**“BUT WHAT IF INSTEAD WE IMAGINE BLACK LIFE”**
Femininity, Performance, and the Black Lives Matter Movement

A thesis submitted by

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

In

Theatre and Performance Studies

Tufts University

May 2018

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## ABSTRACT

This project analyzes the use of gesture and posture in Black Lives Matter protests staged between 2014 and 2017 to explore the performative potential of bodily enactments in contemporary racial justice activism. Through a focus on the feminist performance techniques of laying, kneeling, standing in protest environments, I address the ways in which the BLM movement was founded by and continues to grow through the leadership of female-identifying activists who counter the problematic narrative that masculine figures have historically dominated racial justice advocacy. I engage with embodied forms of performance grounded in femininity and female subjectivity to illustrate how this labor works to create space in highly-policed protest spaces, and that it exists as a means of practicing or imagining liberation for contemporary racial subjects in the United States. In synthesizing the work of scholars from feminist studies, critical race studies, and performance studies, this thesis considers the capacity for femininity to act as a potent tool for racial and gender liberation.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I want to thank my adviser, Kareem Khubchandani. I could not have completed this project without his enthusiasm, guidance, and incredible knowledge surrounding performance studies, gender and racial advocacy, and the proper use of emojis. He was an incredible resource and showed unwavering support throughout the process of proposing, crafting, and defending this project. I truly cannot thank him enough.

I am also indebted to the entire graduate faculty of the Tufts University Theatre and Performance Studies Program. Noe Montez and Heather Nathans served on my committee and provided generous assistance from the prospectus defense to final submission. They never hesitated to send me potential sources and avenues to explore, and for that I am so grateful. I thank Monica Ndounou and David Krasner for helping to shape this project through mentorship, feedback, and suggested resources. Special thanks to Laurence Senelick, Barbara Grossman, and Megan Stahl for their kind words and ongoing support during my graduate education. In addition, I thank Chao Chen at the Tufts University Tisch Library for providing invaluable help during the research stages of this thesis.

I want to express my gratitude to my graduate colleagues in the Theatre and Performance Studies Program at Tufts. I am privileged to be counted amongst you, and to have benefitted from your encouragement, friendship, and support.

Finally, I thank my amazing family and partner for their never-ending patience and love.

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# **“BUT WHAT IF INSTEAD WE IMAGINE BLACK LIFE”**

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## INTRODUCTION

*"Some years there exists a wanting to escape- you, floating above your certain ache- still the ache coexists. Call that the immanent you- You are you even before you grow into understanding you are not anyone, worthless, not worth you. Even as your own weight insists you are here, fighting off the weight of nonexistence."*

- Claudia Rankine, *Citizen*[1]

In his October 2014 review for *The New Yorker,* poet Dan Chiasson describes Claudia Rankine's then-newly-released fifth poetry collection, *Citizen: An American Lyric,* as "an especially vital book for this moment in time. While the book was in press, Michael Brown was killed in Ferguson, Missouri; as I write this, hundreds of people are marching in protest there, engaging in civil disobedience and offering themselves up for arrest."[2] Chiasson's remarks on the timeliness of Rankine's writings, which explore the gritty friction of racial injustice in a society living under the illusion of a post-racial America, are especially fitting considering the ubiquitous quality of the name "Michael Brown." The poet assumes his readers know Brown's name and the circumstances surrounding his death barely two months after the 18-year-old had been shot six times during an altercation with a white police officer. I, much like Chiasson, began this project under the presumption that we, as contemporary, media-saturated American society, simply recognize these names: Eric Garner, Philando Castile, Alton Sterling, and Michael Brown. Some may have even watched the videos that circulated online showing the last minutes of Garner, Castile, and Sterling's lives or heard Garner's labored voice as he called out "I can't breathe" to the officers pinning his body to the cement of a Staten Island sidewalk.[3] Much

of the American public does know these men, or at the very least recognize their names, because of their association with Black Lives Matter (BLM). BLM, the racial justice movement Chiasson alludes to in his review, began as a social media hashtag and became a banner under which thousands have protested the devaluing and extralegal deaths of black people in America and abroad.

While BLM has helped to make these victims of police violence, household names, I am curious if the same holds true for Patrisse Cullors, Opal Tometi, or Alicia Garza, the three cofounders of the movement itself. What about Sandra Bland, Tanisha Anderson, and other black women who died while under arrest? Does the wider American public know the names Ieshia Evans, Raianna Brown, Bree Newsome, or Jamie Thompson, who are just a handful of the black female activists whose work aligns with the objectives set by BLM? I ask these questions because, prior to my research for this project, I did not know of these women. What little knowledge I had of the BLM movement did not include the fact that queer women of color started this vibrant political force. When Jonathan Bachman's viral 2016 photograph "Taking a Stand in Baton Rouge" flooded my Facebook timeline and Twitter feed, I did not learn that Evans was the stunning, formidable figure shown confronting riot police while wearing a sundress.[4] In addition to eliciting a hefty dose of self-reflection on my false sense of "woke-ness," my preliminary research revealed that I was not alone in my unfamiliarity with the feminist activism of the BLM movement. As sociologists Gayle Sulik and Mindy Fried write: "Black women are an untold side of this story."[5]

In fact, there is a long history of black women's activism in the United States that predates the BLM and Civil Rights movements. This thesis, in attempting to analyze BLM protest tactics, aims to contextualize the performative elements examined herein with the wider historical narrative of black women protesting racial inequality since the Antebellum era. My thesis project centers on the activist labor of women, and moreover examines the efficacy of embodied femininity in protest. My approach to this project is directed at the study of performative bodies, specifically focusing on what the body is "doing" when performing black femininity. This is in direct response to the ways in which the media and, in some cases, those working within and against the movement have made the murder of young, black men at the hands of police the central (if not only) tenet of BLM. This erasure of the intersectional objectives of BLM in fact leads our society further away from racial justice. This project addresses how enactments of femininity in three varieties of performative postures – laying, kneeling, and standing – have the potential to be affecting and effective strategies available to and deployed by black women when they use their bodies to practice or reimagine freedom for themselves and for all subjugated global citizens. In short, I argue that these three postures use femininity as social criticism in the BLM movement.

BLM was first launched online in 2013 via a hashtag created by writer and activist Alicia Garza shortly after George Zimmerman was found not guilty in the murder of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin. Through an alliance with two other black female activists and community organizers, Opal Tometi and Patrisse Cullors,

#BlackLivesMatter grew from Garza's original Facebook post into a movement. In its current state, Garza describes BLM as "an ideological and political intervention in a world where Black lives are systematically and intentionally targeted for demise. It is an affirmation of Black folks' contributions to this society, our humanity, and our resilience in the face of deadly oppression."[6]

This intervention gained national attention when the slogan "Black Lives Matter" was used during the 2014 Ferguson protests, which erupted in opposition to both the killing of Michael Brown by officer Darren Wilson and the mistreatment of Brown's body by Ferguson police in the hours after his death. The assertion that black lives matter at the demonstrations in Ferguson and elsewhere across the country took hold of the national imagination due to extensive media coverage of the protests; additionally, the dissemination of first-hand written accounts, videos, and images online helped the movement gain momentum. Through its uniquely twenty-first-century structural cycle of live and digital activism, BLM emerged as a recognized force for change. As Martha Biondi wrote in 2016, "Already, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement and the violence it exposes feel like a fixture of our media and social landscape."[7]

An important distinction to make, however, is that the BLM movement encompasses multiple groups that share a common goal of racial justice and liberation. The BLM movement includes more than twenty sanctioned chapters in cities across the United States and Canada in addition to affiliated organizations like The Movement for Black Lives and Campaign Zero.[8] For the purposes of this project, I examine demonstrations staged by both local BLM chapters and

associated groups, as well as protests where the slogan "Black Lives Matter" is explicitly stated in either written or verbal discourse.

A feature specific to the formal BLM chapters is the lack of a centralized leadership on the national level. The concept of a localized leadership model is a pointedly postmodern approach, moving away from previous social movements that relied on one or more figure heads to act as concentrating forces for the cause's direction and organization, such as the roles that Martin Luther King Jr. or Malcolm X filled for the Civil Rights and Black Nationalist movements respectively. Because of this de-centralized model, the movement's founders provide "guiding principles" that articulate the mechanisms necessary for all black people to achieve freedom within and outside of their own communities. The local chapters, in turn, use these principles to determine objectives specific to the needs of their communities. These principles include: diversity, restorative justice, being unapologetically black, embracing globalism, collective value as a community that is transgender and queer-affirming, upholding black women, empathy, reinforcing black families/villages, embracing loving engagement, and openness to intergenerational membership.[9] The founders based the model on the notion that chapters should focus on local issues that then contribute to the movement's national and global strategies, and which will then, ideally, enact further progress back at the local level. Cullors details that each chapter's objectives emerge from "within the communities where they live and work. They determine their goals and the strategies that they believe will work best to help them achieve their goals."[10] In a separate interview published in 2016, Cullors

corrects the assumption that BLM is a "leader-less" movement, and instead refers to it as "leader-full" because of the movement's bottom-to-top model.[11]

The inclusivity of the movement underpins these principles. It embraces and fights for all black lives rather than solely mounting narrow crusades for legal accountability in specific cases of black people killed by police officers. Tometi harkens back to the core of the movement's name to highlight the broad spectrum of people and demands involved in their fight.

> How are we specifically addressing anti-black violence as it occurs? More broadly, I really wanted to open up the space for a conversation that moved beyond police brutality. So that's why we kind of kept it broad. And that's also why Black Lives Matter is Black Lives Matter, not justice for X. It was very important to have something that was broad enough that captured the state of black life and the fact that we are experiencing a range of violence and we need to be able to speak to all of that.[12]

BLM identifies a variety of systemic political and social ills that render black lives vulnerable to state violence. The movement aims to change the ways in which poverty, the lack of affordable housing, the mass incarceration of black people, and the criminalization and erasure of immigrants have contributed to: the burden placed on black women and families; the commoditization of black girls in times of conflict; abuse continuously inflicted upon those with disabilities; and the simultaneous fetishization and disposability of queer and non-cis gender people in the heteropatriarchy of modern society.[13]

One distinct aspect of the movement's objectives is the vulnerability to state violence experienced by black and trans women, or what Martha Biondi calls being treated as "socially disposable."[14] This centering of non-male, non-cis members of the black community no doubt results from the fact that three women founded the movement, two of whom identify as queer. The self-described

"herstory" of BLM authored by Cullors, Tometi, and Garza encourages activism in which black women act as the main organizing force. In her opening remarks at an October 2016 TedTalk, Cullors states pointedly that "Black Lives Matter offers a new vision for young black girls around the world. That we deserve to be fought for. That we deserve to call on local governments to show up for us."[15]

BLM is a movement in which women of color and queer activists have and continue to contribute a great deal of labor and authorship. Therefore, cooption of the movement's objectives, successes, and cultural capital by patriarchal agents for their own gains – including those who seek to destroy or delegitimize BLM – has become a point of contention for its female leadership. In an entry entitled "Theft of Black Queer Women's Work" on the BLM website, Garza details how various groups have strategically associated themselves with the movement without either citing or respecting the wishes of those who have worked to create it.

> When you design an event / campaign / et cetera based on the work of queer Black women, don't invite them to participate in shaping it, but ask them to provide materials and ideas for next steps for said event, that is racism in practice. It's also hetero-patriarchal. Straight men, unintentionally or intentionally, have taken the work of queer Black women and erased our contributions. Perhaps if we were the charismatic Black men many are rallying around these days, it would have been a different story, but being Black queer women in this society (and apparently within these movements) tends to equal invisibility and non-relevancy.[16]

Appropriation of BLM's authorship and capital is evident in such tone-deaf "movements" as #AllLivesMatter, as well as behavior exhibited by well-known figures that purport to be helping the cause. In her 2016 book *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation,* Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor details how

famed civil rights activist Al Sharpton and then-Attorney General Eric Holder inserted themselves into 2014 demonstrations in Ferguson and Washington D.C. involving BLM, often intoning exclusionary rhetoric and practices that only widened the divide between these elite black men and the young, diverse protestors and organizers laboring in the streets. "Even though Sharpton had just arrived in town, he was describing Mike Brown's character and personality to his friends and peers. It was condescending and presumptuous. Sharpton's words also lent legitimacy to Ferguson officials' accounts, which blamed violence on protestors even as police blatantly violated their rights to assemble."[17] Sharpton's apparent insistence that male figures like himself remain the default avatar in the struggle for black freedom – while concurrently denouncing and politically capitalizing on the movement's activism – serves as just one example of BLM's cooption. It is also certainly worth questioning if the Democratic National Committee, along with its presidential nominee Hillary Clinton, had less-than-purely altruistic intentions when they invited the "Mothers of the Movement" to take the stage at their July 2016 convention.

In spite of this, the founders and local leaders of BLM continue to fight back against this cooption, and against the historical trend of omitting women from the annals of racial justice activism in the U.S. As Cullors explains, "We are dispelling the myth that women have never been involved in the movement. In fact, women have been the architects of the movement: they've just been erased. We've decided, collectively, that that's not what's going down this generation."[18]

Opal Tometi, echoing Cullors sentiment, further articulates the importance of claiming ownership of their roles in the movement as black queer women.

> "People are like, 'Oh wow, queer women helped to start this?' People perk up and listen in different ways and identify in different ways when they really know who it is that started this thing. Lastly, we don't want it to be about ego. It's not about ego, but it's also about historical memory and the truth, so we in many ways are stepping more and more into our own leadership."[19]

This study works in tandem with the efforts made by BLM to uphold the labor enacted by women of color in the movement.

In approaching this study as a white, middle-class, domestically-born, cis-gender woman, I cannot understand the experience of embodying black femininity. Therefore, I draw upon the work of feminist, critical race, and performance scholars of color as I traverse what Michael Awkward describes as a series of "border crossings" that occur when exploring locations and conditions outside of our personal experiences of the world.[20] Furthermore, I recognize that this project walks a fine line between upholding the work of black women in the BLM movement and potentially reinforcing the very cooption they resist. For all my argumentation, I am indebted to black theorists, artists, and historians who thoughtfully examine various aspects of performing black femininity. Their work focuses on black women's embodied knowledge; the potency of the visible female body and exposed flesh; the subversive potential within enactments of objecthood; and agency exercised by women who perform black female sexuality and desire.

In her 1990 seminal work *Black Feminist Thought,* Patricia Hill Collins explains that masculinized methods of validating knowledge discount the

embodied knowledges that black women hold regarding their own abjection.[21] Instead of continuing the trend of subordination through male-oriented modes of analysis, Collins argues that feminist theories should be grounded in the corporeal and intellectual capital held by black women when examining their experiences of labor, motherhood, political activism, and sexual politics. Collins' assertion regarding the self-awareness of black women's embodied knowledge is inherent within all the works I explore regarding black femininity for this project. I also argue that this approach to black feminism aligns with the objectives outlined by BLM's leadership as well as with what I plan to examine as feminine performatives in the movement. The body of knowledge inherent within these activists' corporeality as feminine provides them with specific methods for encountering and validating information regarding their own subjectivity.

The conditions under which one is seen, or visuality, proves central to my exploration of "performing" black femininity. Media and American Studies scholar Nicole R. Fleetwood describes black visuality as how "blackness becomes visually knowable through performance, cultural practices, and psychic manifestations."[22] She explains that visuality is not simply the process of being rendered visible but rather making *knowable* the lived experiences of black cultural producers and subjects who trouble a visual field based on normativity and whiteness. In the third chapter of her 2011 text *Troubling Vision,* Fleetwood re-centers black female cultural producers as inventive but oft-excluded figures in both the public sphere and in the discourses surrounding black subjectivity. Throughout her study into the visuality of black femininity, Fleetwood addresses

the potential agency procured by artists who creatively harness the hegemonic and heteronormative ideologies surrounding how "black female corporeality is rendered as an excessive overdetermination and as overdetermined excess" to create self-determined notions of black femaleness.[23] In doing so, she identifies defiant female producers who make themselves hypervisible in portraiture, performance art, video, and hip hop as a means of reclaiming the cultural and economic capital that historically has been carved from their bodies. Her work serves as a constructive lens through which I explore black women who perform postures of submission on a "national stage," meaning in front of large audiences or in highly-publicized events likely to be recorded and broadcast online and on television.

In line with Fleetwood's focus on women's exposed bodies, Alexander G. Weheliye draws upon the concept of "fleshiness" as it relates to biopolitics. Weheliye frames black flesh as a means through which societal determinations of gender normativity has been established. He writes in his 2014 text *Habeas Viscus* that race has been used to define humanity through sociopolitical discourses that rendered racialized subjects in a limbo-like existence of "not-quite-human."[24] However, Weheliye builds upon the work of black feminist scholars like Hortense Spillers, Saidiya Hartman, and Sylvia Wynter to frame this human/non-human paradigm to trouble modern understandings of humanity that omit the significance of race in the determination of this state of being, thus extracting generative discourse from what may appear to be a completely oppressive notion of black flesh. This work has been especially helpful for my

study into social media spectatorship of black female flesh that is disseminated online through the sharing of protest imagery and videos.

Performance studies theorist Uri McMillan also addresses the productive potential of the less-than-human characterization of black people, specifically black women, in his 2015 essay on avatars.[25] McMillan considers how the dehumanization of racialized subjects enables black women to "transform themselves into art objects."[26] He writes that the performance of abject objecthood can be regarded as a creative, arts-based strategy for exercising freedom and agency. McMillian's premise works in tandem with Harvey Young's study on black subjects in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century photography, in which Young suggests that "subjects actively perform stillness, an enactment of arrest that resonates with their daily, lived embodied experiences."[27] In this study, he contends that the black people who posed for various photographers during this era engaged in the experience of capture so that they may "rehabilitate and, indeed, refashion societal images of the black body."[28] Both McMillan and Young articulate the possibility that certain types of freedom can be found in objectification and arrest, which I use to address repertoires of obstruction and immobility enacted by black women in protest performances of death.

Aspects of sexuality are embedded in the performance of black femininity, and also help to illuminate the various social and physical characteristics that construct femininity and femme aesthetics. In *The Witch's Flight,* Kara Keeling explores how the nuanced figure of the "black femme" troubles notions of gender

normativity, including complications that arise when performances by this seemingly "feminine" body disturb the prescriptions laid out for them. Following her compelling readings of such films as *Set It Off* and *Eve's Bayou*, Keeling writes that:

> "the black femme is 'black' (recognizable as such by skin color) AND 'woman' (recognizable as such by anatomical characteristics) AND 'lesbian' (recognizable by her erotic desire for another who also is or might be revealed as visibly 'woman'). And she is each of these in such a way that each category's claim to be an expression of her identity is exploded by the effort required to maintain validity of that claim."[29]

Drawing on Keeling's description of the femme as an erotic figure, it is important that this project works within the understanding that black femininity is connected to race, sex, and the performance of gender. The notion that gender is performative was most famously suggested by Judith Butler in her groundbreaking 1990 book *Gender Trouble.*[30] Based on the work of Keeling and Butler, I am working under the belief that femininity is visible through various bodily aesthetics. For example, Kai M. Green, a black transman and feminist scholar, writes about his failure to adequately perform masculinity because he continues to bend his wrists in ways that read as feminine.[31] However, Green's self-described failure is more due to the fact that the masculine-feminine binary attached to traditional notions of gender leave little room for the two to comingle. Femininity, therefore, is a complex mode of performance not solely reliant on one's anatomy or choice of sexual partner, but on socially and politically sanctioned modes of embodiment as well as subjective interpretations of gender by others. While recognizing that both femininity and masculinity can be performed by any body, regardless of gender identity or anatomical sex, this

project focuses on femininity as it is enacted by black women in the BLM movement.

I want to make the distinction that I interpret the subjects in my case studies as women, female, or feminine based on numerous factors. The sources for many of these materials provide gender designation through choices of pronouns or other linguistic elements. Femininity or femme attributes are also read based on how these individuals express themselves with stylings attached to or performed through corporeality, such as the fashioning of hair, clothing choices, accentuated body parts, and the angularity of gestures. I contend that femininity is socially legible even while it is variable and subject to interpretation, and that there is merit to the intellectual ability to perform, read, and understand gender qualities that we gain as cultural citizens.

The field of performance studies has a long history of scholarship that addresses aspects of performance and performativity in activism. I have gravitated to the work of D. Soyini Madison, Diana Taylor, Susan Leigh Foster, and Anusha Kedhar, who regard activism as performance acts. This collective approach allows for corporeal practices in protest to be examined as potential tools for knowledge-making and affect. Madison best articulates the possibilities of performance when describing her research on West African human rights advocacy: "By applying a performance analytic to acts of activism, we enter a poetics of understanding and an embodied epistemology concerning how activism is constituted, its dimensions of imagination and creativity, and its rhetoric and politics."[32]

The performance theories in Diana Taylor's *The Archive and The Repertoire* (2003) provide a vocabulary through which scholars can come to understand how the body performs in protest environments. Taylor focuses on practices of communication and transfer, in which the shaping, ornamenting, and placement of the live body serves as a method for imitation. She refers to these performances as "reiterative acts" that are copied from person to person, replicating beyond the corporeality of the protestors and into the culture at large.[33] Such reiterative acts for social justice are found in Taylor's descriptions of the work done by the Madres and Abuelas of the Plaza de Mayo, who strategically orient their bodies in specific geographies throughout Buenos Aires. These activists are often adorned with white scarves and photos of their disappeared children and grandchildren to perform the absence of their missing families. These physical enactments have successfully transferred to the cultural imagination within Argentina; the white scarves and weekly demonstrations by these human rights organizations are recognized memes in the public arena.

Dance scholars Foster and Kedhar apply their discipline's framework of choreography to explain the ways in which bodies in activism can be addressed for their control, movement, stillness, and shape. Foster examines historical protest performances, including the Greensboro lunch counter sit-ins of the Civil Rights Movement and the ACT UP die-ins during the AIDS epidemic, for evidence of rehearsed practices that come about through training the body. This approach counters the misconception that physical demonstrations in activism erupt solely from uncontrollable, spontaneous emotion. She describes how varied

these embodied performances are, and that "it is possible to see the donning of a T-shirt, the singing of chants or shaking of fists that the activists describes as 'techniques of the body' that must be learned."[34]

Kedhar has been one of the premier voices in articulating that "Choreography, movement, and gesture, are not peripheral but central to the politics of protest" in the BLM movement.[35] She explains that gesture, in particular, has become a crucial method employed by BLM to index both the "alive-ness" of bodies in protest as well as the history of Black death at the hands of state power. She further posits the various ways performance scholars and audiences alike can interpret gesture in BLM activism, ranging from habitus, to performances of failure and innocence, to choreographic tactics that illustrate the movement's politics of resistance and freedom. In an October 2014 article for *Feminist Wire,* Kedhar looks to bodily performance in activism as a tool for carving out transformation in landscapes of tyranny: "To me, the Ferguson protesters are quintessential dancers who, even in the most policed spaces… can transform a space of control, in which their movements are restricted, into a space of freedom, in which their movements are defiant, bold, and empowered a space in which they have the ability to move freely."[36]

Anusha Kedhar, Daphne Brooks, André Lepecki, and other scholars working in the fields of theater, dance, and performance studies have produced work about BLM both within the pages of peer-reviewed journals as well as online in features written for such publications as *The New York Times* and *The Guardian*.[37] However, none of these texts explore the feminine performatives

enacted by BLM demonstrators, nor has the potential of black femininity been addressed as a strategy for BLM's objectives and visions of freedom. This project confronts these knowledge gaps.

