So I think it filled a need."[317] Hazelwood further explained the significance of the design:

> "The reason why it says "Can You See Them?" and the names are all jumbled up because it's not until you take a closer look, a really hard look. I think that's really the point behind the t-shirt… [Y]es you have to take a hard look and you have to decipher them and how they're hidden in plane site, but also that we have to put so many names together even to make that splash. What's frightening and what's also driving the movement is that… it takes all of those names for us to make a splash. Whereas a list of names of men and boys there are certain names that get elevated, and inspire whole movements, whole cities to march and have stand alone vigils. But it took us to pull together so many different women to have to inspire [sic] basically to match that. One woman's life one girl's life is not inspiring that much, right?[318]

A lot of the women included in the campaign and listed on the "Can You See Them?" t-shirt were killed within a week or two from the men that are known. "Women who were shot, beaten to death... the same circumstances that lead to the deaths of mean,"

[315] Butler (2013).
[316] AAPF Interview 6.4.16.
[317] Ibid.
[318] Ibid.

Crenshaw emphasized. However, black women faced more instances of rape and other abuses of power in addition to death in police custody.[319] Each member of the AAPF Team reiterated that sexual violence by the police is an insidious issue. When commenting on the #Holtzclaw & #BlackWomenMatter circulations, Hazelwood further stated, “But we know they were raped because they were black women, low income, at the intersection [and] that this officer could prey on them knowing they were vulnerable.”[320] For them the idea that black cis and trans women should be “deferential to ‘the black man’s’ feelings and experiences” is not only insensitive and dismissive but illustrates “a view of racial solidarity, [where] these women’s lives and families have taken a backseat to the idea that disproportionate vulnerability of our men turns into an exclusive imperative for racial solidarity.”[321] Though it is unclear how much money was raised by this campaign, what is certain is that the hashtag, as an extension of the intersectional politics of the broader movement for black lives, introduced a new framing of the question of police terror on black bodies nationally.

Image courtesy of Kimberlé Crenshaw on Twitter, December 13, 2014, first Millions March in New York City.[322]

In the previous chapter, the proclamation and provocation “I Am…” served as an intervention in the discursive crisis within mainstream news and media, surrounding the deaths of unarmed black men. The spectacular nature of black men’s deaths in the public eye quickly gains media attention and spurs community outrage and uprisings. These incidents often involve a loss of life and dehumanization in a public area (more frequently with visual footage circulated via cell phones then social media and online news outlets), while instances of black women and girls killed – with Sandra Bland being one exception – are inside the home or in relation to the home (without an element of “shared witness”). In November 2015, the AAPF participated in the second annual Millions March in New York

[319] Interview with AAPF Team, reiterating points made by Kimberlé Crenshaw, 6.4.16.
[320] AAPF Leadership Team Interview, 6.4.16.
[321] AAPF Leadership Team Interview, reiterating/quoting points made by Brittany Hazelwood and Kimberlé Crenshaw respectively, June 4, 2016.
[322] Found on Twitter @sandylocks with the caption, “Remembering the sistas at the Millions March NYC. #millionsmarch #whywecantwait”.

City that was a gathering of various organizers in the broader movement for black lives. At the event, the AAPF organized a vigil and made sure to have visual representations of each woman. The posters were created based on interviews with their family members and included the women's faces and a few sentences about who they were. These posters are replicated in the social media campaign. Crenshaw explained:

> We wanted the visuals not to be just like a protest but a vigil, a memorial. We were thinking about the ways that funerals and other moments of lifting up the dead become part of the ritual of remembrance. ... We wanted the people to know more about the person than when they died and the circumstances… After we said their names, the posters of the women were passed from the back of the crowd more like passing the body forward and giving her back to the loved ones until each family member by the end of the rally [sic] was seated with their loved one in front of them…We tried to maintain some part of that in the campaign… We felt very strongly […] about making this a kind of moment in which the families were able to occupy that space, and have their loved ones with them.[323]

Image courtesy of the AAPF, 2015.[324]

When I spoke with the AAPF Leadership Team, I confessed (though reluctantly at the time) that I recognized that something else was happening with the t-shirts and social media campaign. What I noticed was spiritual, a disruption of the melancholy of the space with ritual, that to me was more powerful than business as usual. Encouraged that I and others understood the broader meaning and implications of their initiative, Crenshaw candidly expressed that:

> There is some tension between folks who have that sensibility and those who want to view these moments as, I don't want to say purely political events, but the

[323] Ibid.

[324] AAPF's "#SayHerName: A Vigil in Memory of Black Women and Girls Killed by the Police" on May 20th, 2015, in partnership with 1 Billion Rising, at Union Square in New York City.

> sensibilities about whether ritual and memorialization both have a place or whether there's room for this kind for political mobilizing. There was some back and forth as to whether we should do it this way and concerns around whether a crowd could be the place where something like this happened. So we are encouraged to hear that it conveyed itself. And those are risks that make sense to continue to take.

Oppositional Witness: the t-shirt as body-text and testimony

The idea of witness is an element within the black protest tradition and what is commonly referred to as the black church. Here I want to suggest that witness, as a mode of resistance, is also present in #SayHerName and the various initiatives of the AAPF. This practice of witnessing stems from the black women's spiritualist traditions in the Christian Church, and was adopted into the cultural and political practices of womanism. The term womanism was created by Alice Walker in her book *In Search of Our Mothers' Garden: Womanist Prose* (1983), to describe black women's experiences in relation to and not separate, above, or taking the place of black men's experiences with racism. Womanist Theology, influenced by black liberationist theology (i.e. James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 1969) and further employed and theorized by scholars such as Katie G. Cannon (*Black Womanist Ethics*, 2006) and Renita J. Weems (*Just a Sister Away*, 1988, 2007), takes up the practice of witnessing as a strategy of survival. A womanist is committed to advocating for all segments of the black community through the necessary focus on black women and girls. From this, *oppositional witnessing* is an extension of this commitment. If we look also to womanist theology, we can understand witness – in the secular and spiritual sense – as a necessary political practice.

