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Publication Date

2018

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Old Struggles, New Platforms: Black Athletes, Black Twitter and the Fight for Social Justice

By

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A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

African American Studies

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

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Fall 2018

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Abstract

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Since the death of Michael Brown Jr. on August 9, 2014, the social media platform Twitter and its Black usership have become central actors in the production and dissemination of news, political action, and protests challenging anti-Blackness. This dissertation explores what I call the *Black Twitter Turn* as a pivot away from what I term *selfsploitation* as its primary identifiable cultural currency. The *Black Twitter Turn* has transformed Twitter into a place to pushback and challenge dominant white racial frames rooted in white supremacy. It also serves as a site for making Black voices and concerns audible and unavoidable as both a community and as a media force. Black Twitter has provided community for working-class folk, Black freedom fighters and also for those considered to be Black elites (athletes and celebrities), furnishing them all with a safe-space to publicly protest anti-Blackness, becoming a homeplace of resistance.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

On August 9, 2014, 18-year-old Michael Brown Jr. was fatally shot by a white police officer, 28-year-old Darren Wilson, in the city of Ferguson, Missouri. Sadly, the death of Brown was nothing new to the Black community. Black people in the America have been dealing with law enforced forms of terrorism since *Slave Patrols* (Hadden). Michael Brown became yet another tragic example illustrating the growing concern around the deaths of Black men, women, and children by those paid *to protect and serve*¹ the communities that they patrol and police. Social media, and specifically Twitter, however, pushed police brutality into a new realm of surveillance and the death of Mike Brown signaled its power as a transformative medium.

It was 4:06 am pacific standard time and Ferguson, Missouri would not allow me to rest. I could not take my eyes off of the around-the-clock coverage of what could have been seen as a race riot in a presumed post-racial America. My focus alternated between technological devices of conveniences that have become necessities for most Americans. One minute my attention was on the television, the next it was on my smart phone. My intake of information was fluid, as my concentration on all things Ferguson shifted between the punditry of correspondents on traditional media networks such as *CNN*, *MSNBC*, and *Fox News*, and timelines of the millions of voices on the social media network, Twitter. The flow of information and opinions surrounding Michael Brown's death was paralyzing. The real-time news reporting and footage, jostling with the second-by-second updating of Twitter timelines, both gripped my attention, and informed my opinion on Ferguson Missouri, a location that had been violently forced into the historical annals of race, class, gender, power dynamics and policing in the United States.

As I was observed Ferguson, I conjointly participated in the construction of the narrative that surrounded the city, a place that I had never visited, regarding an unarmed teenage Black male that I had never met. Undoubting, #Ferguson was the first mass protest/rebellion/riot/occupation/movement/uprising (depending on who you talk to) in America surrounding issues tethered to the deadly policing of Black bodies in the era of social networking and smart phone technology. There is no quantifiable reason available to fully understand why Mike Brown was the critical moment and not the death of Oscar Grant in 2009 or Trayvon Martin in 2012. While the #BlackLivesMatter² hashtag was created in July 2013, post the death

¹ In February 1955, the Los Angeles Police Department, through the pages of the internally produced BEAT magazine, conducted a contest for a motto for the police academy. The conditions of the contest stated that: "The motto should be one that in a few words would express some or all the ideals to which the Los Angeles police service is dedicated. It is possible that the winning motto might someday be adopted as the official motto of the Department."

The winning entry was the motto, "To Protect and to Serve" submitted by Officer Joseph S. Dorobek.

(BEAT magazine, December 1963)

² According to *Beyond the Hashtags*, a 2016 study that examined 40 million tweets related to Ferguson and Black Lives Matter, the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter gained considerable prominence on Nov. 24, the day a grand jury declined to charge Officer Darren Wilson in Brown's death. Before that date, #BlackLivesMatter had appeared in 2,309 tweets. Its tweet total

of Martin, it was rarely used through the summer of 2014 and did not come to signify a movement until the months after the Ferguson protests and the death of Mike Brown (Freelon et al. 5). Mike Brown's death, and the protest that ensued in #Ferguson, was the tipping point³, and began what I call the *Black Twitter Turn*.

Black Twitter, and its critical pivot away from alleged quotidian Black life, has proven to be a major development in the visibility, sustainability, and virality of Black forms of sociopolitical protest. The Black Twitter Turn can be viewed as an awakening, a turn away from the utilization of Twitter as a platform that viralized the likes of Amber Cole, and the condition and style of gymnast Gabby Douglass' hair during the 2012 Summer Olympics.⁴ Both Cole and the mean-spirited descriptions of Douglass's hair had been common place cultural currency prior to #Ferguson. In fact, Black users of Twitter, and other social media platforms, were largely invested in capturing and catapulting odd happenings and problematic behavior that fed into archetypal anti-Black stigmas, stereotypes, stock characters, and unflattering portrayals which propelled this social media platform into an unrespectable site for some people invested in traditional notions of uplifting the Black race. A prime example of this was the phenomenon known as Lil Terio.

In 2013, Lil Terio (born Terio Harshaw), a six-year-old first grader from Georgia became an Internet sensation. His popularity spawned from a *Vine* (a six-second video clip). In the clip Terio scored a basket on his cousin Maleek's basketball goal and, feeling jubilation in the moment, began a celebratory dance. "Oooh," cooed Maleek, recording his little cousin's wrist-swooping dance routine on a camera phone. "Kill 'em!" Six seconds later, the video ended, and

rocketed to 103,319 that day, the study found. Tweets and retweets pushed #BlackLivesMatter in front of a diverse audience in the months after Ferguson.

³ The term "tipping point" in its most basic meaning refers to a critical point when unprecedented changes occur rapidly with irreversible effect. It entered the academic lexicon when it was used by the political scientist Morton Grodzins in 1957 in his sociological studies on racial segregation to describe the critical threshold at which point the white population would leave an area where more and more black people were present.

⁴ In 2011, Amber Cole, a then a 14-year-old Black girl was caught on video performing oral sex on another student at Frederick Douglass Highschool in Baltimore, Maryland. As TheGrio.com reported, "It's not clear whether the girl knew she was being videotaped, but judging from tweets after the video went viral, it's almost certain she didn't consent to having the footage posted online." The unedited video of two minors engaged in a sexual act was at one point was the top trending topic on Twitter. The 14-year-old Cole's Twitter page was bombarded with taunts, scolding and ridicule, with a large portion of the scorn, taunts, and rating of her skills at performing fellatio were coming from the Twitter accounts of adults.

In 2012, at the age of 16-years-old, Gabby Douglas made history by becoming the first American gymnast to win gold medals in both the team and individual all-around competitions, and the first Black gymnast to win Olympic gold in the all-around. Unfortunately, post winning her second gold second medal, Douglass discovered that negative attention was being focused on her hair, which was described as nappy, messy and unkempt. A few days later, as the state of Gabby's hair continued to be a trending topic on Twitter, Douglas's mother said that these constant criticisms were impacting her daughter's confidence.

Maleek uploaded it to Vine. Terio's 16-year-old cousin had no idea that the clip would blow up into a social media phenomenon. The viralability of Terio's six-second-dance routine became so in vogue that it caught the attention of high profile celebrity athletes. This led to the birth of the "'Oooh, Kill 'em' Movement" (Carson pars. 3-4), a sensation that led to professional athletes mimicking the moves of this six-year-old as a personal expression of both their childlike euphoria as they accomplished a goal while on the field of play, and conjointly, their connection to what was trending within non-mass media generated spaces such as Black Twitter. Athletes such as NBA superstars, John Wall, and Blake Griffin were seen on camera doing Terio's signature dance move⁵. Future NBA Hall of Famer Dwayne Wade and Terio found the time to not only meet, but to also develop a custom dap (handshake) routine, and his favorite athlete, as well as, arguably the most recognizable athlete in the world, LeBron James used his signature catchphrase during a Samsung commercial that featured LeBron James, his wife, and his two sons. In an art imitating life type of moment, the commercial shows Savannah Brinson video-taping their son (LeBron James Jr.) executing a step-back dribble, into a jump shot, leading LeBron to say, "Oooh, kill 'em" as the ball swishes through the net⁶. Terio Harshaw, with his post-bucket celebration, had become a pseudo-celebrity that the celebrities imitated.

Everyone was infatuated with Terio. He conducted an interview and performed on the Arsenio Hall Show, he was on BET's 106 and Park, doing his "Oooh, kill 'em" dance with his newfound friend, All-Pro NFL wide receiver DeSean Jackson, and the first-grader dropped his first official music video for "Oooh Kill Em," with a big Vevo premiere⁷. Clearly excited about the news, Bustle's Sofia Barrett-Ibarria wrote a May 25, 2014 article titled *Lil Terio's "Oooh Kill'em" Music Video Proves Why He's the Coolest 1st Grader on Vine*. Barnett-Ibarria rejoiced in the news, exclaiming, "Our prayers have been answered: Vine star (and first grader) Lil Terio has released a high-def music video for his new single 'Oooh Kill'em.'" She then lets her readers know that, "Lil Terio doesn't actually rap or even say anything in the video, because he really doesn't need to. We will watch pretty much anything with Terio in the center of the shot, just being Terio and doing Terio stuff" (Barrett-Ibarria par.1). As reported by BuzzFeed, Terio was hard at work on his debut album *I Was Just Thinking*, "which will include features from Young Jeezy, DJ Khaled, Migos and Soulja Boy. Labels are also hot on his tail apparently — he's received offers from Interscope and DJ Khaled's label We the Best Music Group" (Zeichner pars. 2-3). That album never came out, and Terio never signed a major label-recording contract, and soon Terio phenomenon became Terio the target.

It is from the show *Desus vs. Mero* (episode six), during a segment titled *Lil Terio's Future*, that a conversation between 33-year-old Daniel Baker (Desus) and 33-year-old Joel Martinez (Mero) surrounding the future of then-seven-year-old Terio Harshaw (Lil Terio) is imagined:

⁵ Carson, Dan. "Terio is Taking Over the Sports World." *Bleacher Report* 18 Nov. 2013: Web. 18 Nov. 2013.

⁶ In the 2013 Samsung television commercial, 'At Home' LeBron James spends a day at home with his family. LeBron and his wife Savannah James relax and swipe through some photos on their Galaxy Tab 3 tablet. Later, he plays basketball with his kids while his wife records them on her Samsung Galaxy Note III phone.

⁷ In a 2014 MTV.com article 'Lil Terio Makes His Official Debut With 'OOOH KILLEM' Video.

Somebody call ACS [Administration for Children's Services] on him please...nobody cares. This kid did one vine video, where he was like 80 pounds-at most. Have you seen his latest video? This nigga has gotta be 800 pounds! This nigga is a unit of measurement at this point. Like you can go to the connect, like 'Yo, I want three Terio's of coke.' When Jadakiss mentioned the scales that they gotta weigh the whales on...he's talking about Terio. And Terio is at the fucking Super Bowl press day. It's fucking Tuesday dude, why are you not at school? People on Twitter sayin', 'he's not getting more so exploited than say, the Olson twins.' I'm like, are you niggas serious? Terio goes to a club, and they give the nigga \$1,500 to do the money dance, if even that. They payin' this fucking nigga in bar snacks, like, 'here's some pretzels, here's some peanuts, here's a bottle of Dasani.' Meanwhile, the fucking Olsen Twins, I think one of them is the president of Baswana or some shit, are worth like 6 trillion dollars...Ashley and Mary Kate Olsen have a fuckin' empire. The only thing that Terio has built is blockage in his arteries! That nigga has no fuckin' retirement fund, and he'll probably be dead by fucking age 10)...Terio is so obese now, if he does any sudden movements, he'll probably have a massive coronary and die...They put that niggas insulin in a pork chop! They put that niggas insulin in a rack of ribs! He already peeked at 8 years old. It's all down hill from here)...You know ain't no god damn homeschooling going on with Terio! If you buyin' an 8-year-old leather pants, you ain't buyin' that nigga text books! You're not concerned about this child's welfare. That nigga be like, 'A my momma home-school me. She give me the iPad, and I play Candy Crush- that's how I do math.' That nigga's fingers are too fat to play candy crush...Yo, how long before this nigga Terio starts doing disgusting sexual shit for money?

For many reasons, Terio became an ideal target for public shaming shrouded in a comedic cloak. It was as if the slandering of Lil Terio, Internet sensation, was disconnected from being read as vicious attacks on the character of Terio Hawthorn, the seven-year-old child from Georgia.

Lil Terio represents the complex entanglement between stigmatization and pseudo-admiration that was endemic of earlier iterations of Black Twitter. Black folks who were not anchored in bourgeois notions of respectability saw the platform as an opportunity for fame. In many ways, Lil Terio personified Twitter's exploitative possibilities, embodying the platform's ability to allow users to engage in what I call "selfsploitation."

In my theory of *selfsploitation* the exploiter and the exploitee are one in the same. The exploiter (which is the self) seeks airtime, views, likes, retweets, friends, followers, and other forms of online validation. To do so, the exploiter (which in this case is the self) must take advantage of the exploitee (which is also the self). In other words, in order for the self to win, the self must lose- the self must exploit itself to achieve the aforementioned goals of pseudo-celebrity.

As Lil Terio evinces, *selfsploitation* requires simultaneous victory and defeat in a quest for attention and equity. The moment one commits to *selfsploitative* acts in an attempt to achieve pseudo-celebrity/popularity, they open the door to being exploited by an outside person or group.

This commonly occurs in social networking spaces, via *users*⁸ potentially seeking similar social media driven attempts to gain likes, retweets, friends and followers at the *selfsploiter*'s expense. Once people see that there are potential benefits to the exploitation of a *selfsploitative* subject, it tends to lead to an online herd mentality⁹.

Michael Brown's 2014 death marks a tipping point for Twitter, shifting the real time, micro-blogging social media site from space utilized primarily as a space for *selfspoitiation* to it be employed as a tactically efficient method of disseminating socially conscious information via tweets, and hashtags. Social media sites like Twitter, that organize and archive what can be seen as everyday mundane events in its users lives, have been repurposed, appropriated and politicized, to provide a counter hegemonic perspective into what is news worthy, and functions as a space to provide the amplification of Black voices in moments where the mainstream media would often times silence or erase the perspectives of non-media affiliated Black people. In a 2015 interview with *The Atlantic*, activist DeRay Mckesson was asked about the social-media's role in the protest that took place in Ferguson. McKesson replied that, "Missouri would have convinced you that we did not exist if it were not for social media." McKesson continued by pointing out that the protesters on the ground in Fergusson were able to document and share their experiences with the world via social media, specifically Twitter, in a way that had never existed before, noting that "we were able to tell our own stories" (Berlatsky par. 5).

Black athletes have been among the most publicly visible supporters of causes surrounding Black lives mattering (Coombs and Cassilo 438) in a post-Ferguson uprising America. On Sunday, November 30, 2014 five (then) Saint Louis Rams players used the team's pregame introductions to offer a show of support for protesters in nearby Ferguson. As the Rams' offense was introduced, tight end Jared Cook and receivers Kenny Britt, Stedman Bailey, Chris Givens and Tavon Austin stopped near the tunnel and raised their hands in a nod to the fatal shooting of black teenager Michael Brown by Ferguson police officer Darren Wilson on August 9, 2014.

Given their hyper-public visibility, professional athletes have unique abilities and platform¹⁰ reach to function as "agents of social change" (Pelak 59) and to take an active part in social movements. For decades, Black athletes have vigorously spoken out on political and social issues including racism and war involvement. Black athletic icons such as Paul Robeson, Muhammad Ali, Tommie Smith, and John Carlos used their achievements, prominence, and the global sports stage to bring attention to various topics during the Civil Rights Movement (Agyemang et al. 420). This advocacy is important, because athletes' influence extends beyond athletic admiration and may affect fans' attitudes and beliefs (Melnick and Jackson).

⁸ I italicize the word "users" to indicate that they are both users of the site as well as users as in exploiters.

⁹ Herd mentality describes a behavior in which people act the same way or adopt similar behaviors as the people around them — often ignoring their own feelings or the possibility of harm to self in the process.

¹⁰ A media platform is a service, site, or method that delivers media to an audience. Its functions are to deliver, but also sometimes to allow for feedback, discussion, or sharing. When a celebrity speaks of using their platform in an effort to bring awareness to an issue, they are often times speaking towards politicizing their popularity to amplify a message that they feel is not receiving enough attention in the media.

With the advent and explosion of social media technologies, athletes no longer must wait for a gold medal at the Olympics or until the TV cameras are focused on them to advocate for social and political issues (Schmittel and Sanderson)—the grand stage, camera, and access to an audience is in the palm of their hands via their cell phones and social media applications. Through social media, they can reach large audiences by merely transmitting a message from their mobile device. Twitter is one social media tool that has become increasingly popular in the sporting world and appears to be the platform “of choice” for athletes (Browning and Sanderson). Twitter enables athletes to present aspects of their identity that extends beyond their involvement in their chosen sport (Sanderson). In addition to using Twitter as a means through which to promote their individual brands, athletes also use the platform to advocate for political and social causes and in the process become active participants in the online communities that emerge around such issues.

Through Twitter the voices of millions of Black citizen journalists, and athletes are heard. As Ferguson demonstrates, mainstream news outlets must take these voices seriously and are no longer able to remain unchallenged in how they construct the narratives of Black people. Through Black Twitter, Black people show that not only do #BlackLivesMatter, but so too do their Black voices, words, images, and perspectives.

The Black Twitter Turn, serving as a moment of mass-awakening in the Black Twitter community, is neither the same as the Civil Rights Movement, or the Black Power Movement, but it does overlap intellectually, and politically with a number of concerns about the ways in which Black people have been, and continue to be, oppressed throughout the African Diaspora. Mike Brown’s death in Ferguson serves as the crystalizing moment of the Black Twitter Turn and many have begun to juxtapose the liberation protests during the 1950s and 1960s with those in Ferguson. When DeRay Mckesson was asked to compare the modern protests with those in Ferguson, he noted that:

Ferguson exists in a tradition of protest. But what is different about Ferguson, or what is important about Ferguson, is that the movement began with regular people. There was no Martin, there was no Malcolm, there was no NAACP, it wasn’t the Urban League. People came together who didn’t necessarily know each other but knew what they were experiencing was wrong. And that is what started this. What makes that really important, unlike previous struggles, is that – who is the spokesperson? The people. The people, in a very democratic way became the voice of the struggle.

This form of decentralized leadership, or put differently, participatory democracy, lead to the likes of Oprah Winfrey seeing those protesting during Ferguson as lacking leadership, and failing to articulate clear demands that mimicked the Freedom movement activists of the 1960s. Winfrey (who was promoting the film that she produced, *Selma*) believed the film could serve as a guiding tool for the new generation protesting that Blacks lives matter. In a 2014 interview with *The Grio*, she went on to say that:

I really think that this film can teach people a lot, because what this film says is it’s been done. It was done. Y’all are not the first to do it ... the first to have an idea ... the first to want to protest ... the first to be upset. We didn’t even have the right as citizens to vote in this country, and because of that you had Martin Luther

King as a leader joining with his band of brothers with disciplined, rigorous, peaceful protests, and they had a goal and intention in mind. You just can't march and not know what you're marching for. (par. 10)

Winfrey, then doubled down on her stance in an interview with *People*, drawing parallels between the protests taking place today, and those that took place during the Civil Rights Movement. Reinforcing her stance on the need for clear, King-like leadership, she stated that, "What I'm looking for is some kind of leadership to come out of this to say, 'This is what we want. This is what has to change, and these are the steps that we need to take to make these changes, and this is what we're willing to do to get it'" (par. 4). Winfrey failed to realize that protesters were already organizing and making demands.

When Winfrey said that, "I think what can be gleaned from our film 'Selma' is to really take note of the strategic intention required when you want real change," she was critiquing Ferguson protestors, organizers, and regular folks living within the community as lacking "strategic intention" versus an embrace of Ella Baker's teachings which encouraged empowering people at the grassroots. When Winfrey used the leadership of Martin Luther King Jr. as the model, "required when you want real change," It is in contradiction with Ella Baker's observation that:

I have always felt it was a handicap for oppressed peoples to depend so largely upon a leader, because unfortunately in our culture, the charismatic leader usually becomes a leader because he has found a spot in the public limelight. It usually means he has been touted through the public media, which means that the media made him, and the media may undo him. There is also the danger in our culture that, because a person is called upon to give public statements and is acclaimed by the establishment, such a person gets to the point of believing that he is the movement. Such people get so involved with playing the game of being important that they exhaust themselves and their time, and they don't do the work of actually organizing people.¹¹

Baker believed in empowering people through their direct participation in social change. The theme that later became a mantra, "Power to the People," served as Baker's criterion for evaluating political work throughout her life (Mueller). In the 1970s, when she was asked to comment on the movement for community control of schools, Baker saw it as part of a broad strategy:

First, there is a prerequisite: the recognition on the part of the established powers that people have a right to participate in the decisions that affect their lives. And it doesn't matter whether those decisions have to do with schools or housing or some other aspect of their lives. There is a corollary to this prerequisite: the citizens themselves must be conscious of the fact that this is their right. Then comes the question, how do you reach people if they aren't already conscious of this right? And how do you break down resistance on the part of powers that be toward citizens becoming participants in decision-making? I don't have any cut

¹¹ The content in this section was pulled from a December 1970 taped interview between Ella Baker and historian Gerda Lerner.

pattern, except that I believe that people, when informed about the things they are concerned with, will find a way to react. Now, whether their reactions are the most desirable at a given stage depends, to a large extent, upon whether the people who are in the controlling seat are open enough to permit people to react according to the way they see the situation. In organizing a community, you start with people where they are.

When Baker speaks of the people having, “a right to participate in the decisions that affect their lives,” and that, “people, when informed about the things they are concerned with, will find a way to react,” is in direct correlation to the ways in which Black folks in Ferguson began to organize as a community (on land and online), devoid of hierarchical leadership, meeting the people where they were (both physically and consciously) in that moment. Much of this informing took place via real-time updates via Twitter timelines, and hashtags such as #MikeBrown and #Ferguson. The people actively participated in a form of participatory democracy.

Participatory Democracy

In the 1960s, a complex of ideas coalesced under the label “participatory democracy,” bringing together in a new formulation the traditional appeal of democracy with an innovative tie to broader participation (Bobo et al. 79). According to political theorists, participatory democracy embraces two main ideas: a decentralization of authoritative decision-making and a direct involvement of amateurs or non-elites in the political decision-making process. Proponents of participatory democracy argue that citizens’ direct participation in the political process serves to make men and women better citizens. More importantly they argue that citizens’ direct participation will lead to political decisions, which are more beneficial to the non-elite involved. The emphasis on participation had many implications, but three have been primary: (1) an appeal for grassroots involvement of people throughout society in the decisions that control their lives; (2) the minimization of hierarchy and the associated emphasis on expertise and professionalism as a basis for leadership; and (3) a call for direct action as an answer to fear, alienation, and intellectual detachment. Despite the importance of these ideas, there is confusion and misunderstanding among historians regarding their origins. Particularly among some scholars studying the history of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), there is the assumption that participatory democracy originated with the intellectual core of students (Al Haber, Tom Hayden, Sharon Jeffrey, Bob Ross, Richard Flacks, and Steve Max) who participated most actively in drafting the Port Huron Statement of 1962.

In Francesca Polletta’s article, *How Participatory Democracy Became White: Culture and Organizational Choice*, she notes that, the deliberative style that was appealing to white activists in the 1960s was in part for its, “association with the militant wing of the black freedom movement” (3). She continues by writing that, “At some point between 1962, when the term ‘participatory democracy’ was coined by Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and now, the term’s symbolic associations shifted. What was ‘black’ came to be ‘white.’ The, “militant wing of the black freedom movement” (3). Polletta specifically speaks of is the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, “because SNCC was widely seen as the cutting edge of militant black protest,” but in referencing SNCC, and its roots in a participatory democracy, Polletta fails to discuss Ella Baker, whom Carol Mueller argues that the basic themes of participatory democracy

were first articulated and given personal witness in the activism of Ella Baker (Mueller). These ideas served as the basis for her decisive intervention in support of an independent student-led organization within the civil rights movement-- the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.

Ella Baker's definition of liberation included three main ideas: grassroots involvement of people throughout society in the elitist decisions that have dominated their lives, absence of emphasis on a hierarchy or one celebrity leader as the sole leadership for the movement, and a call for direct action by all involved as an answer to present and past oppression (Mueller et al. 52; Clements 7).

I argue that Baker's three themes of participatory democracy serve as the underpinnings of the grassroots activism that lead to the Black Twitter Turn that became crystalized via the protest in Ferguson. By critically engaging with the methods of activism, and pedagogy employed by Ella Baker, we can see how her organizational strategies and teaching style informs the ways in which Black forms of protest have taken shape on and in the participatory culture of Black Twitter.

This dissertation explores this Twitter turn for Black empowerment and the role of athletics in helping to perpetuate a protest tradition via this new medium. The chapters that follow detail how Twitter has been used to advocate for the most vulnerable people, those who have suffered from police brutality and the institutional manifestations of anti-Blackness. At the same time, this dissertation engages how President Donald J. Trump and his ilk used the Twitter platform to undermine the goals of these activists by tweeting racist, pro-police rhetoric. Thus, Twitter is a platform that has generated an opportunity for hegemonic and counter-hegemonic forces to simultaneously engage. Additionally, I argue that contemporary political engagement by Black athletes extends (or reflects) a heritage of Black athlete activism that dates back to the early 20th century. Of particular interest to this study, is the central role that technology plays in athletes being able to participate in activism, in ways that flatten the hierarchical distinctions between athletes and fans. Ultimately, I draw a through line between former San Francisco 49er quarterback Colin Kaepernick's use of Twitter, post-Ferguson¹², to draw attention to the inequalities experienced by people of color and the activism performed by Paul Robeson during the 1940s—1960s. In chapter 2, *Trumpian America*, I lay the groundwork for my study by arguing that any analysis of athlete activism through social media must account for how such resistance is in opposition to the policies and actions of the President Donald J. Trump, who has used Twitter in unprecedented ways to meet his constituencies. In chapter 3, *Multiple Modalities of Silence*, while social media has often been championed for its ability to amplify the voices of those who have been marginalized from mainstream, I consider the political efficacy of silence, both how conservatives use Twitter/social media as means through which to silence dissenting voices as well as how those resisting systemic oppression weaponize silence as form of protest. As much of Black athlete's protest can be understood as taking place through what has been dubbed as Black Twitter, in chapter 4, *Black Twitter and the Breaking of Silence* I explore the various conceptions of Black Twitter as a form of community as well as dispelling the myth that all Black people are included in the Black Twitterverse. I illustrate this point by looking at the ways that Black Twitter have taken to task Black sports commentators, Stephen A. Smith and Jason Whitlock, exposing the old adage that "all skinfolk ain't kinfolk". Ultimately, I argue that

¹² When I say post-Ferguson, I am referring to the shift in Twitter activity of Kaepernick after the death of Mike Brown and how he uses the platform at the time of writing this dissertation in 2018.

Black Twitter disseminates the voices of those that have been silenced through other means, and to a degree provides a way for Black athletes to find the political voices that are often muted (or assumed so) through their participation in sports. Finally, in chapter 5, *The Heritage of the Dissidents*, I frame contemporary Black athlete activism, as well as some of the tensions that emerge from within a long history of Black athletes challenging oppression. In this chapter, looking at the activism of athletes like Jackie Robinson and Paul Robeson, as well as women such as Rose Robinson, Wyomia Tyus, and Toni Smith whose resistance has often been omitted when mapping such a terrain, I consider how they utilized the platforms available to them to bring attention to the oppression of Black people by way of dissenting.

Chapter 2: Trumpian America

On March 15, 2017, during an interview with *FOX News Channel's* Tucker Carlson, Donald Trump said that if it were not for Twitter that he likely would not be President of the United States. During the conversation, Trump boasted that:

I have close to 100 million people watching me on Twitter... I have my own form of media... So, when I can reach, whether it's 90 million or 100 million or 80 million, however many people it may turn out to be, when you add everything up -- and then of course it gets disseminated from there, when I can reach that many people, Twitter is a wonderful thing for me, because I get the word out (Fox News Channel).