I base my methodology on critical examinations of images and videos captured during BLM protests. One of factors that contributed to the movement's relatively sudden visibility in mainstream media during the summer of 2014 was that demonstrators and those witnessing protests in Ferguson could easily take photos and video footage of the events in real time and immediately upload the media to the internet. Through the ever-increasing popularity and usership of social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, and Snapchat, visual information from protests becomes widely available when users attach hashtags that make searching specific key words simple on these platforms. Within moments of a performance's occurrence, a recorded version of the live repertoires enacted by demonstrators can be inserted into the digital archives of the internet.

What makes this imagery compelling as archival information is that much of it comes from those who are participating in the protests. Although possible, it is highly unlikely that most of these videos and photos have been edited. Therefore, audiences and scholars alike can generally assume that what they are viewing is in fact what occurred in these protest spaces. This allows for a loosening of the critical scrutiny that scholars normally direct towards recorded data depicting the lives and experiences of marginalized peoples, especially when archives have historically been filled with "factual" explanations predominately authored by white men who had vested interests in painting a specific picture of

those they sought to oppress. The proliferation of personal media devices has enabled black racial justice activists to take control of their own narrative, which often includes having to challenge misconceptions or outright vilification by outside media sources.

Throughout my research process, I have built an archive of photos and videos from BLM demonstrations that I will use to explore the feminine performatives as well as performances by black women in the movement. These materials were collected from video- and image-sharing sites such as YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook. My ability to locate several first-hand accounts from BLM protests is in large part due to the inextricable role the internet plays in the way we function as a global society in the twenty-first century. Furthermore, hashtag activism strategies used by the movement to maintain participation and to attract new activists aided my efforts to collect imagery and media captured from inside protest spaces. Additionally, some materials explored in my case studies come from news articles and online journalism sources.

The thin divide between BLM activists' labors – what I consider to be protest performances – and the representation of these enactments in news media and social media posts provide an opportunity to investigate the tensions linking these bodily acts and the written discourses that accompany the imagery. How does the visuality of these recorded performances disrupt other narratives constructed about BLM demonstrators? Here I look to Daphne A. Brooks' *Bodies in Dissent*, in which she examines race relations in the fifty years following the Civil War by juxtaposing reactions to theater by "the (mostly) white male

recorders who experienced these marvelously unpredictable cultural events" with ephemera and evidence like "periodical reviews, epistolary exchanges, actor's articles, playbills, and personal documents" that offer insight into the experiences of black performers.[38] In a similar manner, I treat the images recorded of and/or by protest participants to be personal documents and (digital) epistolary exchanges that complicate published accounts of the same activism crafted by journalists, critics, and politicians.

The case studies I examine are framed in three chapters. Each chapter has a theme relating to a different level of verticality, meaning three different postures that protesting bodies enact in space: laying, kneeling, and standing. Rather than each chapter focusing on a single demonstration, the themes serve as nodes around which I examine instances of critical feminine performance in BLM activism enacted at several events throughout the United States between 2014 and 2017. This structure provides me with the flexibility to survey the array of techniques, repertoires, and gestures found within these performances. Also, each chapter is based on a different methodological approach, all of which are explained in detail below.

Modeled on Foster's examination into the tactics used by protestors in the Civil Rights Movement as well as those invested in ACT UP AIDS activism, my first chapter addresses the choreographic techniques of blocking and stillness deployed for die-in performances where BLM activists lay down their bodies on college campuses and in high-traffic, urban areas. I explore the resulting effects of obstruction and arrest, which are achieved in both physical and metaphorical

senses. The placement and motionlessness of the laid-out bodies in BLM die-ins shut down or divert movement in the protest spaces, sometimes impeding pathways in and out of the setting so that spectators are either forced to witness the event or strenuously work to avoid it. In borrowing McMillian's concept of female objecthood as well as Young's arguments on black stillness, I aim to nuance the notion of laying so that it speaks not of bodies at rest but of the paradoxical state of being active without physically doing something. Rather, by performing the state of abject objecthood, BLM protestors visualize the repercussions of racial inequality so that the status quo of social attitudes towards race relations are disrupted and "imagined alternatives" begin.[39]

The second chapter addresses the act of kneeling as a posture of submissive femininity. Through a historiographic analysis of the iconology surrounding kneeling black women in imagery from abolitionist literature, the works of black artists Kara Walker and Carla Williams, twentieth-century porn performance, and high school- and college-level activism in athletics, I trace the enactment of female acquiescence as a means of dismantling hegemonic ideologies surrounding black women's bodies and the merits of black life as a whole. The works of Jennifer Nash and Mireille Miller-Young, which explore performances of sexual, exposed bodies laboring in the seemingly misogynistic industry of pornography, aid in my interpretation of hypervisible black women in visual culture.[40] Together, these scholars are used to assess black femininity in past and contemporary performances that move beyond abjection and, alternately, connect with modes of freedom and ecstasy that can be used to counter the

containment exerted over BLM activists by hegemonic forces. I conclude this study by suggesting that similar approaches towards postures of submission can be used to analyze the BLM-associated gesture "Hands Up, Don't Shoot."

Drawing upon the theories of fleshiness and excessive femininity proposed by Nicole Fleetwood and Alexander Weheliye, the final chapter focuses on the extension of upright and sometimes-extraordinarily vertical black women in protest performance documentation. Also contributing to my methodology for this study are various arts and performance scholars who explore the performativity of digital documents that encounter discerning spectators. Based on the premise that BLM digital activism has the potential to organize in-person protest events as well as to inspire specific feminine performatives in these spaces, I examine responses to feminist activism in both online and embodied performances at BLM demonstrations through two case studies of "viral" BLM imagery. The first addresses the award-winning photograph of Ieshia Evans at a July 2016 protest in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, while the second study explores recordings of activist and filmmaker Bree Newsome, who in June 2015 ascended a 30-foot-long pole at the South Carolina State Capitol to remove a Confederate flag.

Upholding the physical and intellectual labor of black women and those who identify as femme in the BLM movement is vitally important to crafting a comprehensive depiction of current racial justice activism. I contend that there are several problematic aspects in existing cultural discourses surrounding women in racial justice movements as well as those made about BLM in general: first, there

is a long-held fallacy that women have not taken part in the numerous campaigns for black liberation throughout American history;[41] second, the reality of their historical participation demands a redressing of what black femininity is capable of, including what it activates both within and outside of protest environments, thus troubling the characterization of black women and femininity as subservient and weak; lastly, the command over one's body denoted by the individuals I examine subverts the racially-tinged rhetoric that circulates on news and social media platforms about the "out of control" nature of BLM activism.[42]

Beyond the discourses occurring within academia, my thesis seeks to address what is at stake for our larger national and global societies by highlighting the physical efforts of those working within BLM. By tackling the performativity of black femininity, this work extends an invitation for those studying, critiquing, and participating in BLM to further examine the tactics available to the movement, namely those available within the body, even if they are often disavowed as immoderate, excessive, or ineffectual. Racial justice activism provides a compelling portal through which femininity should be reexamined for its political capacity to empower marginalized people by being a praxis for imaging black life now and for the future.

# CHAPTER 1

## "Your life is not up for debate and neither is mine": Choreographic Techniques for Laying Down

*If I die in police custody, know that I want to live! We want to live! We fight to live! Black Lives Matter! All Black Lives Matter!*

- Black Lives Matter protestor at the 2015 Netroots Nation Conference[1]

During a planned presidential town hall at the 2015 Netroots Nation Conference in Phoenix attended by then-candidate Bernie Sanders, a group of black women stood up and, one by one, gave impassioned speeches that began with "If I die in police custody…" Led by Black Lives Matter co-founder Patrisse Cullors, the speakers asked the audience to repeat their words in unison so that Sanders and former Maryland governor Martin O'Malley could clearly hear their cries. At nearly every speaker's turn, the precarity of black women's lives was brought to the forefront, with one activist insistently asking the crowd to not let male civil rights leaders like Al Sharpton and Jesse Jackson "destroy my name" should she die while under arrest.[2] The protestors' unified mantra, "If I die in police custody," was not created for this event alone, but borrowed from a viral hashtag that trended on Twitter following the death of Sandra Bland five days earlier.

Bland was arrested on July 10, 2015 in Waller County Texas and found hanging in her jail cell three days later. She was initially pulled over by sheriff's deputies for improper signaling, an encounter that led to, officials allege, Bland assaulting one of the arresting officers.[3] Police claimed that Bland committed

suicide while in custody, but doubt cast by her family and widespread skepticism based on the historical mistreat of black Americans by law enforcement quickly complicated the narrative woven by county officials. The hashtag #IfIDieInPoliceCustody, and its intonement at the Netroots conference, is a performative maneuver that uses the very real possibility of death to illustrate the conditions of black life, specifically of black women's lives and subjectivity. Demonstrations like these, both online and off, exist in a long history of protest that stages metaphorical death to demand that marginalized people have access to resources and treatment that betters or sustains human life.

This chapter examines the objectives behind #IfIDieInPoliceCustody by addressing the ways in which black women lay down their bodies in protest performance. The notion of "laying" explored here describes a posture that requires performers to lower their entire bodies to the ground. It is worth noting that, despite the passivity and resignation associated with laying down, this body posture is in fact a mode of obstruction. When protestors lay their bodies on the ground, they take up space that is normally left open for movement, or more specifically for upright bodies to walk through. I approach the performance of laying as the "die-in" style of protest performance. Die-ins occur when activists lay down to create the connotation of lifelessness. This strategy was widely used by AIDS activists and environmentalists at the end of the twentieth century and has been employed by the BLM movement since at least 2014, based on press coverage of such events.[4]

I examine how the BLM movement has adapted the die-in pose as an obstructionist technique, staged most prominently in higher-education settings as well as during large public gatherings such as parades and marathons. I consider the ways in which die-ins provide an opportunity for activists to force the bodies around them change their trajectories should they want to avoid the message being voiced by these racial justice advocates. I argue that by staging the death with the choreographic tactics of blocking and stillness,[5] demonstrators force spectators to experience similar restrictions on movement and behavior that dictate the social living conditions of black people. Furthermore, I analyze activists that transform their bodies into objects, a creative manipulation of the historical dehumanization of black people, for the purposes of interrupting the "business as usual" attitudes that perpetuate the inequity of black life in America.

My focus on the specific techniques used in die-ins challenges contemptuous commentary about BLM that characterizes the movement's protests as disorderly, chaotic, and uncontrolled. Notions of control and chaos, meaning that BLM protestors are "out of control" or that their interactions in public spaces are "chaotic," are tropes found in online materials posted by right-wing and mainstream media sources alike. For example, Philly.com columnist Dom Giordano wrote a September 12, 2017 online article with the title: "It's time to bring Antifa and BLM protesters under control."[6] Similar discourse surrounding demonstrations during Donald Trump's presidential inauguration in January 2017 discussed destructive activities by "rioters" alongside the protests staged by BLM. One news article by the Associated Press and published by a local D.C. Fox

affiliate described the peaceful actions by BLM and other organizations under the headline: “Smashed windows, chaotic confrontation near inauguration.” The article’s opening sentence reads: “Police deployed pepper spray in a chaotic confrontation blocks from Donald Trump's inauguration Friday as protesters registered their rage against the new president.”[7] Whether directly naming BLM protesters as needing to be controlled or indirectly associating their demonstrations with disorderly actions, allegations are made that the movement is unruly. Describing these activists as unmanageable troublemakers at best – if not willful rioters at worst – feeds into some of the culture’s most deeply-seated stereotypes of the “angry black person,” which continues to contribute to the criminalization of black residents in the U.S., while also diminishing the efficacy of the movement and its message of racial justice.

Through an examination into blocking and stillness enacted during BLM die-ins, I contend that these performative elements indicate planning and careful consideration, thus countering the narratives that these events are accidental or disorganized acts of activism. This claim dovetails with similar assertions proposed by dance scholar Anusha Kedhar, who writes in an October 2014 article for *Feminist Wire* that “analyzing the protests as choreographic tactics disrupts the popular, media-fed view of the Ferguson protesters as mobs of black bodies, which are unruly, lawless, and unpredictable. The actions of the protesters are carefully rehearsed and choreographed; they are intentional gestural acts deployed to protest the status quo and effect change.”[8] Examining these choreographic tactics also illustrates the subversive strategies that black women exercise when

usurping the historical mistreatment of their bodies. This approach resists the notion that these performances are driven solely by unbridled emotion, and instead considers the ways that BLM demonstrators create affecting performances that are based on intellectual analysis of their racial and gendered subjectivities. I frame die-ins as feminine performatives through close attention to the bodies that engage in these events as well as the organizers who plan and instruct activists in performance spaces. I also draw upon scholarship that explores performances of objecthood and obstruction to discuss how these strategies construct a self-ordained version of black femininity and a potential future for black life, albeit through the imagining of death.

Before examining the choreographic tactics of blocking and stillness, I provide additional historical contextualization for the die-in protest practice. This text explains the use of die-in protest performance in the 1980s and 90s in order to clarify and support my study of laying down within the BLM movement. The initial section also investigates scholarship by performance scholars that frames protest through dance terminology and technique. My analysis in this chapter aligns with texts by Kedhar and Susan Leigh Foster, who examine various civil rights, AIDS awareness, wealth inequality, and racial justice activisms. Kedhar and Foster analyze these historical movements for evidence of corporeal technique and knowledge. By focusing on die-ins as well as the tactics within the performance, however, I digress from the existing literature in the hopes that these established theories of choreography can shed new light on the staging of lifelessness.

My investigation into the tactical choreography of blocking details the importance of body placement in die-in spaces on college campuses. Through the study of a die-in staged at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor in September 2016, I consider the ways in which protestors' bodies are arranged to create obstruction. More specifically, this section considers how the performance of a laid out, symbolically lifeless body "gets in the way" of everyday activities for those cohabitating in the protest space. The chapter concludes with an analysis of stillness and the bodily control required by live protestors to eliminate movement in performances staged throughout the Twin Cities area in 2015. The case study on stillness also focuses on the capacity for this choreographic tactic to translate into photographic and video documentation, a theme that connects this chapter with those that follow in the overall thesis project.

**Choreographing Obstruction and Arrest**

The BLM movement is not the first activist organization to enact the die-in style protest strategy. Sometimes referred to as "lie-ins", die-ins are characterized by the intentional occupation of space by demonstrators who seek to highlight the precarity of specific minoritarian identities or people whose lives are made precarious by the state livelihoods. In addition to placing bodies in a location, the spreading of these bodies throughout the space by lying down further amplifies the ways in which this style takes up *and* makes room for performances that simultaneously call to attention life and death.

During the AIDS pandemic in the 1980s and 90s, the advocacy group ACT UP (the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) deployed the die-in style as a

means of indicting the U.S. government for its willful erasure and inaction surrounding the disease's impact. This extended to a lack of government funding and resources for those infected with AIDS. In his book *The Art of Protest,* cultural studies scholar T.V. Reed explains that ACT UP adopted die-ins from antinuclear activists, arguably bringing the technique into a wider awareness.[9] In addition to laying down on the ground, ACT UP protestors would draw chalk outlines around the laying actors, thus associating their staged deaths with procedures undertaken by homicide investigators. Furthermore, Reed explains that the location of these die-ins protests offered a way for AIDS patients and their allies to visualize the disease itself: "these 'living dead' protest their relegation to the hospice and the cemetery or to the silence that equals death. By moving 'death' out into public space, they resist the death sentences written by normative discourse and social indifference to the search for treatment and cure."[10]

Performing die-ins in public spaces also calls to attention how protestors use the placement of their bodies to disrupt action. In her 2003 essay *Choreographies of Protest,* Susan Leigh Foster writes that Civil Rights and AIDS activists used the tactics of sitting- and dying-in to interrupt movement within the densely populated landscapes chosen as performances' locations. Dying-in also restricted the ability of law enforcement to end the protest events. Foster's focus on both body placement and passivity serve as the backbone for the framing of my studies on blocking and stillness. I use her article as a model for examining the techniques used by BLM protests to create the effects of obstruction in interior

spaces as well as disruption in high-traffic, exterior spaces. I also reference the historical contextualization her work offers to frame my understanding of how laying down is enacted. I build on Foster to forge new scholarship on die-in performance by considering each bodily technique through the racial and gender subjectivities of black female protestors. The work of scholars such as Uri McMillian, Anna Martine Whitehead, and Harvey Young help in this investigation by proposing new ways of understanding black corporeal performance.

Because this chapter examines die-ins through the contexts of both ACT UP and BLM, it is worth noting that both movements share a sense of urgency, in that they cannot afford to wait for agents of the state, government officials, the criminal justice system, and the like to enact change. Rather, the critical die-ability of both black and queer people link these two activist communities. In addition to their shared affirmations towards trans and queer rights to life, statistics show that, in the U.S., black people are more affected by HIV than any other ethnic group; 44% of all new infections are found in black patients.[11] Therefore, I contend that it is productive to align the laid-out posture of die-ins enacted by both ACT UP and BLM because their overall political objectives advocate for some of the same resources as well as social and cultural changes towards the treatment of queer and black people.

One important factor to review before embarking on my analyses of blocking and stillness is the role that duration and time play in die-in protests. Foster's article details the use of time in ACT UP die-ins to mark the frequency of

AIDS-related fatalities. Protestors in that movement used the statistics of mortalities, one every 32 minutes, as an impetus to launch waves of "newly dead" bodies.[12] For the BLM movement, numerous media accounts of die-in performances emphasize the symbolism behind the amount of time that protestors lay their bodies down. The duration of die-ins has been attributed to the time that black men and women killed by police were left unattended in public space. During the January 2015 annual Martin Luther King Jr. march in San Antonio, Texas, a group of black protestors with the BLM-aligned organization SATX4 staged a prolonged die-in based on various cases in which black bodies had been disrespected by agents of the state.

> The protest continued for 19 minutes and 30 seconds to symbolize three high-profile police killings last year. Four minutes and 30 seconds represented the number of hours Michael Brown's body laid in the middle of Canfield Drive in Ferguson, Missouri, before it was retrieved by a medical transporter... Eleven minutes of the demonstration were meant to represent the number of times Eric Garner cried, "I can't breathe," before he was killed by New York Police Department officers who were trying to detain him for selling loose cigarettes... Four minutes of the protest represented the number of hours that passed before the sister of Marquise Jones was able to notify her family of her brother's death. Jones, 23, was shot and killed outside Chacho's at Loop 410 and Perrin Beitel by San Antonio Police Department Officer Robert Encina last February.[13]

BLM die-ins staged across the country have adopted the above-described timings as the temporal boundaries for their performances. Sometimes the die-ins are brief, with four minutes and thirty seconds serving as the sole timeframe for protestors to remain in their dying positions. Others use a variety of timings, like in the San Antonio MLK die-in. Alternately, however, many BLM die-ins do not adhere to these symbolic durations, and demonstrators do not put parameters around how long they want or need to be in the space. For example, during an

August 2015 die-in performed in response to the mistrial of Charlotte, North Carolina police officer Randall Kerrick, who shot and killed an unarmed college student named Jonathan Ferrell in 2013, one demonstrator said they planned to protest: "As long as we have to."[14]

While it is important to note the significance behind the number of minutes and seconds used during various demonstrations, I consider how protestors' bodies, specifically black women, are conditioned for the die-in aesthetics of objection and stillness because they exist within a temporal realm of, what feminist scholar Connie Wun calls, "perpetual disavowal".[15] Wun explains that education policies surrounding discipline and surveillance disproportionately criminalize and penalize black girls in school. Wun argues that these constant and consistent conditions essentially render black girls as "captive objects" that are "ever-observed but without recognition," thus leaving them without the ability to assert their subjectivity.[16] This stunning study on school discipline leaves me asking how policy trains black girls' bodies to act and behave through the normative codes of conduct, especially protocols that determine if black women are or are not lawful citizens of the state when they become adults. This chapter considers the potential that exists for black women to subvert the "captivity" of their learned behaviors by using the physical state of stillness and the condition of objecthood as strategies in prolonged protest performances of death.

Both Wun and Foster bring to attention that physical training impacts performances of minoritarian subjectivity and activism. In fact, I cannot base this chapter's methodological and theoretical frameworks around *Choreographies of*

*Protest* without addressing a key component of Foster's analysis: the learning of protest tactics. When examining ACT UP demonstrations, Foster provides detailed descriptions for how and why the AIDS activists rehearsed the interactions their bodies would have with those who sought to extract them from protest spaces. She explains that they gathered in advance to role play the parts of protestor and police. Foster writes, "activists learned what to expect from another body exerting force over them, and this enabled them to remain in charge of the protest as it developed."[17] Through teaching their bodies the strategies of nonviolent passivity, such as corporeal control over one's own weight and limpness, demonstrators developed "techniques of the body," a concept of formulated actions conceived by Marcel Mauss. Mauss explains that physical practices like swimming and digging are not intuitive, and that "in every society, everyone knows and has to know and learn what he has to do in all conditions."[18] Foster takes up Mauss' assertion, arguing that practicing the techniques of protest allows activists to garner greater authority over their bodies, thus enhancing the affective potency of their performances. "Not a script that the protestor learns to execute, these are, rather, actions that both require and provide strong commitment and, once practiced, slowly change the world in which they occur."[19]

Therefore, in the contexts of BLM, this study engages with the ways in which the techniques of die-ins are learned. How is peaceful passivity instructed? How is obstruction choreographed? Through evidence gathered via social media and news discourses surrounding the staging of BLM die-ins, each section below explains the techniques of body placement and stillness in die-ins across the

country by addressing how they are planned, rehearsed, and learned. Finally, a compelling dialectic exists between preparations that take place prior to the protest event and the role that a director or leader plays in the protest space to help demonstrators effectively execute the die-in. The need for an instructor highlights that protests are curated events that require improvisation, flexibility, and adaptability to changing circumstances. It is important to consider both the rehearsed and improvised natures of die-ins because both are necessary components of this performance style. The ability to take up space, block pathways, and deter extraction are threatened when confusion or uncertainty arises, thus the need for a shared vocabulary and clear direction during the protest. That said, protests are subject to change in the midst of the event due to efforts by agents of the state or oppositional forces that lay down their own obstacles in order to stop demonstrations for continuing. In addition to my exploration into how these techniques are learned, I also look at photos and videos of die-ins to examine the execution of specific protests. More specifically, I analyze what these die-ins look like, how effective blocking and stillness strategies are at obstructing or disrupting the status quo, and what clues regarding the techniques aesthetic execution can be extracted from media coverage of the events.