For the purposes of my reading of the AAPF t-shirt, I consider the spiritual, philosophical, and political meanings of witnessing to expand on what I see in the commission of this specific protest t-shirt genre. To witness – that is, standing in testament to (in testimony) for yourself and-or-with others – is an intricate component of worship and the Africanisms embedded in church practices. There is an ocean of possibility in diasporic religions and spiritualities. However, the call-and-response question: "Can I get a witness?" or "Do I have a witness?" was made popular in mid-20th century black congregations.[325] And I build my definition of oppositional witness from this cultural understanding of the term. When a speaker (in testimony or sermon) poses this question to the congregation, they are seeking affirmation and verbal confirmation of a mutual understanding or a shared experience.[326] In a sense, these ancestors are still in fellowship with the living through the practice of listing names (also understood as a naming ritual). While not taking this as essentialist practice among all black women's spirituality or black feminist organizations that also create t-shirts, this genre nevertheless challenges the absence of representations of black women's victimhood and the need to address it in policy and community conversation. In chapter three, I explored how t-shirts are both a mourning ritual and ritual of resistance. I want to suggest the same here in the form of the naming ritual present in the #SayHerName

[325] Riggs, Marcia; Holmes, Barbara. Can I Get a Witness?: Prophetic Religious Voices of African American Women : An Anthology. Orbis Books, 1997.
[326] Ibid.

t-shirt. The AAPF illustrates both black feminist politics and secular usage of womanist theological practices in their t-shirt by acknowledging the victims and saying their names. Taken together, these t-shirt wearers and the AAPF stand in witness for the departed.[327]

Witnessing, as a concept, has a dual meaning that describes a person or object and an action (i.e. seeing with one's own eyes or testifying to what one has seen). Witnessing, as a necessity, has a long history within black feminist, womanist, religious, and spiritual epistemologies. The tradition of black women's oppositional witnessing, is a non-violent and often subversive resistance strategy.[328] It is a contrary witness that allows black women to defend the plight of black men and boys while also insisting that their gendered racialization be recognized.[329] Scholars such as Gloria Wade-Gayles, Barbara Holmes, María Lugones, and Linda Tuhiwai Smith, have each explored the tradition of "witnessing" in women of color traditions as both a healing methodology and survival epistemology.[330]

There are four articulations of witness that seem most relevant to the strategies used by women and queer activists in the broader movement for black lives. Though these examples have roots in religious practice, here I want to be clear about the distinction between religious institutions and spirituality in the black protest tradition. First, the "wailing women" of the Hebrew Bible, were employed to mourn and cry at funerals. For the prophet Jeremiah, they set the atmosphere for worship and encouraged believers to "pay attention to what's happening."[331] However, one of the more important roles these women played was in the mutual affirmation, the witness, for other women in mourning. This was a responsibility and gift of only the "wisest" of these women.[332] Second, in Christian Bible, Jesus Christ is described as "the Faithful Witness" who gives affirmation, rebuke, and counsel.[333] Third, in each of the four Gospel accounts of the resurrection there is a common agreement - women were first to witness the resurrection of Christ.[334] The early Christian Church had difficulty with this written recollection because women were not considered credible witnesses.[335] However, the unanimous remembrance of the first witnesses in scripture provides clear credibility to the text as a historical document. Lastly, there were

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[327] Black Lives Matter group will not endorse any presidential candidates for 2016 election: founders. NY Daily News, Sep 20, 2015. Web.

[328] Blount, Brian K. (Ed.). Can I Get a Witness?: Reading Revelation through African American Culture. Westminster John Knox Press, 2005.

[329] I've developed this term to describe the necessary modes of resistance (much like the black women's oppositional gaze as described by bell hooks "The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators," 1999) developed by black women as political agents and t-shirt wearers.

[330] Holmes (1997); Wade-Gayles, Gloria. *My Soul is a Witness: AFrican American Women's Spirituality*. Beacon Press, 1995.; Lugones, María. *Pilgramages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition Against Multiple Oppressions*. Latham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003.; Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. Zed Books, 2000.

[331] Quote taken from Jeremiah 9:17 in the Basic English Bible.

[332] Weems, Renita. "A Crying Shame" in *Just a Sister Away*. Warner Books, (1988, 2007).

[333] The Revelation of John 1:5, New Testament Christian Bible.

[334] Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Mary the mother of James according to Luke's account; or just Mary Magdalene, in John's account.

[335] Luke 24:11, New Testament Christian Bible.

"two witnesses" described in the Revelation of John — the Old and New Testaments — said to prophesy after the death and before the return of Christ. The first manuscripts of the Bible, "the Word", no longer exist however, copies remains as witnesses to the original words and teachings.[336]

My point here is to insist that black women's oppositional witness as resistance incorporates each of these elements in the t-shirts produced as a healing space and medium for protest. Oppositional witnessing requires black women activists and policy setters to develop a capacity to "witness against the grain of power, on the side of resistance."[337] The womanist sensibilities in calling attention to this erasure are indicative of the practice of oppositional witness. To witness is to call attention, affirm and lend credibility, challenge, and offer solution. The AAPF illustrates oppositional witnessing in both their function (as a policy organization) and in their t-shirt as a historical object that also bears witness by way of it's design.