Trump echoed and expanded on his appreciation of Twitter as a powerful platform to propagate his personal politics during a 2017 interview with *FOX Business Network's* Maria Bartiromo. Bartiromo asked Trump if he felt that some of his, “unscripted tweets,” created an obstacle for many to take hold of his “agenda and overall message,” because he used his Twitter timeline¹³ as a “bully pulpit”? Trump responded by saying:

It is such an interesting question; because I have friends that say, oh, don't use social media. See I don't call it Tweets, Tweeting is like a typewriter -- when I put it out, you put it immediately on your show. I mean the other day, I put something out, two seconds later I am watching your show, and it's up... I doubt I would be here if weren't for social media, to be honest with you. Because there is a fake media out there, I get treated very unfairly by the media... I have a tremendous platform (Fox News Channel).

Engaging with the transcript of the interview between Bartiromo and Trump, and Bartiromo's line of questioning surrounding the 45th President of the United States', “agenda and overall message,” being lost within his tweets, I argue that Trump has employed Twitter (and his position as the President of the United States) as a “bully pulpit” to promote an overarching agenda that encompasses a broad array of sub-themes that fall under Trump's philosophy for making *America Great Again*, a coded rhetoric of white supremacy.

Many of the sub-themes of the Trumpian vision of American greatness are heavily xenophobic. For example, Executive Order 13769, entitled *Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States*, often referred to as the Muslim Travel ban, targets citizens from North Korea, Syria, Iran, Yemen, Libya, Somalia and Venezuela (White House). Underscoring the xenophobic current of Executive Order 13769, is Trump's tweet stating that, “3 in 4 individuals convicted of terrorism-related charges are foreign-born” (@realDonaldTrump), which flatly ignores the fact that over the last decade, 71 percent of all extremist-related murders in America were carried out by members of the right wing (Anti-Defamation League). It

¹³ Your Home timeline displays a stream of Tweets from accounts you have chosen to follow on Twitter. You may see suggested content powered by a variety of signals. You can reply, Retweet, or like a Tweet from within the timeline.

conjointly dismisses additional findings by the *Anti-Defamation League*, who in their annual assessment of extremist-related killings, found that white supremacists, and other far-right extremists, were responsible for 59 percent of all extremist-related fatalities in the United States in 2017 (7).

Further, cementing his xenophobic personal politics, in January 2018, a Democratic aide alerted the media to Trump referring to Haiti and African nations as "shithole countries" during a meeting with a bipartisan group of senators at the White House (Dawsey par. 2). This directly comes in conversation with a *New York Times* report that recounted a 2017 meeting in the Oval Office at which Trump railed against the recipients of U.S. visas. During said meeting, the President reportedly complained that Haitians "all have AIDS" and Nigerians would never "go back to their huts" (Shear and Davis par. 7). Haitians are no longer eligible for U.S. visas, largely because they are identified as low-skilled workers. The visas bring an end to a small-scale effort to employ Haitians in the U.S. after the catastrophic 2010 earthquake. This is a far cry from when, in 2016, while campaigning in Miami's Little Haiti neighborhood, Donald Trump told a group of Haitians that, "We have a lot of common values...whether you vote for me or don't vote for me, I really want to be your greatest champion, and I will be your champion" (Charles par. 4).

Amidst the arsenal of disturbing anti-African diasporic peoples and anti-immigrant rhetoric, Trump reportedly added that, as opposed to bringing in people from "shit hole" countries where people "all have AIDS" and live in "huts," that his desire would be to have more people immigrate to the U.S. from "Norway" (@christinawilkie). Testifying under oath before the Senate Judiciary Committee, Trump's Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen was asked by Senator Patrick Leahy, "Norway is a predominantly white country, isn't it?" to which Nielsen responded, "I actually do not know that, sir, but I imagine that is the case" (@kylegriffin1). What Leahy did was address the elephant in the room, the racist overtones of Trump banning Black and brown people from coming to America. And how Trump particularly stigmatized those from countries within the African diaspora as being uncivilized and diseased, and his seeing those from Norway, a country where (according to the Central Intelligence Agency *World Factbook*) its residents are 83 percent Norwegian, who are ethnic North Germanic people, and another 8 percent is European, as being a superior group of people that he desired to immigrate to America. This pronouncement of anti-Blackness and the supremacy of whiteness is an overarching theme of Trump's presidency. A closer look at Trump under a microscope begs the question, is he a white supremacist?

Trump | White Supremacist

On September 11, 2017, the *Entertainment and Sports Programming Network's* (ESPN)¹⁴ Jemele Hill tweeted: "Donald Trump is a white supremacist who has largely surrounded himself w/ other white supremacists" (@jemelehill). This accusation did not fare well with those inside of the Trump camp. The White House press secretary Sarah Sanders said that Hill's comments were a "fireable offense" (Nakamura par. 2). Putting aside the fact that this governmental

¹⁴ The Entertainment and Sports Programming Network (ESPN) is a U.S.-based global pay television sports channel owned by ESPN Inc., a joint venture owned by The Walt Disney Company (80%) and Hearst Communications (20%).

meddling has a chilling effect on free speech, the more pressing question is—was Jemele Hill wrong?

Donald Trump's first business project with his father (Fred Trump), was the revitalization of the foreclosed Swifton Village Apartments in Cincinnati, Ohio¹⁵. There were several complaints of race discrimination when the Trumps refused to rent apartments to Black people, including one case that went to court in 1969 where the Trumps' general manager called the white woman helping a black couple a "nigger lover" (Wilson). The Trumps eventually settled the case by renting the apartment and paying them \$1,000, the maximum award allowed for discrimination (Wilson).

In 1973, the Justice Department undertook an investigation of Trump Management for discriminating against prospective Black applicants looking to rent housing in their properties. Both Donald and his father were named as defendants in the lawsuit, charging the Trumps with violating the Fair Housing Act of 1968 in the operation of 39 buildings. *The Fair Housing Act* was a bill passed in the wake of the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. It was a key part of civil rights era legislation, and its primary reason for existing was to help dismantle housing segregation (Dubrosky).

The government charged Trump Mgt. with quoting different rental terms and conditions to blacks and whites and lying to blacks that apartments were not available. Testers of different races asked about available apartments and received completely different answers. Numerous Trump employees reported the company's practice of secretly marking applications of minorities with "C" for "colored" or "#9" to exclude blacks and Puerto Ricans in order to segregate them into apartment complexes filled with minorities (Choi par.1-9).

In 1978, the Department of Justice charged that "racially discriminatory conduct by Trump agents has occurred with such frequency that it has created a substantial impediment to the full enjoyment of equal opportunity" (Bump par. 4).

These are documented cases where Donald Trump was accused by the federal government of racialized housing discrimination to maintain segregated living spaces. In other words, The Trump Management was sued for employing white supremacist, Jim Crow-esque practices. But Trump trumped up and personalized his anti-Blackness in 1989 in a witch hunt involving five teenagers, Antron McCray, Kevin Richardson, Yusef Salaam, Raymond Santana and Korey Wise—commonly known as the *Central Park Five*.

In the early hours of April 20, 1989, the body of a white woman barely clinging to life was discovered in Central Park. Assaulted and left for dead, the 28-year-old jogger, Trisha Meili, would survive grave injuries and a coma with no memory of the events. Within days of the attack, McCray, 15; Richardson, 14; Salaam, 15; Santana, 14; and Wise, 16, implicated themselves in Meili's rape and beating after hours of psychological pressure and aggressive interrogation at the hands of seasoned homicide detectives. During a 2016 interview with *The Guardian*, Salaam spoke of the fear that he felt during the police interrogation, noting that, "I would hear them beating up Korey Wise in the next room," recalled Salaam. "They would come and look at me and say: 'You realize you're next.' The fear made me feel really like I was not

¹⁵ Fred Trump purchased Swifton Village Apartments for \$5.7 million in 1962, equivalent to \$46 million in 2017.

going to be able to make it out.” These terroristic interrogation tactics lead to four of the youth signing confessions and appearing on video without a lawyer, each arguing that while they had not been the individual to commit the rape they had witnessed one of the others do it, thereby implicating the entire group (Laughland pars. 8-9).

Two weeks after the Central Park attack, before any of the youth had faced trial and while Meili remained critically ill in a coma, Donald Trump intervened, and injected his personal politics into the case. Trump reportedly paid \$85,000 to take out advertising space in four of the New York’s newspapers, including the *New York Times* (par. 14). Under the headline “Bring Back the Death Penalty. Bring Back Our Police!” and above his signature, Trump wrote:

I want to hate these muggers and murderers. They should be forced to suffer and, when they kill, they should be executed for their crimes. They must serve as examples so that others will think long and hard before committing a crime or an act of violence (par 14).

He continued by stating that, “very soon, they will be returned to the streets to rape, and maim, and kill once again—and yet face no personal risk to themselves” (Laughland). Many echoed this invitation to enact vigilante (in)justice upon the five Black teens. In the May 22, 1989, the *People Magazine* article, *Madness in the Heart of the City*, highlights the white-outrage taking place noting that:

The rage was palpable on the May 3 Donahue Show, where lawyers for two of the defendants confronted an audience of women that quickly turned from coffee klatch to mob. “Castrate them!” cried one gray-haired matron, to raucous applause. “And if this woman dies, then they should be put to death too.” Incensed that, as juvenile offenders, the 14-and 15-year-olds faced maximum sentences of five-to-10 years, the Post called for the execution of “vermin,” and conservative firebrand Patrick Buchanan suggested it would be helpful to public order if the oldest rape defendant, who is 16, were “tried, convicted and hanged in Central Park by June 1 (Kunen and Balfour, par. 24).

Donald Trump and others called for the teens to be executed. *The Donahue Show* had a “mob” of white women calling for the Black teens to be castrated and put to death, and Pat Buchanan (who Trump tweeted on January 9, 2016 was, “way ahead of his time”¹⁶ with his views, (@realdonaldtrump) called for the public hanging of a 16-year-old. These are the characteristics of the white supremacist terroristic tactic of lynching. Salaam views Trump as the “fire starter” because of the publicity generated via his 1989 open letter. Salaam explains:

¹⁶ Donald Trump, in an appearance on Larry King Live in 1999 when he was exploring a presidential run on the Reform Party ticket, criticized his potential opponent Pat Buchanan for being “beyond far right” and only appealing to the “wacko vote.” When putting Trump’s views on Buchanan in 1999 in conversation with the platform that Trump ran on during his run to winning the U.S. presidential election in 2016, once can see why Trump would tweet that Buchanan was, “way ahead of his time.”

Had this been the 1950s, that sick type of justice that they wanted — somebody from that darker place of society would have most certainly come to our homes, dragged us from our beds and hung us from trees in Central Park. It would have been similar to what they did to Emmett Till (Laughland par. 17).

Trump's hatred for the Central Park Five continued. On April 24, 2013, over a decade after the Manhattan district attorney learned through "DNA and other evidence" that Trisha Meili had not been raped and beaten by the five teenagers, but by another man, Trump used Twitter to reignite his assault on the Central Park Five. Following the release of the 2012 documentary, *The Central Park Five*, Trump wrote that, "The Central Park Five documentary was a one sided piece of garbage that didn't explain the horrific crimes of these young men while in park" (@realdonaldtrump). On June 21, 2014, Trump published a piece for the *New York Daily News* in response to the city awarding the Central Park Five a \$41 million settlement, for their wrongful imprisonment. Trump saw this settlement as a "disgrace" and cosigns with a detective that he claims to know that is "close to the case" that sees the settlement as, "the heist of the century" (Trump pars. 1-2). And as recently as Oct. 7, 2016, nearly 15 years after the Central Park Five were exonerated thanks to DNA evidence that proved their innocence in the attack, Trump repeatedly frames them as guilty. In a statement to *CNN*, Trump blatantly ignored the evidence and said that, "They admitted they were guilty," and that, "The police doing the original investigation say they were guilty. The fact that that case was settled with so much evidence against them is outrageous. And the woman, so badly injured, will never be the same" (Holmes par. 9). On that same day, Raymond Santana responded directly to Trump via his Twitter handle, @realdonaldtrump, tweeting, "What more do we have to prove? I'm tired of proving our innocence! I don't care what this asshole thinks," ending the tweet with the hashtag "#CentralPark5" (@santanaraymond).

Racial discrimination charges show that Trump did not want Black people renting from his family owned properties, and his dogged insistency on the Central Park Five's guilt, displays his unwillingness to recognize the innocence in five Black teens that he wished to see executed. A story from former Trump employee, John R. O'Donnell, exposes that Trump saw Black people as inherently lazy and untrustworthy.

In a 1991 book chronicling his experiences running Trump Plaza, in Atlantic City, entitled, *Trumped! The Inside Story of the Real Donald Trump—His Cunning Rise and Spectacular Fall*, John R. O'Donnell recalled a conversation that he had with his former boss about a Black employee in the Plaza's finance department. While Trump and O'Donnell were involved in said discussion, O'Donnell revealed that he was not fond of the Black employee, something that he and Trump had in common. According to O'Donnell, Trump responded by ripping off a racist rant, exclaiming:

Yeah, I never liked the guy. I don't think he knows what the fuck he's doing. My accountants in New York are always complaining about him. He's not responsive. And it isn't funny. I've got black accountants at Trump Castle and at Trump Plaza. Black guys counting my money! I hate it. The only kind of people I want counting my money are short guys that wear yarmulkes every day. Those are the kind of people I want counting my money. Nobody else... Besides that, I've got to tell you something else. I think that the guy is lazy. And it's probably not his fault because

laziness is a trait in blacks. It really is. I believe that. It's not anything they can control (O'Donnell and Rutherford ch.8).

O'Donnell wrote that for months afterward, Trump pressed him to fire the Black accountant, until the man resigned of his own accord. And while Trump eventually denied making those comments, in a 1997 *Playboy* interview, he conceded that, "the stuff O'Donnell wrote about me is probably true" (Bowden). Trump has shown himself to be racist in business, politics, and personal opinion, but it is important to see his racist views in conversation with the people that he associates with.

Trump has politically aligned himself with politicians who have a documented history of racism. These people include Attorney General Jeff Sessions, who, in 1986, had his nomination to a federal district court rejected after people who had worked with him in Alabama testified under oath that he had made racially charged remarks. Sessions called a black prosecutor "boy," joked about his support for the Ku Klux Klan and referred to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People as "un-American" (Glover pars. 14-15). And let us not forget that Trump also elevated former Breitbart News Network¹⁷ head Steve Bannon¹⁸ to a chief strategist role within his administration.

Former Breitbart News Network editor Ben Shapiro, who worked alongside Bannon, wrote on the *Daily Wire* that, "under Bannon's leadership, Breitbart openly embraced the white supremacist alt-right ... with [now former Breitbart editor Milo] Yiannopoulos pushing white ethno-nationalism as a legitimate response to political correctness, and the comment section turning into a cesspool for white supremacist meme-makers" (Shapiro).

Briefly circling back to Jemele Hill's tweet, it is undeniable that her claim that Trump has surrounded himself with white supremacist is correct. But what about Trump himself? Is he a white supremacist? He definitely is a white supremacist sympathizer, as one can conclude by his handling of the Charlottesville rally.

The Unite the Right rally, also known as the Charlottesville rally was a white supremacist neo-fascist gathering that occurred in Charlottesville, Virginia, from August 11-12, 2017, "which was billed at the time as the largest gathering of white supremacists in decades" (Shugerman par. 7). Protesters were self-identified members of a variety of white supremacist organizations (neo-Confederates, white nationalists Klansmen, neo-Nazis). The organizers' stated goals included unifying the American white nationalist movement and opposing the removal of a statue of

¹⁷ Breitbart News Network (known commonly as Breitbart) is a far-right syndicated American news, opinion and commentary website founded in mid-2007 by conservative commentator Andrew Breitbart. Its journalists are widely considered to be ideologically driven, and some of its content promotes racism, misogyny, and xenophobia. In a nationally televised 2016 speech, Hillary Clinton identified Breitbart as the Democratic Party's media enemy No. 1, warning about a "de facto merger" between the Trump campaign and a news outlet that she described as racist, radical and offensive.

¹⁸ Steve Bannon is the former chief strategist in the Trump administration. He has expressed his enthusiasm for the alt right, a loose network of individuals and groups that promote white identity and reject mainstream conservatism in favor of politics that embrace implicit or explicit racism, anti-Semitism and white supremacy. Alt right adherents oppose multiculturalism, immigration and often claim that there is a Jewish conspiracy to advocate for "white genocide." These messages are often delivered via social media, using "ironic" memes and/or slogans.

Confederate General Robert E. Lee from Charlottesville's Emancipation Park (Heim; Silverman et al.).

After white supremacists held violent rallies in Charlottesville, Virginia, which led to the killing of Heather D. Heyer by James Alex Fields Jr.¹⁹, Trump had a chance to denounce the racism and bigotry that led to her death. Fields had led his mother to believe that he was on his way to “a Trump rally” (Time par. 3). Faced with the opportunity to critique the white supremacists that converged on Charlottesville, Trump did nothing of the sort—choosing instead to blame “many sides,” while adding that there were some who came out to protest the removal of Robert E. Lee's statue, framing those honoring the history and legacy of the Confederacy as “fine people” (Merica pars. 3-16).

Trump also cosigns fringe views espoused by other white supremacists surrounding genetics. Consider an interview with *Frontline*, in which Trump biographer Michael D’Antonio claimed Trump’s father, Fred Trump, had taught him that their family’s success was due to their genetic superiority. D’Antonio explains that the Trumps “subscribe to a racehorse theory of human development... They believe that there are superior people and that if you put together the genes of a superior woman and a superior man, you get a superior offspring” (Bennett et al.). This line of thinking is firmly found in the eugenics movement, as eugenicists believe that human beings should be bred for maximum intelligence and character. Eugenics was a commonly accepted means in America of “protecting society from the offspring of those individuals deemed inferior or dangerous – the poor, the disabled, the mentally ill, criminals, and people of color”(Ko par.1). Adolf Hitler’s justification for the Holocaust was in part based on a similar theory of genetic hierarchy (King).

Yet there is nothing new about the President of the United States subscribing to the notion of white genetic superiority. Unfortunately, it’s an ideology that has historically been a mainstay in the Oval Office. Indeed, thirteen men who would become U.S. Presidents enslaved black men, women, and children at some point in their lives. Beyond the *peculiar institution*²⁰ of chattel slavery, however, many presidents have themselves “normalized white supremacy” and served as “platforms for hate” by virtue of their words and deeds.

In 1779, George Washington popularized white nationalism when he ordered General John Sullivan to “destruct” and “devastate” as many Native American settlements as possible. “It will be essential to ruin their crops in the group and prevent their planting more,” he proudly declared (Tiro). Half a century later, Andrew Jackson stated in his fifth annual message of 1833 that Indigenous Peoples:

Have neither the intelligence, the industry, the moral habits, nor the desire of improvement which are essential to any favorable change in their condition.

¹⁹ James Alex Fields’ mother Samantha Bloom was under the impression that her son was merely attending a political rally, noting that she, “didn't know it [Charlottesville] was a white supremacists [rally]. I thought it had something to do with Trump,” she said. “Trump's not a [white] supremacist.”

²⁰ When Kenneth Stampp titled his 1956 study of Southern slavery, *The Peculiar Institution* he selected a title redolent with multiple meanings. Antebellum southerners, of course, had referred to slavery as their “peculiar” institution, as if to render it a quaint curiosity. In Stampp's book, the phrase evoked altogether different meanings. For Stampp, slavery was “peculiar” in the sense that it was aberrant, deviant, grotesque, and strange.

Established in the midst of another and a superior race, and without appreciating the causes of their inferiority or seeking to control them, they must necessarily yield to the force of circumstances and ere long disappear. (Jackson par. 56)

Just a few years earlier James Monroe, in a letter to Andrew Jackson, noted that “hunter state” of Native Americans, “tho maintain’d by warlike spirits, presents but a feeble resistance to the more dense, compact, and powerful population of civilized man” (Jackson et al. 147).

In *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Thomas Jefferson postulated that “the blacks...are inferior to the whites in the endowments both of body and mind” (Avalon.law.yale.edu). Jefferson’s biological white supremacy was echoed in the political arena by Abraham Lincoln in 1858 at his fourth debate with Stephen Douglas in Charleston, Illinois. “I am not, nor even have been,” Lincoln stated, “in favor of bringing about in any way the social and political equality of the white and black races — that I am not nor ever have been in favor of making voters or jurors of negroes, nor of qualifying them to hold office, nor to intermarry with white people...and I as much as any other man am in favor of having the superior position assigned to the white race” (Lincoln et al. par. 2).

In 1865, James Garfield repeated Lincoln’s theme of “white superiority,” arguing in a letter to an anonymous friend that “I have a strong feeling of repugnance when I think of the Negro being made our political equal. And I would be glad if they could be colonized, sent to heaven, or got rid of in any decent way (King 168).” A year after the passage of the 13th Amendment, President Andrew Johnson underscored Garfield’s sentiments: “This is a country for white men, and by God, as long as I am President; it shall be a government for white men” (The Political; Cincinnati Enquirer). Less than a decade later — and in the middle of Reconstruction — President Ulysses S. Grant noted in his second inaugural address that he would not “ask that anything be done to advance the social status of the colored man” (The Avalon Project).

In 1879, Rutherford B. Hayes gleefully referred to “the Negroes and Indians” as “weaker races”. In 1895, Theodore Roosevelt argued in *North American Review* that “a perfectly stupid race can never rise to a very high plane; the negro, for instance, has been kept down as much by lack of intellectual development as by anything else” (Roosevelt). Whereas presidents Cleveland, Hoover, and Coolidge focused their racial animus on the Chinese at the turn of the century, saying they were “backward,” “dishonest,” and “unamerican,” respectively, Woodrow Wilson described the KKK as “great” and “veritable.”

At the turn of the twentieth century, William Howard Taft noted that “social equality between the races shall be enforced by law” has “no foundation in fact” (Maslow and Robison). In conjunction, presidents Warren Harding and Richard Nixon rejected “miscegenation.” Meanwhile, Harding opined in 1921 that “racial amalgamation there cannot be.” Nixon advocated for abortion “when you have a black and a white...or a rape” (Nixon Archives).

Outspoken “liberal” President Lyndon B. Johnson repeatedly referred to the *Civil Rights Act of 1957* as the “nigger bill” and Ronald Reagan noted in a 1980 conversation with Laurence Barrett that the *1965 Voting Rights Act* was “humiliating to the South” (Jacob). Jimmy Carter railed against “black intrusion” into white neighborhoods and Bill Clinton played golf at a “whites only” country club in Little Rock, Arkansas (Martin par. 3). In 2018, America continues this hideous heritage of white supremacy in the White House with Trump.

Donald Trump is a white supremacist. This is evinced by the federal government suing Trump for white supremacist practices of racialized housing discrimination, his role in the media

lynching of the Central Park Five, his hiring of both Jeff Sessions and Steve Bannon, his reported belief in ethnoracial, pseudo-scientific theories of genetic superiority, and the ways in which he ran a bigoted presidential campaign that galvanized white supremacists to hold racist-rallies across the country (Giroux). Nevertheless, Trump is not alone in the white supremacist and anti-Black views and policies advanced through the presidency of the United States. What is unique about Trump is the role that social media plays in the propagation of notions of what it means to “make America great again.”

#MAGA: Make America Great Again

In October, 2017, Ta-Nehisi Coates penned a piece for *The Atlantic* titled *The First White President*. Coates opens the article by stating:

It is insufficient to state the obvious of Donald Trump: that he is a white man who would not be president were it not for this fact. With one immediate exception, Trump’s predecessors made their way to high office through the passive power of whiteness (Coates).

For Coates, Trump’s whiteness is not passive, and invisible, nor situated in symbolism, he sees his whiteness as “the very core of his power” (Coates). In particular, Trump comes on the heels of eight years of America having its first Black President.

Donald Trump arrived in the wake of...an entire nigger presidency with nigger health care, nigger climate accords, and nigger justice reform, all of which could be targeted for destruction or redemption, thus reifying the idea of being white. Trump truly is something new—the first president whose entire political existence hinges on the fact of a black president. And so, it will not suffice to say that Trump is a white man like all the others who rose to become president. He must be called by his rightful honorific—America’s first white president. (Coates)

Trump is the first American President with the task of realigning the White House with whiteness. His presidency has to purge Obama era ideas centered on *hope*, *change*, and *betting on America* to continue moving *forward* by replacing notions of racial progress, with a need to return to a pre-Obama era America in order to make it *great again*.²¹ Trump’s promise to “make America great again” by putting “America first” was central to the overwhelming amount of support that he received from white voters.

In *Explaining White Polarization in the 2016 Vote for President: The Sobering Role of Racism and Sexism*, political scientists Brian Schaffner, Matthew MacWilliams, and Tatishe Nteta, found that voters’ measures of sexism and racism correlated much more closely with support for Trump than economic dissatisfaction after controlling for factors like partisanship and political ideology (Schaffner et al. 15). In *The threat of increasing diversity: Why many White Americans support Trump in the 2016 presidential election*, researchers Brenda Major,

²¹ All italicized words in this sentence are key terms used within the presidential campaign slogans of Barack Obama (2008, 2012) and Donald Trump (2016). Additionally the campaign slogan “Make America Great Again” was employed by Ronald Reagan and George Bush during their 1980 run to the White House.

Alison Blodorn, and Gregory Major Blascovich shortly before the election, found that if people who strongly identified as white were told that non-white groups will outnumber white people in 2042, they became more likely to support Trump (Major et al. 932). And in *Supporters and opponents of Donald Trump respond differently to racial cues: An experimental analysis*, researchers Matthew Luttig, Christopher Federico, and Howard Lavine found that Trump supporters were much more likely to change their views on housing policy based on race (Luttig et al. 7). In this study, respondents were randomly assigned “a subtle image of either a Black or a white man.” Next, they were asked about views on housing policy. The researchers found that Trump supporters were much more likely to be impacted by the image of a Black man. In fact, after the exposure, they were not only less supportive of housing assistance programs, but they also expressed higher levels of anger that some people receive government assistance and were more likely to say that individuals who receive assistance are to blame for their situation. The aforementioned views fly in the face of the fact that white Americans are the biggest beneficiaries when it comes to government safety-net programs like the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, commonly referred to as welfare. As reported in *Newsweek*:

White people without a college degree ages 18 to 64 are the largest class of adults lifted out of poverty by such programs, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. The think tank’s 2017 report stated that 6.2 million working-age whites were lifted above the poverty line in 2014 compared to 2.8 million Black people (Sherman et al. par. 12).

As exit polls reveal, overwhelmingly, white people across various demographics voted for Trump to make America great again. Trump’s white support was not determined by income, as Edison Research reveals, Trump won the votes of whites making less than \$50,000 by 20 points, whites making \$50,000 to \$99,999 by 28 points, and whites making \$100,000 or more by 14 points. According to *Pew Research* results, among whites, Trump won an overwhelming share of those without a college degree (67%), and among white college graduates – a group that many identified as key for a potential Clinton victory – Trump outperformed Hilary Clinton by a slim, yet significant 4-point margin (49% to 45%) (Tyson and Maniam par. 11). And what seemed to be most shocking to many is that 53% of the white women in America chose to vote for Trump over an actual white woman in Clinton. While Bernie Sanders was sterilizing Trump’s voting base by saying, “Some people think that the people who voted for Trump are racists and sexists and homophobes and just deplorable folks. . .I don’t agree” or Clinton herself, who claimed that white women were pressured into voting for Trump by white men. Neither was willing to imagine the possibility of racism, across diverse groups of white people in America, regardless of race, class, gender, or sexual orientation²² as the true spine of his success among white voters. As Coates puts it, “to accept that whiteness brought us Donald Trump is to accept whiteness as an existential danger to the country and the world,” because by doing so, it would implicate themselves into the inherent, bipartisan, toxicity of whiteness (Coates). It would open the door for what Trump means when he says that he wants to “put America first,” and “make America great again,” and how those phrases have a special space in the theorizing of what Joe R. Feagin calls white racial frames.

²² According to *New York Times* exit polls 14% of the LBGTQ community voted Trump, as opposed to 8% of Black voters.