**Obstructive Bodies on Campus**

Since 2014, college campuses have served as particularly active spaces for BLM die-in demonstrations. Students at various levels of higher education, from undergraduates to graduates to law students and those in medical school, have engaged the tactic of dying-in to unite their activism with the movement. When

students returned to campus in the fall of 2014, several die-ins were staged to protest the decision not to charge Darren Wilson for killing Michael Brown in Ferguson the summer before. Students at Penn State, Harvard, Brown, and more laid down their bodies in a variety of interior and exterior settings across their campuses to, as Twitter posts explain, show "solidarity" or "stand" with #Ferguson and #BlackLivesMatter.[20] In subsequent years, as black men and women continued to lose their lives during interactions with police, die-ins remain a visible protest strategy in higher education settings.

Furthermore, die-ins have also been used to make pointed critiques of specific, on-campus racial incidents and discourse. In the fall of 2016, for example, BLM protestors at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor staged numerous demonstrations in response to a spattering of racist incidents that appeared as classes began.[21] For several weeks, racial slurs and graffiti declaring "Free Dylan Roof," "I Hate Niggers," and "Make America White Again" were posted on campus and in downtown Ann Arbor.[22] Within the unrest stirred by these incidents, the Michigan Political Union, a university parliamentary organization, planned to debate a proposed resolution that stated "Black Lives Matter is harmful to racial relations in the United States." In response, hundreds of BLM protestors marched from the U Mich Diag – a central gathering place on one of the university's quadrangles – to the Vandenberg Room in the Michigan League building, where the MPU debate was taking place on the evening of September 27.[23]

Video shot from inside the Vandenberg Room shows what occurred once the protestors reached the meeting. The footage begins with student activists opening one of the three sets of doors to the room and quickly streaming in while chanting together "Black Lives Matter."[24] The protestors surround the estimated 50 audience members that are seated in a square formation facing a podium. Rows of student activists holding signs line up against the room's walls. They stand in position and continue to chant. The small size of the room prevents all 400 of the BLM demonstrators from entering the space, so the remaining crowd stands in the doorway and fills in the hallway outside. A figure seated at a front table vehemently strikes a gavel multiple times, but the chants of the incoming crowd grow louder to drown out the call to order. Roughly two minutes after entering the room, three black women stand at the front of the room and raise their hands to the crowd, signaling that they want the chanting to stop.[25] Once silence falls over the room, one of the women – later identified by the *The Michigan Daily* as Lawrielle West – holds a cell phone and reads aloud the following statement: "Black Lives Matter does not hurt race relations - Racists hurt race relations - Your life is not up for debate, neither is mine - Black lives are not up for debate - If you are neutral in situations of injustice – You have chosen the side of the oppressor."[26] Following each phrase, the crowd repeats back her words in a raised unison.

After finishing the entire speech, the woman to West's right calls out "one more time" and the call-and-response takes place again. After the final stanza, the speaker removes her backpack and the demonstrator on West's right waves her

arms at waist height in a "no" gesture. Both immediately lower themselves to the floor and the protestors behind them follow suit. The third leader steps forward and makes a sweeping gesture with her right arm, circling her the space in front of her chest from right to left while extending her left hand up and outwards to the crowd. The camera stays facing forward but pans left and right to show that the demonstrators in the room and out in the hallway are now laying on the ground. The recording concludes with the activists in the die-in position and the sound of three gavel strikes.

I want to focus on how blocking creates obstruction. As described above, the protestors at the September 27 U Mich die-in utilize the space in which the debate was being held. They do so by placing their bodies all around the audience. A diagram of the Vandenberg Room available on the University's website shows that there are three possible entrances into the space, two along the hallway and a third leading into a room labeled "Concourse" (Figure 1).[27] Based on the video, the BLM protestors place themselves against the walls of the room, and the two remaining entrances appear blocked by their bodies (see screenshot in Figure 2). The number of student-activists that attended the event expands what can be considered the protest space. The hundreds who could not fit inside Vandenberg, and thus had to remain in the building's hallways, extend the activism beyond the tight space of a single room (see screenshots in Figure 3).[28] The use of occupying bodies in the Vandenberg Room and Michigan League building reflects careful curation of the protest space by the organizers who know and frequent the university landscape. Because they live in these spaces on a day-to-day basis, the

student organizers are adept at knowing how movement usually occurs there and, thus, how it can be interrupted. Here the occupation of space by BLM protestors challenges the audience's expectations and ability to move in that location. This creates a disruption not only of the MPU debate but of the quotidian and institutional landscapes that are traversed on campus so that those who witness the event must remain in the space and encounter the politics brought by the activists.

Susan Leigh Foster examines the placement of bodies in die-in protests as a means of disturbing the everyday movements of specific individuals. She writes that ACT UP organizers sought to directly address capitalist mechanisms contributing to the subjugation of AIDS patients by quite literally getting in their way.

> ACT UPers endeavored to adapt their protests to the specific geographical and social environments in which they found themselves. Among the earliest actions, die-ins jumbled lower Manhattan, disrupting the commutes of those working on Wall Street and at adjacent corporate facilities housing companies known for their profiteering from experimental treatments for AIDS.[29]

Here the obstructive positioning of ACT UP protestors was aimed at creating an interaction between their bodies and those accruing financial capital from them. In the case of the U Mich BLM protest, the encounter generated by the protestors' placement on campus forced the MPU and its attendees to confront the privileged positionality of the organizers, who had proposed and elicited a debate regarding the value of black lives and the BLM movement.

As detailed in press coverage of the protest and the MPU event, "None of the students leading the debate were black, but all of them expressed sentiments that they cared about black lives and supported the movement. However, they all

debated the BLM movement was harmful for race relations in American for one reason or another from liberal, conservative and moderate viewpoints for the sake of the debate."[30] The tenor of the event's topic suggests that the all-white MPU attendees can, in some way, gain intellectual or social capital through theorizing black experience. More importantly, the exclusion of black voices at the original event is beside the fact that, as the demonstrators explain in the video, any life, especially black lives, are "not up for debate." Lawrielle West explains the disconnect that MPU seems to have ignored (or failed to realize) in their planning for debate, and which the BLM demonstrators ask them to acknowledge by raising their voices in the obstructed protest space: "'You cannot trivialize my experience as a Black person by debating it,' she said. 'How can you debate my experience? I'm not saying I'm better than you or that only Black lives matter or that my life matters more than yours, but I'm saying that Black lives do matter.'"[31]

The transformation of social spaces and behavior through occupation and obstruction by black activists is a theme of Foster's examination into the lunch counter sit-ins of the Civil Rights movement. Sit-ins at department stores like Woolworths in Greensboro, North Carolina, radically altered predominantly whites-only spaces. Black protestors who sat-in created a new sense of place around their bodies by redesigning the ways that white people had to move in the occupied space. Their bodies, like those of the BLM demonstrators, shifted codes of social movement, "with protestors maneuvering so that white customers would be forced to scrutinize their own behavior."[32] In order to avoid engaging in such

scrutinization, white customers began avoiding the stores, especially as the number of sit-ins proliferated. The stores, in turn, lost profits, which ultimately pushed them to "agree to negotiations with civil rights leaders that resulted in desegregation."[33] By impeding potential exits out of the protest space, the U Mich BLM demonstrators did not allow witnesses to avoid their activist discourse. Instead, they successfully "halted" the debate and elicited new value for the event that shifted away from the troublesome postulations that preceded the protestors' arrival.[34]

Because of the strategic placement of the protestors' bodies, both within the room and the hallway, the effect of obstruction is established from the onset of their entering the Michigan League building and the Vandenberg Room. However, the efficacy of the obstructive tactic is enhanced when the protestors lower their bodies into the die-in position because they cannot be easily knocked off balance or out of their blocking positions, as they could if standing. When signaled by the protest leaders, the student-activists descent to the floor and lie on their backs with their faces turned upwards (Figure 4).[35] The amount of people in the walled space requires the students to place their bodies on top of one another. Some also lay the signs they are carrying on their chests, with the words scribed onto the paper remaining visible to the audience. A hushed silence – stunning in comparison to the unified roar of the preceding call and response – falls on the room as protestors assume the die-in position. However, according to media coverage of the event, neither the living dead nor the audience stayed quiet during the remainder of the occupation.

> For several minutes after the protesters entered the event, debaters continued to speak, while protesters continued chanting. Shortly after the chanting began, a new MPU speaker took the podium and engaged with protesters, asking questions and discussing the issues at hand. Protesters then took to the podium directly, and spoke one by one to a mostly quiet crowd, when a disagreement broke out over whether white people should be speaking at the event.[36]

Although *The Michigan Daily* article, which does not explicit describe the protest as a die-in, considers the continuation of dialogue in space as having "mixed impact" on the debate, I contend that the transformation of the protestors' bodies through the die-in tactic provokes a redressing of their presence so that they are no longer BLM activists or U Mich students but are affecting objects that demand new modes of appraisal.

Here I turn to the work of performance scholar Uri McMillan, whose study of black female avatars provides a productive framework into how women can use hegemonic oppression to transform their bodies. McMillan bases his argument on the premise that the less-than-human categorization placed upon black folks creates a state of objecthood that can be empowering.

> I seek to bridge the chasm between a dehumanizing objecthood, on the one hand, and an embodied self-possession, on the other, by reimagining objecthood as a performance-based strategy that challenges notions of what constitutes black subjectivity. Performing objecthood, I argue, is a process that enables black women to transform themselves into art objects. Performing objecthood is a world making, one that envisions the capacity for agency in, paradoxically, becoming and performing as an object.[37]

McMillan explains that these women are performers who manipulate "the proverbial muck of these queered object relations" so that they become an avatar of black femininity, requiring "the repeated tactic of multiplying the self, circumventing limits on how and where to *do* one's body."[38] This theory succinctly illuminates a common thread throughout the scholarship on performing

black femininity; that agency can be found in objectifying and visualizing, through the body, the state of alterity that black women experience. In this way, the protestors' bodies are not vessels that simply contain trauma but are prospective tools for transforming the spaces around them into potential sites of liberation.[39]

Through his understanding of objecthood as an arts-based strategy, McMillian's notion provides an alternative way to address repertoires of obstruction in protest. The die-in posture, as a feminine performative choreographed as a stationary technique, asks spectators and scholars alike to consider how these activists' performances move beyond the dialectic of life and death and instead assume the de-humanized condition of object-ness, which disrupts the ways in which audiences expect to interact with them. By laying their bodies down, the protestors require their audiences to critique their forms as objects rather than flesh. If the debate's attendees wished to discuss the notion that black lives may or may not matter or be worth advocating for, the technique of dying-in allows activists to force those who question their worth to come into contact with their un-human form. The viewers know, however, that these body/objects are performing because they witnessed the transformation into the die-in. The knowledge that they are witnessing a performance, therefore, requires the audience to think not just about what the demonstrators are doing but how and why they are doing it, a critical thought process that occurs in encounters with art works.

Furthermore, the die-in body as an art object enhances the effect of obstruction because its presence destabilizes the functionality of and intended purposes for the university landscape. Die-in occupations of the Michigan League building as well as the U Mich Law Library in December 2014 (Figure 5) radically altered the meaning of these spaces.[40] Instead of a meeting room or study area, these locations became galleries and theaters in which a contained audience experienced art through their roles as spectators to the performing body/objects. Additionally, the public was unable to use the spaces for their accustomed purposes due to the presence of the body/objects, which obstructed paths to, from, and within the area. Through the enactment of objecthood, feminine BLM protestors create a new subjectivity for themselves that runs counter to the abject state they perform. As art objects, these women force those around them to stop and examine the performing body and the objectives driving its enactment. Theoretically, even if spectators had managed to leave the protest space, the die-in activists would have compelled those individuals to alter their movements and renegotiate their established relationships with the landscape.

I was not able to acquire first-hand accounts of how the protestors rehearsed or learned how to enact the die-in tactic at U Mich on September 27, 2016. Therefore, I rely on evidence from social media, press coverage, and within the video shot during the protest to explore the event's planning. An interview with one of the student organizers, Jamie Thompson, in an October 2017 *Teen Vogue* article reveals that a newly-formed student group called Students4Justice served as the centralizing force for the die-in; today, it continues to prepare and

disseminate information about BLM-related demonstrations on campus.[41] Students4Justice was informally launched on September 26, 2016, the day before the MPU debate, when Thompson and three other women posted a call to protest over Facebook in reaction to racist fliers found on campus. Their first demonstration, which occurred that night, attracted 250 attendees. The next day, Students4Justice planned the MPU protest again using Facebook. Unfortunately, the original post cannot be found, and the Student4Justice Facebook and Twitter accounts were created the day after the die-in. However, posts created for other obstructive events suggest what information may have been sent when the die-in was organized.

A Facebook event page by Students4Juctice for a planned walkout on November 16, 2016 at 3:00 pm includes a logistics document that directed students to three central meeting places on campus where they could gather with organizers, "chant coordinators," "demands readers," and fellow demonstrators.[42] The page lists that there were 837 walkout protestors but those figures are based on the number of people who clicked "going" on the RSVP Facebook function. The U Mich Diag was tagged as the gathering location for students who walked out of class on the central campus, just as the Diag had served as the starting point for the September 27 die-in (Figure 6).[43] Thompson and Lawrielle West, as well as three other individuals, were also named as the organizers who addressed the crowd, served as MCs, and read the protestors' demands at the walkout. The instructions also included directions for "scouts," meaning people assigned to "point out which doors we are entering and leaving from so you can make sure

they are clear."[44] These plans illustrate the roles that the BLM activists employ to coordinate events and to prepare protestors for what they can expect if they are to attend. The title of the event, a "walkout," as well as that for a "Student Sit in!" on February 9, 2017 also work to educate activists on the bodily repertoires they are expected to enact during the protests. The Diag again appears as the central meeting place for the February 9 sit-in, and the information listed next to this location on that event page explains that logistics were discussed sand safety protocols described before the students marched to the student union for their seated occupation.[45]

The details of logistics and safety are especially important for understanding how the die-in protestors may have been instructed in the use of their bodies during the MPU debate die-in. Because none of the media coverage surrounding the die-in protest includes narratives about what was discussed at the Diag on the night on September 27, I can only posit that Thompson, West, and the other leaders of Students4Justice provided direction regarding how, when, and where the 400 protestors were to situate their bodies in the Michigan League building.[46] That said, the use of gesture during the MPU debate occupation supports my theory that some formal instructions for enacting the die-in posture were expressed at the Diag.

As previously described, after the protest leaders concluded the second call-and-response, one of the organizers made a sweeping hand motion in full view of the protests that entered the Vandenberg Room and those in the hallway (see screenshot in Figure 7). The fact that this gesture was made silently, with no

verbal cues or direction to the protestors, suggests that they had seen and knew its meaning prior to entering the space. Furthermore, the demonstrators lowered their bodies into position in relative silence, with no calls for clarification, explanation, or confusion ringing out during the transition. The unified performance of dying-in by so many demonstrators indicates that the gesture was familiar to the crowd that gathered at the Diag, although it is unclear if the protestors indeed practiced the action of laying down at that time.

It is possible, though, that details regarding how the bodies should be laid in the protest space, with their heads and eyes facing upwards, may have been included in discussions of safety at the Diag. The uniformity of this body position during the protest serves as evidence that protestors were informed of the specific shapes they were to make. The potential instruction that I outline here indicates that the hundreds of demonstrators at the event had been taught the protocols and aesthetics of the die-in posture before enacting it, even if it is a less-formal mode of training than the role-plays that Susan Leigh Foster says were rehearsed by ACT UPers.[47]

Press coverage of the U Mich die-in describes the BLM protestors' ability to halt the MPU debate and reclaim the space for black voices. The reactions of debate attendees that appeared in *The Daily Michigan* center on a lack of decorum surrounding the protest. Said one MPU member, a sophomore from the School of Literature, Sciences, and Arts, "I thought the protest was fine… I thought the initial coming in and saying their piece was fine. I had an issue with once they had said what they were supposed to, what they were going to say, continuing to

impede civil discourse."[48] Other quotes from audience members also emphasized the disruptive nature of the event. These responses highlight that the die-in protest was successful at stopping the problematic debate over BLM. The demonstrators' occupation of the Vandenberg room redefined the rules of debate, disregarding the etiquette expected for such forums. Additionally, frustration was expressed over the silencing of white voices in the discussion that proceeding the die-in, with an argument breaking out over whether white students should be allowed to discuss the topic at hand with the protestors. In this way, the overwhelming presence of black voices and bodies in the room transformed the space into an arena for black discourse. The transformation of the educational space into a site of black occupation and discourse is a critical tactic by black students to reclaim control over their own bodies when living and learning in an environment that has historically contributed to the physical and cultural erasure of minorities throughout modern civilization. It is important to note that the disruption of space by die-ins on college campuses does the work of reterritorializing these spaces for people of color, challenging the ongoing dominance of white supremacy in the institution of higher education. The technique of obstruction enacted through the die-in forced displaced white attendees to take on the role of spectator rather than participant.

Eventually, the protestors left of their own accord. But they did not go silently as when they laid their bodies down. Rather, the chanted as they departed, "effectively ending the debate."[49] That the hundreds of protestors disengaged their own bodies from the protest space is noteworthy. They were not made to leave or

physically removed from the Michigan League building by campus police or the administration. Here the technique of stillness enacted by the laid-out bodies complicated any notion of aggression that might be attached to the protestors' occupation of the university building. Instead, by enacting stillness, the BLM demonstrators were able to extend their protest, create ideal conditions for their bodies to be documented in photography or video, and maintain agency over their curation of the event because they did not appear violent or physically threatening, which are characterizations often used to justify force against people of color. The next section explores the enactment of stillness in BLM die-ins staged in a variety of high-traffic areas.

**Performing Arrest in the Twin Cities**

Like Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, and Eric Garner before him, Philando Castile is a name that has become synonymous with the Black Lives Matter movement. On the evening of July 6, 2016, Castile was driving through the Falcon Heights suburb of St. Paul, Minnesota with his girlfriend, Diamond Reynolds, and her young child when he was pulled over by officer Jeronimo Yanez.[50] When Yanez asked Castile for his driver's license, Castile informed the officer that he was carrying a firearm. While reaching for his wallet, Yanez shot Castile, at which time Reynolds activated the "Facebook Live" streaming function and broadcasted the immediate aftermath of the incident. Castile died later that night at an area hospital. It was, perhaps, Castile's death that caused the American public to turn its attention to the Twin Cities. But, in fact, the BLM movement had been a visible presence in the cosmopolis well before Castile's death.

This section examines BLM die-ins organized in the Minneapolis-St. Paul (MSP) area throughout 2015. Much like the demonstrations on college campuses, racial justice advocates in MSP have frequently employed the tactic of dying-in to halt everyday movements in public spaces. However, during my research, I found that demonstrators in the Twin Cities repeatedly staged protests that had still, laid-out bodies occupying and impeding spaces designed for movement and expediency. Whereas the U Mich activists blocked the flow of traffic in and out of areas not specifically meant for bodies in motion, the BLM die-ins in this study perform physical listlessness in zones for efficient and well-organized travel, such as light rail tracks and parade or marathon routes. By enacting the technique of stillness in spaces where uninterrupted movement is expected, the BLM protestors in MSP perform productive forms of passivity, proximity, and weighted-ness to disrupt a social status quo that devalues black life in America. Rather than focusing on a sole case study, I summarize four die-in protests in high-traffic areas to explicate patterns within these events before analyzing the technique of stillness as a praxis of creative arrest.

On two occasions in the summer of 2015, BLM activists gathered in downtown St. Paul to protest the use of lethal and excessive force by police against people of color. During the first, held on August 10, 150 people marched down University Avenue chanting "Black Lives Matter" before staging a die-in on the Green Line light rail tracks at the intersection of University and Snelling Avenue (Figure 8).[51] Altogether, the demonstration lasted an hour, but its timing, which was during the evening rush hour, amplified the interruption caused by the

bodies in protest. A month later, on September 20, demonstrators again laid their bodies down on the Green Line tracks in St. Paul, this time during the season home opener for the Minnesota Vikings NFL team (Figure 9).[52] The protest forced the MSP Metro Transit to replace portions of Green Line service to the TCF Bank stadium with shuttle buses. Despite staging the die-in on a Sunday, the BLM organizers and 100 protestors present at the demonstration exploited the bustling light rail ridership and heavy car traffic that comes with large sporting events.

Large public gatherings at city marathons or for major holidays have also served as settings for BLM die-ins in MSP. However, many of these demonstrations also illustrate the limited power BLM protestors had to disrupt or enter certain high-traffic areas, especially when their planned routes are cut off by police or other forces. Less than a month after BLM was barred from enacting a large-scale protest amongst holiday shoppers at the Mall of America, protestors staged two die-ins on Martin Luther King Jr. Day 2015. The MLK Day protests came one week after 24-year-old Marcus Golden was killed by St. Paul police. The first was performed in front of Minnesota state legislators and civic leaders during a holiday program at Macalester College.[53] The second die-in took place as 2,000 protestors made their way through St. Paul to the State Capitol, stopping at the I-94 overpass of University Avenue to lay their bodies down (Figure 10); this occurred after the march was thwarted from entering the I-94 entrance ramp and redirected by law enforcement to University Ave.[54]

During the Medtronic Twin Cities Marathon on October 4, 2015, protestors were stopped from directly interacting with the runners' route. Rumors circulated that marathon organizers had gone as far as to move the finish line so that it did not coincide with the protestors' march to the die-in location (Figure 11).[55] Because of the deviation, the die-in was staged on a boulevard near the finish line. Despite the improvisational changes to the die-in setting, the demonstrators' attempts to locate their performance in an area where runners, volunteers, and spectators would encounter them were further complicated by a barrier erected by police using bicycles and their uniformed bodies.

While the exertion of energy is perhaps more physically apparent in certain actions needed to halt these high-traffic spaces, such as when stepping in front of vehicles or marching down a major thoroughfare, control over one's body is also necessary for performing stillness in the die-in posture. Firstly, the "dead" bodies of BLM protestors are working against the expected behaviors of the environments in which they are performing by rendering their bodies motionless. Adding to this tension between motion and stillness is the fact that the die-in strategy is being enacted to interrupt efficient movement for those traveling through the protest spaces, which unto itself is an obstructive act. However, by curating their bodies in these space as still and lowered to the ground, BLM demonstrators execute their act of obstructive through the performance of physical passivity. The decision to eliminate movement from their bodily performances potentially alters the perceptions that spectators may have of the racial justice advocates, especially if activists remain unresponsive to verbal or

physical aggression directed towards them by police or counter protestors. This was the case for both the Vikings home opener and Twin Cities marathon demonstrations.