I want to consider the concept of oppositional witnessing as an open rebuke of the deprioritization of black women's experiences with racial (systemic) violence; and to think about the elements of witnessing in t-shirts as body-texts and testimonies. In *Decolonizing Methodologies*, Linda Tuhiwai Smith insists that claiming and testimony are central to the practice of witnessing.[338] And in this way, including names on t-shirts and speaking these names is a way to claim their remains and testify to shared oppressions. What I define as "oppositional witnessing" is the process of looking for those "missing" from the discussion, "saying their names" and affirming their stories, recognizing their fates as inter-twinned and as important as those of black men, and resisting the tendency to fracture resistance efforts along gender and identity lines. The t-shirt is one sign vehicle to do so. It is a way to conspire with those who are the least visible in black political commitments, to amplify the voices of silenced victims. This is a political practice and analytical lens, contrary only in the sense that it's "opposite" would mean splintering the movement. However, the initiatives set forth by the AAPF are anything but separatist or hierarchical.

In her book *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition Against Multiple Oppressions,* María Lugones explains that "To witness faithfully, one must be able to sense resistance, to interpret behavior as resistant even when it is dangerous, when that interpretation places one psychologically against common sense, or when one is moved to act in collision with common sense, with oppression."[339] The calling of names, as a traditional practice of remembrance, is contrary to the "common sense" of what Tillet describes as the patrilineage of gendered racism/racial violence. It is understandable why mass based black movements adopted the dominant narrative that placed black men at the center because white men are also at the center of national political engagement. White women, according to dominant narratives, are characterized as the face of gender equality.[340] However, for black women who live at the intersections of these identities insisting upon the

[336] The Revelation of John 11:3-4, New Testament Christian Bible.
[337] Lugones (2003), 7.
[338] Smith (2012), 144–45.
[339] Ibid.
[340] Breines, W. (2006). The Trouble Between Us, An Uneasy History of White and Black Women in the Feminist Movement. New York: Oxford University Press, pp.6-7.

inclusion of not only the names but targeted policy for black women and girls this go against this "common sense." Oppositional witness both affirms black men's experiences, while intervening in the omission of black women's experiences.

The history of the "calling of names" tradition resonates from these shirts I consider the recitation or "calling" of names listed on these t-shirts as "conjuring". This can also be understood as an act of "witnessing." These t-shirts then, are illustrative of oppositional witnessing and the conjuring tradition in black women's history and political participation. In his book, *Workings of the Spirit: The Poetics of Afro-American Women's Writing*, Houston A. Baker, Jr. uses conjure as a metaphor for African American women's creativity. Baker specifically chooses conjure as a metaphor to chronicle the special role of women in African diasporic religious practices in the African American Literary canon.[341] Baker insists that conjure has everything to do with the power of the word.[342] These t-shirts illustrate black women's resistance culture and their efforts to create spaces for the absences now made visible.[343] The "calling of names" is a preserved tradition practiced in libation ceremonies and call-and-response during protest marches and rallies. Thus, this calling of names, as conjure, is a traditional way to - resist forgetting and "fight amnesia." These t-shirts connect women to past and present victims and emphasize the need for remembrance of the dead, and acknowledgement of one's ancestors.[344] In black t-shirt culture the re-emergence of conjure and witness through "calling/listing names" is an alternate spiritual paradigm used by black women across time.[345] Words give life, and to speak their names is to have them (or at least some part of them) live again. Speaking one's name is a voicing of what remains of the body.[346] The voices of the departed – it would seem – are stitched within each line of the t-shirt. Therefore, if we think of the t-shirt as reimagined "conjure space" and the list of names as a "calling of names" libations are poured out in the form of words on the chest, as opposed to liquid on the ground. By pouring libation in words, these t-shirt makers connect spirit to material.

In the pages that follow, I will focus on two examples within this genre to illustrate the varied ways millennials incorporate the rhetorical strategy of "calling names" via body-text and the survival strategy of oppositional witness in their t-shirt designs. These two case studies give insight to the ways web based companies and grassroots organizations use communication strategies similar to established political groups like the AAPF. Each t-shirt serves as an intervention in the visual representations of black women and LGBT victims in public discourse.

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[341] n.b. Hurston, Zora Neale. *Mules and Men. Folklore, Memoirs, & Other Writings*, Tell My Horse. *Folklore, Memoirs, & Other Writings,* Hurston, *Jonah's Gourd Vine*; Bambara, Toni Cade. *The Salt Eaters*; Morrison, Toni. *The Song of Solomon*; Rhodes, Jewell Parker. *Voodoo Dreams: A Novel of Marie Laveau.*

[342] Baker, Jr., Houston A. *Workings of the Spirit: The Poetics of Afro-American Women's Writing.* University of Chicago Press, 1991, 1993.

[343] Ibid.

[344] Ibid.

[345] Ibid.

[346] McNair (2014).

Black Women's Conjuring Tradition in Millennial Protest T-shirt Culture

Pictured, Ryan "Randi Gloss" Arrendell in the Vol. IV "And Counting…" tee, featured in the
T-Shirt Magazine article, "Tees Against Oppression."
Image courtesy of t-shirtmagazineonline.com, May 4, 2015.