White Racial Frames

In Joe R. Feagin's text *White Racial Framing: Centuries of Racial Framing and Counter Framing* (2010), he argues that America is rooted in racism, and that systemic racial oppression has always been, and continues to be, a reality in the United States. From the theft of land, genocide, and broken treaties with America's indigenous people, to the hellish institutions of chattel slavery of Africans, Jim Crow, the New Jim Crow, and now, Trumpian America, they are the context for the, "dominant white racial frame that was generated to rationalize and insure white privilege and dominance over Americans of color" (166). This racist stance is due to what Feagin has coined as the *white racial frame* which he defines as "an overarching white world view that encompasses a broad and persisting set of racial stereotypes, prejudices, ideologies, images, interpretations, and narratives, emotions, and reactions, to language accents, as well as racialized inclinations to discriminate" (3). White people have long placed the anti-Black subframe at the heart of the white racial frame (167).

In general, frames, small and large, organize social reality and construct meanings while connecting individual interpretations to broader structural and ideological processes, including those of major media institutions (Carragee and Roefs). Frames are essential communication components that structure everyday life; they help organize our lived realities as well as develop and reinforce our attitudes and behaviors on many subjects (Goffman; Bateson). The white racial frame in which Trump, and those that follow him, is hyper-ized in its focus on the alleged superiority of whiteness. A general white racial frame often take place by way of racial-microaggressions.

In 1969 Chester Pierce, a professor of education and psychology at Harvard University was one of the first to highlight the subtle, cumulative mini-assaults that are the substance of today's racism (Pierce, et al.). According to Pierce, Black people experienced these slights and insults on a daily basis, a condition he phrased as "racial micro-aggressions" (Pierce, et al.). "Micro-aggressions can be verbal or non-verbal, snubs, and insults, which communicate hostile, derogatory or negative images, and messages that are targeted at a person or group based on them being an outsider in some way" (Pierce et al.). Racial micro-aggressions can often times on the surface look non-racial, but they contain an underlying message that has a detrimental impact on its racially-otherized recipient (Pierce, et al., Solorzano et al., Sue et al.). In the *Yale Law Journal*, Davis (1989) defines racial micro-aggressions as "stunning automatic acts of disregard that stem from unconscious attitudes of white superiority and constitute a verification of black inferiority."²³ With regards to Trump and his followers, their racism is not micro-aggressive it is

²³ The term racial microaggressions was first proposed by Harvard University professor Chester M. Pierce, MD, in 1969, but psychologists have significantly amplified the concept in recent years. In his landmark work on stereotype threat, for instance, Stanford University psychology professor Claude Steele, PhD, has shown that Black people and white women perform worse on academic tests when primed with stereotypes about race or gender. Women who were primed with stereotypes about women's poor math performance do worse on math tests. Blacks' intelligence test scores plunge when they're primed with stereotypes about Black people having inferior intelligence. Additionally, social psychologists Jack Dovidio, PhD, of Yale University, and Samuel L. Gaertner, PhD, of the University of Delaware, have demonstrated across several studies that many

hyper-aggressive. Their notions of whiteness as superior are not whispers, they are screams. As Christian Picciolini, a “former” white supremacist, that helped lead a neo-Nazi group known as the Chicago Area Skin Heads, noted in choosing to not pick sides in the Charlottesville tragedy, Trump sent clear messages to white supremacists and other far-right groups. Picciolini explains in a 2017 interview with *Business Insider*:

The way he defied the country after Charlottesville, where he put both sides on the same moral plane, this is what people call dog whistles. But to people like me and in our network, it's a bullhorn. It's not lost on us. We recognize immediately the things that are said as 'dog whistles' speak clearly to the people in the [white supremacist] movement. (Jacobs 7)

Picciolini further said that Trump's statements and stances throughout the 2016 presidential campaign, and now as president, have "absolutely emboldened" white supremacist and neo-Nazi groups because, in many cases, they have mirrored what those groups outwardly advocate. And while presidents of the recent past may have employed micro-aggressive white frames as a tool for spreading anti-Black and pro-white messaging, Trump reminded all via a tweet on July 1, 2017, 3:41 pm, “My use of social media is not Presidential - it's MODERN DAY PRESIDENTIAL. Make America Great Again!” (@realdonaldtrump). Coates framed Trump as the “first white president,”²⁴ but I would push that further, and add that Trump is the first white supremacist president in the era of Twitter. And his most visible targets of his overtly anti-Black vitriol are NFL players protesting during the playing of the *Star-Spangled Banner* against the police killings of unarmed Black and Brown people. In his attacks on players taking a knee against racialized systemic oppression, Trump synergizes his use of Twitter as a bully pulpit, his anti-Blackness, and his white supremacist racial framing.

Donald Trump launched a verbal assault on NFL players who kneeled in protest during the pregame playing of the *Star-Spangled Banner*. During the speech at an Alabama rally on September 22, 2017, for Republican senator Luther Strange, Trump issued a challenge to the men who control the National Football League, exclaiming, “Wouldn't you love to see one of these NFL owners, when somebody disrespects *our* flag, to say, ‘Get that son of a bitch off the field right now. Out! He's fired. He's fired’” (Tatum par. 1).

The crowd went wild, erupting into applause, chanting “USA! USA! USA!”

Trump continued to lambaste the league to his eager audience, saying that, “what's really hurting the game [football] is when people like yourselves turn on the television, and you see *those people* taking a knee when they're playing *our* great national anthem” (par. 11). Boos of

well-intentioned whites who consciously believe in and profess equality unconsciously act in a racist manner, particularly in ambiguous circumstances.

²⁴ In a 2017 interview Ta-Nehisi Coates further explains what he means when he says that “Trump is the first white president.” Coates explains that, “it is impossible to image Donald Trump without the force of whiteness,” and that what “separates” Trump from the other white men that have occupied the Oval Office as Presidents of the United States is that he, “is a white male that ran on whiteness as his sole attribute.” Trump was not viewed as being presidential. Trump had zero experience serving in public office. Trump had no military service to America in his background. Trump's most glaring attribute was his whiteness. It is for this reason that Coates sees Trump as the first white president.

disapproval ring throughout the crowd, as the Alabamian Trump supporters howl at the sound of his divisive dog whistle wordplay filling the air with coded messages employed to reinforce ideas, rooted in the rotting fabric of American white supremacy, scapegoating political Blackness as the blame for ruining the sport and the country that they love so much. Trump used the kneeling of Black football players as symbolic of not only being un-American (via citizenry and a lack of patriotism) and deserving of severe social shaming and economic punishment, but also as a group that should remain silent, never to testify to their suffering, or critique of Americanness.

The *Trump-Codes* in which Black athletes are supposed to both be willingly silent and forcefully silenced, reminds one of remixed Slave Codes. With the establishment of the Peculiar Institution of chattel slavery spreading across the South, many states legislated laws outlining the *rights* of enslaved Africans in America. The slave codes were tools of terror, designed to deny Black folks their human rights, thus it should not be a surprise that the most macabre and inhumane punishments were reserved for those who fought against the system of slavery by way of seeking to secure freedom and justice.

Since Trump was spewing his *Trump-Codes* to an Alabamian crowd, a look into Alabama's slave codes is warranted.

Two of the codes that fit the sentiments of Trump (and the crowds) displeasure with kneeling players calling attention to the police killing unarmed Black people with impunity stated that, "No slave shall be admitted a witness against any person, in any matter, cause or thing whatsoever, civil or criminal, except in criminal cases, in which the evidence of one slaves shall be admitted for or against another slave," and that:

If any Slave shall, at anytime, consult, advise, or conspire to rebel, or make insurrection...every such consulting, plotting, or conspiring shall be adjudged and deemed a felony, and the slave or slaves convicted therefore, in manner hereinafter directed, shall suffer death. (Meredith)

Though Trump is not seeking literal death (as he previously did with the Central Park Five) for the NFL players protesting on behalf of Black people who have literally died via unarmed encounters with the police, he is in many ways seeking to secure a form of socioeconomic death for said Black players by campaigning to have men that he calls "his friends," the owners, kill their careers and access to the NFL platform. This should come as no surprise as Trump made his disdain for NFL players rebelling against injustice clear when he openly bragged about using his presidential power to ensure that Colin Kaepernick stay unemployed (Lyles par.2).

The now infamous Trump sound bite evokes the spirit of yet an additional Alabama Slave Code that deemed, "riots, routs, unlawful assemblies, trespasses, and seditious speeches by a slave," as punishable by, "no more than one hundred lashes" (Meredith), Trump sees those *son of a bitches* taking a knee during the "great national anthem," as participating in a taboo assemblage, trespassing on the good American citizens rights to sit down on a Sunday afternoon and enjoy a game of football devoid of a confrontation with the ills of police terrorism. Trump is willing to see the majority Black workforce, inflict pain on one another for their viewing pleasure, mocking the NFL's attempts to make the game safer but is unwilling to see them peacefully protest the pain inflicted on Black people by police in America. And like the aforementioned slave code, the *Trump-Codes* deem "seditious speeches" against him as a

punishable offense. This speaks directly to the ways in which he attempted to leverage his presidential power to punish ESPN's Jemele Hill and the Golden State Warriors' Stephen Curry.

Trump publicly criticized the owner's authority, calling into question their ability to keep the NFL's rebelling Black players in line. He threw down the gauntlet, declaring that, in so many words, the inmates were running the asylum, and that *those people* needed to be punished. He was establishing a set of *Trump-Codes* to govern and castigate an NFL workforce—that is made up of 70% Black men—protesting against racialized systemic oppression and fatal encounters with the police.

Sports is one segment of society where race and racism continue to be pronounced and relatively obvious. As Feagin points out, depictions and treatments of Black athletes out of the anti-Black subframe, is highly reliant on depicting them as “thugs,” “gangsters,” and “deviants” in mainstream institutions, including in the mainstream media (Feagin 99). It is commonplace for a white racial framing to reduce, “Black athletes to a source of white entertainment, as physically worthy but not intellectually worthy of human dignity” (Ortega and Feagin par. 19).

Indeed, one would be hard-pressed to study race in the United States without making an honest examination of the often-racialized politics within professional sports (qtd. in Ortega and Feagin par. 20). The subordinated position of Blackness in the realm of sports remains transfixed in a process of commodification, no matter what their incomes might be. The modern Black athlete has been described as a ““million-dollar slave” (qtd. in Ortega and Feagin par. 20), largely because the institution of slavery has many parallels to the ways in which powerful whites have exploited Black players. In most professional sports institutions, for example, whites are the primary owners and beneficiaries of Black labor. For this reason, whites have framed and rationalized their exploitation of Blacks by pointing to their pay but simultaneously devaluing their (human) worth” (par. 20). Professional sports often provide a moral, socioeconomic, and political battleground where whites pass explicitly and implicitly racist judgments and make racist commentaries in the now extensive realm of social media (par. 21). In the case of Trump, and his followers, not only is anti-Black disdain for the players a space to park their anti-Blackness, being that the players, by and large, are protesting racialized police terrorism during the playing of the American national anthem, it serves as a site to push pro-police views that sits well with his largely white base and fits neatly into themes normalized within a white racial frame.

On July 16, 2016, Trump tweeted: “Shooting deaths of police officers up 78% this year. We must restore law and order and protect our great law enforcement officers! (@realdonaldtrump)” Trump has a proven pattern of tweeting about the shooting of police officers, but never about police shootings of Black people. In 2015, 41 US law enforcement officers were shot and killed according to the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund (Domonoske par. 3). According to the statistics, US police killed 346 black people in the year 2015, of which 31 percent were allegedly armed and violent (The Guardian). In 97 percent of the cases, no charges were raised against the officers firing the bullets. Angela Davis argues, in a 2014 interview with *The Guardian*, that there is, “an unbroken line of police violence in the United States that takes us all the way back to the days of slavery, the aftermath of slavery, the development of the Ku Klux Klan” (Jeffries par. 1). The sentiments of Davis' argument, and Trump's framing of the police as heroes are evident in a 2017 study conducted by the *Pew Research Center*, where they found that 74 percent of white Americans viewed the police “warmly,” holding them in elevated esteem, “just three-in-ten black Americans (30%) express warm attitudes about police officers, while 28% offer a neutral rating. Another 38% give a cold

rating, including 30 percent who give a very cold rating (24 or lower on the 0-100 scale) (Fingerhut pars. 3-4).” A convergence of white trust in the police as being protectors of whiteness, while conjointly being a threat to Blackness has been in full bloom on Twitter, due to Black people on social media making hyper-visible the strangeness of a recent rash of white women calling the police on Black people for doing normal activities, thus framing everyday Blackness as criminal (Lockhart par. 10). George Lipsitz contends that:

Whiteness is everywhere in American culture, but it is very hard to see... As the unmarked category against which difference is constructed, whiteness never has to speak its name, never has to acknowledge its role as an organizing principle in social and cultural relations. (369)

While I agree with Lipsitz regarding the ubiquity of whiteness in America, we who are non-white in America see whiteness all too clearly. As an act of securing whiteness as invisible, whites silence, segregate, and delegitimize “voices that speak about whiteness from a nonwhite location.” As Crispin Sartwell notes, “Above all we [whites] can’t stand to be looked at, described, or made specific” (Yancy 45). By openly identifying and dissecting conceptual whiteness, it disrupts a concentrated effort to remain absent while ever-present. In effect, whiteness (and those that most benefit from whiteness as normal) become “colored.” This coloring process places whiteness in front of the firing squad, armed with some of the weapons of mass racialization and thingification that whiteness so desperately covets in an effort to sustain fictional supremacy. And Yancy strongly argues, “to allow whiteness the power to go unnamed is to reinforce its status as given, as natural, as simply a site of being human” (45). What this also signifies is that those that are non-white, are not only outside of the scope of being normal, but that they are also stigmatized as somewhat subhuman, as Richard Dyer contends that, “As long as race is something only applied to non-white peoples, as long as white people are not racially seen and named, they/we function as the human norm. Other people are raced, we are just people” (10).

Richard Dyer’s essay, *The Matter of Whiteness*, (an essay that based on the tone, and his frequent use of “we” with regards to white people, was geared to a white audience) the most powerful line was couched within the final sentence of the piece, where he states that, “whiteness needs to be made strange” (12). What makes Dyer think that whiteness is not already viewed as being strange by non-white people?

While white people may not see themselves as raced, and imagine whiteness as this blank canvas of normalcy, of universal humanness that all should abide by, Black people have historically observed, commented on, and documented the strangeness of whiteness. While addressing representations of whiteness in the Black imagination, bell hooks informs the reader:

Although there has never been any official body of Black people in the United States who have gathered as anthropologist and/or ethnographers to study whiteness, Black folks have from slavery on, shared in conversations with one another “special” knowledge of whiteness gleaned from close scrutiny of white people. (165)

On April 15, 2018, when Holly Hylton, a white woman called the police on two black men in a Philadelphia Starbucks, the video of the event went viral (D’Andrea). In the following weeks, a

white woman called the police on a group of black people barbecuing in an Oakland park (De Guzman par. 4). Not long after, another white woman called the police on a Black girl selling water on the sidewalk in San Francisco. Because we were able to see these white women's faces, their identities have been turned into memes and they've been given nicknames – #BBQBecky and #PermitPatty, respectively. The accused were not violent, but apparently, they were seen as disturbing the peace, whether it was through conducting business, enjoying themselves, or simply being present and Black.

There is nothing novel about white people policing Black behavior. If they think someone Black seems out of place, they know they can say something to the property manager, a store supervisor, the police, or in the case of George Zimmerman, take matters into their own hands, legally stand their ground, and take the life of Black people. In the past, many Black folks have not been able to publicly fight back due to a lack of media access, but that inaccessibility has been challenged by communities like #BlackTwitter. Now footage captured on smartphones and spread instantly on social media, makes whiteness (and its white frame) strange by shining the spotlight on how Black people are singled out by whites for simply being Black. As Yancy explains:

Black people experience policing every day, even if it's just a look or a gaze.
What social media is doing is magnifying the elephant in the room in such a way
as to reveal to white people the reality that Black people experience all the time
(Yancy).

Now with the first white supremacist president, who's primary mode of communication is Twitter, and the ways in which #BlackTwitter viralizes and shames the strangeness of whiteness and its reliance on white racial frames to interact with the non-white world, we are in the midst of an entirely new era in what it means to protest and push back.

Chapter 3: Multiple Modalities of Silence

On July 28, 1917, thousands of Black children, women, and men stoically marched in silence down Fifth Avenue in New York City in what was called the “Negro Silent Protest Parade.” The silent protest was in response to the ubiquitous horrors of Jim Crow terrorism, placing a spotlight on the horrifying reign of violence that took place in East St. Louis, where within a three-day period, an estimated 100 Black people had been killed by white mobs and more than 6,000 Black people were burned out of their homes. On July 3, 1917, Reporter Carlos F. Hurd published an eyewitness account in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* regarding the domestic terror attacks where he recounted, “The East St. Louis affair, as I saw it, was a man hunt, conducted on a sporting basis, though with anything but the fair play which is the principle of sport.” Hurd continued, “There was a horribly cool deliberateness and a spirit of fun about it. ‘Get a n*****’ was the slogan, and it was varied by the recurrent cry, ‘Get another’” (Gruening and DuBois 219).

Though vocally silent, the protesters spoke in volumes with their presence, and the signs that they carried, one of which read that, “America has lynched without trial 2,867 Negroes in 31 years and not a single murderer has suffered” (Davenport par. 2). On an average, 39 black people were lynched per year during the legal Jim Crow era. In 1892, the worst year, 161 Black people in America were lynched and a 2015 report from the Alabama based nonprofit *Equal Justice Initiative* found that white mobs murdered a total of 3,959 black persons in 12 southern states between 1877 and 1950, which is 700 more than previously reported (Equal Justice Initiative). During the New Jim Crow (a phrase coined by legal scholar Michelle Alexander)²⁵ Era, Quartz states more Black men were shot dead by police in 2015 than were lynched in the worst year of the legal Jim Crow Era (Merelli par. 1).

Just as the lynching of Black people was heavy on the hearts of Black America in 1917 during the Negro Silent Parade protests, so too are the deaths of Black children, women, and men at the hands the police in America a century later. And, just as the Negro Silent Protest Parade participants marched because they deemed, “it a crime to be silent in the face of such barbaric acts” (Armstrong 71) as lynching, Colin Kaepernick began a silent protest on August 14, 2016, because, as he put it:

I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses black people and people of color. To me, this is bigger than football and it would

²⁵ Under Legal Jim Crow laws, Black people in America were relegated to a subordinate status, and legally dehumanized for decades. In her 2010 book *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, legal scholar Michelle Alexander writes that many of the gains of the civil rights movement have been undermined by the mass incarceration and the war on drugs that disproportionately targets Black people in America. The racialized nature of the war on drugs has led to millions of Black folks being arrested for minor crimes such as marijuana possession, and thus marginalized, disfranchised, and trapped within a criminal justice system, permanently placing them as felons which denied them basic rights and opportunities that would allow them to become productive, law-abiding citizens.

be selfish on my part to look the other way. There are bodies in the street and people getting paid leave and getting away with murder. (Wyche par. 3)

Kaepernick (and other athletes practicing silent protest)—like the participants in the Negro Silent Protest Parade—represents a complex collision of being tactically silent as a direct-action method of protest, while serving as a voice for those muted by untimely deaths. It is imperative that scholars deal with the complexities of silence, beyond silence as a position of powerlessness. In this chapter, I will explore the multiple modes through which silence has been deployed as a form of Black resistance and how the age of Twitter complicates this radical protest tradition. First, I will begin with teasing out some of the theoretical frameworks that inform how silence can subvert power.

Silence

Contrary to propagated belief, being a professional athlete does not mean that they must forfeit their right to express themselves in the same manner as fellow Americans. Those who object to athletes—particularly Black athletes—voicing their opinions on matters regarding race in America, want athletes to remain in a windowless box of existence they have constructed for them, a box where the athletes are one-dimensional figures. White America demands silence. Athletes have been expected to, in the words of *Fox News* commentator Laura Ingraham²⁶, “shut up and dribble.” Even Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg said of Colin Kaepernick’s protest against police violence and racialized systemic oppression in an October 10, 2016 interview with *Yahoo News*, “it’s dumb and disrespectful” (Boxer par. 5).

Silence can be useful and employed for a variety of purposes. Silence can prove to be profitable to those in positions of power, as well as to those in positions of subalternity. Silence, markedly by way of silencing, can serve as a means to protect the privileges of those situated in spaces of authority by shielding them from critique that challenges their power and connection to various forms of injustice and oppression. Antonio Gramsci points out, societies subaltern class²⁷ are constantly conditioned by the authority of the ruling class. Even at the moment of an uprising, Gramsci states, “Subaltern groups are always subject to the activity of ruling groups...only ‘permanent’ victory breaks their subordination” (54). Yet, silence can also be used

²⁶ On February 15, 2018, during her nightly cable news show *The Laura Ingraham Show*, the conservative FOX News host said comments made by 14-time NBA All-Star LeBron James on his *Uninterrupted* website, in which James said Donald Trump, “doesn’t understand the people. And really don’t give a fu*k about the people,” were in her view “barely intelligible,” “ungrammatical” and “ignorant,” leading to Ingraham saying that James (as well as fellow NBA All-Star Kevin Durant, and ESPN anchor Cari Champion) needed to stop “running his mouth,” and “shut up and dribble.”

²⁷ The notion of the subaltern was first referred to by the Italian Marxist political activist Antonio Gramsci in his article *Notes on Italian History* which appeared later on as part of his most widely known book *Prison Notebooks* written between 1929 and 1935 while incarcerated. The subaltern classes refer fundamentally in Gramsci’s words to any “low rank” person or group(s) of people in a particular society suffering under hegemonic domination of a ruling elite class that denies them the basic civil/human rights of participation in the making of local history and culture as active individuals of the same nation.

as a form of subversion among those who seek to confront those in power, and the existing conditions that undergird their access to said power. Instead of searching for, or creating, a final definition of silence, I will focus on a critical inquiry into silence that explores how it can work in a multiple communicative context.

Unpacking the Multiple Modalities of Silence

There is a need to unpack the multiple ways in which silence operates, as Anthony W. Lee points out:

There is silence, and then there is silence. That is to say, not all silences are equal. Or, to put it another way, silence is not merely the absence of sound, not simply the recognition or quality of lack. In fact, silence shifts and changes qualitatively according to our openness and sensitivity to it. (13)

When engaging with the varying forms and functions of silence, a scaffolding allows one to factor in surprising, nuanced that transcend silence as repression. Paulo Freire in his work *Cultural Freedom in Latin America* discussed a “culture of silence.” For Freire, in the culture of silence, the masses are prohibited from their right of self-assertion and self-development. They (the masses) are not allowed to take part in the transformation of their society. In this way, silence is devoid of self-generated agency (2). I want to explore the ways in which silence can be used as subversive action that challenges systemic suppression and oppression (Freire).

In writing about the sociology of power in his pivotal work, *Outline of A Theory of Practice*, Pierre Bourdieu, describes the numerous ways in which ruling classes craft, create and implement hegemony. Not only does the ruling class control the means of production, he argues, they also dominate the way the ideology of national identity is shaped. The prototypical national identity indicates how the nation ought to function, what must be kept silent, and what should be considered normal, sensitive, unimportant or absurd (Gramsci). Bourdieu argues: “The most successful ideological effects are those which have no need of words, but ask no more than a complicitous silence” (188). These “social silences,” which according to Bourdieu can be both “deliberately or involuntarily complicitous” (188), may result from explicit strategies of the ruling class. Gramsci’s treatment of hegemony concluded that in order to consolidate their control, ruling groups must elaborate, celebrate, and maintain a popular system of ideas and practices—through institutions such as education, religion, politics, the media, and religion—which Gramsci labeled as “common sense.” Extending through its production, propagation, and adherence to commonsensical ideologies (set forth by the ruling class) is the notion that a society willingly gives its consent to the way in which it is ruled (Omi and Winant). As it relates to racial ideologies, Michael Omi and Howard Winant remind us:

Racial rule can be understood as a slow and uneven historical process which has moved from dictatorship to democracy, from domination to hegemony. In this transition, hegemonic forms of racial rule—those based on consent—eventually came to supplant those based on coercion. (67)

It is within silence where hegemonic consent is often couched and cultivated. Silence is thus a favored tool of hegemony. In *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*

anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot expounded on discourse formation. Trouillot argued that history never orbits around the objective telling of facts, but instead, it entails a highly-politicized play of power wherein silence is weaponized. Not until we uncover, and unpack the silences of the non-elites, creating a myriad of overlapping counter hegemonic narratives and experiences, can we clutch and uncover the true, complex nature of any given societal occurrence. But such discoveries are discouraged by hegemony; silence serves to sanitize, to suppress or whitewash unrestrained material that is considered damaging to hegemonic rule by labeling it as offensive, off-putting, harmful or divisive. This type of hegemonic silencing can be imposed through coercion, or on the contrary it can be voluntarily ascribed to by the masses— hegemony’s “double-edged sword” (Gramsci). Silencing, by way of hegemony can lead to a *spiral of silence*.

Spiral of Silence

In the 1970s, Elizabeth Noelle-Neumann developed a theory suggesting that the expression and formation of public opinion (Glynn 452) results from people’s perception of its climate (Yun and Park 202). Individuals use a ‘quasi-statistical sense’ to determine whether their opinions are popular or unpopular (Hayes 785). If they perceive that their opinions correspond with the majority, they may be willing to speak out. Alternatively, if they perceive their opinions to be those of the minority, they will keep silent or conform to the majority view (Liu and Fahmy 46).

According to this theory, individuals base their reading of public opinion on a series of cues in their environment, ranging from newspapers and mass media to outspoken opinion formers (Heney 7). Moreover, for Noelle-Neumann, social sanctions play a key role, and silence can occur when opinions concerning topics that are perceived to be controversial and divisive are shared by a few (Neuwirth et al., Heney). In this respect, the spiral of silence is a collective phenomenon, which involves individuals relating their own perspective to those of others (Turner and Sparrow 122). Conversely, when people believe that their opinions are dominant or becoming more popular, they express their convictions openly, outside their circle of family and friends (Jeffries, et al., p. 115). In the end, people may cease to express their views because of the fear of isolation (Moy et al.), thus triggering the creation of a spiral, in which individuals fall silent about their political opinions (Turner and Sparrow 122). Noelle-Neumann’s spiral of silence theory is based on four main principles:

- a) Society threatens individuals with isolation, and so cohesion in the social collective must be constantly ensured by a sufficient level of agreement on values and goals
- b) Individuals fear becoming “social isolates”
- c) People constantly assess the climate of opinion through their personal relationships and through the media in order to maintain a high level of awareness concerning the social consensus.
- d) Based on their perception of the climate of opinion, people will be willing or reluctant to speak out. (258)

In summary, Neumann’s spiral of silence theory’s chief antecedents are hegemonically dominant views and fear of isolation. Survival instinct, as manifest in an anti-dissent society, may be a

more comprehensive conception of that fear. In this case silencing is being used as a weapon. Silencing as a form of power purposefully and un-purposefully, systematically and unsystematically, pervasively and sometimes not, works to buttress a monologue that perpetuates a status quo. In *Tell This Silence: Asian American women writers and the politics of speech* Patti Duncan examines the treatment of silence by both activist and scholars. Duncan states:

Silencing is a means of domination, and access to free speech is often limited. Control of language is a constant and powerful tool in the acts of domination and colonization. Within such political contexts, speaking and its association with writing become crucial for the centering of previously marginalized subjectivities" (15).

Silence appears as a formidable oppressor in the literature of vulnerable peoples—Black women, the colonized, peoples of color—who must escape the treachery of silence in order to wrestle away their liberation and peace from the silencers in their path. Sometimes those with the least access to power and resources have to speak up and talk back.