To better illustrate the performance of passivity as a historical practice, I once again turn to Susan Leigh Foster's analyses of the lunch-counter sit-ins and ACT UP demonstrations. The sit-ins required that demonstrators maintain control over their bodies, especially when they were surrounded by groups and individuals who vocally opposed their presence in the protest space. By not rising to the taunts and threats hurled in their direction, Civil Rights demonstrators practiced forms of passive non-violence. This, of course, did not meant that they were inactive in their corporeal performance, but that they, as Foster describes, "imposed themselves as proper rather than unruly, a potential object for compassion rather than a figure that inspired fear."[56] Through this passive state of the body, the protestors crafted a particular way of performing that went against the dominant expectations constructed about their subjectivities and behaviors.

At the September 20 BLM die-in staged on the Green Line tracks, activists met counter-protestors, some of whom took offense to the movement's action because "people shouldn't be targeted and inconvenienced."[57] When one opponent flew the Confederate flag during the event, BLM demonstrators largely maintained their passivity despite the racially-charged symbol. One protestor did become upset by the flag's presence, but organizers quickly moved to defuse any confrontation between the flag bearer and the protestor. By doing so, BLM

leaders avoided a physical reaction that could have ultimately dismantled the emotional resonance elicited from the corporeal performance of the die-in.

The technique of stillness also works in tandem with the proximity one protesting body has to another by complicating efforts to extract activists from the protest space. In the case of the 2016 U Mich die-in, the walled confines of the university campus building caused the hundreds of student-activists to lay their bodies across one another. In protest settings where these architectural parameters do not exist, purposeful connection between one "dead" body and another helps to defy, or at the very least problematize, the processes of arrest and individual detainment that law enforcement often enacts to end demonstrations. Die-in protests in outdoor public arenas like parks and roadways that combine the elements of stillness and proximity can extend the protest duration or help organizers maintain control over the event by dissuading forces of expulsion. Foster describes that the ACT UP activists clustered their bodies into collective units by eliminating visible space between the protestors, room that could be used to extract the demonstrators from the performance. She explains that "the closeness of the prostrate bodies made it difficult for police to surround any given body, grab hold of it, and lug it onto a bus for arrest."[58] Images from the MLK Day die-in performance on the I-94 overpass illustrate the minimization of space between protestors' motionless bodies. Given that the activists had already encountered police when their path was diverted from entering the freeway, the clustering of their forms mitigated further efforts to dismantle the demonstration. By remaining as one unmoving and immobile collective, they kept control over

their bodies and the event. After all, none of the press coverage suggests that St. Paul police attempted to physically remove the protestors during the die-in nor when they rose from their laid positions and continued marching to the Capitol.

When BLM activists cluster their motionless bodies on top of or very close to one another, they elicit practical uses for proximity as well as visually poetic expressions of collectivity. The spatiality of the performers signals both a joined effort for the BLM movement and, what Harvey Young calls, "the sense of shared intimacy between the subjects."[59] Young writes about African American bodies in stillness by examining the photographs of Joseph Zealy, Richard Roberts, and Walker Evans. In one image by Richard Roberts, two black women, one elderly and the other in her 20s or 30s, are captured in a single frame. The younger woman has her right hand placed on the older woman's left shoulder. Young stresses that the photograph does not provide an explanation for how the two women are related, and it is not important the viewer know this detail. Rather, their poses create a material relationship between the two, "bridging the physical space separating them."[60] Young further argues that, while it is probable that Roberts arranged the two women, their willingness to occupy the same space and to hold their bodies in stillness so that the image could be captured indicates that they wanted to be shown in this familial alliance.

So too, I contend, do BLM demonstrators enacting the die-in posture in clustered or layered formations actively create a communal intimacy, one that sometimes lasts for minutes or tens of minutes as they lay in stillness. In addition to conveying their unity as activists in the BLM movement, black demonstrators

construct a shared subjectivity as those who have historically and contemporarily experienced loss. This notion of "loss" extends beyond cases of black men and women killed by law enforcement to include the painful repercussions of the mass incarceration of black people, continued income inequality and poverty, dwindling resources for affordable housing, the erasure of black immigrants, and the killing of black trans women and queer people, all of which the BLM movement identifies as resulting from systematic political oppression.

The physicalized enactment of stillness in die-ins is not divorced from the ways in which protestors use their bodily weight to experience literal and metaphorical liberation. For more utilitarian effect, the release of tension in the body can make it more difficult for a body to be removed from the protest space. Rather than fighting back against police officers attempting to pick up them up, Foster explains that ACT UP activists performed corporeal inactivity, thus making their bodies heavier. "Even as they shouted chants and slogans, they maintained a determined listlessness, thereby increasing their weightiness and requiring police to fumble for handholds, and to jockey for leverage as they coordinated the removal of each body."[61]

Yet still, the paradoxically controlled inactivity that comes from being physically inert presents a more symbolic corporeality for black activists who have experienced loss. Movement artist and scholar Anna Martine Whitehead details in her 2017 essay *Expressing Life Through Loss* that queer folks and people of color share similar lived experiences of loss. She writes that both black

and queer bodies have been shaped by trauma, which means they are increasingly burdened with oppression and simultaneously emptied by it.

> The post-trauma empty-body shape might suggest that muscular composure is at least partly circumscribed by the body's aptitude at turning trauma into cellular tissue-a refusal to relinquish trauma. When we are shocked by unintelligible violence, that muscle memory is dislodged from its quiet holding patterns inside our bodies. Or, if we are repeatedly shocked so that the violence becomes normalized, the hollowed and heavy body becomes the normative body.[62]

Here, Whitehead suggests that black and queer bodies learn, through corporeal memory, how to hold the weight of loss. That said, Whitehead also insists that productive possibilities exist when those burdened by this weight allow the heaviness to leave their bodies. Rather than continuing to carry the weight, black people may, in fact, experience liberation in the act of falling: "Freedom is the release of tension under weight paired with the appearance of bearing no weight at all."[63] Through the technique of stillness, presented in the posture of a body felled, black activists are able to expel the weight of trauma that brings them to the protest space in the first place. In so doing, it is possible to imagine that they are, even for a short time, emancipated from the burden of death through the very act of performing it.

But how do BLM activists learn stillness? How can you rehearse this technique? Here, I find it generative to align Whitehead's belief that abject bodies take shape through the memory of trauma with Harvey Young's study on black stillness. Young posits that the active performance of motionlessness can be understood as the enactment of embodied, everyday experiences of arrest.[64] Therefore, stillness is a well-known condition for black bodies because it has been

molded by social forces inflicted upon them. Anusha Kedhar refers to this in her article on gesture in the Ferguson protests as a "habitus," a term originally coined by Pierre Bourdieu. Quoting sociologist Loïc Wacquant, Kedhar defines habitus as "the way society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel and act in determinant ways, which then guide them."[65] I contend that, for black women engaging in die-ins especially, BLM activists' bodies have been instructed through their lived experiences of perpetual disavowal and social arrest, rather than through formal training. It is also worth considering, as Young suggests, that stillness can also be a subversive act, one that performatively halts the movement and circulation of black bodies that has become synonymous with the black diaspora since the Middle Passage.[66]

**Where do we go from here?**

Throughout this chapter, the choreographic techniques of blocking and stillness have been used to describe the efficacy of die-in protest performance to affect spectators who encounter and are sometimes compelled to witness the event. Furthermore, stillness and objecthood create the potential for liberation for activists of color who enact the practice of laying down. The repeated employment of the die-in strategy by BLM organizers and chapter leaders, on college campuses and beyond, suggests that these racial justice advocates find it productive to embrace what Anna Martine Whitehead calls "a queer Black freakish practice" that emerges from "the compulsion to embellish an expectation of failure and collapse that is always already presumed in the case of both Black

and/or queer bodies."[67] By imagining and performing the very abjection that their protests work to confront, BLM demonstrators are able to inventively destabilize hegemonic conceptions of black subjectivity. In the next chapter, I continue to explore choreographic tactics of subversion through a historiographic examination of the kneeling posture and other gestures of submission.

## CHAPTER 2

### "#TakeAKnee to take a stand": Submissive Femininity as Resistance

Before taking the field for a September 1, 2016 NFL pre-season game against the San Diego Chargers, San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick dropped to one knee during the playing of the national anthem.[1] Kaepernick later explained that he did so as an act of protest to highlight racial inequality in America. Now, more than one year later, "taking a knee" or #TakeAKnee is used describe the recent performance practice in amateur and professional sports where athletes silently express their discontent with contemporary race relations – specifically the mistreatment of black people – by lowering themselves on one or both knees as The Star-Spangled Banner resounds. Kaepernick is often cited as initiating this choreography.[2] He and a small but significant contingent of athletes – both within the National Football League and beyond – continued to kneel throughout the 2016 season, ultimately stoking a national debate over #TakeAKnee that erupted in the first weeks of the 2017 NFL regular season.

Due to the high-profile visibility of NFL players, as well as comments about kneeling black athletes made by President Donald Trump, the ongoing conversation surrounding the act of kneeling in protest almost entirely centers on the hyper-masculine, exceptionally muscular, and sculpted bodies of professional, male athletes. This chapter explores how the performance of kneeling is depicted in imagery and argues that these tactical enactments of individual and collective emergence against indignity, or what D. Soyini Madison calls "acts of activism,"

can also be identified as feminine performatives employed by participants in the BLM movement.[3] With much of the discourse surrounding #TakeAKnee focused on the act of kneeling as a masculinist, aggressive, and transgressive move against the nation and our armed forces, this study asks what new or different meanings can be elicited from reading kneeling as an act of feminine submission. Furthermore, I expand my analysis to include BLM protest performances taking place both on and off the "national stage" as a means of honoring the grass-roots origins of the movement.[4]

By lowering themselves to their knees, styling their bodies with specific props, and/or exposing the most vulnerable areas of their bodies, I posit that BLM protestors wield a specific control over their corporeality that contradicts connotations of disorderliness surrounding these performances.[5] These performances demand rumination on the ways in which submissive femininity aligns with certain hegemonic ideologies of dominance over black women's bodies that are, in turn, subverted by creative curation and choreography. A historiographic analysis of these seemingly acquiescent bodily acts reveals that visual genealogies of the act of kneeling are traceable from abolitionist literature to the choreographies of pornography, illustrating these gestures as moving beyond abjection or surrender and becoming, instead, revolutionary and affecting tactics for BLM activism.

I accrued my visual archive from coverage by accredited news outlets and posts made to social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. This project explains that these images cite specific icons tied to historical, social, and

cultural idealizations of control over black women's bodies. Theories developed by W.J.T. Mitchell and Nelson Goodman are integral to my iconological study of BLM imagery and the relationships drawn between contemporary racial justice activism and images of resistant feminine performance in other industries and settings. Mitchell and Goodman's theories of iconology, including the interplay of image, text, and ideology, are explicated in the first portion of this chapter. There, I also clarify how these theories are applied in the following case studies.

The first case study centers on #TakeAKnee. By shifting away from enactments by Kaepernick or other male athletes, I explicate the productivity and affect elicited when cheerleaders and dance team members engage in this critical performance practice as icons of pleasure. The iconological lens for addressing #TakeAKnee is based on a consideration of both the act of kneeling and the feminine aesthetics that drive the styling of dancers' bodies. To elucidate the potential pleasure and subversion attainable in the execution of #TakeAKnee, I draw connections between this activism and imagery depicting black women performing in pornography, who manipulate the male gaze for their own financial, autonomous, and creative gains.

The second case study examines icons of chattel invoked during BLM protests staged in 2016 and 2017. By focusing on the presence of chains, ropes, clothing bindings, and submissive body postures, I delineate the use of these icons in nineteenth-century abolitionist literature and contemporary fine arts. This suggests that BLM activists and organizers employing chains, locks, and other

icons of chattel in their protest activities draw from a longer history of visualizing the restrained bodies of black women as a means of emphasizing black humanity.

The chapter concludes with an invitation for scholars to investigate icons of surrender and vulnerability through the gesture "Hands Up, Don't Shoot" as it is enacted in BLM protest as well as in religious settings. After describing the performance of "Hands Up, Don't Shoot," I propose an analysis of this BLM gesture that aligns with previous scholarship positing that black women exercise corporeal control and autonomy via dance, gesture, and movement for the purposes of spiritual enrichment and physical space-making in male-dominated Christian denominations. Through this proposal, I aim to nuance the notion of surrender in BLM activism so that the "Hands Up" choreography is considered not as a re-enactment of Michael Brown's death but as a clever visualization of feminine capitulation that allows protestors to create a visualized representation of the self in restricted protest landscapes.

**What an Image Says: An Iconological Approach to Feminine Performatives**

Throughout the research process for this project, various gestures, postures, props, and modes of physicalized style (i.e. uses of clothing, hair, accented or emphasized movement, etc.) appeared repeatedly across different locations and contexts for BLM protest. For example, imagery of BLM activism depicts black women celebrating the beauty of their natural hair by not tying it back or covering it with hats, and instead styling it so that it becomes an extension of their protesting bodies. Georgia Tech dance team member Raianna Brown did just that when she took a knee during the national anthem at an October 2016

football game, with *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* reporter Rosalind Bentley describing her hair as being "blown out in a lush afro" (see Figure 12).[6] Whether styled in an "afro," as Bentley states, braided, or buzzed short, women protesting for black lives use hair, clothing, gesture, and in the case of this study, pose and posture to perform femininity.

Because my archive is based on imagery – both still photographs and videos – identifying commonalities in these visual fields became a productive method for examining the specific tactics employed in racial justice activism. The study of a collection of images and distinct symbols that appear within them is a praxis used in art criticism, specifically called iconography. The interpretation of the symbols for their potential meanings, determining the relationship between the sign and its linguistic signifier, results in an understanding of the symbol's iconicity. However, to propose how icons and their iconicity effectively draw connections between the performance captured on film and sociopolitical implications, a third approach for studying BLM images is needed.

For this chapter's specific focus on performances that seemingly depict submission, iconology provides a cogent framework for how images showing "kneeling" black subjects can be read for their icons, iconicity, and potential productivity outside of the two-dimensional visual field. W.J.T. Mitchell describes iconology as:

> A study of the "logos" (the words, ideas, discourse, or "science") and of "icons" (images, pictures, or likenesses). It is thus a "rhetoric of images" in a double sense: first, as a study of "what to say about images" …concerned with the description and interpretation of visual art; and second, as a study of "what images say" – that is, the ways in which they seem to speak for themselves by persuading, telling stories, or describing.[7]

Adopting Mitchell's theory of iconology supports the icons I locate and interpret in BLM imagery with historical and political contexts. Before applying this approach, however, attention must be paid to the three aspects of iconology defined by Mitchell – those being image, text, and ideology.

Both Mitchell and philosopher Nelson Goodman stress the distinction between an "image" and a "picture." The key differentiation between the two lies in a metaphysical contrast between a picture as an object and an image as a metaphor. Mitchell explains that "An image, then, may be thought of as an immaterial entity, a ghostly, phantasmatic appearance that comes to light or come to life (which may be the same thing) in a material support."[8] So while the material forms that I examine in this project are photographs and video, the study centers on how symbolic systems of art and performance evoke intangible but potent meanings that can be traced through the study of icons present in the art object.

"Meaning," however, requires the acknowledgement of language and textuality. Analysis and interpretation of an image's appearance is processed through what Goodman calls "predicates of a language," meaning that for pictures and gesture, "although they are nonverbal, orientation of referential relationships is provided by established correlations with language… Such parallels and points of contact with language are enough to set the direction."[9] Mitchell also recognizes the inextricable need for language but struggles with how this process of description and interpretation dilutes the potency of the image's true means of expression. He deviates from Goodman's embrace of language as the model for

all artistic modes of expression, and calls the necessary role of textuality in iconology "a foil to imagery, a "significant other" or rival mode of representation."[10] Nonetheless, the relationship between image and text is obligatory for the identification and interpretation of nonverbal, symbolic art forms (i.e. "what to say about images"). Drawing upon Charles Sanders Peirce's conception of semiotics, Mitchell illustrates that the image's immaterial "sensory and aesthetic modalities have been replaced by relations of signification and the production of meaning."[11] In this way, icons are the result of a marriage between image and text, with the conceived similarity between the two referred to as "iconicity."[12]

Where the third pillar of iconology – ideology – converges with iconicity is in the transformation of meaning production into comprehension. Comprehension requires going beyond the process of cataloguing and interpreting icons. Instead, it demands that iconicity be contextualized and interrogated for specific ideas or ideals that shape a culture's social and political structures (i.e. "what images say"). Mitchell explains that ideology is the "'political unconscious' that informs our understanding of imagery and its difference from language."[13] Therefore, iconology is a methodological approach to art and performance criticism that provides an entryway for both holistically understanding an image as well as for investigating what that image is expressing about dominant powers in the history of a given society. This study allows scholars to read imagery for evidence of hegemonic ideologies in a given culture as well as for potential resistance to hegemony by marginalized figures. For the

following two case studies, I employ Mitchell's theory to explore BLM protests where black women exact the posture of kneeling and manipulate props like chains and locks to simultaneously perform and subvert ideologies of feminine acquiescence.

**#TakeAKnee: Kneeling Postures for the National Gaze**

"So proud of you, young sista. What you did matters today."
- @ReignOfApril

"Can we also just appreciate your hair for a second?! 💝 Also very defining to the moment & being brave is the first step to change! 👏👏"
- @_lovelylindaaaa

"wow i actually hope that you lose your spot as a cheerleader and any scholarships you might have."
- @briankratt

"As a Georgia Tech grad I am disappointed at this lack of respect for the men and women who died defending our flag."
- @barry_b3611s

The above comments, whether commending, celebratory, vindictive, or chastising, are but a small subset of the 1,700 plus written reactions to Georgia Tech dance team member Raianna Brown's Twitter post on September 23, 2017. Brown, who goes by the username @freeSpring_5678, tweeted a photograph of her kneeling during the national anthem while surrounded by the remaining members of her squad, all of whom are standing in identical positions with their hands over their hearts (Figure 13).[14] As her gold uniform sparkles brightly in the mid-day sunlight, Brown's hand is not over her heart. Instead, both arms are behind her back. She looks calmly in front of her, with one knee sunk into the field's AstroTurf. Along with the photo, the dancer included the following

caption: “Proudest & scariest moment as a yellow-jacket happened at the same time. Thank you @Kaepernick7 for inspiring me to #TakeAKnee to take a stand.”[15]

This chapter examines #TakeAKnee enactments by cheerleaders and dance team members of color who are largely removed from the narrative of BLM activism in sports settings. I propose that black dancers who “take a knee” stand as icons of pleasure through resistance and rigidity. Both the angularity of the posture and simplicity of movement needed to extend the gesture complicates dominant cultural ideologies of sexualized black femme flesh. In the performance of #TakeAKnee, these black dancers defy the aesthetics of movement that are prescribed by white culture. As Zora Neale Hurston writes in her essay, *Characteristics of Negro Expression*, “After adornment the next most striking manifestation of the Negro is Angularity… Anyone watching Negro dancers will be struck by the same phenomenon. Every posture is another angle. Pleasing, yes. But an effect achieved by the very means which an European strives to avoid.”[16]

The same dominant ideologies play into how these dancers’ bodies are staged for the male gaze of sports viewership, which is made up predominately of men. By troubling the flexible and flirtatious movement styles expected of this entertainment form, these BLM dancer-activists find ways of exercising control over how they are presented to audiences, even while their bodies are adorned with clothing, make-up, and other accessories that contribute to a glorified and sexualized conception of femininity. Susan Manning’s feminist examination into practitioners of early modern dance for “the resistive and recuperative dimensions

of the practice" is helpful for this argument.[17] Manning attempts to reconcile the contested notions that: firstly, early modern female dancers like Isadora Duncan, Mary Wigman, and Martha Graham were aware of the potential within their non-balletic conventions to disrupt the voyeuristic gaze; and secondly, that early modern dancers dramatized female subjectivity and authority, although did so by staging an essentialized idea of femininity that ignored varying shades of race, nationality, and gender. While, indeed, the literature Manning reviews and responds to in her essay focuses entirely on white female dancers, her proposal that "it was precisely the double move of subverting the voyeuristic gaze while projecting the essentialized notions of identity that defined the practice" suggests that BLM dancer-activists create a productive tension between their appearance as glamorized and often-sexualized womanly bodies and the revolutionary choreography of their protest posture.[18]

In many ways, cheerleaders and dancers performing in sports settings seemingly align with what Manning describes as "preexistent images of gender and ethnicity."[19] The design of their costumes is meant to accentuate their chests, necks, stomachs, and legs. Strategic cutouts, top-and-bottom sets, and necklines are used to achieve this effect. The materials that construct their uniforms often include bright-colored fabrics, glitter, and rhinestones. Dancers wear their hair down so that it can be flipped during choreographed routines. Finally, the timing of these routines, which take place before game time, during timeouts, and as part of half-time, indicate that cheerleaders are meant to show deference to the male athletes performing on the field and to drum up support for them with the fans.

However, the enactment of #TakeAKnee challenges who the performance is aimed at pleasing by introducing new shapes and ways in which these bodies enacting their labor. Kneeling, the movement itself, is not an uncommon piece of choreography used in cheerleading and dance routines for sporting events. It can be used to show uniformity, homogeny, and adherence to the squad's peppy appearance and Barbie-esque athleticism (Figure 14).[20] The potency of #TakeAKnee occurs when the act of kneeling is a disjointed and unsynchronized departure from the expected positivity in the cheerleaders' behavior and movements. When one or a few members of a squad drop to their knee, or if an entire squad kneels in relation to other dance teams or staff during a time when the expected (and some believe should be mandatory) posture is to stand, the movement breaks from the collectivity expected of cheerleaders on the field as well as any American present during the playing of the national anthem. It is an act of self-conscious defiance, as it evident on the faces of black dancers who have performed this posture in recent years (Figure 15).[21] In this way, activist-dancers' bodies, which are made to look as though they are conforming – whether to social or cultural standards of beauty and desirability or to the choreographic demands placed on ensemble members in a dance form that demands exact coincidence – instead present an oppositional act.

Generative to my critique of #TakeAKnee are analyses of black women who use the aesthetics of motion to control how their bodies are viewed by the male gaze. Here I look outside of sports and to the realm of pornography. Numerous scholars have provided excellent examples for how femininity can be

considered disruptive to racial and gender hierarchies in archives and industries that are often regarded as oppressive of black women. By examining performances of sexual and laboring bodies within the porn industry, Jennifer Nash and Mireille Miller-Young interpret the hypervisibility of black female performance in this visual culture as moving beyond abjection and, instead, towards possibilities of pleasure and autonomy.