The "And Counting…" series from *GlossRags*, Inc. was created after Ryan "Randi Gloss" Arrendell (the company founder) attended the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom in Washington D.C. in August 2013. For the symbolic anniversary march, she made a poster listing the names of black men and boys killed by police, and after much interest from attendees decided to make it into a t-shirt. The company grew from there, and now includes apparel for both the "And Counting…" and "Stay Woke" collections. In the beginning, Gloss experimented with many colors and dye patterns. The t-shirts are unisex, and now mostly available in the standard colors black and heather grey. Camouflage "Fatigue" designs are also available as tank top and baseball tees. These t-shirts, with names "listed simply yet profoundly," memorialize the victims, encouraging both wearers and observers to "see their humanity, amidst the lies."[347]

This t-shirt style is similar to the African American Policy Forum's #SayHerName t-shirt and the feminist icons t-shirt: "Audre & Gloria & Angela & bell." The latter has been made popular by online companies like Forever Audacious and thugz maison, and was created by designer and screen printer Terry Xiao in 2013. The design, known as the "Goddess" shirt, is a tribute to four feminist theorists (Audre Lorde, Gloria Anzaldúa, Angela Davis, and bell hooks) who the artist says, "have been instrumental in shaping my alignment with intersectional feminism… in an effort to disassemble the structures of a fashion trend's preoccupation with male dominance."[348] The origins of this style come from the Beatles t-shirt ("John & Paul & Ringo & George") by Amsterdam-based graphic design studio Experimental Jetset; made using Helvetica font, popular with this "listing" style, originating from the "Choose Life" tees created by Katharine Hamnett from the 1980s anti-drug abuse and suicide campaign. Experimental Jetset had this to say about their design: "In

[347] Quoted phrasing taken from Glossrags.com website, 2016.
[348] Quoted from the Terry Xiao page on the website: CargoCollective.com.

a way, the shirt is very much about abstraction: the process of translating figurative images into something less figurative. There's also an iconoclastic streak running through the shirt: the idea of puncturing through the world of images, by using text."[349]

In my interpretation, the Gloss Rags t-shirt follows in the African diasporic tradition of libation and calling on ancestors. The term "a calling of names" is most relevant here in that it implies conjuring, an African American cultural tradition most associated with women who mixed African religious traditions and folklore with Christian practices in the new world. If we use Experimental Jetset's abstraction, here what is immaterial (or the lack of women's images in mainstream news and t-shirt culture) is now (re)materialized. The simple method of "puncturing through" a media stream filled with images of victims that excludes black women, with a list of names is effective in that it forces you to question who the women are and what their association is to one another and the wearer. The puncturing disrupts the omission of these women as victims in the public sphere. The very puncture is the bringing forth, the conjuring, of ancestors in the space created by the "And Counting…" t-shirts.

This conjuring is made evident in the second ad campaign for the "And Counting…" series. In the image above, Gloss is seen in a graveyard, wearing a selection from the series that includes the first volume dedicated to women, Vol. IV. The Volume IV collection bears the names of black women who lost their lives at the hands of race-based crimes and police violence. The photo shoot included images of various models wearing the Vol. IV tees and Vol. III tees, the third installment dedicated to men victims on the growing list of casualties. Gloss wears many hats for her company, and one is being creative director and visual director for all the photo shoots. When I asked why she chose this location for her second company photo shot, she explained, "I really wanted there to be a link between the names on the shirt and where the models wearing them were situated. Because the t-shirt series does deal with death, and the systematic killing of African Americans and people of color, it is - pun intended - a very 'grave matter'."[350] Gloss felt the cemetery and large tombstones would provide a fitting backdrop for the collection.[351]

Since Vol. I of the *"And Counting…" Collection* debuted in April 2014, the Gloss Rags company slogan has been - "Fight Amnesia." Gloss believes that part of fighting amnesia is remembering those who are too quickly forgotten about. During a conversation between Gloss and I in fall 2015, she reflected on the emotional toll she'd experienced as a t-shirt maker, wearer, and activist. She recalled:

> … I inevitably became a collector of the t-shirts I produced… I stared at the drawer, full of fallen brothers and sisters. It looked more like a casket than a drawer.
> The lists grew longer. The fonts grew smaller. Vol. I became … Vol. IX…
> I realized that [for some time] I'd subconsciously been avoiding wearing the shirts. Something internally kept me from wearing them as frequently as I usually did.
> I was grieving.

[349] Dobush, Grace. "The Origin of those Helvetica List T-Shirts." *How Design*, March 19, 2012. Web.
[350] Interview with Randi Gloss, October 21, 2014.
[351] Paraphrasing from 10.21.14 interview.

I remembered the day they announced Zimmerman was 'not guilty of murder.'… Trayvon's name burned on my chest… My chest tightened. My heart dropped. Mike and Sandra pervaded my dreams. Freddie's funeral replayed over and over in my head. [After the funeral], I saw Kadiatou Diallo, Amadou's mother leaving the church parking lot. His name weighed heavier on my chest.
Their names were heavy. They are heavy.[352]

The Vol. VIII "And Counting…" tee from Gloss Rags, Inc.
Image courtesy of glossrags.com (2014).