Shattering Silence

In her text, *Talking Back*, bell hooks challenges the silencing of women generally, and more specifically Black women. Hooks' work elucidates the focus among a variety of feminist upon the endangerments of silence/being silenced, and the importance of resistance. Post acknowledging how debilitating silencing has been for feminists, hooks provides key insight to the multiple modalities in which such silences can manifest. One critical facet of silence is its pervasiveness and existence, even when the silenced are being vocal. hooks notes, the relationship between speech and reception, between vocalization and power, stating:

Unlike the black male preacher whose speech was to be heard, who was to be listened to, whose words were to be remembered, the voices of black women—giving order, making threats, fussing—could be tuned out, could become a kind of background music, audible but not acknowledged as significant speech. (6)

Some speakers are given a heightened sense of respect and reception, as their words, thoughts, suggestions, opinions, challenges and commands are infused with gendered and sexed legitimacy, while others are otherized and are silenced by way of forms of intersectional-illegitimacy. Selectively and intentionally ignoring some speech, and therefore speakers, amounts to a kind of silencing. Those who are not listened to come to realize their subordinate status, and possibly adopt reticence (and those who do not come to understand they are being ignored are nevertheless still ignored and, for all intents and purposes, kept silent). Those who witness the disregard of their words by others (especially by those in power), and who then challenge such silencing, can face another kind of silencing; a disciplinary network of pejorative terms and phrases that label the vocal as somehow troublesome, a tactic used to police the transgressor's return to the windowless box. A clear contemporary example of this occurred with former ESPN journalist and on-air personality, Jemele Hill.

The Angry Black Woman

In October 2017, *ESPN* suspended Jemele Hill for two weeks for tweeting what some would consider inflammatory statements about the network's biggest corporate partner—The National Football League (Bruell par. 1). After the Dallas Cowboys' owner, Jerry Jones, stated that he would bench any of his players who “disrespect the flag” by kneeling during the national anthem, Hill suggested that fans who disagreed with Jones should boycott Cowboys advertisers in order to have their grievances heard (Bruell par.3).

Hill tweeted “Change happens when advertisers are impacted...If you feel strongly about JJ's statement, boycott his advertisers” (@jemelehill). This didn't sit well with the network or, indeed, with the White House. On October 10, 2017, at 3:42 am, Donald Trump attacked her saying in a tweet that, “With Jemele Hill at the mike, it is no wonder ESPN ratings have ‘tanked,’ in fact, tanked so badly it is the talk of the industry” (@realDonaldTrump)! While ESPN's ratings have declined the blame cannot be placed on Jemele Hill. In an October 10, 2017, *Forbes* article aptly titled *Don't Blame Jemele Hill for ESPN's Rating Problems*, staff writer Madeline Berg provides context and clarity to Trump's claim by reporting:

ESPN has experienced falling ratings and subscriber numbers in recent years. Last year, ESPN averaged 1.91 million viewers, or an 11% drop from 2015's 2.15 million. In 2015, the network experienced a 7% drop in viewership from 2014. Ad dollars have reflected this. Sports Center brought in \$408 million for the network between January 2016 and June 2016, and only \$305 million during the same period in 2017. A deeper dive shows the primary causes of this decline are likely cord-cutting²⁸ and increased competition from the Internet — not politics — as people turn away from linear television and to their computers to follow sports, including live events, which now air on Hulu and Amazon (Berg pars. 2-3).

There was something more at play with regards to Trump and his discrediting of Hill that serves as an overarching outlook. In fact, there is a poisonous pattern at play with Trump and his need to discredit Black women that have spoken out against him.

On August 14, 2018, at 4:31 am, Trump tweeted, “When you give a crazed, crying lowlife a break, and give her a job at the White House, I guess it just didn't work out. Good work by General Kelly for quickly firing that dog” (@realDonaldTrump)! This vile verbiage was directed at former White House staffer Omarosa Manigault-Newman. Hill and Manigault-Newman were not the only Black women Trump has attacked via Twitter.

²⁸ Cord cutting refers to the process of cutting expensive cable connections in order to change to a low-cost TV channel subscription through over-the-air (OT) free broadcast through antenna, or over-the-top (OTT) broadcast over the Internet. Cord cutting is a growing trend that is adversely affecting the cable industry.

Netflix, Apple TV and Hulu are some of the popular broadcasting services that encourage cord cutting. The cord cutting concept received a considerable amount of recognition beginning in 2010 as more Internet solutions became available. These broadcasters have convinced millions of cable and satellite subscribers to cut their cords and change to video streaming.

Trump has regularly used Twitter as a platform to maintain his longstanding feud with California Rep. Maxine Waters²⁹, a fierce critic of the Trump administration, tweeting that Waters is “wacky,” “unhinged,” and has a “low IQ” (@realDonaldTrump) after claiming she incited violence during a speech in June 2018. Also, in the tweet, Trump states that Waters, “has just called for harm to supporters, of which there are many, of the Make America Great Again movement. Be careful what you wish for Max” (@realDonaldTrump)! When Trump responded, saying that Waters had called for “harm to supporters” and warning her to “be careful,” because “there are many” in the “Make America Great Again movement,” it also served as a potential threat (as well as a dog whistle Executive Order) that wherever she is in the U.S. there is someone that may be willing to meet her with physical violence, as Trump's past directives have led his supporters to violent action.

At a March 1, 2016, Trump rally in Louisville, Kentucky, three protesters attending the rally were assaulted when Trump directed the crowd to “Get ‘em out of here (McKay par. 14).” Trump supporters did exactly that, with video showing three men (one wearing a “Make America Great Again” hat, another being an admitted white nationalist³⁰) shoving a Black woman named Kashiya Nwanguma out of the crowd.³¹ As Nwanguma was being screamed at, videotaped, and physically assaulted from several directions, the raucously racist crowd cheered, leading Trump to say, “In the old days, which wasn’t so long ago, they would have...” (Mora). Although Trump did not finish his statement, one can only imagine what would have happened in the “old days” at a rally full of white people, supporting a white supremacist leader, when he gave an order to remove an *Angry Black woman* from their space for breaking the silence.

Justifiably angry, in 1918, Mary Turner refused to be silent in the face of white supremacy, as she vocalized her aim of seeking justice for the death of her husband at the hands of a bloodthirsty mob of white supremacists. As reported by the *Anti-Lynching Crusade*³²:

In May, 1918, a white plantation owner in Brooks County, Georgia, got into a quarrel with one of his colored tenants and the tenant killed him. A mob sought to avenge his death but could not find the suspected man. They therefore lynched another colored man named Hayes Turner. His wife, Mary Turner, threatened to have members of the mob arrested. The mob therefore started after her. She fled from home and was found there the next morning. She was in the eighth month of pregnancy but the mob of several hundred took her to a small stream, tied her ankles together and hung her on a tree head downwards. Gasoline was thrown on her clothes and she was set on fire. One of the members of the mob took a knife and

²⁹ A 2018 analysis conducted by the Guardian found that Trump’s criticism of Waters is one of his most sustained political attacks, adding that he has already referred to Waters as having a “low-IQ” at least seven times in 2018.

³⁰ According to court records, Matthew Heimbach, represents the white nationalist Traditionalist Workers Party.

³¹ A Black man was also punched in the face by a white male Trump supporter as a police officer escorted the protesters from the event.

³² The Anti-Lynching Crusaders (ALC), was an all-Black women’s organization, backed by the NAACP, that joined the battle for the Dyer Bill in June 1922. Their slogan “A Million Women United to Stop Lynching” exemplified an ambitious goal to create a nation-wide movement against lynching and white supremacist mob violence.

split her abdomen open so that the unborn child fell from her womb to the ground and the child's head was crushed under the heel of another member of the mob; Mary Turner's body was finally riddled with bullets (White 221).

In 2018, one hundred years after Mary Turner lost her life (and the life of her unborn child) in one of the most ghastly and ungodly ways imaginable, Maxine Waters received multiple death threats, post Trump's tweet, that lead Water's to cancel a series of public appearances in Texas and Alabama. In a statement, on June 29, 2018, Waters explained:

As the President has continued to lie and falsely claim that I encouraged people to assault his supporters, while also offering a veiled threat that I should 'be careful', even more individuals are leaving (threatening) messages and sending hostile mail to my office....There was one very serious death threat made against me...from an individual in Texas which is why my planned speaking engagements in Texas and Alabama were cancelled...This is just one in several very serious threats the United States Capitol Police are investigating in which individuals threatened to shoot, lynch, or cause me serious bodily harm³³ (Killough pars. 3-4).

It should not escape the reader that "Individuals threatened to shoot, lynch, or cause serious bodily harm" to silence Waters, and the convergence of those threats in 2018, were the methods of terror used in the lynching of Mary Turner in 1918.

By speaking out against Trump as a racist and a white supremacist, and breaking the silence, Hill, Manigault-Newman, Waters, and Nwanguma all needed to be discredited, muted and removed, and the way in which this silencing was acted out by Trump evoking and affixing the angry Black woman trope to their voice in an effort to discredit, threaten, and thus silence them. When the stereotype of the angry Black woman is evoked, it characterizes Black women as irrationally angry, hyper-aggressive, verbally abusive, raucous and argumentative. When employed, the stereotype of the angry Black woman is used to discredit Black women's standpoint, render them invisible in an effort to mute their individual and collective voices, and it dismissively couches their concerns as tantrums of emasculating emotions.

This stereotype delegitimizes Black women's justifiable anger in reaction to intersectional inequality based on their race, class and gender. It is used by character assassins, looking to shoot Black women down, who have the audacity to turn a spotlight on social inequality, expose uncomfortable truths and publicly advocate for human rights. Take the reaction from Clay Travis, one of America's most famous sports journalists. On May 22, 2017, at 3:53 pm, Travis tweeted that most sports fans want to "pop a beer & chill" and instead "they got a chick in a feminist t-shirt talking about police shootings" (@ClayTravis). That "chick" that he crudely spoke of is Jemele Hill, and the "police shootings" that he referenced are centered largely on Black males such as Oscar Grant, Michael Brown, Ezell Ford and Tamir Rice. Passionate Black journalists have a history of being silenced in the United States. Ida B. Wells-Barnett reported on the inhumane lynching of black men in the south at the hands of white supremacists. Racists were so upset at her that they burned down the building where she

³³ In response to the reported death threats on Waters' life, Donald Trump tweeted on July 3, 2018, at 3:16 am, that she was "crazy" for her "ranting and raving" about threats of "lynching, shooting, and causing other bodily harm" to her.

produced her newspaper, and threatened to kill her if she ever set foot in the southern part of America (Giddings).

In 2008, conservative pundits cast former First Lady Michelle Obama as an unpatriotic, angry, Black woman when she said that: “Hope is making a comeback and, let me tell you, for the first time in my adult life I am really proud of my country. Not just because Barack is doing well, but I think people are hungry for change” (Thomas par. 1). This was the same year that *The New Yorker* (July 14, 2008) ran with cover depicting a cartooned Michelle Obama as a machine gun-toting, afro-wearing Black woman, playing not only on images of Black Panther Party members, but also on America’s targeted fear of women like Angela Davis and Assata Shakur.

Obama herself suggested that the angry black woman label is rooted in fear (Liptak par. 1). Maybe critics want black women to internalize and muffle their anger because they fear the potential ramifications of them having an opinion. Maybe they fear black women taking the sexist and anti-Black trope of the angry black woman as a loathsome figure and turning her into an agent of change. It was Audre Lorde, who wrote:

My response to racism is anger...Black women are expected to use our anger only in the service of other people’s salvation or learning. But that time is over. My anger has meant pain to me but it has also meant survival, and before I give it up I’m going to be sure that there is something at least as powerful to replace it on the road to clarity (9).

By talking back, Hill refused to be silenced. The act of talking back is a direct form of resistance, an insubmissive speech act that takes place within contexts of power determined to disparage, denigrate and silence, as hooks states:

Moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited, and those who stand and struggle side by side a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and new growth possible. It is that act of speech, of "talking back," that is no mere gesture of empty words, that is the expression of our movement from object to subject—the liberated voice, (*Talking Back* 9)

hooks encourages Black women to talk back unswervingly to those who deem their speech as deriving from invalid standpoints, devoid of legitimacy, dependability, and authority. It is this critical posture that moves one from object to subject, from being defined to defining, hooks continues:

The struggle to end domination, the individual struggle to resist colonization, to move from object to subject, is expressed in the effort to establish the liberatory voice—that way of speaking that is no longer determined by one’s status as object—as oppressed being. That way of speaking is characterized by opposition, by resistance. It demands that paradigms shift—that we learn to talk—to listen—to hear in a new way. (*Talking Back* 15)

What happened to Hill, has been experienced by so many other Black women who courageously used their voice against the double bind that they face under intersectionally oppressive conditions. Communication—speech and silence—involve gravely destructive consequences,

and both, in many cases, end with being silenced (Fry, 48-51). But sometimes being silent is not a form of being silenced and oppressed. Recurrently, “citizens need to agitate for inclusion by using silence to fight silencing (Jungkunz 2).

Silence as Voice, Insubordination, and Empowerment

In his 2011 article *Dismantling Whiteness: Silent Yielding and the Potentiality of Political Suicide*, Vincent Jungkunz focuses on three kinds of “insubordinate silence” available for political contestation: silence for voice, silence as protest and silence as refusal.

Silence for voice is about using insubordinate silence in order to help solve the predicaments associated with being silenced. For the most part, those who advocate voice have focused exclusively upon it as the vehicle for liberation. And, as a correlate, they have directly challenged the prevalence of silence itself (Jungkunz, 7). On the other hand, insubordinate silence for voice, seeks to use silence as a form of empowerment. Instead of exclusively meeting voices that silence with vocal resistance, a careful and tactical deployment of silence might help draw attention to the reality of being silenced and work as a form of discourse that conveys the position that the silencing itself is unacceptable.

Silence as protest is not necessarily a direct response to the phenomenon of being dominated via being silenced. Instead, it is about challenging the ways in which speech itself can be very damaging to individuals and groups. Lisa Block de Behar notes that silent protest can entail ‘a rebellion against the abuse of words’ (6). King-Kok Cheung adds, “Certainly, language can liberate and heal, but it can also distort and hurt; and while silence may smother and obliterate, it can also minister, soothe, and communicate” (114). Silence as protest can be used to resist and call attention to unjust conditions and behaviors. Like silence for voice, silence as protest relies upon the ways in which silence itself can convey important messages.

Another way that silence can be used as a form of insubordination involves silence as an intentional absence or self-exclusion from a given terrain of political contestation and constitution. Silence as a refusal to speak and as a self-imposed absence on certain matters altogether can be a refusal to enter discourse, a refusal of the political as discursive contestation; or it can involve a refusal of a specific discursive construct in order to make ideational space for, or to conserve, another. Kennan Ferguson states, “The very existence of silence thereby becomes a form of resistance, of non-participation in these practices of community building, identity formation and norm setting. Silence, in other words, betokens a rejection of these practices of power” (54). Silence as refusal and resistance is related to the concept of interpellation. Donna Haraway states:

interpellation occurs when a subject, constituted in the very act, recognizes or misrecognizes itself in the address of a discourse. Althusser used the example of the policeman calling out, “Hey, you!” If I turned my head, I am a subject in that discourse of law and order: and so I am subject to a powerful formation’ (50).

Insubordinated silence adds an important layer on modalities of silence, especially when it comes to Black athletes and political protest. Black athletes have a history of protesting America’s governmentally supported and sustained systemic oppressiveness. In the case of Colin Kaepernick—the most recent Black athlete to gain international recognition for protesting

systemic oppression in the United States—I see his protest as not only a convergence of the multiple modalities of silence, but his employment of silence is polyfunctional in its execution, leading to a form of subversive silence.

Subversive Silence

While Kaepernick’s protest has been silent, I would argue that it is important to add the qualifier of subversive to his silence. This allows us to add clarity to the potential ambiguity of the intentionality of his silence. By labeling his silence as subversive, it provides a cogent conceptualization to his inaudible symbolic protest. Additionally, I see it as providing an added layer towards understanding, not only the politics behind his protestation of racialized systemic oppression, but also the ways in which people see his action via the frame of subversion.

Subversion, like terrorism and insurgency, has no universally accepted definition (Spjut, 254). Within American military institutions, the term subversion has different connotations. For the United States Department of Defense, subversive activities are those actions, “designed to undermine the military, economic, psychological, or political strength or morale of a regime,” that do not fall into the categories of “treason, sedition, sabotage, or espionage” (Department of Defense). When thinking about the definitional elasticity of subversion, and a term like terrorism, and thus terrorist, it becomes clear how these concepts are employed depends on who is providing the definition and the intended audience.

For example, I want to be clear about my intended audience. I am writing this dissertation as I remember Erica Garner, and in doing so, I am writing for those like Erica Garner and her father Eric Garner—people who have been affected by the violent and oppressive police presence in their lives.³⁴ As Zeus Leonardo reminds us, “Oppression is best apprehended from the experiences or vantage point of the oppressed.” “Critical analysis,” he explains, “begins from the objective experiences of the oppressed in order to understand the dynamics of structural power relations. It also makes sense to say that it is not in the interest of racially dominated groups to mystify the process of their own dehumanization.” Erica Garner, her father, and the countless Black men and women she dedicated her life to fighting for have experienced trauma associated with interactions of the police. In this way, the Garners were embattled in a war on terror—one in which Black men, women, and children have been systemically and physically terrorized by the police.

Policing units and individuals in authority have terrorized Black people in the United States as far back as the slave patrols and night watches, and continue to the present. Most of those perpetrators have not been publicly or privately punished and are emboldened by a larger society that frames officers as protectors, celebrated for their dedication to keeping law and

³⁴ On July 17, 2014, Eric Garner died in Staten Island, New York, after a New York City Police Department (NYPD) officer put him in a chokehold for about 15 to 19 seconds while arresting him for allegedly selling cigarettes. While being choked to death (NYPD policy prohibits the use of chokeholds) he was recorded saying, “I can’t breathe,” 11 times before his death. Those were Garner’s final words.

Erica Garner is the daughter of Eric Garner. She became an activist after the death of her father. Sadly, after suffering brain damage following a heart attack, Garner passed away, on December 30, 2017, at the age of 27. Her death was announced via her official Twitter account.

order. From the vantage point of those who are policed, however, the police can be seen as terrorists—instituting a system of violence, fear, and terror in Black communities.

Rarely are the systemic usages of violence by the police in Black communities seen as forms of terrorism, but I would argue that this has everything to do with the lack of definitional power afforded to those that have been victims of state sponsored policing.

States have legislative power to define what terrorism is—or is not—and to establish the consequences of those charged with the crime. They have force at their disposal and they can lay claim to the legitimate use of violence in many ways that civilians cannot. In the case of an unarmed Eric Garner, the state declined to indict police officer Daniel Pantaleo, who illegally choked Garner to death (McLaughland).

While “terrorism is a pejorative term,” as Bruce Hoffman asserts, it most aptly describes the violence that Black people encounter at the hands of the police. Eric Garner’s public execution functions as an act of terror with the intention of creating fear— not just with the victim but also among a wider audience that can identify with said victim. Erica Garner was one of these people. These actions are means through which Black people are silenced, prevented from talking back to a system bent on muting any form of critique by any means necessary.

One can only imagine how many times Erica Garner watched the video of her father being choked to death. By her own account, she remembered yelling at the screen when she first saw the footage. She recalled that her “head was spinning” and that she “was hot and throwing up.” Garner openly brought up the mental health issues suffered by family members, broken into pieces as they attempted to pick up the pieces of a broken life, shattered by their loved one’s fatal encounter with the police. She continued by saying that she:

has to literally beg doctors to help me talk to someone professionally, and it’s \$300 an hour. And who got money for that? I’m not rich, and I’m pretty sure that other families are not rich, and can’t afford that...*this is trauma, this is trauma (The Breakfast Club).*

In an interview with Progressive Army³⁵ founder Benjamin Dixon, just three weeks before her passing, Garner again expressed the toll that dealing with being a victim of police terrorism had had on her everyday existence:

I’m struggling right now, with the stress and everything. Because this thing, it beats you down...My father he died, he died on national TV. I had to see him die on national TV. A lot of people don’t get to see their parents die...I felt the same pain that my father felt on that day that he was screaming ‘I can’t breathe.’ When he was saying that he was tired of being harassed, tired of being arrested, his money being stole from him [by the police].

While post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a mental health problem that some people develop after experiencing or witnessing a life-threatening event—such as combat, a natural disaster, a car accident, or sexual assault—victims of police terrorism are rarely documented as

³⁵ Founded in 2015 by Editor in Chief Benjamin Dixon, *Progressive Army* is a rapidly growing online publication that provides an uncensored and unfiltered platform to progressive citizen journalists and elevates the voices of the poor, people of color, and marginalized communities.

“post” the traumatic events that have permanently impacted their mental and physical health. Black people like Erica Garner who resided in hyper-policed spaces are constantly reminded of police power—the source of their trauma—not only by way of their personal experiences but also through the experiences of others. Their trauma, therefore, is perpetual and persistent, never passing and always present.

For those critical of labeling police officers killing unarmed Black folks with impunity as a form of terrorism—as if it is mere hyperbole—consider the testimonials of those who have been terrorized by the police. When Erica Garner spoke of how she was terrified when NYPD officers surrounded her, forcing her out of a courtroom because she had her cellphone in her hand, a convergence of traumas were at play—the death of her father and the experience that she was going through during her own encounter with the police. In contextualizing the encounter Garner said: “Y’all [the police] killed my father, y’all see me, and now y’all wanna harass me...y’all got all these officers here for Eric Garner’s daughter. I felt like I was targeted as soon as I walked into the courtroom.” Erica continued by recounting how the police would follow her in unmarked cars as she protested the death of her father.

Her fears were not exaggerated. As a recent report revealed, police in the United States killed a reported 1,129 people in 2017 alone. Of this number, a quarter of those killed were Black—even though Black people comprise only 13 percent of the population. In addition, Black people are three times as likely to be killed by police as white people (policeviolencereport.org). These grave statistics underscore that the notion of police terrorism is no hyperbole but a reality for Black people in the United States. It’s a reality that Erica Garner endured on a day-to-day basis. It’s a reality that shaped the course of her life. Erica Garner passed away after suffering from cardiac arrest on December 30, 2017 (Levenson par. 1). But make no mistake—the trauma that she had endured as a result of the police unjustly killing her father contributed to her untimely death (Wamsley).

In an article on the official website of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (F.B.I.) entitled, *Terrorism*, citizens are instructed to protect themselves from those that they may suspect as being a terrorist:

1. Remain aware of your surroundings;
2. Refrain from oversharing personal information; and
3. Say something if you see something.

It is extremely difficult for Black folks, and People of Color (POC) to truly follow the advice of the F.B.I. with regard to protecting oneself from people they see as potential terrorist, when the police-terrorist can legally invade their “surroundings,” intimidate them into “oversharing personal information,” and when you, “say something if you see something,” even if you have the terroristic activity caught on video, and shared millions of times on social media—as in the case of Eric Garner for example—you receive no justice.

Black Identity Extremist

As previously stated, terrorism has no universally excepted definition. When the oppressed deflate or take the power away from the oppressor, and define terms for themselves, based on whom they see as a threat, the terrorist is no longer couched in the stereotypical racial projects of the Muslim Jihadist, the Black Gang Banger, or the Mexican Drug Cartel. By taking

control of the language, and creating a counter hegemonic commonsense, it becomes easy to see why Black and Brown folks dealing with the police and *Immigration and Customs Enforcement* (ICE) can rightfully qualify the law enforcement agencies as terrorist organizations. The term “terrorist” is a label that is both normalized and politicized. As Human Rights Law professor Conor Gearty has observed, “governments will often attempt to condemn their opponents as terrorists, since the public relations victory achieved by this linguistic sleight of hand can be crucial in any ensuing struggle for popular support” (15). In a 12-page report, prepared by the *F.B.I. Domestic Terrorism Analysis Unit*, it declared that post the 2014 death of Michael Brown, re-ignited the existence of a “Black Identity Extremist” movement in the United States. Deemed as violent threat by asserting that Black activists’ grievances concerning racialized police violence and inequities in the criminal justice system incited retaliatory violence against law enforcement officers. In the F.B.I. report, prepared by the Domestic Terrorism Analysis Unit, it defines Black Identity Extremist as:

The FBI defines black identity extremists as individuals who seek, wholly or in part, through unlawful acts of force or violence, in response to perceived racism and injustice in American society and some do so in furtherance of establishing a separate black homeland or autonomous black social institutions, communities, or governing organizations within the United States. This desire for physical or psychological separation is typically based on either a religious or political belief system, which is sometimes formed around or includes a belief in racial superiority or supremacy. The mere advocacy of political or social positions, political activism, use of strong rhetoric, or generalized philosophic embrace of violent tactics may not constitute extremism, and may be constitutionally protected. (2)

The use of the vague, yet racially specific term, Black Identity Extremist, as it labels and defines, “autonomous black social institutions, communities, or governing organizations within the United States,” as potential domestic terrorist organizations, based on religious or political beliefs, rooted in combating systemic oppression, and anti-Blackness, is eerily similar to COINTELPRO.

COINTELPRO (an acronym for Counter Intelligence Program) was a series of covert, and often illegal, projects conducted by the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation (F.B.I.) aimed at spying on, infiltrating, discrediting, disrupting, silencing, and destroying domestic organizations and individuals that it considered to be "subversive." According to the F.B.I., "intensified attention under this program should be afforded to the activities of such groups as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Revolutionary Action Movement, the Deacons for Defense and Justice, Congress of Racial Equality, and the Nation of Islam" (Hoover). And while focusing on subversive groups, the Black Panther Party was one of the F.B.I.’s prime targets, the prevention of the subversive individuals from gaining a following was one of COINTELPRO’s primary goals. The program wanted to:

Prevent the RISE OF A “MESSIAH” who could unify, and electrify, the militant black nationalist movement. Malcolm X might have been such a “messiah;” he is the martyr of the movement today. Martin Luther King, Stokely Carmichael and Elijah Muhammed all aspire to this position. Elijah Muhammed is less of a threat

because of his age. King could be a very real contender for this position should he abandon his supposed “obedience” to “white, liberal doctrines” (nonviolence) and embrace black nationalism. Carmichael has the necessary charisma to be a real threat in this way (Hoover par. 3).

In the cases of what the F.B.I. defines as Black Identity Extremist in 2018, and the Black Nationalist that the F.B.I. targeted via COINTELPRO during the Civil Rights and Black Power eras in the United States, the F.B.I. has proven to be fearful of, “autonomous black social institutions, communities, or governing organizations within the United States,” that openly challenge, “systemic white racism,” which is the “central and enduring social structure around which the United States and other modern societies are organized and evolve” that maintains the privilege of the “white’ socially dominant racialized group.”

Systemic Racism Approach

For four centuries, systemic racial oppression and terror has impacted and defined the character and culture of the United States of America. This system of racial oppression, as Joe R. Feagin argues in his book, *Racist America: Roots, Current Realities, and Future Reparations*, was not an accident of history, but created and sustained intentionally by elite white Americans, by way of, major societal institutions that have been thoroughly pervaded by racial framing, ideas, stereotypes, images, emotions, and practices. Feagin appraises America as a fundamentally racist nation. Feagin writes:

The U.S. Constitution, which embraced slavery and imbedded the global racist order in the United States remains the nation’s legal, political, and—to a substantial degree—moral foundation. At no point, has a truly democratic Constitutional Convention been held to replace this document with one created by representatives of all the people, including the great majority of the U.S. population not represented at the 1787 Convention. Moreover, the racist spirit and impact of the original document persist today. Even as they live in, and often maintain a racist system, most white Americans still do not see slavery, legal segregation, or contemporary racism as part of the country’s continuing foundation. At the most, the majority see racist institutions as something in the distant past, something tacked on to a great nation for a short time, and something non-systemic (16).

Feagin continues by outlining what he sees as the key aspects of systemic racism:

1. The patterns of unjust impoverishment and unjust enrichment, and their transmission over time.
2. The resulting vested group interests and the alienating racist relations.
3. The cost and burdens of racism.
4. The important role of white elites.
5. The rationalization of racial oppression in a white-racist framing.
6. The continuing resistance to racism.

For those seeking to subvert systemic racism by resisting the institutional realities and ramifications of racial oppression, it is seen as a core, defining value of America equivalent to capitalism, and democracy, that must be challenged.