When navigating through the problematic landscapes of pornography and sex work, the performances explored *A Taste for Brown Sugar* by Miller-Young destabilize the limited characterizations constructed around black female subjectivity by the patriarchy. Miller-Young opens her text by describing the career of X-rated film actress Jeannie Pepper, who in 1982 considered herself to be one of the few black women working in the adult entertainment industry.[22] In an era preceding a wider acceptance of porn within popular culture, Pepper navigated social and cultural stigmas against both sex work as a form of labor and the stereotyped characterizations of black women as victims or promiscuous, as related to their sexuality and sexual economies. Miller-Young writes that there were black women working in porn who consciously and strategically employed their race and gender as means of claiming their sexuality and the potential pleasure – financial and sexual – to be gained from their ventures. "As Jeannie Pepper shows, some black women choose to perform *brown sugar* – the perverse, pleasurable imago projected onto black women's bodies – in an effort to express themselves as desired and desiring subjects."[23] In this way, these women were aware of the expectations held by male gaze for experiencing their nude, partially-

nude, or sexualized bodies. However, by enacting certain modes of expression through the dynamisms inherent in the performance of sex, these women complicate any notion that they are not in control of their body, how it is seen, and how they take pleasure from their labor.

Miller-Young details that autonomy and satisfaction are deeply rooted in Pepper's motivations to perform in porn. Aside from the economic reasons to work in the industry, Pepper and other black women shirked any perceived "betrayal of respectable black womanhood," and instead expressed that they "take pleasure in "show[ing] the world" a beautiful and sexually self-possessed black woman."[24] Through an understanding of the stereotypes and racial fetishization surrounding black flesh, these performers attain erotic capital by using the skill and presentations of their bodies to gain notoriety and upward mobility in the stratified hierarchies of porn. Similar to the ways in which clothing, makeup, hair, and physical ability play into the fashioning and expected labor of cheerleaders' bodies, so too do certain black sex workers go to great lengths to ensure that their appearances and performances are appreciated by producers, consumers, and other actors alike so that their careers progress.[25]

The terms "performance" and "actors" are an especially important designation, as it highlights the intent, ability, mastery, and skill wielded by these women in their bodies' enactments. Take, for example, the recognizable notion of a sex worker or porn actor being "on her knees," meaning kneeling on one or both knees in the seemingly submissive position for giving fellatio (Figure 16).[26] This kneeling posture is ripe for surface-level critiques of this feminine performative as

contributing to the historical mistreatment of black women, especially in sexual circumstances. And while it is likely that Jeannie Pepper and any number of sex workers were directed to take on this position by white, male producers in the industry, it is worth considering that the black actors approached it as performance and treated the bodily act of kneeling as choreography that has potential to garner economic and sexual pleasure.

Further complicating the notion that kneeling black women in the contexts of porn exist only as an icon for *male* pleasure is an image from one of Jeannie Pepper's films, *Fucking and Sucking Black Bitches*. In tension with the misogynistic and racially-tinged wording of its title is the black woman who graces the front of the VHS tape's box (Figure 17).[27] In the photo still, a black woman is kneeling on a bed, her head titled upwards and back. Unlike the "on her knees" description above, however, this woman is not kneeling in relation to a standing figure but is in the position of receiving oral sex from a male actor. Although her face is not readable, it is possible to deduce that the woman is performing an ecstatic sexual experience based on the expressive quality of her hands as they graze her lower abdomen. It is impossible to tell if this woman is Jeannie Pepper, who is credited as appearing the film, or if it is either Angel Kelly or Sahara, two other black porn stars in the 1980s.

Nonetheless, this act of kneeling illustrates a power held by the feminine actor, who is not only receiving pleasure in the sexual act but whose performance of that pleasure resists ideas of black women in porn settings as being solely exploited or abused. These actors, therefore, utilize performance and

choreography as subversive tactics for creating their own subjectivity. As Miller-Young explains, "black women working in porn understand the historical depictions of their bodies as containing dynamic possibilities for reinterpretation and re-creation through performance."[28] These women are not passive, submissive, or victims, but instead enact powerful, mobile feminine performatives that hold the potential for gratification and financial gain.

The recovery of the kneeling posture in relation to sexual pleasure is further explored by fine artists who have reclaimed hypersexualized and fetishized black women in the annals of pornography. In her book, *The Black Body in Ecstasy,* Jennifer C. Nash examines the work of photographer Carla Williams. Williams'1994 self-portrait titled *Venus* (Figure 18) engages with the legacy of Saartijie Baartman, a Khoikhoi woman who was publicly displayed as the "Hottentot Venus," with her most commodified features being "her breasts, her buttocks (her imagined steatopygia), and her labia (her imagined "Hottentot apron"), all of which were thought to indicate an abundant sexual appetite."[29] Nash explains that Williams' *Venus* emphasizes the curves and sensuality of her bare black flesh but does so to make a claim about beauty and desirability rather than the grotesqueness or fetishization that drew paying customers to Baartman. In the photo, the artist is shown half-sitting-half-kneeling, with her legs bent and knees turned slightly to the left. Not unlike the VHS cover of the Jeannie Pepper X-rated film, Williams' head is tilted backwards, her hair spilling down and over her bare back. As Nash writes:

> What is significant about the image's depiction of pleasure, though, is that Williams's ecstasy is contained, inward, not at all performed for the

> spectator… Williams's head is pointed away from the viewer and her eyes are closed. Indeed, the logic of the image makes viewers feel as though they are peering in on a private moment, on an encounter between Williams and her body.[30]

The air of privacy that the photo elicits in the viewer suggests that the visualization of black feminine sensuality and sexuality not only combats notions that this imagery exploits women but shows the attainment of female pleasure, specifically self-pleasure, in this performance practice. Williams, as the kneeling figure in this image, shows that a partner or fellow actor is not needed for giving or receiving pleasure. Rather, she exists as an icon for pleasure that is derived from both sexual activity and constructing one's own identity through "the racial and gendered politics of representation."[31]

Rounding back to cheerleaders and dancer team members of color who have and continue to participate in #TakeAKnee, I believe these acts of protest creatively subvert the expectations and desires of male viewers by exercising an autonomy over their bodies because they understand the hypersexualized, highly stylized way they have been adorned and directed to move. These activists productively exploit how their bodies "look" by changing the ways in which they perform. The choreography of kneeling in cheer routines has been previously explored within this study for its use in or breaking away from synchronicity. An important step to elucidate is that the choreography of kneeling is often depicted as flirtatious, if not outright ecstatic. Activists use their knowledge of kneeling's use in dance to enunciate the angularity and rigidity of #TakeAKnee. Take, for example, a pre-game performance by the Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders in August 2017. The Cowboys Cheerleaders are an exclusively female dance troupe

employed, like nearly all NFL cheer teams, as part of their home-team's organization.[32] At the 15-second mark of their routine at the 2017 Pro Football Hall of Fame game, the Cowboy Cheerleaders drop to their knees while simultaneously raising their poms in the air, all enacted in a triangular formation (Figure 19 - top).[33] Next, each row of dancers bends forward so that their heads and chests rest on the AstroTurf (Figure 19 - middle). Lastly, they collectively whip their heads up from the ground and slowly raise their upper bodies, while also dragging one arm inwards towards their spread knees (Figure 19 - bottom).

This fast-paced section of the dance routine is not unique to the Cowboys Cheerleaders, and the hair-whipping/kneeling position is identifiable in many dance forms. I do not want to exclude the possibility that cheerleaders and dancers find the execution of this choreography pleasurable and lucrative. After all, the camera crews near the Dallas squad at the Hall of Fame performance almost guarantees that these women displayed their beauty and athleticism to a national audience via television and online streaming. The potential gains to their dancer careers and/or monetary compensation in the form of sponsorships and private event bookings are just a few of the positive and empowering results of their labor. This is important because cheerleaders, even for professional sports teams, are vastly underpaid compared to the male players in the league.[34] That said, when dancer-activists take a knee to protest racial justice, they know that the simplicity of that posture is in opposition of the ecstatic accent usually added to this position. Also, by taking a knee at the top of the game, these activists disrupt spectators' expectations of their bodies and movements early on, thus

transforming how they might be seen even while performing with their squad later. #TakeAKnee is a tactic for resisting expectations of how their bodies perform, and allows them to display control over how their bodies are presented on the stage of the sports arena.

The efficacy and visibility of #TakeAKnee, however, is complicated by the fact that no members of any NFL cheerleading squad have participated in this activism. Unlike the high-profile male athletes in the 2016 and 2017 seasons that have garnered both positive and negative attention for kneeling in protest, NFL cheerleaders of color have remained standing during the national anthem. The examples of kneeling imagery by dancers in this study are based on performances at amateur events, mostly from the college- and high-school-level sports. According to Elissa Strauss' October 2017 article for *Elle,* a variety of factors have contributed to NFL dancers' reticence.

> Cheerleaders… are expected to be founts of positive energy, impeccable rhythm paired with toothy smiles and toned legs. They are supposed to be fun and have fun on the field; such a good time that it compensates for the fact that they are, in the best of circumstances, being paid minimum wage with no health benefits by an industry that rakes in $14 billion dollars a year in revenue.[35]

Although Strauss and the former NFL cheerleaders interviewed for the piece acknowledge that the financial compensation for dancers is not the primary motivation for women to pursue these positions, there is an intensified precarity experienced by these athletes because of the male-dominated hierarchies that determine the squad's activities and employment.

Numerous sources cited that protest is not encouraged in the culture of cheerleading, and that support would not be given by the captains and coaches of

the teams. “Cheerleaders are discouraged from voicing personal opinions while working or critiquing their profession, and when they do, controversy ensues.”[36] Danetha Doe, a former black dancer for the Indianapolis Colts, expressed a two-part reasoning for why she would not have participated in #TakeAKnee: her main source of apprehension had to do with the vulnerability of being the only black woman on a mostly white squad that is meant to entertain mostly white fans; the second, she details, is because of the short length of cheerleaders’ skirts. Whether the forces behind NFL cheerleaders’ decision-making is financial, personal, or career-oriented, consideration should be paid to the precarity of these dancers’ positions in these name-brand organizations, something that has been regularly used to defend black male athletes against threats that they should be benched or outright fired for taking a knee. Because no current NFL cheerleaders consented to an interview with Strauss, it is difficult to know if more pointed directives have been made to dancers about kneeling during the anthem. However, the self-restriction described by former members illustrates that social and cultural attitudes surrounding race and gender continue to combat these radical acts of activism in sports settings.

More apparent restrictions to the enactment of #TakeAKnee have been taken against cheerleaders at the collegiate level. In October 2017, the administration at Kennesaw State University in Georgia dispensed a directive that the football team’s cheer squad would remain off the field until after the national anthem was played.[37] Many thought this decision was in response to five Kennesaw dancers who knelt during a September 30 game. The squad was

relegated to the field's entrance tunnels during the anthem, although it did not stop some dancer-activists of color from continuing to kneel, nor did it halt their performance being captured by photographers (Figure 20).[38]

Within days of deciding to keep the cheerleaders off the field, local journalists discovered digital messages exchanged between the KSU President Sam Olens, State Representative Earl Ehrhart, and Cobb County Sheriff Neil Warren urging the school to limit #TakeAKnee protests. The continuation of the cheerleaders' kneeling protests in the tunnels is heartening evidence of how the autonomy and control held by these women activists combats what performance scholar André Lepicki calls "choreopolicing," in which agents of state power – in this case local politicians and law enforcement – attempt to designate and design the physical parameters of protest spaces.[39] In their effort to choreopolice the KSU dancers, Olens, Ehrhart and Warren brought even more attention to these activists' performances. Rather than rendering them invisible to the gaze of KSU sports fans, commentators, and the like, more "eyes" were on these critical acts of activism than before, thus providing additional recognition for the relentless cheerleaders who took to their knees game after game.

After intense public scrutiny, Olens reversed his earlier decision on November 8, allowing the KSU squad to stand on the field during pre-game activities once again. The Kennesaw Five, as the kneeling cheerleaders became known, chose to link arms with their fellow squad members as a sign of solidarity to the armed forces during their return to the field on November 11, but also outlined that they would continue to kneel at future games.[40] When cheerleaders

of color like the Kennesaw Five and Raianna Brown – not to mention the numerous other squads and dancers of color across the country – enact the posture of #TakeAKnee, they subvert historical, social, and cultural expectations regarding the how their race and gender are to be performed in the contexts of sports. By exploiting the hyperfeminine aesthetic of the cheerleading performance practice, these activists create a compelling tension between the posture they take when kneeling and the assumed roles of cheerleaders as figures of flirtation and athleticism for the enjoyment of male viewers. In doing so, black women advocating for BLM on the sports field attain a personal and restorative power of autonomy that, I argue, brings them one step closer to liberation.

**"Am I Not a Woman and a Sister?"Icons of chattel making a case for black humanity**

In the early morning hours of January 20, 2017, demonstrators carrying Black Lives Matter banners and clothed in garb reading "Unapologetically Black" met at the 400th block of Indiana Ave. in Washington D.C. Hardly an arbitrary choice of date or location, the activists gathered for the inauguration of Donald Trump as 45th President of the United States with the intent to disrupt one of the security checkpoints leading into the National Mall. The tools used by these protesters went beyond banners, hand-written signs, and megaphones. By 8:45 AM, women wrapped metal chains around themselves, essentially stringing their bodies together, before securing the collective mass to steel barriers originally setup to direct the flow of foot traffic. [41] While locked together, the ensemble lowered their bodies to the ground. This formed a line of feminine forms in

various squatting and seated positions (Figure 21).[42] Media coverage of the protest reached as widely as the *Fox Business Network*, ensuring that television viewers outside D.C. watched the event as it unfolded.[43]

The specific employment of long, tangled, and heavy chains is productive on two fronts for the BLM protestors. The first is purely utilitarian. By locking themselves together and to obtrusive and fixed objects in the vicinity, the performers make literal that they "shall not be moved."[44] Additionally, the excessive wrapping and crossing of chains over their bodies makes difficult any attempt by law enforcement to separate individuals from the collective. The symbolism of these chains carries equal weight, especially when read in conjunction with the postures and body shapes of the black performers.

In a more metaphysical reading, the chain symbolizes a tension between living – in this case, a living person – and the suppression of mobility. The demonstrators push the performance of submission further when they lower their bodies to the ground. Such a position limits movement, flexibility, and access. The uniting of this specific protest imagery and the language directly associated with it invokes the iconicity of chains. By centering the chain in the visual field of the performance, these protestors exploit the viewer's knowledge of America's history of systemic oppression. This does not illustrate slavery and victimhood in a literal sense, but instead juxtaposes the inhumanity of oppression with live bodies in the protest space to demand that their humanity be recognized. The performances depicting this imagery are riffing on hegemonic ideologies and

systems that bind and restrain black women's bodies to illustrate the fundamental principle that black people are human beings.

My interpretation of the chain imagery in the Inauguration Day BLM demonstrations aligns with the objectives outlined by the organizers of this event. During an interview with the self-proclaimed independent global news site *Democracy Now*, writer and BLM Cambridge member DiDi Delgado explained what she and her fellow activists aimed to achieve.

> What would make anyone put their bodies on the line, right? What about today? What about the events leading up to today? What about the years leading up to today? What are we holding inside of us to put our bodies on the line to say that our black lives matter? We are saying: "Hey, look at us. See our humanity. We matter." We shouldn't have to say that. We shouldn't have to chain ourselves to let people know what our narrative is. Our narrative is our humanity.[45]

The need to enact these performances suggests that language can only go so far in communicating the right to life. It is not enough to verbally or textually express that black lives matter. Thus, demonstrators for this movement visualize their humanity through creative forms of imagery that include chains, bindings, and supplicant body postures. These protestors do not only use chains as props but become chains through the linking and attachment of their bodies.

This strategy has a long genealogy that can be traced from antebellum activism to contemporary fine arts. In 1837, abolitionist George Bourne published a 128-page manuscript titled *Slavery illustrated in its effects upon woman and domestic society.* On the page separating his dedication and the table of contents, there is an recognizable image of a kneeling black woman couched between a poem and quote attributed to poet Elizabeth Margaret Chandler and women's rights advocate Lydia Maria Child (Figure 22).[46] The most prominent text on the

page, however, is the phrase “AM I NOT A WOMAN AND A SISTER?” molded to the top portion of the illustration’s circular frame. The figure who seemingly poses the rhetorical question is positioned on one bent knee, in the same fashion as the #TakeAKnee posture enacted by contemporary athletes. Her arms are raised in front of her, clasped together in a manner that suggests penitence, pleading, or prayer. Falling downwards from the elevated arms are two strands of chain links.

Despite the image’s rudimentary artistry, as well as the androgynous quality of the figure’s hair and dress, there are clear marks of her gender. This figure is clearly feminized in comparison with its inspiration, a near identical image called “AM I NOT A MAN AND A BROTHER?” (Figure 23).[47] The prominent back muscles of the “MAN AND A BROTHER” figure are absent in the feminine supplicant. Shaping of the chest area on the woman is more pronounced, suggesting her veiled but exposed breasts. Lastly, the cloth covering the womanly figure’s legs is considerably longer than that of the masculine image. These aspects are, of course, in addition to the linguistic clues of “woman” and “sister” in the banner.

While both gendered versions of this performance were used in abolitionist literature and poetry, the “WOMAN AND A SISTER” adaptation speaks to the compounded oppression of black women in this era. The interplay of her feminine body and the chain icon renders legible her double precarity as an enslaved subject in a patriarchal society. However, what keeps the image from communicating an insurmountable narrative of despair is her posture. Although

the enactment of kneeling can be read on the surface as submission, the clasped hands lifting the heavy chains signal to the viewer that the woman represents a strong and dynamic body. She details her humanity by showing how she continues to live despite extraordinarily cruel and oppressive conditions. In short, the image testifies that this black woman is, even in this plain form, a human being.

The texts that accompany the "WOMAN AND A SISTER" image explore various facets of the human condition that are specific to women. This includes childbearing, motherhood, and the love invested by a mother for her children. The E.M. Child quote Bourne placed below the image reads as follows: "By virtue of special contract, Shylock demanded a pound of flesh cut nearest to the heart. Those who sell mothers separately from their children, likewise claim a legal right to human flesh; and they too cut it nearest to the *heart*."[48] Here Borne associates the humanity of the woman in the image with the inhumane treatment of black families through the trading of their flesh and the dismemberment of their blood relations.

The E.M. Chandler poem preceding the image on the page includes two linguistic clues specific to slavery and the black condition: "sold" and "chains." The poem begins by addressing a "lady," presumably a literate, white woman, before posing a long and emotional question to the female reader: "when a sister's cry is ringing on the air, when woman's pleading eye is raised in agonized despair, when woman's limbs are scourged and sold 'midst rude and brutal mirth, may female hearts be still unstirred, and 'midst their wretched lot, the victims of

unmeasured wrongs, be carelessly forgot?"[49] The allusion to the buying and selling of slaves this time is related to black women's flesh rather than that of children. But by calling them "sisters," Chandler creates a kinship between white and black women that draws the abuses inflicted upon black women's bodies in close proximity to that of the white reader. Finally, Chandler's poem ends with, "Or shall the prayer be poured for them, the tear be freely given, until the chains that bind them now, from every limb be riven?" With the poem's earlier text illustrating the links between black and white women, this final phrase aims to instill in the reader a shared womanhood, sisterhood, and humanity that can enact great change and break the chains of slavery.

The iconicity of the BLM kneeling protests draws its performativity not from a singular citation of the "WOMAN AND A SISTER" image, but other circulating reiterations of these images, such as those seen in the work renowned contemporary artist Kara Walker. Her diverse and provocative art provides a unique opportunity to examine the icons of bondage found in abolitionist literature as they travel from the contexts and imagery of antebellum America to those surrounding BLM imagery in 2017. Walker is perhaps best known for her sweeping instillations made of black cut paper silhouettes mounted against stark, white walls. As Yasmil Raymond details, Walker's cut paper pieces are "appropriating preconceived ideas about the antebellum South" through the repeated use of specific symbols like hoop skirts, nooses, and, of course, chains and ties.[50] That said, Walker is a prolific talent who interrogates America's history of slavery, violence against black women, and racism by constructing

uncomfortable and often disturbing images out of various mediums. Her use of collage and drawing and the icons of bondage in her work reflect the fight to assert black humanity against systems of oppression and state violence inflicted on femme figures in the past and today.

*Daylights (after M.B.)* from Walker's 2014 exhibition *Dust Jackets for the Niggerati--and Supporting Dissertations, Drawings Submitted Ruefully by Dr. Kara E. Walker* is a two-canvas, large-scale graphite drawing that depicts the impact of geopolitical hegemony on black bodies, from primitivism to cosmopolitans of the great Northern migration (Figure 24).[51] Of interest is the feminine figure positioned center, who I read as a gyrating amalgamation of numerous ideologies imposed upon black women. She dons a loin-cloth skirt and bralette that barely contain her voluptuous form. She also wears high-heeled shoes, a vestige of the modern era. Her hair is pulled back under a head scarf that, when viewed in relation to the twentieth-century-style hat of the black woman on the picture's far left, draws associations with the mammy figure commonly found in romanticized antebellum slave-master relationships.

Once again, a chain icon is around the womanly figure's hands. Though not made of metal links, the ties that bind appear as a taut, smooth rope. Although this binding does not restrict her body's ability to walk or dance – considering that Walker's sharp linework and shading gives the impression of a body in motion – her shackles seem to suggest that she is unable to deflect the characterizations thrust upon her. Because this figure is placed in the middle of the image's right-to-left progression through time, it is possible that she will become the suitcase-

carrying femme on the left. However, the far-left figure's dress and luggage suggest she is headed North, where her hands will be knotted by the challenges of employment and housing shortages experienced by black Americans who moved to major metropolitan areas in the first half of the twentieth century.

In her visual essay *Chronology of Black Suffering: Images and Notes, 1992-2007,* Walker includes two powerful images depicting restriction and oppression. The first shows a photograph of a painted black woman on thin tissue-paper-like material (Figure 25). The woman is bound and gagged by white rope. She rests in a stilted, kneeling position. The nudity hints at an exploitative force impacting how her body is positioned and treated. Her hair, a rounded and mostly indistinct orb, suggests an afro.[52] The title of Walker's essay explains that this is not an enjoyable performance for this woman, but rather an image of black suffering.[53]

Black suffering is also evident in an image I refer to as "The Housing Authority," which Walker curated to appear six pages after the bound and gagged subject described above (Figure 26). In a scanned photograph taken from a newspaper, a young black woman appears on the right and is identified by the caption as Serrita Green.[54] She sits in a typical bureaucratic office, across the desk from an older white man who seems to be speaking to Serrita and another foregrounded woman. Both women hold small children on their laps. Serrita gestures emphatically with her right hand, her palm facing upwards. She is deep in conversation and wears a serious, semi-exhausted expression on her face. The caption goes on to explain that she "tried to navigate the system with workers in

Forth Smith, Ark." We know from the caption that the "system" she is negotiating is the government-run program that provides affordable housing. The expanse of folders, papers, and files that cover the administrator's desk further suggests the maze of bureaucracy that Seritta and other applicants must overcome to qualify for assistance. In reading the relationship between the overt constraints placed on the body of the first image's femme figure and the forces of state oppression that complicate access to affordable housing for black families, I propose that Walker's art depicts restrictions placed on economic autonomy for black families by governmental programs purporting to assist them. The various chains and bindings that appear in Walker's work articulate the various ties that have and continue to bind and submit black women to forms of oppression as well as those that obstruct paths to freedom.