Today, Vol. IV is now Vol. VIII and includes ten names of black women killed by police spanning the last thirty years. Given the number of black women protesting on the front lines of Ferguson, New York, Los Angeles, Oakland, and nationally the Vol. VIII. t-shirt from Gloss Rags and other t-shirts like the AAPF's #SayHerName t-shirt seemed especially poignant. As a researcher it is necessary for me to explore the ways in which black women are represented in this genre (as subjects, creators, and wearers), and account for the absence in t-shirts featuring these victims of police violence in particular. To contend with these absences, I first had to acknowledge the binary that already exists in the ways we report and circulate incidents of the extrajudicial murder of unarmed black people. Prior to the deaths of Renisha McBride and Sandra Bland, black women victims were referenced "in addition to" those men already recognized. This mirrors how women's issues are often relegated to an afterthought in not only broad ranging black political engagement, but also scholarship on police violence. The proliferation of t-shirts with male victims, it would seem, illustrates an absence in black memory and a silencing of other victims. To be clear, I believe this was mostly unintentional - yet, black women and black queer communities were relegated as addendums to the central concerns about police brutality against unarmed black men and boys in the black community.[353]

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[352] Interview with Randi Gloss, October 21, 2014, April 17, 2016; also documented In "A Month in Memoriam" on Medium.com.
[353] For periodization, this is during the Reagan era war on poverty (as a war on black women) and the war on drugs (as a war on black men).

My research has shown that even "unisex" is ironically read as male, and many t-shirt companies do not offer women's tees or v-necks. This is significant when thinking about t-shirts as a medium to express community identity and mourning of "all black lives," including women and LGBT victims. It is an example of how gender and race norms are produced via clothing practices. However, this is also an issue of aesthetics and cost of production, and it's worth discussing. When I asked Gloss why she chose not to include the names of known black LGBT victims and why there wasn't a shirt that included a list of both men and women's names, she insisted that this decision came mostly from a practical "need for space." She wanted each victim to have space and recognition on the shirt and an "all inclusive list" would require an even smaller font.[354] Gloss also insisted that separate lists were necessary to acknowledge the different ways men and women are victimized; and that a women's cut tee may be limiting to those "brothers who wanted to represent for the sisters."[355] As a result, she continued with the unisex t-shirt and discontinued the women's cut tee. There is a sad irony in the practical need for space and uniformity. Here the circumstances (qualifiers) of death, the crowded list of names, and lack of variance in style are all used to create a memory object that can be mass-produced. After all, Gloss is both and activist and business owner who makes choices that are cost effective. I also chose not to press Gloss on how she made sense of the "different" ways women and men experience state sanctioned murder or the criminal justice system. It was evident she understood that "dead is dead," and I was reluctant to offer a different analysis for fear of disrupting her mode of oppositional witnessing.

Like Gloss, I come to this issue at a crossroads. It's the space between scholarship and spirituality; where one must reconcile both secular and spiritual implications in the work. The tradition of honoring the departed even calling on ancestors and speaking their names has special significance in many activist communities.[356] At several points I needed to pause and reflect – or pause and pray – when wearing a t-shirt listing (or "calling") the names of those murdered, for the same reasons that Gloss described, "They're names [are] heavy. They are heavy."[357] My reading of the "And Counting…" t-shirt series and others of the "calling of names" genre is tempered with the realization that as a researcher it was necessary for me to develop a capacity for a kind of "witnessing" of my own. The rhetorical strategy of listing names that simultaneously affirms the stories of these victims and embraces their memory is also an assertion of the wearer's oppositional witness. This two-fold survival strategy through which blacks have formed coalitions in order to combat multiple and systematic oppressions, also proved to be a way to acknowledge my positionality as a black woman, researcher, and t-shirt wearer invested in its message bearing functions and provocations.[358] In truth, borrowing a comment from Ericka Huggins quoted in chapter one, "[I wear] the t-shirts because of love. That's why [I] wear the t-shirts." I had to reimagine my relationship to the subject, and to the women listed on the shirt. After news of the police assault on a black woman professor in Arizona and the

[354] Paraphrasing Gloss' words here, this is not a direct quote.
[355] Interview with Randi Gloss, April 17, 2015.
[356] Reference: Lorraine Guzman Interview, featured in chapter one.
[357] Randi Gloss (2016), documented In "A Month in Memoriam" on Medium.com.
[358] Lugones (2003).

murder of Sandra Bland circulated the Internet, Gloss and I wondered about the possibility of becoming a name on a t-shirt.[359] Being a researcher "compelled to witness faithfully," required me to not only recognize Gloss' knowledge and expertise as a t-shirt maker and activist but also our shared experiences as t-shirt wearers, movement participants, and African American women (with all of the history that accompanies our intersecting identities).

Black Matters of Intersectionality

"All Black Lives Matter" intersectional t-shirt.
Image Courtesy of Etsy.com fundraiser for LoveLttrs4Liberation in Tucson, AZ (2015).

In a 2015 *Washington Post* article, Crenshaw addressed "Why Intersectionality Can't Wait" in the broader movement for gender and racial equality, by saying:

> Intersectionality is an analytic sensibility, a way of thinking about identity and its relationship to power… Intersectional erasures are not exclusive to black women. People of color within LGBTQ movements; girls of color in the fight against the school-to-prison pipeline; women within immigration movements; trans women within feminist movements; and people with disabilities fighting police abuse — all face vulnerabilities that reflect the intersections of racism, sexism, class oppression, transphobia, ableism and more. Intersectionality has given many advocates a way to frame their circumstances and to fight for their visibility and inclusion.[360]

With this vision of inclusivity in mind, new t-shirts for black queer and LGBT victims began to emerge in the broader movement for black lives. The screen print design on the basic black unisex t-shirt above differs aesthetically from the two previous examples. The screen

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[359] Lacey-Bordeaux, Emma. "Arizona professor's jaywalking arrest quickly gets out of hand." *CNN*, June 30, 2014. Web. Article chronicles the arrest of Arizona State University Professor Ersula Ore in 2014, which made national news due to the altercation with arresting police officer, Stewart Ferrin, who most believed used excessive force.