Frank Kitson, the counterinsurgency practitioner and theorist, defined subversion with characteristic directness as:

all illegal measures short of the use of armed force taken by one section of the people of a country to overthrow those governing the country at the time, or to force them to do things they do not want to do. (3)

One of the methods of protest that is considered as being subversive is the generation of civil unrest through demonstrations, strikes, and boycotts.

Richard Clutterbuck notes that, fomenting riots, organizing strikes, and staging demonstrations can have a corrosive effect on the power, presence, and capabilities of the state. Such unrest is first and foremost an affront to governmental authority, and the failure to suppress it can have damaging political repercussions for the state by demonstrating that it is incapable of living up to its fundamental responsibility to maintain public order. Such actions are part of a strategy for discrediting, disarming and demoralizing the establishment. Ultimately, whether its Jemele Hill speaking out and naming Donald Trump as a white supremacist, Black Identity Extremist protesting police terrorism in the streets across America, COINTELPRO targeted Black Nationalist Groups, and potential “Black Messiah” figures, or Colin Kaepernick silently protesting police killing unarmed Black and Brown people with virtual impunity, all of these actions are subversive. They are all aiming to upset what they see as a core system of ultimate ends or values upon which the systemic-consensus of the society is built, and that is white supremacy. As Ernest van dan Haag exclaimed in 1955:

In a democracy... incitement to revolution is unlawful and contrary as well to the substantive principles on which the law rests. Revolution would necessarily defy the wishes of the majority and thus not only the governmental principle of legitimacy but also the democratic principle of popular consent (62).

Would it not make sense for Black people to dedicate their energies towards renouncing allegiances to, and undermining the efforts, of a system rooted in anti-Blackness? Silence has proven to be one tool that Black people have employed to subvert the systemically racist system that undergirds American society.

The challenge to those who, for whatever reason, have taken issue with Jemele Hill is to ask yourself: are you upset about what she said, or are you unglued by the fact that an *angry Black woman* had the nerve to say it. Hill had the audacity to talk back to power through Twitter, the same platform used by Trump hate and anti-Blackness. The Twitterverse allows for this cross fertilization, but Black Twitter, a sub-platform has shifted the stakes and leveled the field, as analyzed in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Black Twitter and the Breaking of Silence

On November 3, 2010, I joined Twitter from the perspective of a researcher. I was conducting a digital ethnographic research project as a participant observer investigating everyday social interactions. In some ways, during my early days of tweeting, my views echoed public criticisms of Twitter, depicting it as an egocentric network. For example, in a 2009 *Public Relations Week* editorial Niall Cowley wrote, “Twitter might just serve a very interesting purpose when people start using it correctly to share useful and relevant information, but at the moment it appears to be exhaustively populated with egocentric bores who think we give a crap about their thoughts or opinions” (par. 2). Interestingly, Niall Cowley is now on Twitter as @NiallCowley and his last tweet to date was about a restaurant poster, with a picture of giant hamburger, and the tagline that states, “Stairway to burger heaven.” His tweet read, “Really bad messaging guys” (NiallCowley). While my initial views were not as damning as Cowley, I did tweet that tweeting was, “The process of trying to achieve visibility as an individual in a virtual sea of alternate individuals attempting to jointly achieve the same viral visibility” (LeftSentThis). Although, in many ways I still feel this sentiment, I’ve broadened my views and significantly altered my thinking after travelling to an academic forum on the East Coast.

During the summer of 2013, I worked at *the Annual Martha’s Vineyard Forum: Take Two Aspirin: Race, Place and Health in the 21st Century*, presented by Harvard University’s Charles Hamilton Houston Institute for Race and justice. I sent out an update tweet letting people that follow me know that I was going out of town. I then opted not to tweet during my travels. I did not consider this to be an unreasonable decision, moreover, I did not want to seem as if I was contributing to the egocentrism present in the Twitterverse. But, from a Twitterverse perspective, I was wrong, and missing an alternate way of looking at chronicling my travels. One of the people that initially encouraged me to join Twitter (based upon our offline conversations) reminded me that a lot of my followers (I proudly had approximately 500 followers at the time) had never been to an academic conference. Although they may have heard of Harvard University, and Martha’s Vineyard, they did not *know* anyone who had experienced either of those spaces. Dhiraj Murthy argues that self-presentation is an important aspect of Twitter, and that users of social media spaces/sites such as Twitter, continue to regularly post as the status-updating becomes a meaningful part of their self-identity (1062). I agree with Murthy that for many tweeters, posting tweets serve as a vehicle to their online identity maintenance, but for Twitter Influencers³⁶, sometimes our tweets are more about how we document happenings and the affects on those who are reading said tweets.

As we tweet about our lives, followers are not only learning about the quotidian aspects of our existence by studying the perceived banality of our daily selves, but the tweets can actually be fertile ground for exchange allowing others access into spaces and situations that they normally would not have access to. Additionally, to feel as if one belongs to a community, even when disconnected physically, and connected digitally, allows its members the opportunity to

³⁶ As *Social Media Examiner* notes,

Influencers are the glue of Twitter networks, providing tweet fodder and inspiring passion among followers. Conversations don’t exist without them, and their position within networks is a critical component of their influence. Brand24.com continues by adding, Twitter influencers are experts at engaging audiences on Twitter, and each one is focused on a slightly different topic.

know one another. Strong social ties are forged around experiences and values. Ever evolving communications technologies, such as Twitter allow us to stay in touch even when we are scattered across distant parts of the globe, rendering geographical boundaries increasingly less important (Sergeant and Tagg 2). By reading a tweet that affirms what you feel, what you love, what you hate, when someone tweets that one thing that you thought only you were thinking, it creates an intimacy from a far. As Twitter user Sim91Sima tweeted, “There’s always someone on Black Twitter tweeting what I’m thinking” (Sim91Sima). This shared appreciation from different spaces, in different bodies, living differently, can create a closeness that among strangers is difficult to duplicate in the physical world. In many ways, social media spaces aided in the evolution of the world wide web from being a place where you went predominantly to consume content and information. It became a place where you were an active participant; a dynamic space that was shaped (both intentionally and inadvertently) by your own actions and contributions (Sergeant and Tagg 2). Overtime, Twitter users build and congeal into a real community, with people who have feelings for one another. And in this case, many people consider that community to be, what is commonly known as *Black Twitter*.

What Is Black Twitter

While lecturing in a course that I taught on Black re-presentation in the media, I asked the students in class how they defined Black Twitter. As the students were sitting there silently formulating answers to my question, one of the students laughed and said, “We should be asking you that question. You’re the one that’s a *Twitter-famous* intellectual,” (Student). Myself, and several students in the class found amusement in the exchange, but at the same time the student was serious. Another student asked in a more serious tone, “Really, how do *you* define Black Twitter?” The student then immediately followed-up with a two-part question, “How do you experience it as someone that is extremely visible, who is followed by other extremely visible people on Twitter?” (Student). I was not caught off guard by the questions, but I had not really looked at myself as being an influential member of the Twitterverse³⁷. I don’t say that arrogantly, I say that with an intense sense of responsibility. I took the questions and the task to define Black Twitter seriously. In *The Power of Self-Definition*, Patricia Hill Collins explains how the work and the “power to name one’s own reality” has historically occurred in “safe spaces,” socially constructed sites—churches, community settings, or within the context of written words—where Black folks (specifically Black women) are able to speak freely to one another and question the legitimacy of widely circulated ideology pertaining to their lives. I hold no pretensions to speak for the entire Black Twitterverse, but I do believe that my defining and theorizing the phenomenon/community/movement known as Black Twitter may resonate with others. Again, no one is capable of constructing a definition of Black Twitter that will satisfy all that self-identify as members—here I am feeling like James Baldwin when he said, “I as a Black writer, must in some way represent you. Now, you didn’t elect me, and I didn’t ask for it, but here we are” (Iton 3).

³⁷ While the average Twitter user has 707 followers, I currently have 50,985 followers on Twitter, and my following includes (to name a few) influencers such as Jack Dorsey, co-founder and CEO of Twitter, Grammy Award winning recording artist Chance the Rapper, former NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick, and film director, Ava DuVernay.

Discussions about defining Black Twitter often begin with Farhad Manjoo's think piece *How Black People Use Twitter*. On August 8, 2010, a group of tweets clustered in the West Coast caught the attention of Slate Technology Writer Farad Manjoo. The tweets that sparked Manjoo's interest were under the hashtag #WordsThatLeadToTrouble. According to Manjoo, the "Blacktag" (as he called it) was, "initiated by a young African-American woman in Hollywood, pushed to a wider audience by a black woman in South Africa..." (Manjoo par. 3). The hashtag was tweeted and re-tweeted by hundreds of people in the Twitterverse, primarily concentrated in the United States, with an overwhelming majority of them having profiles with avatars that would indicate that they were Black.

The initial interest in the hashtag #WordsThatLeadToTrouble (it was a trending topic³⁸ in the United States) lead Manjoo to expound on media critic Choire Sicha's piece *What Were Black People Talking About On Twitter Last Night*. Sicha shared that he could not, "keep quiet," about his, "obsession with Late Night Black People Twitter." He continued by adding that his "obsession" was linked to having access to Black people's conversations via various timelines³⁹ and Black hashtags was, "an obsession I know other white people share, because it is awesome" (Sicha par. 1). What kind of late night Black awesomeness was Sicha so obsessed with? Based on the tweets that he singled out, such as, "#UAintHittinItRight if she leaves before you even get the condom off," and "#UAintHittinItRight if I ain't makin' no noise =\." Sicha's thinking speaks directly to bell hooks' concerns: hooks said:

Mass culture is the contemporary location that both publicly declares and perpetuates the idea that there is pleasure to be found in the acknowledgement and enjoyment of racial difference. The commodification of Otherness has been so successful because it is offered as a new delight, more intense, more satisfying than normal ways of doing and feeling. Within commodity culture, ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture (hooks).

At play in both Manjoo and Sicha's think pieces are the ideas of racial difference, Black (Twitter) in juxtaposition to Normal/White (Twitter), designating and reducing Blackness in the Twittersphere to a resource of racialized pleasure. But within Sicha's racialized Twitter lurking, there is another fold—Black sexuality and ideas of promiscuity. The hashtag #UAintHittinItRight, when put in the structure of a sentence and translated, reads as, "You are not fully satisfying your partner sexually." Three out of the four tweets that Sicha profiles assume (based on the avatar) that the women were Black, and they (the three tweets from Black women) were all focused on their sexual experiences. The Black women tweeting within a sex-themed hashtag is not the issue. The issue lies in the fact that of all the hashtags dominated by

³⁸ A trending topic on Twitter refers to a hashtag-driven topic that is immediately popular at a particular time. A hashtag is a keyword or phrase that is preceded with a pound (#) sign, as with #BlackLivesMatter or #MakeAmericaGreatAgain. Trends are determined by an algorithm that monitors hot subjects based on who you follow and where you're located.

³⁹ A timeline displays a stream of tweets from accounts that users have chosen to follow on Twitter. The user may see suggested content powered by a variety of signals. The user has the option to simply observe, reply, retweet, or like a tweet from within the timeline.

Black folk on Twitter, Sicha decided not only to pick ones that were sex-themed, he also sifted through the tweets and singled out Black women. Sicha used tweets that befit Patricia Hill Collins' articulation of the controlling understanding of the "bitch" which constitutes one representation that, "depicts Black women as aggressive, loud, rude, and pushy" (123), while simultaneously evoking the myth of Black female hypersexuality/hyper-availability, which was, "created by men in a white supremacists patriarchy" (hooks 69). The presentation of Black women as "bitches," "is designed to defeminize and demonize them" (Collins 123), while the myth of hypersexuality/hyper-availability has historically been used as a tool to exploit them through means of sexual violence, leaving them with little to no control over what happens to their bodies. In many ways Sicha presented the Black women that he selected and exploited, without their permission, via lurking⁴⁰ in a Twitter hashtag, as being hypersexual/hyper-available, amalgams of the stereotypical lascivious Jezebel, and the rude/overbearing, angry Black Sapphire character, anchoring them as definitional representatives of *how Black People use Twitter*. These well-worn racialized misrepresentations, are why we have to define terms dealing with Blackness for ourselves, or to state it more effectively, "If I didn't define myself for myself, I would be crunched into other people's fantasies for me and eaten alive" (Lorde).

Defining Black Twitter As a Black Twitter Community Member

A general definition of "Black Twitter" can be described as, "a collective of active, primarily African-American Twitter users who have created a virtual community that participates in continuous real-time conversations," (Jones par. 6). But what exactly does this mean? Outside of the use of, "African-American," this definition of Black Twitter does nothing to distinguish itself from Twitter in general. Maybe that was Jones' point, that Black people on Twitter are just doing what everyone else does on Twitter, the only difference is that they are "African-American." But is this the case? Is it more to it than this? Contemporary scholars that study ethnic identity and community argue that the feeling of togetherness, inclusion, and "w-ness" is important in encouraging mental health and wellbeing in black individuals (Keys, 2009; Marama and Velasquez, 2012). Therefore, it is important to analyze the framing of Black Twitter as a community instead of simply an aggregate of users (Daniels, Gregory and Cottom, 2017). Fleshing out and going beyond Jones' definition of Black Twitter requires addressing the question of Black Twitter as an online community.

How we come to understand community can go in several directions. A traditional definition is strongly aligned with the notion of a neighborhood or a village, spaces in which we live where interpersonal ties are locally/geographically bounded (Sundaram et al.). In thinking about my own community, and the neighborhood that I live in, although my neighbors and I live in the same area, shop at the same grocery store, even wash our dirty laundry in the same washing machines located in our apartment complex, we rarely speak, outside of the small talk as we unintentionally cross paths. This real disconnect is why scholars are constantly rethinking what constitutes community. Sociologist Barry Wellman extends the notion of community to

⁴⁰ Lurking is a slang term for when an individual reads a message board without posting or engaging with the community. Lurking is sometimes encouraged by forum moderators as a way for new members to get a sense of the community and etiquette before participating. Lurking also may occur if a user simply wants to get some information without adding to the discussion (www.Techopedia.com)

encompass more general networks of interpersonal ties that provide sociability, support, information, a sense of belonging and social identity, thus, community can also be seen as a feeling of fellowship with others, as a result of sharing common attitudes, interests, and goals (2). Within this second understanding of community, people do not have to have face-to-face interactions, nor are they required to live in the same areas. Historian Benedict Anderson reminds us that a national imagined community is a socially constructed mental image where members “will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion (49).” This understanding of community that moves away from geographically bound membership has been foundational to thinking about community and leads us to virtual/online community formation.

Virtual Community

The concept of community, like all of our lives, is socially constructed. A virtual community has several characteristics that distinguish it from a chance meeting of people who happen to live in the same area. Quentin Jones conceptualized the notion of a virtual community based on the definition of a virtual settlement (the place, or cyber place, where a virtual community forms). He identified four necessary characteristics of a virtual community: interactivity, communicators, a publicly shared mediated communication place and sustained membership (par. 15). Howard Rheingold (for whom the term virtual community is attributed) provides us with a less rigid, and more emotive definition in his book *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*. According to Rheingold, “virtual communities are social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace” (5). Rheingold gives readers a glimpse into how connected he, and others in his virtual community (WELL community) are, as he informs us that:

Since the summer of 1985, for an average of two hours a day, seven days a week, I've been plugging my personal computer into my telephone and making contact with the WELL (Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link)--a computer conferencing system that enables people around the world to carry on public conversations and exchange private electronic mail (e-mail). The idea of a community accessible only via my computer screen sounded cold to me at first, but I learned quickly that people can feel passionately about e-mail and computer conferences. I've become one of them. I care about these people I met through my computer, and I care deeply about the future of the medium that enables us to assemble (xv).

What Rheingold passionately communicates is real human connectivity, despite the lack of face-to-face interactions, which he and his WELL community have built by way of the internet. Not everyone agrees with Rheingold. The debate over the validity of Rheingold's position has raised doubts about the existence of virtual communities and the appropriate use of the term. “Frank Weinreich argues that the idea of virtual communities ‘must be wrong’ because ‘community is a collective of kinship networks which share a common geographic territory, a common history, and a shared value system, usually rooted in a common religion’” (qtd. in Jones 6). Both Rheingold and Weinreich respectively penned their perspectives on the virtual community

during the 1990s, a time that predates Web 2.0, social networking sites, and smartphones. As time has revealed, Rheingold was correct, and Black Twitter is a perfect confirmation.

Black Twitter: Who is A part of the Real-time Tribe

We are now in a moment where Black Twitter is being assessed positively as a vehicle providing Black folk with a platform to produce, promote, and propagate our own narratives, and to (in real time) create a counter narrative to mainstream/historical portrayals of Blackness. 73 percent of Black internet users—and 96% of those ages 18-29—use a social networking site of some kind. Black people have exhibited relatively high levels of Twitter use, 22 percent of Black people online are Twitter users, compared with 16% of online whites. 40 percent of 18-29 year old Black folks who use the internet say that they use Twitter. That is 12 percentage points higher than the comparable figure for young whites, 28 percent of whom are Twitter users (Smith par. 4). According to a Pew Research Center study, *Public Attitudes Toward Political Engagement on Social Media*, published on July 10, 2018, eight out of ten Black people say social media spaces such as Twitter, help shed light on rarely discussed issues (the same share of whites say these sites distract from more important issues). Members of the Black Twitter community circulate and raise awareness on their own terms without waiting for mainstream media outlets to take interest.

Being a part of Black Twitter is more than simply being Black, having a Twitter account, and using it to interact with other Black users, and “Black Twitter does not represent the entirety of Black online presence” (Brock 253). Black Twitter is a community, that many people who are both Black and on Twitter do not fully understand, and do not know how to find it—in many ways, “it’s hidden in plain sight” (Mark Lamont Hill). Jamilah Lemieux echoes this point by noting that she has had, “Black people” ask her about how to find Black Twitter, “people who were writers and editors, who were supposed to be media savvy say, ‘I don’t understand how to get there? Am I there? Am I not there? Some of them were not there. You’re not following the right people and engaging in the right way.’” Researching Black Twitter is not enough to get Black Twitter the community—you have to be in it. And while I agree with Lemieux, in some ways her comment about finding/not finding Black Twitter, does not fit with her earlier statement about Black Twitter being a digital space where we are, “doin’ what we do anytime we get together.” There is a distinction. Some Black people are on the Twitter micro-blogging site but are non-contributors/members of the Black Twitter community.

How Are Black Folk Using Black Twitter

How are Black folk using Twitter? Mikki Kendall correctly states that we use Black Twitter to, “have conversations that, maybe, we don’t feel are happening in mainstream media. And also to have them with our community, because we have to say these things out loud” (Goldenberg par. 7). This is an important point, and one that has led to several moments where Black Twitter as an online community has rallied to secure offline victories for the Black community. In a piece written by Candace King for *NBC News* entitled *Top Ten #BlackTwitter Moments of 2015*, she opens by writing that, “Black Twitter is a movement about reclamation and agenda setting. It is the unapologetic, unfiltered and unabashed recognition of the black experience as it unfolds in real time” (par. 1). This too is an accurate statement. Hashtags like #SayHerName that focused on Black women’s under-acknowledged experiences with various

forms of police terrorism, and #IStandWithMizzou, which focused on showing solidarity with Black students at the University of Missouri as they put pressure on Tim Wolfe, then-president of the University of Missouri system, and R. Bowen Loftin, the outgoing chancellor of the Columbia, Missouri, demanding that Wolfe and Loftin address complaints of racial insensitivity on campus made King's list (12).

Overtime Black Twitter has evolved into a guerrilla journalistic sub-platform, within a larger generic Twitter platform that reports on (amongst many things) anti-Black public crises. The recurring discursive patterns that persist during moments of crisis exhibit several generic characteristics that result from people acting together as a Black Twitter community. For example, in moments of violence and trauma rooted in anti-Blackness of a systemically oppressive nature, users take to the platform to fulfill four specific social functions: 1) attempting to force balance in media representation, oftentimes by way of cultivating a counter narrative 2) forcing forms of accountability to take place by finding and punishing via public correcting and shaming the party that is made guilty for the order's violation; 3) to give every day Black folks agency, and power 4) the ability to grieve, console, laugh and love as a digital diaspora, referring to both the African Diaspora as its connections reach across continents and oceans digitally (Everett).

Black Twitter acts as a space where information is distributed to a wide array of individuals who have actively selected to receive it. But this fundamental norm begs an important question: What constitutes newsworthy information? In many respects, the informational distribution quality of Twitter, which is one of the platforms most indispensable characteristics, is a form of journalism. If journalism is understood as the distribution of "news" across a media platform (television, newspapers, or the internet) to inform an audience, then Twitter is in fact a journalistic channel that has become a key contributor in the production and dissemination of news. As the *American Press Institute* points out:

That value flows from its purpose, to provide people with verified information they can use to make better decisions, and its practices, the most important of which is a systematic process – a discipline of verification – that journalists use to find not just the facts, but also the truth about the facts (par. 3)

Additionally, Black Twitter serves another important function, both for those who participate as members of the Black Twittiverse, as well as society at large. It has morphed into a homeplace for resisting anti-Blackness and overall systemic racism. Because it archives a written and visual record, it's invaluable in disseminating information quickly in times of protest and organizing. Black Twitter also rallies against racial ideologies that operate to normalize the interests of the dominant group. These normative over-generalizations and micro aggressions are often present in Twitter interactions. These moments are blatant and overt acts of resistance to the normative white racial frame (Feagin).

In his book, the *White Racial Frame*, Joe Feagin argues that counter-frames replace existing systems of white dominance with new paradigms. His "critical counter-frame thus incorporates a counter system analysis, one that examines the institutionalized and systemic character of white racial oppression and calls for its replacement with a new social system"

(Feagin 162). Black Twitter contributes to the breaking of both news and silence, as an alternative media ⁴¹ outlet, amplifying oft underrepresented views on what news is news worthy.

In *Why Study the Media?* Roger Silverstone affirms that alternative media, “have created new spaces for alternative voices that provide the focus both for specific community interests as well as for the contrary and the subversive” (Silverstone 103). In his 2017 text, *Journey Into Social Activism: Qualitative Approaches*, Joshua D. Atkinson expresses the importance of alternative media within social movements by declaring:

Alternative media constitute the lifeblood of modern social activism. Alternative media serve as the backdrop against which activists engage in protest and resistance. Alternative media (particularly interactive forms of alternative media) are often the connective lines of communication upon which networks are built. Alternative media aid in the formation of activists’ political identity, oftentimes by way of taking part in the production process; the production of alternative media constitutes an action that solidifies critical worldviews and makes them more concrete for the activists (Atkinson 173).

“The purpose of journalism,” writes by Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel in *The Elements of Journalism*, “is not defined by technology, nor by journalists or the techniques they employ.” Rather, “the principles and purpose of journalism are defined by something more basic: the function news plays in the lives of people.” News is that part of communication that keeps us informed of the changing events, issues, and characters in the world outside. Though it may be interesting or even entertaining, the foremost value of news is as a utility to empower the informed. The purpose of journalism is thus to provide citizens with the information they need to make the best possible decisions about their lives, their communities, their societies, and their governments (“The journalist as the ‘committed observer’”). In arguing for social change alternative media, journalism and journalist may then be understood not only as producing instrumental discourses/of instrumentality (theoretical, expository, organizational) to provoke change, they are able to enact social change through their own means of production, which are themselves positioned in relation to the dominant means of production.

Atton asserts that:

The alternative media employ methods of production and distribution, allied to an activist philosophy of creating ‘information for action’ timeously and rapidly. As such, they are able to deal with emerging issues. It is in the nature of such media to have these emerging issues at their very heart, since it is in the nature of activism to respond to social issues as they emerge. (6)

⁴¹ Alternative media are media that differ from established or dominant types of media in terms of their content, production, or distribution. Chris Atton, lecturer and scholar of alternative media states that the primary aim of alternative media is social and political action, "to change towards a more equitable social, cultural and economic whole in which the individual is not reduced to an object... but is able to find fulfillment as a total human being" (52).

Putting Black Twitter in conversation with concepts pushed forward by sociologist Elijah Anderson, the Black Twittersverse can be seen as a “Black space⁴²” of alternative media production, that creates and circulates counter-hegemonic narratives and news, combating (and making news of) “nigger moments⁴³,” or moments of acute disrespect based on one’s Blackness, which is oftentimes framed through the white gaze as being synonymous with being from the “iconic ghetto⁴⁴.” The iconic ghettoization of Blackness, serves as a “master status” in American life. The, “stereotypical image of the ghetto works to define the Black body as a powerful symbol in American culture — the iconic Negro” (5). Disproportionately, the iconic Negro/Nigga are the victims of fatal forms of police terrorism, as *Mapping Police Violence* reports, police in the United States killed 1,147 people in 2017. Black people were 25 percent of those killed despite being only 13 percent of the population—and these killings are executed with virtual impunity. Unfortunately, this macabre phenomenon is nothing new. In Huey P. Newton’s book *Revolutionary Suicide*, he explains that:

A son is murdered by the police, and nothing is done. The institutions send the victim’s family on a merry-go-round, going from one agency to another, until they wear out and give up. This is a very effective way to beat down poor and oppressed people, who do not have the time to prosecute their cases. Time is money to poor people. (69)

This lack of police accountability and the denial of justice is echoed by imprisoned journalist/activist Mumia Abu-Jamal, who brings the media into the conversation, and their corroboration with law enforcements framing of police violence on Black bodies. Jamal’s observations lead him to recognizing a pattern where:

A video is released, and at least initially, public sympathy flows to the beaten figure on the bottom. Before long, however, the official narrative takes hold: the beaten was belligerent, combative, resisted arrest, or, worst of all on drugs! (118)

In this particular case Abu-Jamal was referring to the March 3, 1991, incident where four Los Angeles Police Department officers were savagely tazing, kicking, and hitting Rodney King with their batons upwards of 53 times, during his arrest for speeding on California State Route 210. The incident was recorded by bystander George Holiday, who tapped the beating from across the street on “March 3, 1991. The Rodney King beating caught on tape” was one of the first police brutality videos of its kind. Jamal continues, explaining that, “Until people began seeing actual

⁴² The people inhabiting “black space” are not always African Americans, but may be also classified as African, Latino, Haitian, Caribbean, Cape Verdean, and so on.

⁴³ Anderson defines a “nigger moment” as “a moment of acute disrespect based on their blackness. Such moments vary in intensity, ranging from incidents they consider to be minor to those they know to be major.”

⁴⁴ In sociology, a “master status” refers to a facet of identity that serves as the primary identifying characteristic of a person. The iconic ghetto acts as a “master status” in American life, superseding whatever else a black person might claim to be. This stereotypical image of the ghetto works to define the black body as a powerful symbol in American culture — the iconic Negro.

footage of police in action, the police and the media were able to play down reports of beatings and abuse” (119). Abu-Jamal concluded that times are different, largely due to the, “age of social media, we become witnesses to the intolerable fact that police beat who they want, and shoot who they want, simply because they can” (119). I would add that social media is not just a space where witnessing police brutality takes place, but social media communities like Black Twitter are the primary creators and curators of this corrupt-cop content. Black Twitter is an alternative media outlet that not only shapes what becomes breaking news, and thusly, what is in fact news worthy, but it also is a force that keeps stories breathing, alive and in the public eye, that traditional media would rather suffocate, and have die a quiet death in the mainstream media cycle. An example of this can be seen via the protest of former National Football League (NFL) player, Colin Kaepernick.

Kaepernick Protest

Social media provides a front row seat to the Black communities protest against systemic oppression and Black Twitter community members, many times served as the journalistic voices, videographers, photographers, and reporters that were live on the scene. Black athletes are prominent members of the Black Twitter community due to their large following(s) on social media, and access to larger platforms outside of social media such as *ESPN*, *FOX Sports*, and *Sports Illustrated*. The unique place that professional sports hold in American culture means that, with Twitter, Black athletes have another platform and potential to address a large segment of the public across the political and racial spectrum. In no way was this more evident than the ongoing protest by Colin Kaepernick.

On August 14th, 2016, during the first of three preseason games for the San Francisco 49ers, quarterback Colin Kaepernick silently sat during the playing of the *Star Spangled Banner* prior to the start of the game as a form of personal protest. On August 20th, 2016, Kaepernick made the same choice. His protest first became a public issue on August 26th, after a photograph of the pregame sideline was tweeted by San Francisco 49ers beat writer, Jennifer Chan.