In conclusion, I return to chain in BLM protest performances. On August 30, 2016, the BLM chapter in Cambridge, Massachusetts staged a protest in response to dwindling access to affordable housing.[55] Much like the inauguration day event, the activists used chains and locks to bind their bodies together and then to the front doors of the City Hall building. Other attendees of the protest broadcast the demonstration through the online web streaming tool Periscope. In several still images, protest performers are seated on the ground, u-locks wrapped around their throats (Figure 27). There are no visible chains in this demonstration's imagery because participants wrapped red plastic sheeting around their arms to trouble attempts by law enforcement to end the protest. Beyond the

practicality of these materials to extend the length of the protest, however, these bindings are visually evocative because of the iconicity between flesh and chains.

This example, as well as the numerous others that I identify, interpret, and ideologically analyze for this case study, are affecting images that illustrate how activists, abolitionists, and artists stage black women's bodies in bondage. The potency of this tactic is used by BLM protest performers and organizes when they visualize the icons of chains, ties, and locks in relation to the liveness, control, and agency they have over their bodies, thus illustrating black humanity and resilience. These bodily acts of activism trouble hegemonic social prescriptions of black femininity as amenable to dominance because, while they visually perform submission, they simultaneously demand (like the phrase "Am I Not a Woman and Sister?") that they be treated as human beings and given access to the same resources allotted to their white counterparts.

**Proposed extensions and conclusion**

As a conclusion for this chapter, I want to extend the proposal that the same iconological methodology employed in the above case studies can be applied to other postures and gestures associated with submission used in racial justice activism. In this invitation to my fellow performance scholars, I contend that the performative tactics and corporeal semantics within BLM activism demand further rumination on how these practices fit within a larger tradition of resistant feminine performances. These potential enactments can move beyond a literal conception for the performance of "kneeling," and instead consider various

interpretations of surrender and compliance as they appear in the visual fields of art and media.

One such resistant performance that aligns with literal and non-literal performances of "kneeling," is the gesture "Hands Up, Don't Shoot," which has been used repeatedly in BLM protest spaces. "Hands Up, Don't Shoot" is enacted when a demonstrator raises their arms above their head, with elbows bent at a ninety-degree angle and palms facing forward (Figure 28).[56] I use the phrase "Hands Up, Don't Shoot" to describe this gesture because its use in BLM protest performance originates in Ferguson following the shooting death of Michael Brown. *Washington Post* reporter Michelle Ye Hee Lee details how the gesture "Hands Up, Don't Shoot" is based on eye-witness testimonies of Brown's fatal encounter with Darren Wilson, although Lee also explains that federal investigators never confirmed these accounts in their final report of the incident.

> This phrase became a rallying cry for Ferguson residents, who took to the streets to protest the fatal shooting of a black 18-year-old by a white police officer, Darren Wilson. Witness accounts spread after the shooting that Brown had his hands raised in surrender, mouthing the words "Don't shoot" as his last words before being shot execution-style. The gesture of raised hands became a symbol of outrage over mistreatment of unarmed black youth by police.[57]

Additionally, this gesture is linked to the phrase "Hands Up, Don't Shoot" through chants verbalized during demonstrations as well as in online discourses via the hashtag #handsupdontshoot. Countless examples of the spoken and textual uses of "Hands Up, Don't Shoot" are available on Twitter. Once such instance appears in a video shot by freelance journalist Mike Bivins on February 16, 2017. In the video, a mass of protestors march through the streets of Portland, Oregon in response to the "police shooting and killing" of Quanice Hayes.[58] Bivins posted

multiple videos from this specific protest that also include demonstrators chanting "Black Lives Matter." The 22-second video of "Hands Up, Don't Shoot" shows protestors cloaked in winter gear enacting the gesture while simultaneously voicing the chant. In this way, the raised-arms gesture has become what Diana Taylor identifies as a meme, meaning an embodied form of imitation or "reiterative acts" that are copied from person to person.[59]

This bodily practice, outside of the linguistic message associated with it, immediately communicates the vulnerability of the protestor's body in relation to the power of the state. Performers sometimes enact this gesture in relation to uniformed law enforcement tasked with policing large public demonstrations (Figure 29).[60] The dominance of state power is further amplified in this enactment if the activist chooses to lower themselves onto their knees or flat on the ground. This leads me to suggest that the performing bodies in "Hands Up, Don't Shoot" imagery "stand" as icons of surrender.

However, I want to nuance the notion of surrender by proposing that it is productive to examine similar performances to the raised arms seen in "Hands Up, Don't Shoot" in worship spaces. Specifically, the enactment of this gesture by black women in the contexts of contemporary Christianity allows for "Hands Up, Don't Shoot" to be addressed as a choreography of agency and joy, a potential pathway that is reliant on understanding the gesture as movement rather than as a static pose. This argument is based on the work of Telia U. Anderson, whose essay *"Calling on the Spirit"* contends that women worshiping in the Baptist church exercise a physicalized faith practice that spiritually and spatially makes

room for femininity in a realm dominated by men. She explains that "black women, through 'calling on the spirit' (also known as 'getting happy,' 'shouting,' or 'stomping'), operate a radical Africanist performance strategy that accesses and enacts personal and corporeal divine authority, which challenges church patriarchy"[61] (Figure 30). Korean-American writer Sarah D. Park also writes about the freeing possibilities within the physicalized practices of African American Christian worship after having attended services at a church with a predominately black congregation. She specifically approaches the "yielding posture" of raising one's hands as a glorification of God and an exercising of feminist agency and accountability:

> Raised hands, palms out, I'm now demanding something from God. Raised hands, palms up, I'm celebrating who he is. I'm standing straighter, claiming my right to stand before God and asking him to be accountable to his Word. Having grown up in a culture where meeting my father's gaze was a direct challenge to his authority, I have had to slowly let go of how inappropriate it feels to approach God with such boldness. The more I raise my hands, the more liberating it feels.[62]

Whether from scholarly or faith-based perspectives, Anderson and Park offer compelling launching points for further analysis of surrender gestures like "Hands Up, Don't Shoot" and their lineage in faith-based practices depicted in imagery. What liberating potentials exists for black women who use these movements as a means of "making space" for themselves in environments and organizations dominated by men? How does "Hands Up, Don't Shoot," as a feminine performative, enable BLM demonstrators to represent their racial and gendered selves in the physical landscapes restricted by the choreopolicing of state power in the form of barricades, parameters, and routes? How is this gesture a tool that makes space for femininity and femme-driven leadership in the

masculinized iconicity of racial justice activism, which contributes to the cooption and erasure of women's authorship and labor in the movement?

This chapter's exploration into resistant performances captured in imagery counters the biased conception that BLM activism is chaotic or disorganized. Rather, by manipulting the dominant ideologies of black submissiveness elicited in specific acts of activism, performers curate how their humanity and desirability are visualized in live performance as well as in photos and video. This command of the self in protest spaces is an exercise in creative agency that holds radical possibilities for black feminine performance in activism.

As this project continues, it is productive to address the dissemination and proliferation of BLM videos and imagery through the circulation of search engine buzz words and contemporary contexts for performance in the public arena. For example, a simple Google search for "BLM kneeling" in 2017 results in media that is predominately related to masculine sports figures. These digital trends, driven at least in part by attention paid to certain figures in news coverage and social media conversations, are unavoidable. Therefore, this project explores performances of femininity that challenge the focus on masculine bodies in online discourses surrounding BLM. Recent performances of excessive femininity indicate that there is fertile ground to tread when tracing "viral" femininity on the inter-web. One such example is world superstar Beyoncé's performance during the half-time show at Super Bowl 50 in February 2016, when she and her all-women dance crew wore costumes and enacted gestures directly related to the Black Panthers (Figure 31).[63] Bridging both this chapter and the next, Beyoncé's

performance counters both the historical contexts of the Panthers as a masculinist organization for black identity and the expectations of feminine performance for entertainment in sports settings. When raising their fists in the air, the performers complicate the iconologies of pleasurable black femme flesh and black power by harnessing their bodies' inherent excess, a tactic that extends their activism beyond the physical landscape of the football field.

## CHAPTER 3

## "Stand in your POWER": Extending Activist Bodies in the Digital Sphere

*If George Zimmerman was not engaged in an unlawful activity and was attacked in any place where he had a right to be, he had no duty to retreat and had the right to stand his ground and meet force with force, including deadly force if he reasonably believed that it was necessary to do so to prevent death or great bodily harm to himself or another or to prevent the commission of a forcible felony.*

- Instructions to the jury in State of Florida v. George Zimmerman[1]

After a Florida jury acquitted George Zimmerman of second-degree murder in the death of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin in July 2013, debates waged over the enactment of controversial "stand your ground" laws as criminal justification for deadly altercations between civilians. Although stand your ground was not used by Zimmerman's defense team, it was cited by the City of Sanford as to why Zimmerman was not immediately arrested for shooting Martin; it also appeared in the jury instructions. Adapted from the so-called Castle Doctrine of English common law, which ordained that a man had the right to protect his property (including his children and spouse) if confronted by an intruder, stand your ground laws "allow individuals to use lethal force if they fear for their lives."[2] However, historian Caroline Light explains that this legal right was created for white, property-owning men, and that the same protections were not extended to Native or African Americans until well into the Jim Crow era.

Now, nearly two decades into the twenty-first century, the right to stand one's ground remains an exclusionary legal privilege, in which the race of the

defender or the intruder determines if standing is justified or overdetermined. Following the role of stand your ground in Martin's death, the *Tampa Bay Times* surveyed other cases, which showed that "defendants claiming stand your ground 'are more likely to prevail if the victim is black.' Blacks who use stand your ground are almost 15 percent more likely to face a penalty for doing so than their white peers."[3] In short, "standing" in self-defense is a slippery and racially-biased right that has and continues to be used as a means of eluding responsibility when black men and women are killed.

In a society that continues to tolerate, ignore, and facilitate the killing of black residents under the pretense of "standing your ground," what political capacities does the enactment of an upright, lengthened body have in troubling and highlighting the double standard of standing? Long before Colin Kaepernick began taking a knee during the national anthem, American sprinters John Carlos and Tommie Smith raised their gloved fists in what many describe as the "Black Power salute" while atop the podium at the 1968 Mexico City Olympic Games, creating one of the most iconic images of racial justice activism in twentieth-century sports (Figure 32).[4] The repercussions of Smith and Carlos' performance were immense. Their lives and those of their families were threatened, and both men were removed from the U.S. track and field team. They have also been hailed as heroes. This famous example illustrates the limitations that are placed on the "uprightness" of the black body, and the price that is paid when the body extends itself beyond what is prescribed by dominant cultural powers.

In this chapter, I address the notion of "standing up" for racial justice in the Black Lives Matter movement by exploring the discursive landscape of digital activism. Here I consider how the affecting, protesting bodies of black women are elongated through the documentation of their "live" performances in photography and video. I argue that the dissemination of BLM digital media as well as how this media encounters supportive and combative commentaries online are productively performative. In this way, I reframe the idea of "standing" to shift away from the literal pose of being upright or unmoved, and instead investigate the dispersal of BLM imagery as feats of expansion that move beyond physical protest spaces when they enter the complex online networks of social media and digital journalism. While recognizing that the internet is a realm of constant movement and change, it is productive to consider the ways in which the dissemination of protest imagery allows for a political "stance" to be made and fixed by those who appear in the media as well as the digital spectators sharing the images. Ultimately, I contend that the relationship between the documented performances and their digital spectators illustrates the complicated conceptions of black identity - specifically black female identity – rendered online. I also argue that these performance documents inspire and instruct others on how they can use the generative tool of their bodies in activist settings.

The methodological approach for this study is based on the premise that the circulation of digital objects online works as a roadmap to elucidate the performative potential of these captured acts of activism to reflect cultural attitudes towards black femininity and racial justice activism. In short, I posit that

the capturing of BLM protest performances enacted by women in photography and video provides an entryway into examining how their flattened, 2D bodies interact with digital spectatorship, and that these interactions often result in continued activism offline. To argue that an object is performative, I must look closer at what the affecting information within it "does" to those who encounter its presence on the internet, as well as evidence within these frictions that complicate or contribute to the effort for racial justice. Furthermore, this chapter's case studies are centered on two well-known or "viral" pieces of BLM media, and my analysis wrestles with the complexities that arise when iconicity is attached to activist performance.

The first and second portions of this chapter contextualize the role and reach of the BLM movement in digital spaces, including on social media platforms. I draw upon scholarship by sociologists and critical race theorists who examine the efficacy and framing of BLM as "hashtag activism."[5] To bridge the objectives and practices of BLM's online presence and the case studies themselves, an expanded understanding of photography and video as both performance documentation and digital objects is necessary. Here, the work of performance theorists Philip Auslander and Sarah Bay-Cheng help to articulate what the performing body "becomes" when captured in media form as well as how the digital object performs for online users that engage with it. I conclude with an outline of my methodological approach in tracing BLM imagery across the digital sphere.

The first case study examines the photograph titled “Taking a Stand in Baton Rouge” by Reuters reporter Jonathan Bachman. Bachman, who was in Baton Rouge to cover a series of BLM rallies in response to the death of Alton Sterling at the hands of local police, captured the moment in which a young woman named Ieshia Evans stood down two heavily armored law enforcement officers in the middle of a city street. The image went viral within hours of Bachman posting it on July 9, 2016. I further describe the photograph and descriptions by Bachman before analyzing responses to the image on various media platforms. Commentary on Evans’ posture, clothing, pose, profession, and personal biography offer illuminating insights into the generative potential of what scholar Nicole Fleetwood calls “excessive femininity” in BLM demonstrations.

The concluding case study is centered on recordings of filmmaker and activist Bree Newsome, who in June 2015 scaled a 30-foot-tall pole at the South Carolina state house to remove the Confederate flag. Different pieces of footage showing the Newsome demonstration can be found on video-sharing sites like YouTube. I explore how various news and media sources framed and re-framed the flag pole ascension video, as well as the ways in which polarized discourses surrounding the videos online reflect the human/non-human paradigm of black fleshiness, as described by critical race theorist Alex Weheliye. The study concludes with what I believe to be powerful evidence of the effect Newsome’s performance document had on impassioned demonstrators in her local community and nationwide.

**Hashtag Activism**

It is impossible to fully comprehend the efficacy and model of the Black Lives Matter movement without attending to its origins in social media or the ways in which digital activity is embedded in the scaffolding of the movement. Here I explore the dynamics of the BLM movement as an ever-churning feedback loop of online content sharing and offline action in the form of live demonstrations and community organizing. Integral to this analysis is a deeper understanding of the digital language employed in social network discourses.

While sitting in an Oakland bar on July 13, 2013, Alicia Garza learned that George Zimmerman had been found not guilty by reading a breaking news story on her phone. From the very same device, Garza opened Facebook and posted a message that launched a movement: "Black people. I love you. I love us. Our lives matter."[6] Garza's friend and community organizer, Patrice Cullors, saw the post and shared it on her own Facebook account along with the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter. Within days, Garza, Cullors, and fellow activist Opal Tometi launched a formal campaign around #BlackLivesMatter using a model of collective action both in tweets and on the streets. Early work in the movement, prior to the Ferguson protests in summer 2014, came in the form of social media posts about why black lives matter, which the founders encouraged online users to share. Additionally, Cullors led a march down Los Angeles' Rodeo Drive that carried signs and banners with the slogan.[7]

The purpose of tagging the phrase #BlackLivesMatter is to create a digital community of racial justice advocates. In the sweeping and congested landscape of online social communities, special characters are employed to organize text,

images, videos, and other digital content shared by users around specific cultural topics or political ideologies. Sociologists Jelani Ince, Fabio Rojas, and Clayton A. Davis explain that:

> Many social media platforms allow users to use a special symbol, usually a hash (#), to index, label or flag content so that other users may find it (e.g. "Vote for #Obama")…Thus, indexing is the way that "the crowd" on social media sorts through content and labels it in an attempt to create a semantic network. Much as a book's index clusters ideas with tags, social media hashtags group messages and ideas together.[8]

This indexing language of digital communication is used across social media platforms, thus allowing organizers to cast a wider discursive net. Knowing this, Cullors, Garza, and Tometi quickly expanded the early digital campaign for black lives in 2013 beyond Facebook by tagging the turn of phrase in posts, pages, and discussion on other social media sites like Twitter and Tumblr.[9] As of 2018, hashtags are supported by numerous other social networks, including Instagram, Google+, and YouTube, to name a few. On Instagram alone, #BlackLivesMatter has been attached to more than 6.8 million images posted to the site. As of March 2016, Twitter had more than 320 million users, 79% of which reside outside of the United States.[10] Because of its simple format, meant for sharing 140-character-long statements and the option to attach images and video, Twitter users have become adept at using tools like hashtags to link profiles and trending topics to their individual posts.

Social networks are a relatively new platform for community engagement. Websites like MySpace, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram were founded in the early- to mid-2000s, when access to personal computers, cell phones, and app technology was more financially feasible and a popular means of making contact

for professional and personal reasons. While millennials and other members of post-baby-boomer generations have been widely credited with popularizing and integrating the use of social media into modern daily life, scholars also believe that literacy of these networks can also be connected to racial communities. Citing a 2011 study by communications scholars Eszter Hargittai and Eden Litt, sociologist Dustin Kidd writes that "using original longitudinal data in which they surveyed participants in 2009 and again in 2010… black participants are more likely to use Twitter than white participants and more likely to have adopted Twitter during the period of analysis."[11] Kidd supports the 2011 Harittai and Litt study with figures assembled by the Pew Research Center which showed that "a full 25 percent of black Internet users were also Twitter users, based on data from 2011… We can compare this to only 9 percent of white Internet users and 19 percent of Hispanic internet users. Furthermore, black Twitter users also use Twitter more *often* than other groups."[12] Based on these figures, Kidd asserts that the sustaining of the BLM movement's presence in political conversation is because Twitter and other social network sites are especially effective platforms for young black voices. In essence, he posits that the adoption of hashtag activism is what made the issue of black lives mattering a movement rather than a temporary trending topic: "If social media did not exist, we still would have power civil rights organizations, and we might even have one called Black Lives Matter, but their embrace of social media has allowed them to capture public imagination and to have a powerful place in public discourse."[13]

Furthermore, studies have shown the strategy of digital activism to be an effective means of gaining investment in the movement by young, emerging demonstrators. Kidd writes that "a report by Ogilvy Public Relations Worldwide and The Center for Social Impact Communications at Georgetown University (2011) found that Twitter and other social media play an important role in getting black citizens involved in social issues, more so than whites."[14] The power of social media engagement to get black people involved in social issues and to create ties that lead to continued engagement with BLM is also confirmed in a 2016 study by computer research scholars at Georgia Institute of Technology. In their paper, "Social Media Participation in an Activist Movement for Racial Equality," the Georgia Tech scientists evaluated nearly 30 million tweets linked to demonstrations in Ferguson, New York, and Baltimore, which indicated that "the [BLM] community is unlike many other social movements because of its ability to bond over the course of many months. More than a third of those who participated via social media for the first time continued their participation during the next BLM event."[15] These two studies illustrate social media's ability to introduce users to the movement's mission as well as to retain their attention and ongoing contributions to racial justice discourse.

Although online activity is an important aspect of the movement, the ultimate objective of enduring social change requires that the energy of hashtag activism result in concrete action offline. The deployment of hashtag activism as a tool for community engagement in-person is precisely what the co-founders and organizers of the movement envisioned for their digital efforts. As Garza

explained in a 2015 *USA Today* profile, the digital presence of #BlackLivesMatter works to link advocates "so they can connect offline and actually do something in their communities."[16] The need to harness digital engagement for engagement on the ground – this being in the forms of rallies, protests, and community meetings – is rooted in a major pitfall of hashtag activism, what experts call "slacktivism." Kidd describes slacktivism as a movement "in which participants simply click 'like' or 'retweet' and go about their day, a charge levied against the Kony activism of 2012."[17]

It is unclear how many online users engaging with BLM hashtag activism actually attend protests "in real life." This is perhaps due to the employment of multiple social networking sites in the planning and advertment of BLM events. For example, Facebook users can create event pages through the site that records the number of people who have been invited and RSVPed to an event. If the event page is "public," those invited to an event or alerted to its existence via a post on their timelines can share the event page on their own account and invite all or individual friends to "attend" (i.e. say that they are going to attend in-person when the event occurs). Twitter, Tumblr, and Instagram do not have such capabilities, but links from Facebook events can be shared on these sites. Also, information about the same event, such as date, time, and location, can be included in posts on these other platforms and shared via retweets, tagging friends' names, or adding a hashtag that is then searchable across the site. For BLM events, information about its purpose or topic, meeting dates and times, as well as other details about

conduct, clothing, and plans are all compulsory information included on event pages and/or posts.

In this way, it is fair to assert that digital activists engaged with BLM online learn of impending demonstrations, rallies, or community events through their existing relationship with the movement, and that a portion of these users then participate in-person at the events. Therefore, social engagement online not only serves the purpose of activating awareness of racial justice but to also gather bodies in protest settings and direct those performers on how to engage with BLM activism. Bijan Stephen, in his November 2015 article for *Wired* magazine, explains the power of online activism to pull people away from their keyboard when he states that "Social media could serve as a source of live, raw information. It could summon people to the streets and coordinate their movements in real time. And it could swiftly push back against spurious media narratives with the force of a few thousand retweets."[18] Much of this thesis has been dedicated to the ways in which activists use their bodies as performance tools in BLM settings, and so I refrain from going into further detail about those tactics here. Instead, I shift the focus on performativity in BLM protests to how demonstrators' performances are captured in images and videos during events. These images and videos are then integrated into the movement's digital activity when uploaded to the very social media sites that mobilize and coordinate live events.

**Digital Historiography & the Performativity of Digital Documents**

Integral to my analysis of BLM's digital activism is a larger understanding of the relationship between live performance and media. In his seminal 1999 work

*Liveness*, Philip Auslander counters the notion put forth by Peggy Phelan that the nature of performance is rooted in its ontological ephemerality. Instead, Auslander aims to destabilize the divide erected by performance theorists between live events and media by proposing that liveness be redefined in our digital age because of "the progressive diminution of previous distinction between the live and the mediatized, in which live events are becoming even more like mediatized ones."[19] Auslander asserts that our culture's exposure to media in fact influences the production of live performance.[20] This supports my earlier discussion of the impact created by digital media in organizing and mobilizing protest events.