[360] Crenshaw, Kimberlé. "Why Intersectionality Cain't Wait". The Washington Post, September 24, 2015. Web.

print was designed by Matice Moore and hand carved by Shreya Shah, two activists living and working in Tucson, Arizona. The word "BLACK" bolded in large gold lettering includes: "B - Trans, Women; L - Men, Babies, Bois; A - Working Class, Poor; C - Immigrant; K - Disabled, Incarcerated, Queer… *lives Matter.*" And the Love Letters 4 Liberation "heart-fist" symbol and signature accent the design. This t-shirt also differs from the other black lives matter t-shirts that were digitally designed. This t-shirt was the first all inclusive and intersectional design I encountered in my research, and unsettled the assumed "black = all" in movement rhetoric.

Moore, an artist, activist, and educator living in Arizona, insisted: "We didn't initially set out to make a t-shirt. Shah wanted to make a Black Lives Matter onesie for her 7 month old nephew." Then Moore participated in the Black Lives Matter Freedom Ride in August 2014, and they wanted to create something to help process their thoughts on the experience. For the design, Moore was inspired by Alicia Garza's article on *The Feminist Wire* online journal about the origins of Black Lives Matter, and recalled:

> I really liked that Black Lives Matter was lead by black queer women and I liked the way she worded some of the intentional inclusiveness of the movement and why it's not "all lives matter" or some of the other substitutions for black lives as articulated in that article… And so, [the idea behind the design] which is really words inside of words essentially, was to focus on even the most marginalized aspect of our community often times and put them at the center… Also as a black queer person, it inspired me to be [present] in this moment and to be [accountable] in this moment.[361]

Moore and Shah used this medium as a tool to make the invisible visible and connect with the broader movement in many ways. Moore and Shah's project, and its process of production, illustrates the intersectional and all-inclusive politics this t-shirt materializes. Though they initially did not set out to design a t-shirt, Shah saw the possibilities in making the design more available to benefit a mass audience beyond Tucson. After making the onesie, patches, and other small items they printed a few t-shirts using the local print shop, the Gloo Factory. Moore recalled that:

> When we started making the t-shirts there was definitely urgency around need for the t-shirts… We went to a union print shop in Tucson called the Gloo factory. They are committed to fair labor and only print on American made shirts. They were a key component, because they fronted us shirts when we didn't have the money to give them up front. Then we paid them after they sold the t-shirts. The Gloo factory ethics around activist work and printing in the Tucson area, helped spread the t-shirt.[362]

Shah added that: "The Gloo Factory also works with larger companies for a profit and hires formerly incarcerated young men. [So], they have many layers of giving back to the community."[363] Much like Damon Turner's "BULLETPROOF" t-shirt campaign discussed in chapter three, the Love Letters 4 Liberation fundraiser and its cost of production held equal important to their activist ethics. By using artist collectives and print collectives Love

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[361] Interview with Matice Moore and Shreya Shah, October 19, 2015.
[362] Ibid.
[363] Ibid.

Letters 4 Liberation found a way to "fund the movement from within," a goal shared by many t-shirt companies discussed throughout this project. This illustrates how t-shirt making exists in a broader ecosystem of public outreach and coalition efforts, and is part of their political beliefs and principles. They first donated to the Ferguson Bail and Support fund, then the Black Lives Matter Bay Area and Arizona, and the Black Voter Alliance in Arizona. Because of the compelling message of the design, members of activist groups like the Black Friday 14 (a group of activists arrested in Oakland, CA during a Black Lives Matter protest that disrupted the Bay Area Transit system in 2015) requested that they send them each a t-shirt.[364] Shah described the t-shirts as "low cost uniforms" that the group wanted to wear in solidarity at their court appearance.[365]

Like the AAPF and "And Counting…" t-shirts discussed earlier, this intersectional t-shirt emerged when there was less visibility for women and trans people in the movement. Moore, who is gender non-conforming, partners with Monica Jones to manage the Love Letters 4 Liberation Etsy.com site. Monica is a black trans woman, once involved in a high profile 2014 case in which she was convicted of "manifesting prostitution" (eventually overturned), and uses this collective art space to fundraise for her "Real Feminists Support Trans Women and Sex Workers!" t-shirt and national advocacy campaign.[366] With all of these community partnerships in mind, the intersectional t-shirt represents black lives *lived*. This renders what was once absent, present, not only in material but also in practice. The various identities and communities within communities represented in the design, account for black life, not death. What is apparent is that the access to technology and community networks encourages a process of production that allows activists to connect on the local and national level in profound ways. It illustrates "standing in witness" for the living and for oneself.

Conclusion: On Absence and (Re)materiality

In this chapter, I have outlined how the t-shirts discussed illustrate intersectional politics and troubles the media narrative of black male exceptionalism and the exclusion of cis and trans women and girl in t-shirt culture. The aim was to investigate not only how t-shirt makers account for the lack of t-shirts addressing black women, girls, and trans femmes but also how these t-shirts help intervene in the political debate surrounding extrajudicial murder of black people in the United States. The #SayHerName t-shirt illustrates that to stand in witness is in turn a way to testify to one's own victimization. Trailing the shadow of what is absent in photograph, symbol, and slogan iconicity gave way to a naming strategy taken up by Gloss Rags and Love Letters 4 Liberation. I explored the practices of oppositional witness; black women's conjure tradition, and intersectional initiatives as a way of exposing underlying narratives and piecing together the victim narratives that were *not* present in media circulation. In the preceding pages, t-shirts emerge as testimonies that resist easy categorization. At many points I rejected methods of separation between spiritual and

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[364] Bond Graham, Darwin. "Alameda County DA O'Malley Drops Charges Against Black Friday 14." East Bay Express, December 4, 2015.
[365] Shreya Shah, Interview on October 19, 2015.
[366] Kellaway, Mitch. "Arizona Appeals Court Overturns Monica Jones' Conviction for 'Walking while trans'" The Advocate, web, January, 25, 2015.

intellectual knowledge, as this work required a candid reflection on my own positionality. In black protest t-shirt culture, black women and LGBT activists are credible witnesses for their own experiences.