Following the August 26th game, in an exclusive interview with Steve Wyche of NFL.com, Kaepernick was asked about his motivation for sitting during the national anthem, to which Kaepernick said:

“I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses Black people and people of color...To me this is bigger than football and it would be selfish on my part to look the other way” (Wyche 3).

This moment came at a highly volatile time in America’s history of police terrorizing Black people. According to data collected in 2016, by *The Counted Project*, Black males aged 15-34 were nine times more likely than other Americans to be killed by law enforcement officers, they were also killed at four times the rate of young white men (2). Through the summer of 2016 leading up to the 2016-2017 NFL season, Police officers and Black folks confronted one another multiple times across different metropolitan locations. The two most prominent clashes came in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, on July 5, 2016, when an unarmed Alton Sterling was executed by police outside of a convenience store; and in Falcon Heights, Minnesota, on July 6, 2016, when Philando Castile was shot and killed by police during a routine traffic stop, in front of his partner and his daughter.

Soon after Kaepernick decided to sit during the national anthem a wave of analysis, backlash, and support grew. At the same time Kaepernick’s 49ers jersey became both the best-selling jersey in the NFL, and the one that some 49ers fans decided to burn (Heitner, 2016; Boren, 2016). The story gained attention far beyond the newspapers and sports blogs of the nation. Around the United States, both the pundits and the public debated the situation, intervening with everything from tweets and *hot takes*⁴⁵, to the careful considerations of long form journalism. The case seemed unusually polarizing, with critics and supporters rapidly choosing sides. Predictably, there was a lot of support from the Black community in the corner of Kaepernick, yet some of his most vehemently vocal detractors defaming his protest, and his character were highly visible Black men on television.

Not All Skinfolk Is Kinfolk

When Zora Neale Hurston wrote that, “All my skinfolk ain't kinfolk,” it could easily be attributed to Black folks caught in the clutches of a colonized mind, suffering from internalized white racism, echoing W.E.B. Du Bois, “peculiar sensation,” of double-consciousness, as a “sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the

⁴⁵ According to Merriam-Webster dictionary, a *hot take* is a published reaction or analysis of a recent news event that, often because of its time-sensitive nature, doesn't offer much in the way of deep reflection. An example of a hot take would be when ESPN’s Stephen A. Smith, on April 17, 2018, gave the hot take that Donald Trump and Colin Kaepernick are of the same ilk, stating that, "Here you have a white billionaire who wanted to be part of the league and couldn't get in! Colin Kaepernick couldn't get back in!" This particular hot take lead Twitter user @ChocnessMonster to call Stephen A. Smith, “Sunken A. Smith.” The “Sunken” reference is a play on the fictional *sunken place*, popularized by the film *Get Out*. The film’s writer-director Jordan Peele tweeted that, “The Sunken Place means we're marginalized. No matter how hard we scream, the system silences us.”

tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (Du Bois 3). Stuart Hall refers to internalized racism as one of the most common and understudied features of racism. He defines internalized racism as, “the ‘subjection’ of the victims of racism to the mystifications of the very racist ideology which imprison and define them” (Hall 26). In the case of the Anti-Kaepernick Black television pundits/personalities, there seems to be, “psychic costs of internalized racial oppression defined as the individual inculcation of the racist stereotypes, values, images, and ideologies perpetuated by the White dominant society,” surrounding Kaepernick’s protest, “leading to feelings of self-doubt, disgust, and disrespect for one’s race and/or oneself” (Pyke 553). To further delve into this phenomenon, I will focus on *Entertainment and Sports Programming Network’s (ESPN)* Stephen A. Smith, and *FOX News Channel Sports 1* Jason Whitlock. Smith and Whitlock are among the most prominent Black personalities in sports media today. Both television sports commentators represent moderate to conservative voices with a pro-status quo outlook, particularly regarding their attitudes towards Black athletes and Black activism.

Stephen A. Smith

“Of all Americans, Negroes distrust politicians most, or, more accurately, they have been best trained to expect nothing from them; more than other Americans, they are always aware of the enormous gap between election promises and their daily lives.” (Baldwin 73)

Colin Kaepernick is not a novelty. Far from an anomaly, the 49ers quarterback is part of a storied history of Black political protest. From refusing to stand for the National Anthem, to exercising his right not to vote, Kaepernick’s actions are part of the lineage of skepticism over mainstream politics in the United States. Black skepticism, however, should not be read as lack of interest in politics, but rather a struggle to expand what is meant by politics. Black skepticism says that if voting is the only way to be political, then we’re in trouble.

Colin Kaepernick is part of a tradition that predates the *Star-Spangled Banner*, the song that became the United States of America’s National Anthem in 1931, and the ratification of the 15th Amendment, which enfranchised Black men. Black people have been fighting for the human right to be free since the first Africans were captured and brought to the North American colony of Jamestown, Virginia, in 1619. From rebellions on slavers like the Amistad, to something as seemingly innocent as learning to read. Black people were fighting against systems of oppression and oppressors for the right to be free.

So, no, Colin Kaepernick is not a novelty. And Just as George Wilson and Joe LaRoche — who opposed Denmark Vesey’s planned 1822 uprising (which would have the largest Black revolt in American history) were willing to side with the master class at the expense of those willing to fight for their freedom — not all Black people rebel against systemic forms of oppression in this country.

Do not misread me. I am not suggesting that Colin Kaepernick is the Denmark Vesey of our generation. What I am arguing is that there are Black people in 2018 that think the United States treats all of its citizens fairly, regardless of race, class and gender.

So, what does all of this have to do with Stephen A. Smith?

On August 29, 2016, Stephen A. Smith took to his televisual platform on ESPN's ⁴⁶ *First Take* and spoke in support of Colin Kaepernick's right to protest, noting that Kaepernick "personified what a protest is supposed to be." Smith showed concern for Kaepernick, noting that, "Colin Kaepernick may suffer because of this." He added, "There's a difference between bringing attention to something, and sacrificing. And I'm telling you right now, when you look at what Colin Kaepernick did, this was a sacrifice." Worried about the impact of Kaepernick's protest that effectively brought attention to violence against Black people by the police, Smith went on to further express his concerns about the potential effects of his stance, saying that:

The reason I don't love it is because he's opened the floodgates of being scrutinized for his intent ... Colin Kaepernick, even though I don't question it, there are those cynics out there who will bring into question the motivation behind all of this. Because he's coming off a subpar year. They're talking about how his skills have dissipated ... So now because of those cynics who may not like what he did, they'll use those other things on the field as an excuse. That's why I didn't love it so much. Because he's in a vulnerable position (Smith).

Smith anticipated the acrimonious cynicism and backlash that Colin Kaepernick would face as he continued his steadfast stance against systemic oppression/oppressors. Smith also used his multiple-media platforms (television, radio, and social media), playing the role of pied piper⁴⁷ to publicly persecute Kaepernick, leveling vicious attacks on his political choices, player performance and all around personhood.

During the post-election day broadcast of ESPN's "First Take," Smith weighed in on the results of the 2016 presidential election, reflectively noting that, "We all know if we're looking at the election here, it's undeniable that you had a whole bunch of white folks who came out and voted for Donald Trump. Certainly, he did better in the Black community than was anticipated ...". According to *NBC Exit Polls*, Donald Trump performed better than Mitt Romney among Black voters, claiming 8 percent of the vote in the 2016 presidential election, as opposed to Romney's 6 percent (par. 3). Barack Obama, the first Black president, carried 93 percent of the Black vote against Romney in 2012. Hillary Clinton came in five points below Obama (with regard to Black voter support) against Trump. One obvious factor that contributed to this uptick in Black votes shifting from the Democratic Party to the Republican Party is the lack of a Black candidate running for president. While this news may have been alarming to many people paying attention to the inflammatory racialized rhetoric repeatedly employed by Trump, this modest spike in Black support for Trump should come as no shock to Smith. Since at least 2010, Smith has publicly urged the Black community to vote for a Republican presidential candidate.

In a 2015 *Cable News Network (CNN)* interview, Smith specified that the Black community should vote for the Republican presidential candidate in the 2016 election between Trump and Clinton. Smith also added that:

⁴⁶ ESPN (originally an initialism for Entertainment and Sports Programming Network) is a U.S.-based global pay television sports channel owned by ESPN Inc., a joint venture owned by The Walt Disney Company (80%) and Hearst Communications (20%).

⁴⁷ Pied Piper—1: one that offers strong but delusive enticements 2: a leader who makes impossible promises 3: a charismatic person who attracts followers

When I'm talking to Black folks, and I'm thinking about what's in the best interest of the Black community, it's because you are suffering. The country could be prospering, but if Black folks have nothing to show for it ... if Black folks are suffering, and we have been suffering for decades, upon decades, upon decades, and we've tried something, one thing after another, and it's the same thing happening over, and, over, and over again, and it's not reaping any results, then what do you expect somebody to do? You're going to address it with the fervor, directness, and candor that it deserves (Smith).

Smith was urging "Black folks," by voting with the Republican Party, to avoid being predictable to address the systemic suffering taking place in Black communities. Systemic oppression takes on many forms, but one of the issues that the Black community was bringing global attention to while Smith was making that speech was fatal forms of police-induced violence on Black citizens.

When Smith was talking to "Black folks" in 2015, young Black men were nine times more likely than other Americans to be killed by police officers. Despite making up only 2 percent of the total US population, Black males between the ages of 15 and 34 comprised more than 15 percent of all deaths logged in 2015 by an ongoing investigation into the use of deadly force by police. Their rate of police-involved deaths was five times higher than for white men of the same age (Swaine and McCarthy par. 2).

The "Black folks" that were "suffering" systemic oppression, by way of fatal forms of police brutality in 2015, was a continuation of the terroristic policing of "Black folks" that has been going on, undisturbed, since its slave patrols roots. As Smith asked, "What do you expect somebody to do?"

Why, then, was Smith perplexed on November 9, 2016, when he said on live television that, "We thought no way in hell would Black folks vote for Donald Trump." In truth, based on Smith's previous assertions, one would have expected him to proudly poke out his chest, as a practice of peacockery, and not only say that he predicted an uptick in Black folks voting with the GOP, but he also encouraged it, and Black America listened to him, and answered his call.

If Smith felt like Trump supporters had the right to vote for "whoever the hell they want, with no explanation required to any of us," and that when faced with the prospect of Americans being mandated to vote, he spoke of citizens' freedoms to participate as voters, making their voices "heard," or to flex their rights as citizens and exercise their "freedom not to speak," and avoid (for whatever reason) voting. In light of all these claims, how could Smith be so upset with Colin Kaepernick deciding not to vote in the 2016 presidential election?

Smith said copious incendiary things about Kaepernick not voting that contradicted his stances on everything from Trump supporters having the right to do whatever they wanted to do during the election "with no explanation required to any of us," to citizens having the right to avoid the polls during the election, devoid of scrutiny, because American citizens are not mandated to vote, to feeling empathy towards Kaepernick's "vulnerable position," because there are "cynics out there" that would "question the motivations" behind his protest. Smith lead the charge against the man that he has called "a flaming hypocrite" that can "go to hell" for his consistent, though not always popular, informed protest against systemic oppression, and the oppressors who reinforce it.

Hypocrites feel entitled to point out (or invent) the most minor mistakes in others — and they will point them out repeatedly, to negate, conceal and excuse all of their own horrible

actions. So, for example, when Smith exclaimed that, “Colin Kaepernick is absolutely irrelevant,” on November 9, 2016, and that he did not want to “hear a damn word about anything that he has to say,” he became his own worst enemy.

He continued his hypocritical tirade by “personally making a request, to the media in this nation” to avoid talking about Colin Kaepernick, outside of the context of football, but then proceeded to not only talk about him later on during his nationally syndicated radio show, and he then tweeted about it to his 3.9 million followers. The next day, Smith came on television, radio and as *ESPN’s “First Take’s”* Twitter page and tweeted out to its 1 million followers: “@StephenASmith is doubling down on his criticism of Colin Kaepernick’s decision not to vote (FirstTake, 2016). Stephen A. Smith is wrong, but he is not alone.

On November 21, 2016, in response to Kaepernick not voting, a veteran *Los Angeles Times* political columnist took to his platform to echo Smith’s hot take by saying that, “Kaepernick is the classic hypocrite. And a bad role model. He hasn’t been connecting the dots between griping and voting to fix what he’s griping about” (Skelton par. 8). However, there was also a legion of Black Twitter members that echoed Kaepernick’s sentiments about the utility of voting.

The truth is that every American citizen, based on the 15th and 19th Amendments, should have the right to vote, but no citizen is obliged to do so. As Yale law professor Stephen Carter reminds us,

Participation in governance might be said to be obligatory, but voting is only one form of participation, perhaps not the most important one. Democracy at its best rests on a thoughtful, reflective dialogue among the citizenry. It’s the dialogue, not the vote, that matters most ... trying to shame people into voting isn’t just creepy — it’s wrong. It seeks to deny the individual the basic liberal freedom to choose his or her own version of the good life (Carter).

Vote shaming veiled as patriotism relegates the citizen refusing to vote as ignorant and un-American when, in fact, the decision not to vote should also be interpreted as an actively informed political choice to not support candidates that one deems unfit to leading this nation. W.E.B. Dubois penned a piece for *The Nation* in 1956:

I shall not go to the polls. I have not registered. I believe that democracy has so far disappeared in the United States that no ‘two evils’ exist. There is but one evil party with two names, and it will be elected despite all I can do or say (DuBois par. 4).

Would the Stephen A. Smiths of the world have the unmitigated gall to say that Dubois was ill informed, ignorant or un-American? Would the Stephen A. Smiths of the world have an issue with Malcolm X, during his April 3, 1964, speech “The Ballot or the Bullet,” when he said, “I’m not anti-Democrat, I’m not anti-Republican, I’m not anti-anything. I’m just questioning their sincerity and some of the strategy that they’ve been using on our people by promising them promises that they don’t intend to keep.” Malcolm continued by urging the Black community, “Don’t be throwing out any ballots. A ballot is like a bullet. You don’t throw your ballots until you see a target, and if that target is not within your reach, keep your ballot in your pocket” (X par. 20).

Did DuBois and Malcolm X have no right to discuss politics because they exercised their

right not to vote? Is all of the work that both DuBois and Malcolm X did on behalf of Black folks throughout the diaspora dismissible? All systems of oppression not thoroughly coerced through brute force and overt repression involve the dominant group's ability to win consent of the oppressed. Again, relying on a Gramscian conceptualization of cultural hegemony to understand the process by which the ruling class attains consensus of subordinated groups. The dominant group controls the construction of reality through the production of ideologies or "knowledge" (Foucault) that circulate throughout society where they inform social norms, organizational practices, bureaucratic procedures, and commonsense knowledge. In this way the interests of the oppressors are presented as reflecting everyone's best interests, thereby getting oppressed groups to accept the dominant group's interests as their own and minimize conflict (Pyke 529).

Questions surrounding Smith and his criticisms leveled against Black people protesting systemic oppression in America have not escaped Black Twitter (something that I will flesh out later in this chapter), as members have berated him for his views on Kaepernick, and his views expressed under the Twitter hashtag #BlackLivesMatter. Smith's constant condemnation on Black protest movements in the age of Black Twitter is something that he, and Whitlock, have in common.

Jason Whitlock

In his study of Jewish "Self-Hatred," Sander Gilman describes how ideologies win compliance by inspiring a desire among the subjugated to be like the oppressors. He uses the example of the liberal myth that social categories marking difference, such as race and ethnicity, are mutable and all can join the powerful if they abide by the rules and behave like the dominant group (2–5). The more the subjugated identify with the powerful, the more they accept the ruling values and structural arrangements that keep them down. Gilman calls this a classic double bind situation. The empty promise that the oppressed can escape their "otherness" by shunning their difference lures them into supporting the very rules that define them into existence as the "other"—as those who are not allowed to share power. "Become like us and you will be accepted into our group" (2). But they never are (Pyke). In the case of Jason Whitlock, his internalized racism has reared its ugly head by way of mimicking the right-wing rhetoric of the news network that he works for—FOX.

Post Kaepernick peacefully protesting by kneeling during the pregame playing of the Star Spangled Banner, bringing attention to the multifaceted ills of systemic oppression, one of which being police terrorism, Whitlock suggested in the *Wall Street Journal*, that Kaepernick isn't Black enough to protest and tweeted a picture of himself standing in a red apron with someone dressed as Kaepernick holding up a black-fisted glove, wearing an afro-wig, and black paint on his face in the form of a beard, and mockingly dubbed Kaepernick, live on television, "Martin Luther Cornrow" (WhitlockJason).

This racialized ridiculing by Whitlock sounds similar to former Selma, Alabama mayor, Joseph Smitherman, in 1965, when he called Martin Luther King Jr. "Martin Luther Coon." (*Eyes on the Prize*) The reasoning behind both attacks were similar, they both were born of disdain, as Whitlock and Smitherman were belittling Kaepernick and King for protesting racialized systemic oppression. Within psychological investigations, internalized racism refers to the permeation of racism into the psyche, and it is disturbingly clear that the internalization of anti-Blackness resides in Whitlock.

Misogynoir (a portmanteau that combines "misogyny" and the French word for black,

“noir”) is a term coined by Black feminist scholar and Northeastern University professor Moya Bailey. In 2008 (and popularized via Black Twitter), to lend definition to the specific ways in which racism and misogyny converge in an effort to oppress Black women. Whitlock’s anti-Blackness includes his exhibiting misogynoiristic vitriolic viewpoints, specifically lobbed in the direction of Serena Williams. In her piece titled *4 Tired Tropes That Perfectly Explain What Misogynoir Is – And How You Can Stop It*, Kesiena Boom identifies tropes “pervasively woven into popular media, which contribute to making society a more hostile place for Black women”:

1. Sassy Black woman
2. Hypersexual Jezebel
3. Angry Black woman
4. Strong Black woman (pars. 16 - 51)

In the case of Whitlock and his history of publicly attacking Serena Williams, he has converged the four aforementioned tropes of misogynistic anti-Blackness into one body (in which he has shamed on several occasions). In a 2009 *FOX Sports* article, Whitlock’s critique of Williams included labeling her as an “under achiever,” lacking in “courage,” and that she would, “rather eat, half-ass her way through non-major tournaments,” while, “bitching on Twitter...complain[ing] she's not getting the respect.” When describing Williams’ eating, Whitlock said that she was, “grazing in her stall,” like an animal, and that her eating was the cause of, “her size 16 shorts.” “With a little less butt,” Whitlock argued she could possibly be accepted by the mainstream media like “Michael Jackson, Tiger Woods, and Rosa Parks.” He continued by saying that, “appearance matters in televised sports,” and that Serena has forsaken her “genetic,” gifts that, “God gave her,” by smothering her body, “in an unsightly layer of thick, muscled blubber” (pars. 4-12). In a later article for FOX Sports, Whitlock exclaims that:

No one should ever...apologize for disliking Serena Williams, or for pointing out her lack of class... Her critics cannot and should not be dismissed as ignorant and insensitive bigots. Even if their perspective is fueled by their racial biases, it does not mean all of their criticisms of the world’s No. 1 player are inaccurate. (pars. 7-9)

Whitlock is not alone in his repugnantly misogynistic rendering of Williams. On June 5, 2001, sportscaster Sid Rosenberg said that Serena, and her sister Venus Williams were too masculine looking, and found it “disgusting” to watch them because, “they’re just too muscular. They’re boys.” Rosenberg continued his racist rant by saying Venus Williams was an “animal” and that she and Serena Williams would fit better posing for National Geographic magazine than for Playboy” (pars. 3-5). He later told the Daily News that his comments weren't racist, “just zoological”(Hinckley par. 2)

Scholar David Leonard compiled the following tweets, which he recorded after Williams won her fifth Wimbledon title in 2012, in his article, *Serena Williams: Ain't I a Champion?*, arguing that Williams faced racism from the media and fans alike:

- Today a giant gorilla escaped the zoo and won the women’s title at Wimbledon... oh that was Serena Williams? My mistake.
- Serena Williams is a gorilla

- Watching tennis and listening to dad talk about how Serena Williams looks like gorilla from the mist
- I don't see how in the hell men find Serena Williams attractive?! She looks like a male gorilla in a dress, just saying!
- You might as well just bang a gorilla if you're going to bang Serena Williams
- Earlier this week I said that all female tennis players were good looking. I was clearly mistaken: The Gorilla aka Serena Williams.
- Serena Williams looks like a gorilla
- Serena Williams is half man, half gorilla! I'm sure of it.
- Serena Williams look like a man with tits, its only when she wears weave she looks female tbh, what a HENCH BOLD GORILLA!
- Serena Williams is a gorilla in a skirt playing tennis #Wimbledon
- My god Serena Williams is ugly!
- She's built like a silver backed #Gorilla (Leonard, pars. 3-7).

It is the guerilla journalism and counter narrative construction taking place and virializing within (though not exclusively) the Black Twitter community that the defense of Serena Williams and Kaepernick when Whitlock's ESPN/Fox Sports supported and funded anti-Black racist rhetoric rises, and rears its ugly head. It is the Black Twitter community that unapologetically admonishes Stephen A. Smith when he tweeted in a clip of his *hot take* that he believes Kaepernick, "loves the fact that he has been martyred," and that, "he [Kaepernick] is enjoying," being forced out of the N.F.L. for the stance that he took against systemic oppression (@StephenASmith). It was Black Twitter members that added context to Smith's attack by posting a picture of himself and former Milwaukee Sheriff David Clarke, who on FOX News, trumped up the anti-Black trope of Black athletes being, "dumb jocks, (Fox News)" and that activists speaking out against police terrorism are the "enemy" of America (Beckett 2016). By doing such work, Black Twitter as a community, were in real-time defending, both Williams and Kaepernick with facts and Black love.

In an excerpt from *Outlaw Culture*, bell hooks proposes an, "ethic of love," as the means by which we might guide our Blackness and political-self; thus, steering us away from succumbing to the social-self mutilating nature of internalized racism:

In this society, there is no powerful discourse on love emerging either from politically progressive radicals or from the Left. The absence of a sustained focus on love in progressive circles arises from a collective failure to acknowledge the needs of the spirit and an over-determined emphasis on material concerns. Without love, our efforts to liberate ourselves, and our world community from oppression and exploitation are doomed. As long as we refuse to address fully the place of love in struggles for liberation we will not be able to create a culture of conversion where there is a mass turning away from an ethic of domination. Without an ethic of love shaping the direction of our political vision and our radical aspirations, we are often seduced, in one way or the other, into continued allegiance to systems of domination—imperialism, sexism, racism, and classism (hooks par. 2).

Echoing the call by hooks, Kaepernick reminded all that were willing to listen, that "love is at the root of our [Black folks] resistance" (Kaepernick), to systemic oppression. In his 2018

acceptance for the Amnesty International Ambassador of Consciousness Award, Kaepernick gave further fleshing of his placing love at the center of Black resistance, saying that Black love can, “sometimes manifests as Black-rage,” serving as, “a beautiful form of defiance against a system that seeks to suppress our humanity--A system that wants us to hate ourselves.” He continued this thought by saying:

It is our love for 12-year-old Tamir Rice, who was gunned down by the police in less than two seconds that will not allow us to bury our anger. It is our love for Philando Castille, who was executed in front of his partner and his daughter, that keeps the people fighting back. It is our love for Stephon Clark, who was lynched in his grandma’s backyard that will not allow us to stop until we achieve liberation for our people. (Kaepernick)

Concluding his placement of love at the root of Black resistance, he reminded the audience that:

Our love is not an individualized love—it is a collective love. A collective love that is constantly combating collective forms of racialized hate. Chattel slavery, Jim Crow, New Jim Crow, massive plantations, mass incarcerations, slave patrols, police patrols, we as a collective, since the colonization of the Americas have been combating collective forms of systemic racialized hate and oppression. (Kaepernick)

Bringing into the conversation that Black resistance, rooted in Black love, is often times in response to Black pain, and how the Black community deals with it as a collective.

Black Twitter: Communal Vicarious Bereavement

Bereavement is the reaction to the death of someone that you know personally; collective bereavement, therefore, is the reaction of the community to a massive loss. There is another form of bereavement, often practiced within Black communities—vicarious bereavement that can be ignited by Twitter. Vicarious bereavement refers to experiences of loss and consequent grief and mourning that occur following the deaths of others *not* personally known by the mourner. The three psychological processes necessary to experience vicarious bereavement are empathy, sympathy, and identification (Rando).

According to Therese A. Rando, there are two types of vicarious bereavement. In Type 1, the losses to the mourner are exclusively vicarious, and are those that are mildly to moderately identified with as being experienced by the actual mourner. For instance, the vicarious mourner feels that this is what it must be like to be in the actual mourner's position. In Type 2 vicarious bereavement, Type 1 vicarious losses occur, but there are also personal losses sustained by the vicarious mourner. These personal losses develop because: (a) the vicarious mourner has relatively intense reactions to the actual mourner's loss (e.g., the vicarious mourner feels so personally stunned and overwhelmed in response to the actual mourner's losing a loved one through a sudden death that he or she temporarily loses the ability to function normally); and/or (b) the vicarious mourner experiences personal assumptive world violations because of the loss. An assumptive world violation takes place whenever an element of an individual's assumptive world is rendered invalid by the death. The assumptive world is a person's mental set, derived

from past personal experience, that contains all a person assumes, expects, and believes to be true about the self, the world, and everything and everyone in it (Rando). In the case of Black people, dealing with the random in unpredictability, yet racially predictable fatal encounters with the police, I see an additional element of vicarious bereavement outside of empathy, sympathy, and personally being able to identify with the bereaved, it is the fear of also being able to identify with the victim. It is the fear of losing a loved one, because within their own lives, family, and community, they too have intimately experienced racial profiling by the police, or targeting by anti-Black citizens with the intent to bring pain into their lives.

On July 19, 2013, Barack Obama gave a Presidential speech that was foreign to the ears and eyes of anyone who has ever lived in the America. A President of the United States personally identify with the wrongful death of a Black male murdered in America, when he said, “Trayvon Martin could have been me 35 years ago” (Obama par. 5). In that moment, he informed the world of his personal pain and connection to Trayvon. He publicly stood his ground on a highly controversial, racialized hot button issue. But there was another moment of identification that was put on the table, serving as an alien acknowledgment; President Barack Obama made the reality of, “Black pain,” a topic to be openly discussed. In that moment, Obama moved beyond his personal pain associated with the isolated killing of an unarmed teenage Black male and spoke of the post racially taboo truth of “Black pain.” In this speech, President Obama spoke as if he were (what many of the Black folks that stood in lines for hours to vote for him) speaking on behalf of Black America. Barack Obama said:

If Trayvon Martin was of age and armed, could he have stood his ground on that sidewalk? And do we actually think that he would have been justified in shooting Mr. Zimmerman who had followed him in a car, because he felt threatened, and if the answer to that question is at least ambiguous, then it seems to me that we might want to examine those kinds of laws. (Obama par. 20)

I add to Rando’s definition of vicarious bereavement as the emotional residue of exposure to traumatic stories, images, and in the case of social media, virialized videos of (but not limited to) Black-death at the hands of the police, resulting in communal Black-pain, Black-rage, and Black-vicarious bereavement. By becoming witnesses to the fear and terror that comes from police terrorism (and other forms of traumatic deaths), and how one internalizes those traumatic feelings byway of group connection or similitude, vicarious bereavement engulfs the pain and loss of a loved one passing. In many ways, this communal vicarious bereavement finds itself couched in a form of racially derived group survivorship that happens on Black Twitter.

The phenomenon of group survivorship involves the interplay of factors specific to the individuals and to her/his community, which operate as the confront and contend with the death of one or more members of the group. Given the requisite experience of death loss, concepts of trauma are necessarily relevant within group survivorship (Rando).

Behavioral health professionals more broadly define trauma as resulting “from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual’s functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being” (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA] 7). This is sometimes referred to as “psychological trauma” to distinguish it from other types of trauma.