The intertwined relationship between live and media is further explored by Auslander in relation to the capturing of art events in the forms of photography and video. This is especially productive for articulating the performativity of BLM documentation, meaning the transformation of embodied practices into digital objects when demonstrators or bystanders record in protest spaces. Auslander explains the performativity of documentation by approaching the document not as a point of reference to the original event but as an affecting performer that elucidates the artist's intent in its relationship with the viewer/audience. He writes that "it may well be that our sense of the presence, power, and authenticity of these pieces derives not from treating the document as an indexical access to a past event but from perceiving the document itself *as a performance* that reflects an artist's aesthetic project or sensibility and for which we are the present audience."[21]

Auslander denotes performance records as being either "documentary" or "theatrical" in nature. Documentary media is, unlike the theatrical, not staged solely to be recorded but instead has "meaningful prior existence as autonomous events presented to audiences."[22] Although the focus of Auslander's analysis is centered in performance art produced by the likes of Vito Acconci, Yves Klein, and Chris Burden, these definitions offer a compelling means of framing photos and video taken during BLM protests as performance documents. BLM "live event" are staged for an audience in that landscape but are also recorded by the array of digital devices in the space. I posit that BLM demonstrators do not curate their gestures, clothing, and bodily enactments specifically for the gaze of a camera lens but that they are aware of the presence of documentary technology at the event.

An important point of clarification is the use of these documents. Within the documentary performance framework described by Auslander, he explicates "the traditional functions of performance documentation" as serving two purposes: first, to "provide evidence" that the performance occurred at some time and place; and second, to allow future performers, artists, critics, etc. the opportunity to "reconstruct" or "recreate" the performance.[23] In this way, these documents not only record the historicity of the event but also encounter audiences/viewers of the document who may attempt to reverse the original transformation of the "live" to "media" by recreating the performance based on, what Rebecca Schneider would call, its "remains."

Performance theorist Sarah Bay Cheng echoes Auslander's argument as well as Schneider's language around the performativity of documents by considering the duality of these objects. Bay Cheng, much like Auslander, examines performance art works in the contexts of digital documentation. In her 2012 *Theatre* article on famed artist Marina Abramović's *Seven Easy Pieces*, Bay-Cheng writes that "without ignoring the potential for digital records to function as documents within a fixed archive, it is necessary to articulate a more nuanced consideration of the roles that such records play not only in the documentation of performance but also as performative fragments themselves."[24] In the case of *Seven Easy Pieces,* Abramović reenacted iconic 1970s performance art by herself, Vicconci, and others based on documentation captured of the original events. Therefore, photographs and videos captured during performance events take on a performative life of their own in their ability to, though fragmented and incomplete, provoke embodied action that imitates or emulates what is perceived from the document.

Because of its double function as record and performative object, Bay-Cheng and art historian Jessica Wyman explore the possibilities of treating mediatized performances as historiographic material that has been (semi) democratized in the digital ecologies of the internet, where more people from various backgrounds and perspectives can upload historical information. In her essay on Abramović, Bay-Cheng argues that:

> Digital access to documentation via computers (searching library databases, viewing digitized documents, scanning photographs, and most significant, sharing these within digital networks) affects the ways in which we approach and organize performance history. They are more

> dispersed, more democratic, more regulated by invisible algorithms. At the same time, our participation within digital media — through social networking sites, blogs, and phone-based communication — constitute forms of performance. When we reenact, record, and circulate these performances through digital media, we participate in a kind of mediated exchange that takes on all of the hallmarks of theatrical performance, including careful attention to scripts, costumes, and audience response. That is, we perform our historical evidence as a kind of assembling dance through the data.[25]

In this way, the performativity of the document is not only evidenced in the acts of recreation that audiences undertake but is further constituted through the sharing of the document online. For Wyman, it is important to celebrate our access to performance documents, or what she calls "objects," because it allows "both historiographer and the (imagined) end reader/viewer/consumer" numerous entryways into the event, and that their psychological interaction with these objects results in their transformation into performers as well.[26]

Herein lies the cornerstone of my methodological approach for this chapter. By considering viral photographs and videos from BLM demonstrations as historiographic material, I believe that performance scholars and racial justice activists alike have the ability to understand "how" the event took place. After all, as art historian Amelia Jones contends, the absence of the spectator in the space where the "live" performance took place does not destroy their capacity to garner "specificity of knowledges that develop in relation to the documentary traces of such an event."[27] Furthermore, I maintain that approaching BLM protest document as performative historiographic evidence creates an impetus for examining the ramifications provoked by the viewer's encounter with the digital object.

The previous section on BLM digital activism and the theories discussed above are the bases for the methodological framework I use to examine the two case studies that complete this chapter. Using specific tags in online media, BLM organizes events and creates a community of activists that attend demonstrations. During these live events, protestors and by-standers often document what occurs in images and videos that are then uploaded to the internet and put back into the digital discourse of the movement. The documents of past BLM events then inform how future demonstrations are organized and how bodies in protest perform in those spaces. Both the uploading of performance documents as well as commentary about and sharing of those materials is not a random choice made by online users. Rather, I contend that the dissemination of BLM content online is a pointedly curatorial practice by social media participants who engage in online discourses that reflect or challenge their personal ideologies through content sharing.

Tracing two specific documents from BLM events through Facebook and Twitter hashtag searches, as well as searches made in YouTube, I will show the various ways that the digital objects of performance documentation are framed, reframed, and encounter commentary online. I also explore how the documented performances are characterized and what that illuminates about digital spectators' attitudes towards BLM and black femininity. In this way, my analysis mirrors the loop of BLM online and offline activity by examining performances in protest settings, the documentation and dissemination of these performances online, the interaction between the document and the digital spectator, and finally the

pedagogical results of these performances in similar deployments of upright, and extended bodies by BLM demonstrators who recreate aspects of the documented performance during other protests.

### "Taking a Stand in Baton Rouge" – Ieshia Evans' Excessive Femininity Goes Viral

More than three years after Zimmerman was acquitted of the murder of Trayvon Martin, and nearly two years to the day since the death of Eric Garner at the hands of a New York City police officer, one stunning image swarmed social media newsfeeds around the world in the name of "Black Lives Matter." However, unlike the many faces that have become synonymous with the BLM movement, the July 9, 2016 photograph of 28-year-old Ieshia Evans was not splashed across the internet because she had become the latest in a never-ending list of victims of police brutality in America. Instead, the photo shows Evans donning a long, flowing dress that exposes her arms, neck, back, and legs as she stands still and alone on a highway while confronting two police officers clad in riot gear (Figure 33).[28] Evans is rigidly upright, holding out her left arm and cradling her stomach with the other. She stares straight into the eyes of the advancing forces. While hers is not the first or the last or the only body to visually depict the vulnerability of black life, the centering of a woman of color in the public's imagination of what BLM stands and fights for is greatly significant. Some online commentators even referred to her figure in the image as "legendary."[29]

The photograph of Ieshia Evans was captured during a BLM protest in response to the shooting death of Alton Sterling by two Baton Rouge Police Department officers. It was just one of the many public demonstrations staged by the movement since its inception in 2013. What is perhaps most remarkable about the virality of the Evans photograph is that the liveness of her body's pose and the illustration of a black woman's subjection to state power becomes the primary focus of public discourse, rather than the officer-involved death that prompted the demonstration's assembly. While in no way diminishing the impact of Sterling's death, I, like many others, am repeatedly drawn back to Evans' performance of femininity. The interplay between her posture of resistance, the ways in which her arms signal her dual roles as warrior and mother, and the exposure of her flesh demands consideration beyond this one snapshot.

The iconic image of Evans, which has since been titled "Taking a Stand in Baton Rouge," was captured by Reuters photographer Jonathan Bachman. The event was Bachman's first ever assignment in a protest setting, but upon seeing Evans standing alone on a three-lane highway in the Louisiana capital, he immediately recognized the efficacy of her performance. Evans explained that the Baton Rouge BLM rally was also the first protest she had ever taken part in. Having watched the videos taken when both Alton Sterling and Philando Castile were shot dead by police, Evans explained to Gayle King on CBS that she had to do something. "I have a responsibility to do something… I felt like I was just a bystander. You have a choice as a human being to do something or not to do something… Once the opportunity presented itself, it was just like, yeah,

definitely."[30] The dissemination of content related to the devaluing of black life evidently inspired Evans to travel from her home in Pennsylvania so that she could take part in the BLM protests in Baton Rouge. It brought her to Louisiana so she could stand within the center of the movement rather than, as she explained above, continue living as a bystander. It was at the July 9 event that Bachman witnessed Evans standing her ground and snapped the iconic image. He later described the moment, stating "I was on the side of the road photographing protesters arguing with police. I looked over my right shoulder and saw the woman step onto the road. She was making her stand. She said nothing and was not moving. It was clear that the police were going to have to detain her."[31] In a separate interview with *Time* in the days following the photos viral breakout, Bachman elaborated on the efficacy of Evans' protest performance: "I knew it was a representation of what was happening in Baton Rouge at that moment."[32]

Although he found Evans' protest profound, Bachman did not anticipate its impact while filing his photos with Reuters early in the morning on July 10. It was not until the next day that he learned of its growing traction online. Posts by citizens and celebrities alike began to appear on social media pages by midmorning. For example, a 1:00 PM Facebook post including Bachman's photo of Evans by the eminent writer and civil rights activist Shaun King garnered tens of thousands of likes by July 11.[33] Despite the attention paid to Bachman for taking the photo, he made a point of telling *Time* that credit for the image's infamy belongs to Evans. "People have been trying to talk about me, but really it's that woman that made the photo."[34]

When the photo of Evans began gaining traction online, her clothing became a major point of discussion for users. Before being identified by name, Evans was often referred to as "the woman in the dress" or "the woman in the flowing dress" in headlines and tweets sharing Bachman's image.[35] The dress as an identifying marker firstly addresses Evans' presented gender. The clothing worn by this protestor offers the audience/viewer interacting with the image online something personal and easily understandable in a photograph that conveys a great deal of chaos, uncertainty, and conflict. As Vanessa Friedman wrote for *The New York Times* eight days after "Take a Stand in Baton Rouge" went viral, "clothes tap into all our subconscious associations and connect a far-off event to our own experiences. They telegraph the fact that these individuals are private citizens, taking a stand for what they believe is right… just a man, just a woman, who got in the morning and threw on some clothes."[36] In the case of Ieshia Evans, the dress she threw on that morning was practical for day spent outside in the summer heat, with its open and airy skirt, but also served as a clear declaration of her femininity. Friedman, in her article about protest clothing, calls Evans' garb a "sundress: it's ankle-length, feminine, spaghetti-strapped. The kind you might wear on a hot summer day or out to dinner with your friends. The kind that is so universal, and so concretely visual, that Irwin Shaw titled a short story after it in 1939: "The Girls in Their Summer Dresses."[37]

The universality of the sundress as a staple of feminine clothing proposed by Friedman is reflected in the social media discourse surrounding the image. Posts about Evans and the photograph latch onto the sundress as a femme

aesthetic that challenges notions black criminality. Many of the strongest responses recorded across Twitter drew a relationship between the bulky armor of the police and thin material of Evans' backless garment. The following tweet by @JasonNParkinson is exemplative of numerous posts reacting to the tension between the two dress codes: "Baton Rouge robocops defenceless against a summer evening dress. #BlackLivesMatter."[38] Discourse on the flowing dress extended to the fabric and texture of the dress, as well. On Facebook, one commenter responded to musician José James' July 11 post sharing the image with a bitingly sarcastic script of what he imagined the police were thinking upon approaching the woman in the dress: "Those must be exploding sequins in her dress, I just know it."[39]

These users' commentary around the image highlights how they interpret the efficacy of a feminine clothing item to *expose* Evans' body for productive means. Baggy clothing and pockets are elements that law enforcement often target for potentially carrying concealed weapons. For example, Philando Castile was shot by Minnesota police officer Jeronimo Yanez while reaching into his pocket to retrieve his license, a point of confusion where Yanez though Castile was reaching for the gun that the driver had calmly disclosed he was carrying.[40] The dress Evans wore in Baton Rouge does not appear to have pockets. The long slit down the dress' lower half waves in the wind, showing her legs. Her arms, upper chest, and neck are completely uncovered. The "summer evening dress" reveals that Evans is hiding nothing. The dotted pattern of the dress, which the Facebook commenter interpreted as the hyper feminine sparkle of sequins, is decorative.

The comments further emphasize that she is visibly feminine and unarmed, which is in stark contrast to the layers of Kevlar and helmets worn by the officers, as well as the service weapons clearly seen at their hips.

Although the dress Evans wears denotes both her presenting gender and supposed defenselessness, the exposure of her body has additional potency beyond its negation of black criminality. It is a mistake to define her as "weaponless" or "defenseless" just because the photo does not show her with a gun or other conventionally dangerous object. Those who encountered the photo online on July 10 and beyond described Evans with the following hashtags and phrases: ""#Powerful," "#ThePowerOfABlackWoman," "strong," and "epic."[41] How then does a woman dressed so plainly, who is in the midst of capture by both Bachman's camera and the approaching police, become a viral symbol of power? Her body, as it is manifested in the digital document, is her affecting weapon for change. Here I want to consider the potential of Evans' visible flesh to elicit commanding narratives surrounding and reperformances of black female subjectivity, which celebrate the force that comes with being overtly feminine.

In her 2011 book *Troubling Vision,* critical race and arts scholar Nicole Fleetwood offers a compelling theoretical framework for understanding and analyzing the responses of digital spectators to Evans' image by explaining that both gender and race contribute to dominant notions of black female subjectivity. Fleetwood writes that the notion of "blackness" has been framed as masculine because the visual field in Western culture is constructed by (predominately white) men. Therefore, when black femininity is visible it is, by this design, a

residue of masculinity, or what Fleetwood refers to as "excess flesh… the ways in which black female corporeality is rendered as an excessive overdetermination and as overdetermined excess."[42] In this way, it is worth arguing that Evans' very presence as a feminine black subject in the visual fields of the protest space, the photograph, and the digital landscape of social media means that she is transgressing hegemonic ideologies of her gender and race. Furthermore, the proliferation of the Baton Rouge image online brings into question what Fleetwood calls the "hypervisiblity" of blackness in our contemporary culture of mass media and entertainment, where "the black body as commodity fetish has a heightened salience."[43] By moving beyond a basic understanding of Evans' corporeality as inherently aberrant, however, I believe that it is possible address how Evans' body in the digital document is read not as a commodity but as cogent.

In her third chapter, Fleetwood identifies defiant female arts producers who stage enactments of excessive flesh – meaning the exposure of body parts and nudity – in portraiture, performance art, video, and hip hop. These enactments of excess flesh are in response to the fact that, as Daphne Brooks explains, "black women's bodies continue to bear the gross insult and burdens of spectacular (representational) exploitation in transatlantic culture…Yet there are ways to read for the viability of black women making use of their own materiality within narratives in which they are the subjects."[44] Whereas Fleetwood takes on Brooks' "making use" assertion by analyzing black female performers who use dominant representations of black women "to construct new modes of operation," I focus on

the new modes of operation for black female subjectivity that emerge in the discourse surrounding a digital document that captures an enactment of excess flesh.[45] Without reducing the power Evans had over her body in the protest space, I am interested in how her flesh instigates commentary that subverts and reimagines black female subjectivity. This moves the discussion of "Taking a Stand in Baton Rouge" past a superficial study of what Evans wore so that more nuanced responses to the digital document by users are included, such as the following narrative thread centered on Evans' posture that I traced across posts on both Facebook and Twitter.

The online discourses pertaining to her pose, such as the placement and shape of her body as well as her posture, result from and rely on the visibility of her arms, legs, back, chest, head, and feet, all of which appear as exposed flesh in the image. Although not all commentary about Evans' pose read with such detailed description, Facebook user Jami West wrote a particularly clear comment to Shaun King's July 10 post of Bachman's photograph: "Look at her posture. She is balanced, powerful, upright and well grounded with both feet firmly planted on the earth. Look at the line made from the crown of her head to the heels of her feet. She is only protected by the force of her own personal power."[46] West's specific use of language is compelling. "Balanced" in relation to his later reference to her rigidly linear posture illustrates the 2D rendering of Evans as an unwavering figure that refuses to bow or break in the face of advancing state authority. The "upright" body and "firmly planted" feet outlined by West can be

seen through the slit in Evans' dress as well as the subtle but significant forward thrust of her bare sternum.

What West describes but does not name is the vertical position of Evans' body in space, something that Twitter users and Jonathan Bachman make a point of stating. As previously quoted, Bachman narrates the moment in which he witnessed the protestor's encounter with the Baton Rouge police as Evans "making her stand." Defining Evans' posture as both upright and standing is significant because it conveys mastery over one's body, even under volatile circumstances. Twitter user @Only1Oflowers demonstrates such a connection between standing and control in her July 12, 2016 tweet reading "Stand in your POWER! #ieshaevans #blacklivesmatter #blacklivesmattertoo #endpolicebrutality."[47] Additional commentaries on Facebook and Twitter detail a steadfastness of Evans' posture and the immobility of her body interpreted from the image. Digital spectators, such as the Facebook account Shelly Bee, align phrases such as "stands tall" with historic racial justice sentiments like "she will not be moved."[48]

These chronicles on the pose, posture, and non-movement authored by digital viewers depict the figure of Ieshia Evans in contrast to notions of black female docility that served as the center of my previous chapter. Here, maintaining an elevated body position is construed across the digital sphere as a credible and captivating act of resistance. From the affecting qualities of her exposed and excessive flesh, digital spectators disrupt dominant ideas surrounding the passivity of black women by defining Ieshia Evans' performance as one of

defiance. The inscription of resistance and defiance upon Evan's subjectivity in the photo is further expounded upon in reperformances. Reperformances, in this study, explain two types of continued activism. The first refers to alterations made to Bachman's photograph or new images created in its likeness that adapt online discourses about Evans. The second type of "reperformance" are those in which activists in real-world protest spaces enact similar tactics as those attributed to Evans' original act of activism.

Digital reperformances of Evans' resistant posture appeared on both Facebook and Twitter in a variety of forms and for a range of purposes. In the first few days following Evans' arrest, numerous artists posted their interpretation of the young woman's powerful pose. One Twitter post on July 13, 2016 by @PhotoNutrients shows the photo "Taking a Stand in Baton Rouge" above an ink sketch depicting the events from a rear perspective rather than from the side (Figure 34).[49] The drawing reproduces the strong, upright stance associated with the balanced and powerful female figure, though heightening the feat of her resistance by depicting a dozen or more anonymous riot officers in addition to the two who are foregrounded in Bachman's photo. The artist uses color to darken the agents of state authority while lighter tones are used to illustrate Evans' dress. The female figure's exposed back, arms, and right leg are the only swaths of flesh visible in the picture. It is unknown if @PhotoNutrients is the artist who created this captivated reimaging, but it is probable that it was seen by multiple Twitter users and potentially shared via retweets beyond this post.

A second, more commercial reperformance is an advertisement for the BBC's #100women list, which Evans was counted amongst in 2016 (Figure 35).[50] In the BBC's Facebook post, Bachman's image has been cropped and filters have been added to mute the bodies of the approaching police officers so that Evans' upright body pops out to the viewer. Around her body is a large circle with the words "I am Defiant" superimposed on top of the photo's background. This image is strategically used to both attract users to explore the #100women list and to continue the performance of Evans' designated defiance. Furthermore, the choice by the BBC to assign the term "defiant" to Evans' place on their list of influential women reflects the communication across the digital sphere between social media activity and the discourse appearing on news sites.

Performances by activists in real-world protest spaces carrying the threads of powerful femininity constructed around "Take a Stand in Baton Rouge" are less straightforward than those seen online. BLM protestors, though clearly utilizing specific methods and practices to communicate their aims for racial justice and liberation, do not employ precise re-stagings in their activism. While it is fair to assume that countless BLM organizers, participants, and allies interacted with Bachman's photograph in some way on social media, it is unlikely that any one image documenting BLM protest performers will show the exact aesthetics, positions, and circumstances as those of Evans' arrest. Rather, subtle clues are found in imagery from protests after July 2016 that suggest BLM activists are performing resistant femininity through both posture and clothing.

Student activists at Hofstra University staged a BLM protest during the first presidential debate broadcast from their campus in October 2016. In photos taken of the event, two female protestors stand out amongst their peers (Figure 36).[51] The black women are wearing dark shirts with "BLM" and "Black Lives Matter" seemingly hand-stenciled onto the front. The shirts are not what is most noteworthy, however. It is the way in which these women created the home-made clothing so that they would not entirely cover their upper bodies. One of the women is wearing a tube-top style garment, which leave the entirety of her arms, upper chest, and neck completely exposed. Her fellow protestor dons a cropped, spaghetti-strap tank that also leaves bare much of her upper body; both women's torsos are also marginally visible in the gap between their shirts and the waistbands of their pants. These protestors made clear choices about how they wanted to present themselves in this space, and as such showcase their femininity and flesh while standing tall and extending their raised fists to the sky.

Although this case study focuses on digital viewers' interpretations of Ieshia Evans' posture and pose in "Taking a Stand in Baton Rouge" as productive and empowering, it is important to note that numerous posts that circulated Bachman's photograph include oppositional frameworks and commentary. Hashtags like #AllLivesMatter appeared in Facebook comment sections. Others sought to diminish the efficacy of the viral image by questioning the authenticity of Evans' hero status online by contrasting her performance with other, more extreme forms of physicalized protest like self-immolation.[52] Although neither Bachman's photo nor Evans' act of civil disobedience were directly addressed in

commentary by conservative media sites like Fox News or Brietbart, BLM organizers in Baton Rouge were accused both online and in civil court of encouraging violence towards law enforcement after six police officers were shot by a lone gunman on July 17, 2016.[53] Furthermore, not all reperformances of Evans' powerful femininity are successful or, arguably, ethical. In April 2017, Pepsi pulled a commercial starring model and reality television personality Kendall Jenner in which pointed echoes to Evans' standoff against the Baton Rouge riot police are enacted in an unrealistic and ultimately tone-deaf scenario aimed at selling soft drinks.

That said, this case study makes the argument that Bachman's viral photograph, as a digital performance document, provokes compelling commentary on and performances of visible black femininity and excessive flesh in hashtag and live activism. In the next section, I employ the same methodology to explore how an activist and filmmaker creatively manipulated hegemonic prescriptions of abjection and inhumanness surrounding black flesh in a protest performance that took her 30 feet off the ground and catapulted her name and body into the digital sphere. By aligning these two studies under the same framework, I hope to provide a multi-dimensional examination of far-reaching, viral female performance in the BLM movement.

**#KeepItDown – Bree Newsome's Reach for the Flag**

The summer of 2017 brought the issue of Confederate monuments into broad national discourse, much of it centered on the fatal clash between anti-monument protestors and white nationalists in Charlottesville that left one woman

dead and several others injured and under arrest. However, the Confederate flag as a visual display of pro-slavery ideology continues to challenge advocacy for racial equality in the United States. The troubling history of the banner as well as its symbolism for white supremacists in contemporary America served as the impetus for one black woman's activist performance, in which she not only stood against racial injustice but lifted her body off the ground to bring down the flag. Furthermore, it is my contention that her physical performance reached far beyond removing a flag during a single protest, and instead continued into the digital sphere where spectators worked to #KeepItDown through reperformances of her activism.