In t-shirt culture social relations are performed around absence and presence. In line with another black woman tradition of "making something out of nothing," I focused on t-shirts that demonstrated who was absent from our conversations around police violence, by their presence in the material fabric of the t-shirt. The policy organization, company, and grassroots organization featured in this chapter illustrate that connections between these various movement participants and their efforts within mass movements are complex and refuses any hierarchy of established and grassroots political organizations. They each used t-shirts to help amplify the voices of those at the margins of traditional black political organizing and also underscore common experiences of loss and racial trauma. The t-shirts illustrate how organizations and individuals can do something "with" the absence (i.e. evoking and invoking); and perhaps, do something about it.

Conclusion

Afterword: Toward Future Areas of Study

The Cotton Framed Revolutionaries project was born out of a curiosity about how t-shirts, as memory objects, offer connections to the past that have implications in the present. In my research I found that people not only wear t-shirt as a political strategy for visibility within contemporary social movements; but like Huggins contended in chapter one: People wear t-shirts because of love. For the past five decades, black bodies "perform protest" on the sidewalks, courthouse steps, streets, and highways of the United States. These movements influenced similar events throughout the Atlantic African diaspora from the Black Power era to the current international Movement for Black Lives in locations like Brazil, Nazareth (Jerusalem), and the United Kingdom.

Taking a more diasporic view, clothing has been used as a way to regulate black behavior in public spaces and blacks have been criminalized for their clothing practices from enslavement to the current day.[367] Public policies regulating clothing (e.g. the Zoot Suite riots and "sagging pants" policies in schools) fueled ideas around black criminality and growth of mass incarceration in the United States and abroad. Different initiatives established to address class and racial disparities actually served to further marginalize black youth.[368] The emergence of the t-shirt as a medium in this moment, speaks back to this history of marginalization. The diasporic connections present in policies such as New York's Stop-and-Frisk program in the US and the Sus law in the UK allow for an examination of how the protest t-shirt has become a global symbol for shared struggle and coalition.

Using t-shirts to investigate different perspectives allows a diasporic comparative analysis of varied black experiences with police community violence within specific locales. The t-shirt then helps us understand the interconnected networks of family members, activists, artists, and scholars who connect across borders in coalition against global issues facing black. My guiding question: How are t-shirts used as mediums for protest in other diasporic locations? How does this illustrate shared concerns? How is this illustrative of the characteristics of diaspora?

[367] Miller (2009).
[368] Pritchard, Eric D. "Sagging Pants: Criminalization and Racialized Adornment." *The Funambulist 3: Clothing Politics*, January – February 2016).

Image courtesy of FergusonSolidarityTour.com, US to UK Justice Tour 2015.
(Location: Oakland's Oscar Grant plaza (Frank Ogawa plaza), October 4, 2015.)

What follows is an introduction to an important area of future study I plan to undertake. I aim to address the unspoken delineations and spatial politics of social media, digital diasporas, and direct action as a historical thread in black cultural production and political engagement. Using a diasporic lens, I will explore shared efforts against police brutality and surveillance of minority communities in the United States and the United Kingdom. I am interested in London, one of the most mass surveilled cities in the world with an estimate of one camera for every 14 people, as my site of study. I will argue that youth of color in London use smartphone applications specifically designed to monitor and record police-citizen encounters to collect visual evidence of systemic racism. Several themes that connect my future study with this current project are: 1.) What social media can tell us about diasporic communication regarding global struggles and the points of differentiation between varied Black experiences in the United States and United Kingdom; 2.) The ways artists, entrepreneurs, and movement participants use Twitter to publicize movement paraphernalia (e.g. t-shirts); 3.) The ways social media has changed black political participation and the stages of social movements (emergence, coalescence, Institutionalization, and decline) and how organizations have managed the role of social media in grassroots initiatives (e.g. #BlackLivesMatterUK, #FergusonSolidarityTour, and #FergusontoBirmingham).

In the evolving global Black Lives Matter movement, there is an inter-diasporic exchange occurring. I am interested in how this movement has created a global community that allows diasporic Blacks to claim affiliation with this movement regardless of their location. Taking into consideration the global reach of online tools like Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook I will consider the international coalitions formed among organizations like Black Lives Matter (Ferguson, Los Angeles, and Oakland) and their UK to US Justice Tour, the Love Not Blood Campaign, the United Families and Friends Campaign, and the London Campaign Against Police and State Violence and the particular work t-shirts do in these instances. Ideas of *diaspora*, blackness, and Black political participation can be formed and transformed through the varied political practices that challenge the racialization they experience in their respective locales.