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (5th ed.; DSM–5; American Psychiatric Association), which is used by psychiatrists to diagnose behavioral conditions, is even broader. DSM-5 expands the definition of trauma to include vicarious exposure:

Exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence in one (or more) of the following ways: directly experiencing the traumatic event(s); witnessing, in person, the traumatic event(s) as it occurred to others; learning that the traumatic event(s) occurred to a close family member or close friend (in case of actual or threatened death of a family member or friend, the event(s) must have been violent or accidental); or experiencing repeated or extreme exposure to aversive details of the traumatic event(s). (271)

However, as Briere and Scott pointed out, despite its breadth, the DSM–5 definition is limiting because actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence need not occur for people to perceive an event as traumatic.

Furthermore, as SAMHSA observed, trauma is subjective. “A particular event may be experienced as traumatic for one individual and not for another” (SAMHSA 8). Traumatic events, leading to communal vicarious bereavement, can sometimes arise in anger post experiencing a tragedy, while others collapse in grief. The grief that a community experiences post traumatic events, “may stagnate a communities future development or propel a community into new areas of growth, (Rando 8), and, “if the event becomes a catalyst for social change and the community takes adaptive action, healing may occur more quickly and pervasively” (Shapiro; Rando 9). The degree of connectedness and similitude to a traumatic event often determines the necessity for a communal response, as “survivor groups have certain social rights and obligations, analogous to those afforded family survivors (Zinner 39). According to Zinner, there are three important “social rights” for the survivor group vicariously grieving. The first right is to be acknowledged and recognized as a survivor, as having suffered a significant loss. The second right is to be informed of facts concerning the death and subsequent actions taken. The final right is to participate in traditional or in creative leave-taking ceremonies (Zinner 39-43). The social rights that Zinner theorized materialize in the Black Twitter community. The right to be acknowledged as not only a survivor, but also as a potential victim, both being informed, and informing others, takes place with in hashtags, such as #IfTheyGunnedMeDown.

Under this hashtag, Black Twitter responded to how Mike Brown was initially portrayed in the mainstream media (Stampler par. 2). Rather than using photographs of the 18-year-old, reportedly known to his friends as a “gentle giant” (Crouch), in a graduation picture, smiling, wearing his cap and gown, the image that circulated among mainstream media was one in which Brown was throwing up a peace sign. The photo led to unsubstantiated tweets calling Brown a “thug” who was flashing “gang signs” — with many noting that similar images of Trayvon Martin in February 2012, elicited a similar response after they were used by the media (Stampler par. 3).

Images posted under the #IfTheyGunnedMeDown hashtag, were for example a Black male reading to children in army fatigues, for example, juxtaposed with that same man with gold

grillz⁴⁸ muggin⁴⁹ for the camera showing his teeth. In my post under the hashtag, I created a side-by-side image of myself wearing glasses, a buttoned collar shirt, and a bowtie, in contrast to a picture of myself wearing a sweatshirt, no glasses and a beanie hat, with a tweet that read, “#IfTheyGunnedMeDown, and I was unarmed, what picture would the media use to create a racialized bias?” While I reminded my followers that Civil Rights Movement protesters were beaten by police wearing their Sunday best⁵⁰, a follower of mine on Twitter replied, by posting a meme⁵¹ of Malcolm X, with the quote, “If you’re not careful, the newspapers will have you hating the people that are being oppressed and loving the people that are doing the oppressing.”

Black Twitter created counter images and narratives to combat the media’s reliance on framing Black bodies via tropes of being menacing, deviant, and criminal, and thus deserving of death at the hands of the police, serving as one of the many ways that group survivorship norms unfold on Black Twitter.

Tragically the 2018 traumatic death of 18-year-old Nia Wilson, in Oakland, California, is the latest incident where the phenomenon of group survivorship, vicarious bereavement and the Black Twitter community have converged in a shared sense of mourning, Black-pain, and Black-love, were activated in an effort secure the social (justice) rights of Wilson, her family, and all of those who are survivors within the group.

On July 22, 2018, Nia Wilson and her sister, 26-year-old Lahtifa, were simply changing trains at a Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) MacArthur Station in Oakland, California, when John Lee Cowell, a 26-year-old white man suddenly approached them, slit Nia’s throat, and wounded Lahtifa. Nia was pronounced dead at the scene (Adone & Simon; St. Felix).

When the news of Nia Wilson’s death first began to circulate, it did not take place on traditional forms of media—it took place on Black Twitter. As a way to alert the Black Twitter community to the suffering of a significant loss of a loved one, there first was the creation of the #NiaWilson, as a space to alert, inform, archive and update members of the community of the victim, what happened, where the crime took place, and to put pressure on the mainstream media to cover the story and acknowledge her death as news worthy. As Zinner reminds us, “Without an outward display to indicate that a loss has occurred, others cannot know or respond to the group’s loss” (Zinner 42). Additionally, the impetus behind spelling out the name of Nia Wilson, by way of hashtagging, falls under the larger #SayHerName movement, that was birthed by Black women on Black Twitter in an effort to highlight how race, class, gender, and other social factors play into the lack of media attention is devoted to violence against Black women (Khaleeli par. 2).

Black Twitter members also informed the community with updated facts surrounding the death of #NiaWilson, while using its social media communal platform to put pressure on the BART Police to release photos of the suspected killer, John Cowell, and then circulating/viralizing his image. For example, on my own Twitter account, I tweeted a picture of Cowell, with the caption:

⁴⁸ Grillz decorative covers often made of gold, silver or jewel-encrusted precious metals that snap over one or more of their teeth.

⁴⁹ When someone is muggin, it means to look serious or stone-faced.

⁵⁰ If you are in your Sunday best, you are wearing your best clothes, which you only wear for special occasions.

⁵¹ A meme is an image, video, piece of text, etc., that is copied (often with slight variations) and spread rapidly by Internet users, particularly on social media sites.

If you see this man, HE IS A MURDERER. He stabbed an 18-year-old, #NiaWilson, to death at the BART station in Oakland last night. His name is John Lee Cowell. If you know him, now is not the time to be silent. Have the human decency to let the world know where he is. (@LeftSentThis)

That particular tweet received 11,149 retweets, and 7,989 likes, and just within that one tweet, from my account, 4,819 different people clicked on the hashtag #NiaWilson, and my single tweet was viewed 1,325,752 times. While that is a lot of eyes seeing Cowell's face from that single tweet, that does not count the amount of times this tweet was seen and shared once Colin Kaepernick retweeted⁵² it to his 1.7 million followers. Black Twitter ensured that the hashtag #NiaWilson was the number one trending topic in the world on Twitter.

It was also members of Black Twitter that pressured local media outlet KTVU to issue an apology to the family of Nia Wilson. Shortly after Nia Wilson's murder, KTVU inflamed Black folks on social media by showing a picture of Wilson holding what looked like a gun, but was, reportedly, a gun-shaped cell phone case. By way of my own profile on Twitter, I reached out to the Black Twitter community to see if anyone within my network had a way to get in contact with the family of #NiaWilson. Within a short amount of time a Twitter community member reached out to me and gave me the number of one of Wilson's cousins. Next came someone that follows me on Twitter, sending a text message to my smart phone, based on the tweet that I had posted, telling me to come down to the vigil that was to take place at the MacArthur BART station on July 23, 2018.

While paying my respects, amongst the estimated 1,000 people in attendance, someone from Twitter, noticed me in the crowd, and on the merits of what I had been saying online, wanted me to speak to those in attendance. Post addressing the crowd, a member of Nia Wilson's family came and thanked me for my words (both online and at the event). It was then that I told her that Colin Kaepernick, who learned about the death of Wilson via his timeline on Twitter, was interested in assisting the family with the cost of the funeral arrangements. The next day I spoke with Wilson's father, Ansar El Muhammad, over the phone. That same day I spoke with Wilson's mother, Alicia Wilson, and within hours of that conversation, I was hugging Nia Wilson's mother, sister, and grandmother, at their home in East Oakland. I brought the grandmother (who raised Nia Wilson) groceries, as the mother had informed me that there was no food in the home. Within that same moment, I put Kaepernick on a facetime call with Wilson's mother, and he gave her his condolences, and expressed his sorrow for their loss, how it affected him personally, and how he wanted to help the family by taking on the expenses of the funeral/burial of their loved one. As I was in the moment of grieving with Wilson's family, it overlapped with the moment of writing this chapter of my dissertation. And in this moment, I was reminded of the second obligation connected to a survivor group, and Zinner noting that:

It is assumed that the next-of-kin are most bereft following a death and are in most need of consolation. A show of support of the family through the sending of sympathy cards, attendance at the funerals, or establishing of memorials to the deceased by the group and/or its representatives is a traditional mechanism used by groups to pay due respect to the next-of-kin and to show attachment (Zinner).

⁵² This particular tweet was posted on July 23, 2018 at 12:33 pm.

Had it not been for the online community of Black Twitter as a collective experiencing genuine vicarious bereavement, none of the events that lead to Kaepernick, and my own offline interactions with the family (who when I met them in person felt/functioned like so many of my own family members) would have transpired.

Chapter 5: The Heritage of the Dissidents: Black Athletic Activism

When Colin Kaepernick used his platform as a professional athlete to join the voices of thousands of others in expressing his outrage and sorrow at the killing of Black people by police officers, his actions were in conversation with a history of Black athletes that challenged racialized systemic oppression in the United States. The fact that detractors, including many in the press, found Kaepernick's silent refusal to stand during the playing of the '*Star Spangled Banner*' as an insolent refusal to act, rather than a proactive action consciously chosen, speaks to a lack of historical understanding of Black protest in the United States (Bryant). In the spirit of Malcolm X when he exclaimed on April 12, 1964 in his speech, *The Ballot or the Bullet*⁵³:

No, I'm not an American. I'm one of the 22 million Black people who are the victims of Americanism. One of the 22 million Black people who are the victims of democracy, nothing but disguised hypocrisy. So, I'm not standing here speaking to you as an American, or a patriot or a flag-saluter, or a flag-waver--no, not I. I'm speaking as a victim of this American system. And I see America through the eyes of the victim. I don't see any American dream; I see an American nightmare. (X, par. 33).

Kaepernick also bears witness to an American nightmare, but unlike Malcolm X, it is recorded daily on iPhones, uploaded and shared all over the world via social media.

On August 14, 2016, Kaepernick's engagement in thoughtful, political action was an expression of his recognition of Americanism, which serves as proxy for the political manifestation of white supremacy and anti-Blackness as echoed by Donald Trump via Twitter account. His efforts are linked to Black athletes who have politically engaged for decades. This activism is known informally as *the Heritage*.

The Heritage

Sports arenas have been transformed into staging grounds for Americanism. Here the hero worship of law enforcement and faux-patriotism reign supreme. Teams wear camouflage jerseys to honor those who serve in the military, with American flags stitched into the fabric of the uniform—which in fact violates American Flag Code (United States Flag)—police officers throw out first pitches at baseball games, soldiers stationed in international wars surprise their families with homecomings at halftime. Sports and the politics/performance/propagation of patriotic notions have become decidedly entwined, but sports have always been more than a game for Black athletes.

In his 2018 book, *The Heritage: Black Athletes, a Divided America, and the Politics of a Divided America*, journalist Howard Bryant wrestles with the history of Black athletes, who early on were committing a political act simply by being on the field. During the Jim Crow era they destabilized racialized segregation and exclusion with their athleticism. The immense social

⁵³ On April 12, 1964, one month after splitting with the Nation of Islam (NOI), and free of the NOI's ban on members participating in the mainstream civil rights movement, Malcolm X gave his "Ballot or the Bullet" speech at King Solomon Baptist Church in Detroit, Michigan (X, 1965).

responsibilities that came with the role is part of the Black athletic “heritage.” It is a, “heritage built by the influence of the superstardom and radical politics of Paul Robeson, Jackie Robinson, Muhammad Ali, Tommie Smith, and John Carlos through the 1960s; undermined by apolitical, corporate-friendly ‘transcenders of race,’ O. J. Simpson, Michael Jordan, and Tiger Woods in the following decades; and reclaimed today by the likes,” of Colin Kaepernick and Eric Reid.

While Bryant’s text focuses on a slew of Black athletes affected by racism in America and how their participation in sports was a political act in itself, his framing of the “heritage,” needs to be unpacked. It is imperative to explore the distinction between the impetus of the athletes’ political motivations as a path towards contextualizing their commitment to American integration compared to athletes who spoke against the racist hypocrisies in the U.S. and argued for Black power, Black self-defense, Black economic autonomy, and encouraged a radical love of Blackness. This difference can be found in Bryant’s inclusion of Baseball great Jackie Robinson as a pillar of the “heritage,” when in fact his politics were profoundly different from Black athletes and leaders that spoke harshly and honestly about America from both Pan-Africanist⁵⁴ and Black Nationalist⁵⁵ perspectives.

Jackie Robinson | Paul Robeson

Jackie Robinson was burdened with the task of desegregating America’s athletic pastime. He was the first Black Major League baseball player, serving as not only a representative of American Black folks, but also as the embodiment of America’s long promise of integration, while enduring vicious white supremacist attacks along the way. Gerald L. Early frames Robinson as being:

...almost a perfect Gandhi-like figure of sacrifice and forbearance, and he created the paradigm for how integration was to proceed in the United States in the 1950s

⁵⁴ Pan-Africanism, the idea that peoples of African descent have common interests and should be unified. Historically, Pan-Africanism has often taken the shape of a political or cultural movement. There are many varieties of Pan-Africanism. In its narrowest political manifestation, Pan-Africanists envision a unified African nation where all people of the African diaspora can live. (African diaspora refers to the long-term historical process by which people of African descent have been scattered from their ancestral homelands to other parts of the world.) In more-general terms, Pan-Africanism is the sentiment that people of African descent have a great deal in common, a fact that deserves notice and even celebration (Abdul-Raheem, 1996; Shepperson, 1962; Walters, 1997).

⁵⁵ Black Nationalism, political and social movement prominent in the 1960s and early ’70s in the United States among some African Americans. The movement, which can be traced back to Marcus Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association of the 1920s, sought to acquire economic power and to infuse among blacks a sense of community and group feeling. Many adherents to black nationalism assumed the eventual creation of a separate black nation by African Americans. As an alternative to being assimilated by the American nation, which is predominantly white, black nationalists sought to maintain and promote their separate identity as a people of black ancestry. With such slogans as “black power” and “black is beautiful,” they also sought to inculcate a sense of pride among blacks (Ogbar, 2004).

and early 1960s—the Noble Negro who, through his nobility, a mystical product of his American heritage of suffering but enduring devotion to the foundational principles of American life, legitimates white institutions as he integrates them. (Early, 48).

As the *New York Times* put it in 1950, “The going wasn’t easy. Jackie Robinson met open or covert hostility with the spirit of a gallant gentleman. He kept his temper, he kept his poise and he played good baseball. Now he has won his battle. No fan threatens to riot, no player threatens to go on strike when Jackie Robinson, or any one of several Negroes, takes the field” (qtd. in Early 48). This is the Robinson that is usually remembered when his career is reexamined. He is almost always sentimentalized.

The hardships of Robinson cannot be forgotten, which is why one can understand the rationale for Bryant (and many others) placing him as a pillar within the pantheon of Black athletes that kept their eyes on the prize. What also cannot be forgotten are Robinson’s positions on Black leaders whose politics were anchored in Black nationalism/Pan-Africanism, and how Robinson was often willingly and unwillingly used by powerful white people to publicly otherize, demonize and chastise Black radicals. This assured the white public that such politics did not reflect the social compass of the Black community. Robinson in many ways represented Black loyalty to Americanness. His citizenship sadly had its roots in disavowing Paul Robeson—and those akin to him—by testifying against Robeson in order to affirm his loyalty to the United States.

Paul Robeson was one of the greatest Black internationalists of the twentieth century. A world-renowned vocalist and actor, he was also an athlete and unabashed leftist and union supporter. This resulted in his bitter persecution by the American government, destroying his career (Duberman). Robeson’s life exemplified Pan-Africanism, embracing this ideology, along with communism, and he supported the Soviet Union during the cold war. Robeson and other leftwing Pan-African Black intellectuals and activists—such as W. E. B. Du Bois—fought long and hard for racial equality in the United States and for liberation of African and Caribbean nations abroad (Cole par. 2), Robeson's stand for the human rights of Black folks throughout the diaspora, under political terms that were not defined and controlled by white people/institutions in the U.S. positioned him as a disloyal to American to the establishment. Robeson had the courage to pledge his allegiance to Black liberation, and this was perceived as a threat to white power. As reported at the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) in 1949 by Ronald J. Smith:

By 1949, Jackie Robinson was probably the best-known black in America with the possible exception of Joe Louis and Paul Robeson. At the time of the HUAC hearings on communist infiltration of minority groups, Robinson was leading the National League in batting with a .360 average and was also the top vote getter in the annual all-star balloting in his league. It was not unexpected that HUAC would ask a black of Robinson's public exposure to testify against another prominent black. According to Alvin Stokes, a black investigator for HUAC, the Committee felt it was necessary to get someone of the popular stature of Robinson to discredit Robeson. (19)

Bryant himself concurred that the HUAC needed someone to assure America that in spite of Robeson's disloyalty to the American way, and, despite the lynchings, the segregation, and the injustices, that Black Americans could still be counted on as loyal Americans, and to do so the Committee turned to Jackie Robinson. Chairman of HUAC, John S. Wood of Georgia, telegraphed Robinson asking him to testify before his Committee "to give the lie" to statements by Paul Robeson. Robinson had faith that whites would ultimately render justice to Blacks (Smith 19). He chose to testify before HUAC. With advice from (then) Brooklyn Dodgers General Manager Branch Rickey and the Urban League's Lester Granger, Robinson prepared a statement, which he delivered before HUAC on July 18, 1949 (Smith 6). When addressing Robeson directly during his testimony, "Robinson did exactly what the committee had brought him to the Congress to do. He played the Good American" (Bryant 26). One historian has written that the accused would leave HUAC hearings "with a mark of Cain," while the accuser would depart "the tribunal with a halo of potential market value."⁵⁶

Seated before the Committee, Robinson testified that baseball was, "as far removed from politics as anybody can possibly imagine." Referring to Robeson's statement, Robinson said:

I can't speak for any 15,000,000 people any more than any other one person can, but I know that I've got too much invested for my wife and child and myself in the future of this country, and I and other Americans of many races and faiths have too much invested in our country's welfare, for any of us to throw it away because of a siren song sung in bass. (Smith 6)

With those strong words that underscored his own vulnerability, Robinson closed his testimony. Earlier in his statements he had qualified his harsh remarks by stating that Robeson should have a, "right to his personal views, and if he wants to sound silly when he expresses them in public, that is his business and not mine." Clearly Robeson did have his "rights" otherwise he would not have been charged as un-American.⁵⁷

Robinson's testimony against Robeson predictably prompted panegyric praise for his patriotic loyalty by the HUAC. Missouri Democrat Morgan Moulder exclaimed at the close of Robinson's testimony that he (Robinson) had, "rendered a great service to your country and to your people and we are proud of you and congratulate you upon being the great success that you are in this great country of ours."

⁵⁶ Belgrave, *The American Inquisition*, p. 29. Others such as Buckley, *Ibid.*, have challenged the statement that HUAC operated to expose political deviants.

⁵⁷ In Jackie Robinson's 1995 autobiography, *I Never Had It Made: An Autobiography*, Robinson showed remorse about what happened to Paul Robeson, but he remained staunch on his loyalty to America, as he notes:

That statement was made over twenty years ago, and I have never regretted it. But I have grown wiser and closer to painful truths about America's destructiveness. And I do have an increased respect for Paul Robeson who, over the span of the twenty years, sacrificed himself, his career, and the wealth and comfort he once enjoyed, because I believe, he was trying to sincerely help his people" (8).

Again, while Robinson expressed remorse, in his own words he had no regrets about testifying against Robeson, and by saying that Robeson, "sacrificed his career," Robinson takes no ownership in his role in the blacklisting of Robeson.

While Bryant acknowledges that, “Robinson’s testimony would commence the economic destruction of Paul Robeson,” and that Jackie Robinson’s loyalty to the U.S., would make him, “forever lauded as an American hero for standing up for America,” Bryant still perceived a “radical Robinson who never backed down...embedded in his testimony,” (37) merely because he acknowledged that Black people suffered “injustices” in America. Certainly, Paul Robeson was clear about what was taking place, as he testified to the HUAC:

Could I say that the reason that I am here today...I have struggled for years for the independence of the colonial peoples of Africa. For many years I have so labored and I can say modestly that my name is very much honored all over Africa, in my struggles for their independence...I am here today, again from the State Department and from the court record of the court of appeals, is that when I am abroad I speak out against the injustices against the Negro people of this land...I am not being tried for whether I am a Communist, I am being tried for fighting for the rights of my people, who are still second-class citizens in this United States of America...I stand here struggling for the rights of my people to be full citizens in this country. And they are not. They are not in Mississippi. And they are not in Montgomery, Alabama. And they are not in Washington. They are nowhere, and that is why I am here today. You want to shut up every Negro who has the courage to stand up and fight for the rights of his people...that is why I am here today. (United States Congress, House, Committee 4499)

In his introduction to the reprint of Paul Robeson’s 1956 testimony before the HUAC, Eric Bentley points out that one of the truly significant accomplishments of Robeson’s actions was how his dedication to Black people served as, “an alignment with the future—Paul Robeson was a brother of Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael, Rap Brown, Huey Newton, Eldridge Cleaver, before they were there to take his hand” (770). This alignment also extended to the likes of Muhammad Ali, John Carlos, and Tommie Smith.

While Jackie Robinson was seen as the great integrator, braking the color-line in Major League Baseball, he can also be seen as the great conservative voice for Black America. His loyalty to Americanness was demonstrated by way of his attacks on not only Paul Robeson, but also Malcolm X and Muhammad Ali.⁵⁸ It was Robinson who took Malcolm X to task for his disloyalty to America, with particular attention paid to X’s blunt calling out of systemic white supremacy. The Nation of Islam’s view of Black people functioning as a nation within a nation and separating from white-America all together also rubbed Robinson the wrong way.

Robinson said in a televised interview that, Muhammad Ali’s protest against the government/Vietnam War was damaging, “to the moral of a lot of young Negro soldiers over there in Vietnam” (Burns). He continued saying, “The tragedy to me is that Cassius [who at this point in time had changed his name to Muhammad Ali, yet Robinson refused to acknowledge his right to abandon his *slave name*] has made millions of dollars off of the American public, and now he’s not willing to show his appreciation to a country that has given him, in my view, a

⁵⁸ Robinson never walked back his critique of Malcolm X and Muhammad Ali.

fantastic opportunity...” (Burns)⁵⁹. Robinson’s fight was for the rights of Black athletes to be integrated into white spaces, particularly Major League Baseball. For Robeson, Malcolm X, and Ali, on the other hand, fighting back was the entire point, and being disloyal to Americanness, a nation that was rooted in anti-Blackness was centric to their convictions.

Ali (for example) was not protesting for a right to racial equality and inclusion, in fact he was fighting for the right to be excluded from being forced to fight for America by way of military draft enlistment (Ali and Durham). Instead, Ali was fighting for the right to be an unapologetically vocal Black man, refusing to show loyalty to the American imperialism, which as one can see from the ways in which Robeson was targeted, made white American authorities uncomfortable. Ali said that, “My conscience won’t let me go shoot my brother, or some darker people, or some poor hungry people in the mud for big powerful America.” Ali also questioned the American government forcing him to serve in the Army. He shot back by asking, “And shoot them for what? They never called me nigger, they never lynched me, they didn’t put no dogs on me, they didn’t rob me of my nationality, rape and kill my mother and father. ... Shoot them for what? How can I shoot them poor people? Just take me to jail.” Ali’s thinking aligns with the commentary of Robeson. In fact, it’s in direct conversation with Robeson, who in the spring of 1949 while giving a speech at the Paris Peace Conference said, that if America were to engage in a war with the Soviet Union, that Black folks in American should not fight. Robeson believed that, “It is unthinkable that American Negroes would go to war on behalf of those who have oppressed us for generations against the Soviet Union which in one generation has raised our people to full human dignity” (As quoted by Marie Seton, Paul Robeson (London: Dennis Dodson, 1958). In many ways the conflict between Robinson, Robeson, Malcolm X, and Ali is a collision of conflicting loyalties and disloyalties. Robinson’s loyalty was to America, and those in the tradition of Robeson were seen as being disloyal, due to their commitment to Black liberation, and their unflinching willingness to castigate, challenge, and condemn America for its practices of systemic racialized oppression. In other words, to be disloyal in the tradition of Robeson meant that you were willing to disrupt white supremacy, coded as patriotism, while fully functioning as racism. This leads to the need to focus on a different “Heritage.” A heritage of those athletes willing to protest against racism which can be read as unpatriotic and disloyal to many Americans. Often their protest happened during the playing of the U.S. National Anthem.

The Dissidents

In an interview with Sharon Basco on July 3, 2002, historian and social activist Howard Zinn was asked a question surrounding dissent as an, “unpatriotic...dirty word,” to which he replied:

While some people think that dissent is unpatriotic, I would argue that dissent is the highest form of patriotism. In fact, if patriotism means being true to the principles for which your country is supposed to stand, then certainly the right to dissent is one of those principles. And if we’re exercising that right to dissent, it’s a patriotic act. (Basco par. 1)

⁵⁹ When enslaved Africans were sold into chattel slavery, the slave masters changed their first names, as well as their surnames. A slave name is thus is the personal name given to an enslaved person, or a name inherited from enslaved ancestors.

When thinking about current and former athletes that have protested during the playing of the *National Anthem*, and the framing of their actions as being unpatriotic forms of disloyalty to America, one cannot help but be reminded of James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son* where, he poignantly captured the nature of his right to be a dissenter by proclaiming, “I love America more than any other country in this world, and, exactly for this reason, I insist on the right to criticize her perpetually” (9). The complex interaction between racial and national identity is a prominent theme throughout the history of Black athletes protesting during the playing of the *National Anthem*.

I would be remiss to not circle back to Paul Robeson when discussing Black athletes and critiquing America by way of protest during the playing of America’s *National Anthem*. The fact that:

We do not know what Robeson sounded like singing the U.S. anthem; he never recorded it nor was he filmed singing it. For a man whose studied repertoire is marked by the inclusion of national songs from around the world—including the anthems of the former Soviet Union and China—the absence of “The Star-Spangled Banner” tells us a great deal about how he as a Black man imagined his role in the performance of nationalism. (Redmond 616)

In the place of singing the *Star-Spangled Banner*, Robeson, instead chose to sing *Ballad of America* as his American *National Anthem* (Redmond 617). In *Ballad of America*, lyrics such as, “A man in white skin can never be free while his Black brother is in Slavery,” can be juxtaposed to the *Star-Spangled Banner*, written by Francis Scott Key, a lawyer and a slave owner, who viewed free Black people as, shiftless and untrustworthy: a nuisance, if not a menace to white people. Key spoke publicly of Africans in America as a, “distinct and inferior race of people, which all experience proves to be the greatest evil that afflicts a community” (Morley 40). In the rarely sung third stanza, it victoriously celebrates how enslaved Black people’s, “blood has wash’d out their foul footstep’s pollution,” and that, “No refuge could save the hireling and slave from the terror of flight or the gloom of the grave.”

Instead of lyrics celebrating anti-Blackness, *Ballad of America* championed an idea of America that was diverse and all-inclusive. The song acknowledges America as being represented by the, “Irish, African, Jewish, Italian, French and English, Spanish, Russian, Chinese, Polish, Scotch, Hungarian, Jamaican, Swedish, Finnish, (Dominican), Greek and Turk and Czech and Native American.” *Ballad of America* imagined an America that was polytheistic, made up of, “Baptist, Methodist, Congregationalist, Lutheran, Atheist, Roman Catholic, (Moslem) Jewish, Presbyterian, Seventh Day Adventist, Mormon, Quaker, Christian Scientist and lots more.” The dynamism and flexibility within the themes of *Ballad of America* are absent in the *Star-Spangled Banner*, which is charged with cohering a nation around its citizens living in a “land of the free.” Colin Kaepernick and other dissenters point out how the U.S. incarcerates more people than any other country on the planet, as the *Prison Policy Initiative* points out:

The American criminal justice system holds almost 2.3 million people in 1,719 state prisons, 102 federal prisons, 1,852 juvenile correctional facilities, 3,163 local jails, and 80 Indian Country jails as well as in military prisons, immigration

detention facilities, civil commitment centers, state psychiatric hospitals, and prisons in the U.S. territories. (par. 2)

America's grim labyrinth of federal and state prisons, local jails, juvenile correctional facilities, and immigration detention centers represents a land of the un-free, thus, the *Star-Spangled Banner* does not, nor ever has, reflected the complexities of a Black citizenship. For Black communities who live under the terror of perpetual forms of systemic violence—from Jim Crow segregation to mass incarceration, and fatal forms of police terrorism— and everyday experiences of racism, will not allow a blind allegiance to America and the racialized hypocrisies encoded in its national anthem. It is for these reasons that the *Dissidents*, with their protest during the playing of America's national anthem are to be seen as truly patriotic because of their action that lifts the veil off various American injustices.

It is important to situate Black athletes protesting during the playing of America's national anthem on a continuum of Black athletic activism. It is also important to dislodge the stronghold of framing said protest as exclusively being enacted by Black men. While many situate the first site of Black athletes protesting during the playing of the National Anthem with John Carlos and Tommie Smith at the 1968 Summer Olympics in the Olympic Stadium in Mexico City, instead the credit should go to high jumper Erooseanna "Rose" Robinson.

Amira Rose Davis' groundbreaking forthcoming book *Can't Eat A Medal: The Lives and Labors of Black Women Athletes in the Age of Jim Crow*, introduces the story of Rose Robinson. In an interview with Dave Zirin of *The Nation*, Davis explains the significance of Robinson who refused to stand for the American national anthem during the 1959 Pan Am Games. Robinson predates the protest of Carlos and Smith by nearly a decade, placing a Black woman, potentially as the pioneer of protesting systemic racial oppression in the U.S. during the playing of anthem. Moreover, it forces one to really wrestle with the question, why do we not know about Robinson? Why was her story lost in the fissures of historical erasure?

We also know so little about Wyomia Tyus: At the tumultuous 1968 Mexico City Games, Wyomia Tyus did something no other Olympian, man or woman, had done before. She won the gold medal in the 100-meter sprint for a second consecutive time, pairing it with the gold medal that she had won at the 1964 Olympic Games in Tokyo, Japan (Aitcheson par. 1). What Tyus also did during the 1968 Olympic Games (along with other Black women) was wear black protest shorts, in the same vein as Carlos and Smith wearing Black gloves. Tyus dedicated her gold medal to Carlos and Smith, after they were kicked out of the Olympics for their silent protest. She said, "Look, as black women, we had a particular stance on not only the boycott, but of these issues. When we heard the OPHR⁶⁰ say human rights, we understood that human rights to be about eradicating racism, but also eradicating patriarchy" (Zirin par. 4). Given our lack of knowledge about Rose Robinson and Tyus one must ask what other stories are virtually missing from the *heritage* of dissenting Black women in the history of athletic activism?

In the spring of 2003, Toni Smith was an unknown Division III basketball player at Manhattanville College in New York. However, she soon made national news by refusing to face the American flag, silently protesting during the playing of the National Anthem prior to the start

⁶⁰ In the fall of 1967, amateur Black athletes formed the Olympic Project for Human Rights (OPHR) to organize a Black boycott of the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City. When they got to the podium for the medal ceremony, Smith and Carlos were wearing OPHR badges on their tracksuits. (In solidarity, Silver medalist Peter Norman, an Australian, wore one as well).

of a basketball game; she stood, but chose to turn her back to the flag (Columbia Broadcasting System; Pennington par. 2). She was swiftly branded as anti-American for not supporting her country or her President in a time of war. If it were truly her country, why would she not have the freedom to express dissent? In a 2004 interview with the website *Political Affairs*, Smith was asked what motivated her to begin and continue her protest during the playing of the American national anthem, turning her back on the American flag, she replied:

Prior to my stand I simply stood, faced the flag with my head down and thought of something else, I reflected on the anthem, did whatever, I wasn't paying attention. Then, in the beginning of that last season, I had to think about it another way. I came to realize that I didn't believe in what the flag stands for. I don't feel like it represents me, my beliefs or my family...My belief is that the flag represents the rise of American power since the slave trade and going back in history. I'm very unhappy with how America has become such a worldwide power. When I decided not to face the flag, it was for personal reasons. It was a personal choice I made not to compromise my beliefs and not to sell out on myself. (Political Affairs par. 3)

With Smith's beliefs, protest, and dissent, being framed as unpatriotic and anti-American by jingoistic fans that frequented her games, they made it a point to terrorize her with their Americanness. Prior to an away game at Mount St. Mary's, the host school's student government handed out small flags to the 500 fans in attendance, who booed Smith at every opportunity, and who sang *God Bless America* at the conclusion of the game (Giardina 108). Prior to that, on February 11, 2004, Smith was vilified at another away game, this time against the United States Merchant Marine Academy. There, "300 flag-waving midshipmen greeted Smith with chants of 'USA' and 'Leave our country'" (ibid), and there was additionally the moment where a random *fan* charged the court to berate her while another player shot free throws, attempting to physically force her to take an American flag into her hand (Bryant). While being interviewed by Howard Bryant, reflecting on her protest during the playing of the national anthem, Smith said that

People remember it as an antiwar protest, but it really wasn't. It was a statement about the way people of color have been treated over the history of this country, and we've perpetuated it around the world. You're [America] sitting here with a broken people and a broken country...One of the things I wanted to say during my protest was, 'I don't want to play this game anymore.' We [America] haven't handled slavery. We haven't handled the Constitution never being an equal document. We've never handled that it was all a lie. Maybe it would do a whole lot of good for us to be able to say it out loud. (116)

Smith's stance, is akin to Robeson's reasoning behind Black people not joining in with the American armed forces in a fight against Russia during the Cold War, and Ali's refusal to join the Army during the Vietnam War. All three were wrestling with the history of racism in America, and how that spills over into the military, war and the daily lives of all on its soil. The amalgam of anti-Blackness, militarism, war, and the everyday lives of Black folks in the U.S. and the military is core to the narrative of the dissenters (and hate filled narratives surrounding

them). The 2017 death of Sergeant La David Johnson, and the treatment of his family by both the military and President Donald Trump, served as a reminder of America's ugly history regarding Black people and the military.

In 2017 Sergeant La David Johnson, a 12-member Army special forces unit, died in a hail of gunfire. He was hit as many as 18 times as he took cover in thick brush, fighting to the end after fleeing militants who had just killed three of his comrades in an ambush in Niger, Africa (Dilanian and Kube par. 2). Donald Trump's reported response to Myeshia Johnson, widow of slain soldier Sergeant La David Johnson, had the 45th President of the United States in the thick of yet another controversy. According to Frederica Wilson, a Democratic congresswoman from Florida, Trump said to the grieving widow that her husband "must have known what he signed up for" (Vazquez par. 1).

In an interview on CNN's *New Day*, Wilson said Trump's condescending condolences made the young widow cry: "When she actually hung up the phone, she looked at me and said: 'He didn't even know his name.' That's the worst part" (Vazquez par. 3). Sergeant Johnson's mother, Cowanda Jones-Johnson, added: "President Trump did disrespect my son and my daughter, and also me and my husband." In response to the allegations, Trump tweeted, that Johnson's claim was "fabricated," and, "I had a very respectful conversation with the widow of Sgt. La David Johnson, and spoke his name from the beginning, without hesitation!" This tweet posted by Trump was, less than an hour after Sergeant Johnson's widow appeared on *Good Morning America*. After the president's denial of the accusations, and conjointly asserting that the Johnson family lied about the incident, Jones-Johnson stood her ground in a Facebook post: "Yes, he did state that comment."

The face of Sergeant Johnson, forever frozen in a picture circulating throughout the media, along with images of his grieving widow standing over his American flag covered casket, evidences a Black family in pain. Trump's voice, that "he must have known what he signed up for", cries out for a reply. Sgt. Johnson sadly signed up to be a part of a long history riddled with Black military veterans being disrespected in the United States. The close of the Civil War marked a rejuvenated reign of racialized terror levied on Black individuals and communities in America. After the Emancipation Proclamation of 1865, thousands of Black children, women, and men were slaughtered as a violent response to freedom for former enslaved Black people (Rhyne).

As the 2016 report by the *Equal Justice Initiative*, a Montgomery, Alabama-based civil rights organization reminds us:

No one was more at risk of experiencing violence and targeted racial terror than Black veterans who had proven their valor and courage as soldiers during the civil war, world war I, and world war II. Because of their military service, black veterans were seen as a particular threat to Jim Crow and racial subordination. Thousands of black veterans were assaulted, threatened, abused, or lynched following military service. (Stevenson par. 2)

Sadly, the racialized terror experienced by Black veterans was also taking place inside of the military, as the military death penalty fell disproportionately on Black soldiers (Equal Justice Initiative).

During the first world war, Black folks in America accounted for less than 10% of the army's enlistment. Yet during the war, 70 soldiers were executed by the US military and, of

those, 55 (79%) were black (Equal Justice Initiative). After President Truman ordered an end to the armed forces' segregation in 1948, this racial disparity actually increased. The military carried out 12 executions from 1954 until the most recent one in 1961. Eleven of the 12 executed service members were Black (Death Penalty Information Center). Disproportionate punishment for Black people in the military continues to this very day. According to a 2017 study published by military advocacy group *Protect Our Defenders*, found "significant racial disparity in the military justice system" (par. 1). Black members of the military are, "substantially more likely" than their white counterparts to be punished in four out of the five branches of the US armed forces (par. 5)

The report also found that Black military service members were as much as 2.61 times more likely than their white peers to face court-martial or non-judicial punishment in an average year, noting that:

- In the air force, Black airmen on average are 71% more likely to face court-martial or non-judicial punishment (NJP) than white airmen.
- In the Marine Corps, Black marines are, on average, 32% more likely to receive a guilty finding at a court-martial or NJP proceeding than white marines, with the size of the disparity becoming more significant the more serious the disciplinary action was.
- In the navy, Black sailors are on average 40% more likely than white sailors to be referred to special or general court-martial.
- In the army, Black soldiers are on average 61% more likely to face a special or general court-martial compared to white service members.
- The disparity is alarmingly notable, considering active white service members make up the largest racial group in the military at 74.6 % (pars. 6-16).

How can we not fully empathize with the family of Sergeant La David Johnson. One can only imagine the levels of loss and grief: the loss of a loved one, the loss of privacy, while being forced into the historical politics of anti-Blackness. Sadly, the lack of respect given to this family is not an American aberration. It is a part of this country's ugly history regarding Black people and the military. It is central to the likes of Robeson, Ali, and Smith protesting American imperialism and its tethering to racism. It is a part of a troubling legacy of the discrediting and omittance of Black women and their voices.

Who among us can forget the image of John Carlos and Tommie Smith- heads bowed in silence, shoeless⁶¹, black gloved fists raised in the air, at the 1968 Olympic Games? Or the words of Muhammad Ali in 1967, when he said, "I ain't got no quarrel with the Viet Cong. No Viet Cong ever called me nigger." These are some of the greatest moments of dissent/protest in the history of athletic-activism of the last century, burned into our collective memories as having advanced the cause of the human/civil rights for Black folks in America as well as abroad. While we should never forget these courageous moments of protest, we should also remember women

⁶¹ Smith and Carlos wore no shoes, to symbolize the poverty that plagued so many Black people in America. Additionally, Carlos wore a necklace of black beads, he said, "for those individuals that were lynched or killed that no one said a prayer for, that were hung tarred. It was for those thrown off the side of the boats in the middle passage."

like Rose Robinson, Wyomia Tyus, and Toni Smith. What is at stake in the erasure of women? And what happens when women are expunged from the narrative of dissenting?

Rhetorically, I have begged the question, why are so many unfamiliar with the likes of Rose Robinson, and her possibly being the first Black-athlete to protest during the playing of America's national anthem? Why is their so little mention of Wyomia Tyus, dedicating her gold medal to Carlos and Smith, while also protesting (along with other Black women) by way of wearing Black protest shorts? Why has there been so little attention paid to Toni Smith's 2003 American national anthem protest, during the same time frame that the country is so engaged with Colin Kaepernick taking a knee during the playing of the anthem? In *Women, Media, and Sport*, Pamela Creedon conveys that, "Contemporary mass media, like the plays, epic poems, fairy tales, fables, parables, and myths before them, preserve, transmit and create important cultural information" (6). Thus, the media may not tell people what to think, but due to its pervasiveness, it has the power to influence what people think, how people interact, and inform people's decisions (Coakley). By excluding Black women who have dissented and participated in athletic activism, it situates them as outsiders of the sacrifices and hardships that come with being victims of systemic oppression. It also removes Black women (in general) not only from the acts of protesting, but it erases their contributions to the aesthetic symbols that frame the optics of Black protest. A perfect example of this is the role of the iconic Afro.

Kaepernick's afro shined like a crown of Black consciousness on the cover of GQ Magazine's 2017 *Men of the Year* issue, serving as a crucial component for framing his unspoken love for Black aesthetic affirmation. But if one picks through the historical roots of his natural hair halo, they will find a legacy of powerful Black women affiliated with the Black liberation struggle. Arguably, the most iconic afro of all rested atop of the head of the women engaged in black revolutionary praxis — most notably, Angela Davis. Unfortunately, many reduce her natural hair choice to simply a style to be easily emulated and not a powerful symbol that reflected a departure from the politics of respectability that served as a visual hallmark of the civil rights era, nor as a choice that combated Eurocentric standards of beauty that waged war on the self-esteem of black children, women and men in America. As Davis noted, "I am remembered as a hairdo. It is humiliating because it reduces a politics of liberation to a politics of fashion" (Snyder par. 3). This reduction that Davis sees as humiliating anchors the important implications involved in the multilayered nature of the Black Power-era mantra, "Black is beautiful." It was not just about looks, it was about liberation. Black Panther Kathleen Cleaver adds that the reason that Black people were wearing their hair natural, as an afro, was a way to promote that:

...their own natural appearance was beautiful. For so many, many years, we were told that only white people were beautiful. Only straight hair, light eyes, and light skin were beautiful, and so Black women would try everything they could to straighten their hair and lighten their skin to look as much like white people. This has changed because Black people are aware...

Hairstyles serve as important cultural artifacts, because they are simultaneously public (visible to everyone), personal (biologically linked to the body), and highly malleable to suit cultural and personal preferences (Firth; Synott; Weitz). Identity is an activity of self-discovery, becoming, and being. Each and every one of us has participated and engaged in it; it's natural and necessary for us to find who we are through the activity of identity as individuals, and whom we chose to

identify with in a group setting. By Kaepernick's choice to associate his hair-politics with an afro, it is an alignment with a follicle fight, most often taken on by Black women. Aesthetics as a form of activism swirls around Black womanhood.

Additionally, aesthetics highlights the ways in which race and gender intersect to malign Black women's contributions to not only Black athletic protest culture, but protest culture in general. The blotting out of Black women, as if they are a weakness, or a blemish, or a stain on the banner of Black power politics/protest, denying them the place in history that they so richly deserve, rendering them as dualistically Otherized (as Black and woman) and thus under represented, and silenced, even when they were often times the most vocal, and most effected by racialized systemic oppression. As Kimberle Crenshaw remarks on the urgency, necessity, and impetus of the #SayHerName campaign popularized on social media platforms like #BlackTwitter:

Although Black women are routinely killed, raped, and beaten by the police, their experiences are rarely foregrounded in popular understandings of police brutality. Yet, inclusion of Black women's experiences in social movements, media narratives, and policy demands around policing and police brutality is critical to effectively combating racialized state violence for Black communities and other communities of color. (The African American Policy Forum)

In Patrica Hill Collins' 1986 article *Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought*, she argues:

First, defining and valuing one's consciousness of one's own self-defined standpoint in the face of images that foster a self-definition as the objectified 'other' is an important way of resisting the dehumanization essential to systems of domination. The status of being the 'other' implies being 'other than' or different from the assumed norm of white male behavior (S18).

Here Collins highlights the process of Othering alienation experienced by Black women, because of interlocking systems of oppression (that she would later define as a matrix of domination), which define what it means to be a socially acceptable human being. I would argue that this specific type of Othering, via a matrix of domination, as referred to by Collins, undergirds not only Crenshaw's call for the #SayHerName campaign, but also her definition/theorization of "intersectionality" in her widely read 1990 article *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color*. These intersectional erasures and otherizations have to be addressed in the chronicling of Black athletes protesting as dissenting citizens fighting against interlocking forms of systemic oppression. While Colin Kaepernick's dissent has engendered a level of respect (Amnesty International's *Ambassador of Conscience Award*, GQ Magazine's *Citizen of the Year*, and Harvard University's *W.E.B. Du Bois Medal*) that has never been mapped onto a Black female athlete, but, as stated by the Combahee River Collective in 1974, "If Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free."

Chapter 6: Conclusion (Black Twitter as Homeplace for Resistance)

In her 1990 essay *Homeplace: A Site of Resistance*, bell hooks both describes and theorizes the value of “homeplace” for Black families living in the colonized world of white supremacy. hooks explores a site where Black folks can unapologetically be Black outside of the oppressive gaze of whiteness. For hooks, sites of homeplace not only offered refuge from the daily struggles that resulted from Black folks (specifically Black women) working in white spaces that enhanced the otherization of their Black bodies, that aggressively sought to deprive them of agency and any semblance of dignity — the homeplace allowed for the establishment and maintenance of Black communal resistance. A political space that is critical towards securing and fighting for Black liberation, hooks explains:

Historically African-American people believed that the construction of a homeplace, however fragile and tenuous (the slave hut, the wooden shack), had a radical political dimension. Despite the brutal reality of racial apartheid, or domination, one’s homeplace was the one site where one could freely confront the issues of humanization, where one could resist. Black women resisted by making homes where all black people could strive to be subjects, not objects, where we could be affirmed in our minds and hearts despite poverty, hardship, and deprivation, where we could restore ourselves the dignity denied us on the outside in the public world. (384)

The concept of Black Twitter put forth in this dissertation, in many ways, serves as the digital embodiment of hooks’ homeplace. Black Twitter is a digital space carved out by Black people, that serves to construct a digital domain where Black folks can build community and collective communal action through the power of self-definition, and counter narrative construction in an effort to fight against white supremacy and overall anti-Blackness. hooks continues by declaring that:

Throughout our history, African-Americans have recognized the subversive value of homeplace, of having access to private space where we do not directly encounter white racist aggression. Whatever the shape and direction of black liberation struggle (civil rights reform or black power movement), domestic space has been a crucial site for organizing, for forming political solidarity. Homeplace has been a site of resistance. (388)

Since 2014 Black Twitter has proven to be a critical space for connecting Black folks for purposes of organizing and protesting. The modern Black liberation traditions that were fought during both the civil rights and the Black power movements—are now both extended and transformed by way of new technologies. It is in the Black Twitterverse that its inhabitants can evade the strife of anti-Blackness and as the site of resistance to the feelings of displacement and alienation. It is also here that Black folks can fight back against the objectification and acquire the tools necessary for establishing a sense of positive self-worth and familiar connection.

The feelings of alienation and displacement can be particularly pronounced for elite Black athletes, whose experience in the sports industrial complex turns them into commodities (Van Rhee). In this sense, we can understand the use of Black labor in sports as paralleling

that within peculiar institution, a relationship that Rhoden acknowledges in the title of his book, *40 Million Dollar Slave*. As professional athletes are traded, bought, and sold, Saidiya Hartman's observations about interchangeable nature of slaves is particularly productive for this conversation. Hartman notes:

The fungibility of the commodity makes the captive body an abstract and empty vessel vulnerable to the projection of others' feelings, ideas, desires, and values; and, as property, the dispossessed body of the enslaved is the surrogate for the master's body since it guarantees his disembodied universality and acts as the sign of his power and dominion. Thus, while the beaten and mutilated body presumably establishes the brute materiality of existence, the materiality of suffering regularly eludes (re)cognition by virtue of the body's replaced by other signs of value, as well as other bodies. (21)

In pursuing their dreams of earning money through their sport, athletes may be required to travel from their literal homes to attend boarding schools. If their journey to professional sports includes attending a four-year-university experience, Black athletes may not have access to the physical counterspaces that may develop organically for other Black students at Predominantly White Institutions (PWI) (Yosso). Thus, their ability to participate in the (imagined) community that emerges for Black people through social media may be of particular value to Black athletes. There is something about community, collectively knowing you are not alone that brings comfort during the most horrific happenings. For example, Elizabeth Alexander's observations about how Black people witnessing Rodney King's March 3, 1991 beating engendered a form of collectivity among Black people is apropos for thinking about the reception of images of Black death that currently proliferate through social media. Alexander writes, "Traumatized African American viewers have been taught a sorry lesson of their continual physical vulnerability in the United States that concurrently helps shape how to understand ourselves as a 'we', even when that we is differentiated" (81). As it relates to elite Black athletes' relationship to Mike Brown's murder, there was an understanding that despite their wealth, and presumed distance from Ferguson, Missouri, they too could be victims of police terrorism. In fact, there is understanding that their social and financial status may make them *a greater* target for such violence. To think about this differently, social media allowed Mike Brown's death to resonate, to reverberate in ways that facilitated the Black Twitter turn. As media theorist Herman Gray explains the imagery surrounding Mike Brown's death can be understood as possessing an "ability to convey what it feels like to live constantly exposed to racially organized and distributed vulnerability and risk" (1110).

There is not one verifiable reason why Mike Brown's death lead to the Black Twitter turn towards being a site of resistance and rebellion, shifting away from the racialized cultural currency so normalized by way of selfploitation, and towards being a humanizing homeplace for Black folks to gather and heal—but it did. Maybe it was the fact that Mike Brown's death was a news story that broke via the tweets of @ThreePharoh⁶² a member of Black Twitter.

⁶² At 12:03 pm, @ThreePharoah tweeted, "I JUST SAW SOMEONE DIE OMFG." @ThreePharoah continued by framing his bodily response to this event by tweeting, "Im about to hyperventilate." At 12:04 pm in response to an inquiry by another Twitter user by the name of @allovevie, @ThreePharoah provided more specific aspects of the death that he had witnessed

Possibly, as Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor notes, "...it was the inhumanity of the police leaving Brown's body to fester in the hot summer sun for four and a half hours after killing him, keeping his parents away at gunpoint and with dogs" (154). Viewing Brown's body on my timeline, lying lifeless in the streets, while his parents were held at gunpoint by members of the same police force that gunned down their child, forced me to think of Franz Fanon saying that:

The white world, the only honorable one, barred me from all participation. A man was expected to behave like a man. I was expected to behave like a black man or at least like a nigger. I shouted a greeting to the world and the world slashed away my joy. I was told to stay within bounds, to go back where I belonged. (114-115)

In this case, the "Ferguson police, a 95 percent white and male force," (155), *barred from all participation* in honorably mourning Mike Brown. When Mike Brown Sr. said the Ferguson police department, "...sicked dogs on us. They [the police] wouldn't let us identify his body. They pulled guns on us" (153), the *white* police force treated his living Black body and his son's lifeless Black body, like *niggers*, forcing each to stay where the officers believed they *belonged*.

Most mainstream media outlets criminalized Mike Brown by choosing a photo of him wearing a red jersey and throwing what many interpreted as a gang sign (par. 4), in conjunction with the officer, Darren Wilson⁶³, who shot an unarmed Mike Brown to death. Officer Wilson's words about Brown included him saying that he was, "...staring at me, almost like to intimidate me or to overpower me," and that he (the 6'4, 210-pound armed officer), "felt like a five-year-old holding onto Hulk Hogan," describing Brown as a, "demon...grunting... bulking up to run through the shots, like it was making him mad that I'm shooting at him." Witnessing this spectacle, again lead me to Frantz Fanon.

Fanon writes about the Black body and how it can be mutated, mangled and made into an ontological problem via the white gaze. Describing an encounter with a white woman and her son, Fanon narrates that the young boy screams, "Look at the nigger! . . . Mama, a Negro!" (113). Fanon continued:

and was now reporting. @ThreePharoah responds by tweeting, "the police shot someone dead in front of my crib yo." He then tweeted a photograph of Michael Brown's lifeless body, uncovered in the middle of the street with a visibly White, presumably male, uniformed police officer standing over him. Brown's body would lie in the middle of that street, exposed and on display for all of the Ferguson onlookers to view, but not attend to. Deceased and disrespected, serving as both a spectacle and commonplace, Brown's corpse remained in the street for four hours. @ThreePharoah continued reporting, tweeting next, "Its blood all over the street, niggas, protesting nshit. There is police tape all over my building. I am stuck here omg." Another Twitter user asked @ThreePharoah why was the man gunned down and dead in the street, what did he do, @ThreePharoah emphatically replied, "no reason! He was running!" As if someone had questioned the authenticity of his account, @ThreePharoah somberly tweeted, "I saw it happen man." After other tweets like, "Homie still on the ground tho," @ThreePharoah tweeted that he was, "DONE TWEETING ABOUT THE SITUATION."

⁶³ While the quotes from Wilson were widely reported by the likes of Time, CNN, Fox News, and MSNBC, the quotes originate from transcripts of *Stave of Missouri v. Darren Wilson Grand Jury testimony*.

My body was given back to me sprawled out, distorted, recolored, clad in mourning in that white winter day. The Negro is an animal, the Negro is bad, the Negro is mean, the Negro is ugly; look, a Negro, it's cold, the Negro is shivering because he is cold, the little boy is trembling because he is afraid of the nigger, the nigger is shivering with cold, that cold that goes through your bones, the handsome boy is trembling because he thinks that the nigger is quivering with rage, the little white boy throws himself into his mother's arms: Mama, the nigger's going to eat me up. (113-14)

Several mainstream media outlets, the larger Ferguson Police Department (many of whom showed up to a demonstration honoring Mike Brown wearing “I am Darren Wilson” bracelets) and Darren Wilson, the officer that killed Brown largely imagined him as a Black savage beast, a primitive and uncivilized animal, with super-subhuman strength—a dangerous nigger brute⁶⁴. Just as negrophobia⁶⁵ is clearly expressed in the boy's fear that he is going to be eaten by the cannibalistic Nigger, Darren Wilson expressed that same childhood negrophobic behavior, except instead of relying on the lap of his white mother to settle his fear of a Black man, Wilson relied on a handgun and bullets. Wilson said that he witnessed one of those shots hitting Brown, claiming that “...when it [the first bullet] went into him, the demeanor on his face went blank, the aggression was gone, it was gone, I mean, I knew he stopped, the threat was stopped.” While Wilson “stopped” the life of Mike Brown on August 9, 2014, his act of police terrorism gave birth to the Black Twitter turn and a movement of Black folks connecting digitally throughout the African Diaspora congregating and creating a homeplace for resistance.

This resistance has manifested in a number of ways and this dissertation explores how Black athletes, sports pundits, sports team owners, and Donald Trump (and his ilk) all engage around who is worthy of humanity via the Twitter platform. Black Twitter challenges dominant white racial frames that are generated to rationalize and ensure white privilege and dominance over Black folks in America. Black Twitter also served as a site for breaking silence within mainstream media. In fact, it's through this platform that Black voices and concerns audible and unavoidable as both a community and a media force. This Black Twitter Turn that challenged white racial frames rooted in white supremacy is a space that Black athletes can protest Anti-Blackness. It's largely because of Black Twitter that they are allowed to be present in a Black communal space. In the end, however, Black Twitter has not only provided community for the working-class fan, the Black freedom fighter and the justice seeking scholar. For all of those who identify as members of Black Twitter it has become a homeplace of resistance.

⁶⁴ The brute caricature portrays black men as innately savage, animalistic, destructive, and criminal -- deserving punishment, maybe death. This brute is a fiend, a sociopath, an anti-social menace. Black brutes are depicted as hideous, terrifying predators who target helpless victims, especially white women (Ferris.edu).

⁶⁵ As phobias are extreme aversions embedded deep in our psyches, activated when we come face-to-face with the thing we fear. Negrophobia the unjustified fear of black people.

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