Image courtesy of FergusonSolidarityTour.com
Families deliver a letter to Downing St on the 17th annual march against deaths in custody.
Image: Copyright 2015 Mark Kerrison

The above photograph, taken at the 17th annual march against deaths in custody during the Black Lives Matter UK/US Solidarity Tour in 2015, features the relatives of those killed by police in the United Kingdom. The solidarity tour was an act of reciprocity, organized mostly through communication via social media. The United Families and Friends Campaign (UFFC) together with other grassroots organizations invited Patrisse Cullors, one of the co-founders of the Black Lives Matter, to London in February 2015 to tour across the UK. Latter that year, the Ella Baker Centre and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) brought a number of family members to Southern California to share their family member's stories. Those who participated in the tour (pictured in the image above) are: the sister of Thomas Orchard and Stephanie Lightfoot-Bennett, the twin sister of Leon Patterson, Shaun Hall the brother of Mark Duggan, and Kadisha Burrell-Brown sister of Kingsley Burrell, and Marcia Rigg (second from the left) the sister of Sean Rigg traveled to the US to start a global conversation about deaths in police custody and state violence.[369] Also pictured is Mr. Cephus (Uncle Bobby) Johnson, featured earlier in chapter three, the uncle of Oscar Grant who was murdered by former Oakland BART Police Officer Johanas Mesherle.

The t-shirt worn by Stephanie Lightfoot-Bennett (second from left) includes the statistic and statement: "1518 Deaths in Police Custody Since 1990 in London and Whales. 0 Convictions." The number "1518" is the largest word on the t-shirt and the words grow increasingly smaller as they progress down the shirt. The bright yellow lettering is similar to that of the Black Lives Matter t-shirts worn in the United States. This t-shirt is an outgrowth of the organizing efforts made by the UFF and the Right to Protest organizations in the United Kingdom. Like in the United States and within the global Black Lives Matter Movement these t-shirts are used to raise awareness and funds on the issues surrounding extrajudicial murder. Of the 1,518 deaths in police custody since 1990, 152 of these victims were Black. Despite there being 10 unlawful killing verdicts, there has not been a single conviction. I hope continue my investigation into the use of t-shirts as protest tools and organizing transnationally via social media by expanding my research to include: Through

[369] Rigg, Marcia. "We must unite globally against police brutality" Marcia Rigg on building an international coalition, November 9, 2015. Ferguson Solidarity Tour, *WordPress* 2015.

interviews and surveys, I will visualize (graph) organization's social networks to determine what this "digital diaspora" looks like geographically and spatially. This will help me analyze the social geography of activists and incidents of police murder within a global context. I will also explore what the geographic distribution is for Y-Stop and the ACLU Mobile Justice app users. This can illustrate how harnessing the frequency and currency of social media usage can popularize new technology to fight against police terror in their communities.

In closing, like the t-shirts featured in this project, the pictures above illustrate how t-shirts and self-display can function as a means for political intervention in the public sphere. The second image is taken from the first leg of the solidarity tour in London. Uncle Bobby, with his wife Beatrice (first from the right), travelled to the UK and attended the UFFC remembrance procession in solidarity with the families. For seventeen years now, the families and supporters meet annually in remembrance of their loved ones at Trafalgar Square in London, and then march to Downing Street to the Prime Minister's residence to hand in a letter of demands.[370] When reflecting on her trip to the US Marcia Rigg (second from left), the co-founder of UFFC stated:

> From the beginning, the most surprising aspect of our trip was the lack of awareness amongst communities and activists in the US in relation to the UK context. Throughout our tour of California, we wore t-shirts highlighting the 1518 people who have been killed in police custody since 1990, with not one single conviction of officers involved… Black lives on both sides of the Atlantic appear to mean nothing and there is a remarkable dis-proportionality of deaths.[371]

This quote from Rigg represents a key take away in this project — wearing t-shirts as a provocation toward dialogue — from Uncle Bobby's interview when he recalled… "It's a way to let the suffering speak."[372] Though African American popular culture dominates international media, this exposure to Black Atlantic life and culture does not go both ways. As cultural imports, Black American political movements (e.g. the Black Power Movement), music, and culture have influenced Britons with cultural roots from various diasporic locales (i.e. the Caribbean and the African continent especially). Though many in the United States are unaware of the systemic issues faced by Black Britons, participants believe that the solidarity tour helped changed that.[373]

In the United Kingdom, multigenerational organizations — those focused on policy change and those that support youth expressive culture — see the movement as encompassing multifaceted articulations of what it means to be Black and British.[374] As is the case in the United States, Black Lives Matter (UK) has seen an increase in youth participation and apparel companies founded to help fund the movement. The t-shirt below is designed and distributed by Stop Killing the Mandem, an independent clothing brand from Birmingham. The brand began as an extension of the Black Lives Matter marches

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[370] Ibid.
[371] Ibid.
[372] Cephus "Uncle Bobby" Johnson interview, December 15, 2015.
[373] Marcia Rigg interview, October 11, 2016.
[374] Marcia Rigg interview, October 11, 2016.

taking place in the United Kingdom following infamous cases of police violence in United States police in 2015 and 2016. The "Stop Killing the Mandem/Gayldem" slogan could be seen on posters at many rallies nationally. Mandem is a slang word that originates from the Caribbean and is used by British youth to mean "homies/home boys/home girls." Therefore, the plea/demand of the t-shirt is for the police to "stop killing my homies". This vernacular is evidence of the diasporic condition of two-ness – One (diasporic) black, one British. This movement within a movement is geared toward youth empowerment and improvements in the public education system. Like the Liberation Ink, #BULLETPROOF, and #SayHerName t-shirts, profits made from the selling of the t-shirts are used to provide resources for a community based free school in the United Kingdom. For these reasons, I believe Black British protest t-shirt culture is a worthy area of future study.

Image Courtesy of Stop Killing the Mandem (@stopkillingthemandem), 2017.

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