On the morning of June 27, 2015, the Confederate flag waved aloft the grounds of the South Carolina State Capitol. Under a gray, hazy sky, 30-year-old activist Brittany "Bree" Newsome donned a harness and climbed up a 30-foot-long pole to remove the flag.[54] Newsome was also accompanied by a white, fellow activist named James Tyson. Tyson wore a neon construction vest and hard hat while simultaneously standing guard and monitored Newsome's climbing equipment before she left the ground. Also watching from below were bystanders shooting video footage and photos of the event, although the videos make clear that there were only a handful of people present for the climb.

In the videos available on YouTube, two uniformed police officers swiftly approached and demanded that Newsome "get off the pole" as she neared the half-way point of her climb.[55] Undeterred, Newsome continued upwards. After reaching the top, she unclipped the carabiners securing the flag and shouted down

to the officers and those watching: “In the name of Jesus, this flag has to come down… We come against hatred, and oppression, and violence. I come against you in the name of God. This flag comes down today.”[56] During her impassioned speech, Newsome held the flag between her two hands, seemingly posing for cameras (Figure 37).[57] Knowing full well that she would be arrested once she reached the ground, Newsome carefully descended the pole with the flag now secured to her harness. As she lowered herself, Newsome intermittently quoted scripture while also assuring the officers below that she planned to remove herself from the pole and was prepared to be arrested.[58] With her feet back on solid ground, Newsome raised her arms and hands in a gesture reminiscent of the “Hands Up, Don’t Shoot” pose while Tyson detached her climbing equipment (Figure 38). Calmly, the officers then helped Newsome jump over the gate surrounding the flag pole’s podium and immediately placed handcuffs on her and Tyson’s wrists. The crowd gathered on the Capitol grounds clapped and chanted reassuring phrases as the police led Newsome off the property, the flag tucked under the arm of a law enforcement officer.

Within an hour, Newsome and Tyson were charged with defacing a monument and the Confederate flag was again raised above the Capitol.[59] In interviews conducted after the activists were released on bond, Newsome explained that she was prompted to take down the flag after nine black congregants were killed by an admitted white supremacist named Dylann Roof during a bible study at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in

Charleston on June 17, 2015.[60] Speaking with *Blue Nation Review*, Newsome describes the immediacy to act.

> I realized that now is the time for true courage the morning after the Charleston Massacre shook me to the core of my being. I couldn't sleep. I sat awake in the dead of night. All the ghosts of the past seemed to be rising… A white man had just entered a black church and massacred people as they prayed. He had assassinated a civil rights leader. This was not a page in a textbook I was reading nor an inscription on a monument I was visiting. This was now. This was real. This was—this is—still happening.[61]

With the image of Roof jauntily holding the Confederate flag circulating on television news stations and online media, the Charleston shooter's hatred served to narrativize the flag's power as a historical and contemporary symbol of racial injustice. Newsome cites this as the very reason for her June 27 climb.

> For far too long, white supremacy has dominated the politics of America resulting in the creation of racist laws and cultural practices designed to subjugate non-whites. And the emblem of the confederacy, the stars and bars, in all its manifestations, has long been the most recognizable banner of this political ideology. It's the banner of racial intimidation and fear whose popularity experiences an uptick whenever black Americans appear to be making gains economically and politically in this country.[62]

Just as quickly as the Confederate flag was replaced at the South Carolina Capitol did the images and video of Bree Newsome's ascent appear on the internet, more specifically on social media and content sharing platforms like YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. Perhaps unlike the photo of Ieshia Evans, it is probable that Newsome curated her performance for digital documentation. The act of waving the flag while at the apex of the pole as well as the scripted language she used during the performance suggest that the activist recognized the presence of recording technology in her protest space. Furthermore, Newsome is herself a filmmaker, having received a BFA in Film

from New York University's Tisch School of the Arts and producing multiple projects centered on the lives and histories of black Americans.[63] Her work as a writer and director, therefore, cannot be divorced from her activist performance. This is perhaps why so many images depicting her reach spoke to online users, in addition to the symbolism behind the demonstration.

Both video and photos of Newsome climbing the flag pole were shared widely on social media on June 27 and thereafter. One Twitter account for an activist who goes by "deray" posted a three-minute video of Newsome along with the caption "And here is the video of the Confederate Flag being removed in South Carolina today by @BreeNewsome and the team."[64] The video was retweeted, meaning shared by other Twitter users on their accounts, over 11,000 times and received 8,700 likes. Some supporters who retweeted deray's video included their own 140-character narratives regarding the beauty of her act as well as of Newsome as an activist.[65] Commenters to the original post by deray expressed pride, emotion, and amazement. They also described the performance as one of bravery and courage. Of course, some comments also disparaged Newsome's protest, calling the video proof of her crime and attaching memes that assert that the Confederate flag is a piece of history that has been reimagined as racist. Sharing across platforms also occurred, with a function available on YouTube that allowed supporters to share the Newsome video to Twitter along with their own comments on the content.[66]

Still images of Newsome waving the flag during the protest also spread widely on Twitter. A particularly popular photo shows Newsome a few feet below

the pole's summit, holding the flag in her right hand; the notorious blue and white cross emblem is visible as the breeze catches the open corners of the fabric (Figure 39).[67] However, whoever took the original photo did not place the pole and Newsome's body at the center of the field but rather to the far right so that the imposing figure of the Capitol building is largely visible in the background. Jessica Belle, @chinnyj22, is one of the many Twitter users who posted this photo on their profiles, with Belle writing in what appears to be a response to another account "@ZeddRebel: Seriously that is some superhero pose right there. #FreeBree."

The hashtag #FreeBree refers to a viral campaign that swelled in the wake of Newsome and Tyson's arrests. Various posts that retweeted images or videos of the protest include the tag #FreeBree as well as others like #QueenBree, #KeepItDown, and #TakeItDown. As Newsome's performance gained more attention, information circulated online that she and Tyson could each face up to three years in prison and a $5,000 fine for the misdemeanor charge against them.[68] Those who interpreted Newsome's performance as a valiant act for a necessary change used #FreeBree to attract attention to petitions and crowd-sourced funding efforts for the activists' legal defenses. One Indiegogo campaign created by an organization called CREDO Action raised over $125,000, 629% beyond the original funding goal of $20,000.[69]

In addition to petitions and donations, online users continued to engage in digital discourse as a means of advocating for the honor of Newsome's ascent. Some profiles even attempted to mitigate characterizations of criminality

surrounding Newsome's act of civil disobedience by comparing it to historical protests that we now celebrate as a nation. For example, user rik massey, @rikmas, posted the following on July 14, 2015: ".@BreeNewsome in her own words #FreeBree http://d.shpg.org/133092586t Rosa Parks was on a bus Bree Newsome climbed a pole."[70] By likening #KeepItDown to Rosa Parks' inciting of the 1955 Montgomery Bus Boycotts, digital spectators like rik massey create narratives that recast Bree Newsome as a hero rather than an unruly lawbreaker.

This recharacterization of Newsome as a hero also appeared in posts across Twitter that do not directly relate her work to that of past civil rights leaders and activists. Numerous users employed language and hashtags to discuss the heroism of Newsome's performance. Through the technique of video and image editing, members of Newsome's social media audience shared imagery from the protest while also reperforming moments that they found especially affecting. Within hours of Newsome's arrest, @Iedisi posted a 15-second clip from a video shot during the event, removing the portions that show the performer's preparation and climb, and instead including only the section where the activist triumphantly raised the unclipped flag in the air.[71] Along with the video, Iedisi writes "Bree Newsome #FreeBree Advocacy ♡ #fearless #hero #TakeItDown." Other tweets sharing news articles and Facebook links to videos and images include language calling her a "real," "true," and "American" hero, thus invoking linguistic markers of veracity and legitimacy in their newly formed reenactments of #KeepItDown. However, the notion of heroism attached to Newsome's performance suggests a deeper examination of her corporeal

potential. Heroes, whether in Greek mythology or the extended universes of comic books, are often figures that look human but whose bodies hold extra-ordinary powers. Discourse labeling Newsome as a hero indicates that viewers found her physical enactment to exemplify superhuman abilities.

Although it is certainly telling that Twitter users include the idea of heroism when discussing the event online, recreations of Newsome's body as a superhero or extra-ordinary indicate a creative deployment of what Alex Weheliye calls the biopolitics of fleshiness. In his book *Habeas Viscus*, Weheliye explains that flesh, as it is conceived of in black feminist theory, has been used by society to determine gender. However, flesh has also been used in an abject narrative of ambiguity for black people as neither fully human nor non-human. Weheliye avoids theorizing of this experience as solely oppressive. Rather, he approaches the experiences of abjection and fleshiness as "alternative modes of life alongside the violence, subjection, exploitation, and racialization that define the modern human."[72] Building off Weheliye's notion of fleshiness, it is productive to examine reperformances of Newsome's protest as ways of celebrating the human/non-human paradigm as being superhuman. This is evident in several hand-drawn animations posted to Twitter showing Newsome's performance through comic book aesthetics and symbols of superpowers.

On June 28, 2015, freelance comic book artist Robert Jeffrey II shared an image of Newsome drawn by Legends Press illustrator Quinn McGowan in the style of popular graphic novels.[73] She is depicted aloft the flag pole, her head thrown back in sublime joy and the banner clutched in her left hand (Figure 40).

Despite McGowan drawing Newsome so that she appears in the same all-black ensemble donned for the protest, the artist pointedly removes the helmet, climbing harness, and ropes she used to reach the flag. Instead, this superhuman version of Newsome seems to have reached the top on the strength of her body alone, which McGowan depicts as unabashedly feminine, most notably in the lines used to illustrate her collar bones, neck, chest, thighs, and face. In interviews with the animator, McGowan explains that he saw a series of GIFs online showing Newsome's performance, and he felt compelled to produce his own take on the event because "she became a mythical figure right before my eyes and that's what I wanted to convey."[74] Another drawing posted to Twitter by Kentucky-based artist Niall-Julian Watkins also imagines Newsome's performance as unaided by mortal means, and instead her body easily holds itself to the pole and against an unseen wind blowing back her hair (Figure 41).[75] Watkins' image was shared more than 3,000 times and appeared alongside McGowan's drawing in numerous articles, thus further extending the reach of Newsome's activist body across the digital sphere.

Other animated reperformances of Newsome's body are less subtle in their connections to legendary super women. Artist Rebecca Cohen posted her imagining to Twitter, using the particularly poetic username @GynoStar, the day after the protest.[76] In Cohen's image, the ascendant activist is cloaked in the outfit usually worn by the feminist comic book superhero Wonder Woman (Figure 42). Cohen did not remove the black pants and shirt that Newsome wore to climb the flag pole but instead superimposed Wonder Woman's top and skirt over the

activist's clothes. In this way, the artist differs from Watkins and McGowan's images by recognizing the physical labor necessary to complete the act while still attaching superpower emblems to Newsome's body. She also shows Newsome as being held to the pole by Wonder Woman's famous Lasso of Truth, a clever indication that, in Cohen's animated world, this real-life super woman needs only the power of her just cause to fly high above the ground.

In these responses, Newsome is conceived of as both a black woman and extra-ordinary, with the ability to ascend 30 feet off the ground without equipment. Through these reperformances, artists imbed supernatural qualities into the activists' body to convey her heroic character. I contend that the superpowers figuratively and literally illustrated for Newsome in these images also express the productive potential of being neither completely human nor alien but instead a subject whose flesh "represents racializing assemblages of subjection that can never annihilate the lines of flight, freedom dreams, practices of liberation, and possibilities of other worlds."[77] The histories of de-humanization waged against black people, therefore, opens up a space in which the bodies of Bree Newsome and other black activists can be imagined as more than human. In this way, Newsome is envisioned as performing the extra-ordinary feat of flight as a means of ripping down the flag and standing up for racial justice.

The fan-art-type illustrations explored here are examples of reperformance and illustrate the effect that Newsome's Confederate flag protest had on online users. I also assert that her activism inspired action offline as well, in the forms of

awareness, policy change, and enactments by anti-Confederate demonstrators to #KeepItDown. If anything, Newsome's demonstration most likely awakened an urgency on the part of BLM allies and activists to make the flag a major topic of discussion as well as to counter efforts by white nationalists and pro-Confederate forces to rewrite the symbol's history. This is reflected in tweets and online content that contextualizes the flag's presence in our nation's past as well as in the present moment.

Less than a month after Newsome's performance, Twitter user No More Donation$ @NoMoreDon8 posted a compilation of photos (Figure 43) that included images of Elizabeth Eckford, one of the Little Rock Nine, walking past the enraged, white crowd gathered outside of Little Rock Central High School on September 4, 1957.[78] Included in the collage, though not in the same frame as Eckford image, is a man white man holding the Confederate flag. This photo is also from the Little Rock Nine anti-desegregation protests, and the man is Paul Davis Taylor who gathered along with 500 other people outside Little Rock Central on September 3.[79] The last image is contemporary and shows a crowd gathered at twilight and waiving at least four Confederate flags. @NoMoreDon8's comment, "The more things change, the more they stay the same :/" works to negate arguments by Confederate advocates that the flag has somehow been made to be a racist symbol by liberals and racial justice warriors. It also places brazen displays of the flag by all-white crowds in both historical and contemporary contexts, thus suggesting that the anger and distain for black people visible on the faces of the 1957 flagbearers is also a part of Confederate advocacy today.

Despite the criminal charge pending against her, Newsome was applauded for her role in keeping the flag down when, on July 10, 2015, the Confederate flag was formally removed from the grounds of the State House after a vote by the state Senate, House, and then-South Carolina Governor Nikki Haley.[80] Much of the media's coverage of the flag's final descent fails to mention Newsome's protest two weeks earlier, though numerous Twitter users did not overlook her efforts.[81] In the months and years since the protest, no articles or records online indicate that Newsome or Tyson faced legal repercussions for #KeepItDown after their initial arrest and release on bail.

Newsome continues to advocate for racial and social justice, and has appeared as a speaker at college campuses, conferences, and BLM events. On February 22, 2017, Newsome was set to speak at the College of Charleston in South Carolina. Outside the event hall, pro-Confederate advocates and members of the South Carolina Succession Party protested the platform given to Newsome by the College.[82] Within the same outdoor area were racial justice supporters present to hear Newsome speak. As local news cameras rolled, a confrontation ensued between a self-identified BLM activist and one of the pro-Confederate protestors, resulting in an incredible feat of athleticism that, I suggest, acts as a reperformance of Newsome's own act. Footage from Charleston CBS affiliate WCSC captured a young black man named Muhiyidin Elamin Moye d'Baha as he ran towards James Bessenger, who was waiving a Confederate flag on a long, plastic pole.[83] Just before reaching Bessenger, d'Baha launched his body into the air, crossing over yellow police tape, and snatched the pole from Bessenger's

grasp (Figure 44). After gaining possession of the flag, d'Baha attempted to run out of the area but was quickly apprehended and arrested by police. A friend of d'Baha's, Mary Smith, told *The Washington Post* that it was no accident that the young activist leapt for the flag at this particular event: "There's Muhiyidin, pulling a Bree Newsome at a Bree Newsome event. Taking that flag down."[84] The video of d'Baha taking down the flag was disseminated online, with sources like Buzzfeed news penning articles that place d'Baha's name alongside Newsome's.

**Conclusion**

In the early morning of February 6, 2018, d'Baha was shot and killed in New Orleans, Louisiana. Local and national media outlets that reported d'Baha's death describe him as an activist and recount the narrative of his leap for the flag in Charleston the year before.[85] The WSCS video of the flag grab also appears in these articles, rendering the performance document a testament to the liveness of his body as it continues to "exist" via the dynamism of the video's circulation in the digital sphere. From beyond the grave, his digitized bodily performance will likely inspire young BLM advocates who encounter the clip to #KeepItDown or engage other physical strategies to stand up for racial equality and the valuing of all black lives.

My assertion that d'Baha's leap for the Confederate flag has the potential to provoke other forms of activism is supported by the case studies explored in this chapter, which demonstrate that the wide reach of BLM hashtag activism results in participation for the movement offline as well as on. Through analyses of two black women that took figurative and literal stances in their protest

performances, I traced the transformation of their live enactment into digital documents that were then extended in the news feeds and tweet decks of various social media platforms. These disseminations of BLM protest videos and photos elongate the activists' performing bodies beyond the protest space and into the digital landscape of the net. The reactions and responses by digital spectators to the documents indicate that these performance documents strongly affect viewers, sometimes resulting in presentations by online users that reperform aspects of the original event through reimagined versions of the female activists' bodies. Coming full circle, this chapter's investigations also offer evidence that demonstrators who likely encountered the digital documents online borrow attributes from the original enactments for their own physical extensions and gestures in BLM protest spaces. The feedback loop of live and digital performance described here is a productive means of understanding the vast array of participants, organizers, allies, and future activists contributing to the movement. May this study be a model for scholars interested in the generative possibilities that lie at the intersection of live performance and the transfiguration of physical forms into digital documentation.

# CONCLUSION

Almost five years after Alicia Garza, Opal Tometi, and Patrisse Cullors launched Black Lives Matter, the movement has defied its critics and dissenters by remaining at the forefront of contemporary racial justice activism in the United States and abroad. Those who hoped that BLM would be a moment rather than a movement must confront the fact that the work set out by its three co-founders and female-driven leadership – that is to affirm the contributions, value, and humanity of black people – remains evermore imperative. Now sixteen months into the Trump presidency, threats are being waged against the livelihood of black citizens and residents through economic and immigration policymaking. Furthermore, lethal encounters between black people and law enforcement have not stopped. To illustrate my contention that the movement for black lives is more relevant than ever, as well as to propose future pathways for scholarship on BLM activities and performance, I provide descriptions for just a few recent developments that reflect the sustained devaluing of black life in America and the political demonstrations that have resulted from them.

Several policy maneuvers on the part of the Republican-held White House and Congress to sever funding, resources, and residency to black people have become some of the most detrimental political decisions for this community, and which often go unnoticed by the wider public. Trump's budget for fiscal year 2019 proposed slashing more than $8.8 million from the Housing and Urban Development budget, with the administration stating that the cuts "address the increasing and unsustainable Federal costs of rental assistance."[1] According to

HUD's own website, 46% of households that received any form of housing assistance nationwide between November 2016 and February 2018 were black or African-American.[2] Analyses of Trump's budget document revealed that block grants for maintaining existing public housing as well as voucher programs were included in the 14.2% decrease the department would experience under the President's plan. BLM specifically cites the ways in which poverty and affordable housing have contributed to racial injustice. That said, housing assistance is just one of the numerous social services programs that have faced eviscerated resources under the administration.

In 2016, a coalition of BLM activists published a comprehensive plan to end economic violence against black people in the U.S. that included tax code changes, employment programs, and affordable housing regulations.[3] The August 2016 protest by BLM members in Cambridge, Massachusetts examined in Chapter 2 of this thesis serves as evidence that the movement is also making attempts at actionable demonstration for housing rights. However, time will tell if proposed plans and localized events can stand up to the tide of conservative policy-makers currently allocating funding for social programs. While outside the scope of this project, future scholarship on BLM could include examinations into efforts by organizers, members, and their supporters to use the movement's ubiquity and visibility to put political pressure on elected or campaigning officials. Additionally, scholarship examining how the movement contributes to the mobilization of eligible voters for the 2018 mid-term election, at which time it

will be decided if conservative control over Congress will be sustained for the remainder of Trump's first term, could be another fruitful avenue to explore.

One of the most polarizing policies announced by the White House is the "travel ban" or "immigration ban" first put forth on January 27, 2017, less than a week after Trump was sworn into office. The original executive order attempted to block all travel into the U.S. by those holding visas from seven "Muslim-majority countries," three of which are located in Africa: Libya, Somalia, and Sudan; the ban also included a 120-day halt on the entrance of refugees from these countries.[4] After numerous legal motions were filed to block the travel ban in the hours and days after it was first reported, several new versions have appeared. However, these too have faced legal opposition in various state and appellate courts. In September 2017, Trump announced a third, indefinite ban, which removed Sudan and replaced it with the nation of Chad.[5] As of now, the Supreme Court has stopped short of ruling against the bans. Instead, they are set to hear oral arguments about the policy's legality on April 25, 2018, the last day of the Court's term for the fiscal year.[6]

The concept of a travel ban has been opposed for its suggestive discrimination against Islamic immigrants, but what is perhaps most troubling about this governmental action is the language that the President has used to justify its existence as well as characterizations he has since made about potential immigrants from African and Caribbean nations, many of whom are black. Upon signing the first order, Trump rationalized his decision as a means of protecting the country from terrorists, stating "this is about terror and keeping our country

safe."[7] Legal representatives for the executive branch have continued this line of reasoning in their defenses of the policy in court. The association created between terrorism and black travelers in these bans contributes to an ongoing legacy constructed by hegemonic social and political forces in the U.S. to criminalize black and brown immigrants. BLM co-founder Opal Tometi, whose work in community organizing largely centers on immigration reform, explains the effects that the bans, the criminalization of immigrants, and the President's language have on communities of color.

> Our communities are reeling from his rhetoric as well as reality. It feels like almost every week there is something. Already, there's historic amounts of fencing and walls around the border... A lot of women are being hurt and victimized as they try to get to a place where they thought they could have a better life. Sadly, when people arrive they might then experience another level of criminalization and victimization here…There are also a lot of African immigrants, Haitian immigrants, Afro-Latino immigrants that have come across the border; it's *also* a Black issue. Any increase in law enforcement and militarization that is allowed in our communities impacts us really acutely as well. Donald Trump and the administration are creating new policies and practices that only increase the human rights abuses—that to me is what is most alarming and concerning… At the end of the day I think we, people of conscience, people who believe in human rights and dignity, are the majority. When you see tens of thousands and, with the women's march, millions across the globe taking a stand, you realize that you are amongst people who want a different world. The majority is clear that we are already living in multi-racial societies—we just need this administration to get with it! Affirm the lives of all people, instead of attempting to demonize us and lock us up.[8]

Here Tometi explains that BLM and immigration rights cannot be separated, and that efforts by the movement to address the cultural indictments of black and brown bodies as dangerous, threatening, and unsafe extends beyond the experiences of black American citizens. Additionally, there are policy decisions by the administration that target black immigrants already residing in the U.S.,

with the President declaring in September 2017 that the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program (DACA) would be rescinded in March 2018. 11,000 current DACA recipients hail from predominately black countries, while 3% of individuals who would have been eligible for DACA, had it not been revoked, are from African nations.[9] Although BLM has participated in or organized protests in response to the travel ban and deportation orders, demonstrations that initially erupted in airport terminals and city streets have been quelled by a sort-of "limbo effect" created when battles against both the ban and Trump's rescindment of DACA began to play out in the courts. With the fate of these two issues tied up in legal proceedings for the near future, it appears protestors are taking a "wait and see" approach. It is very possible, however, that decisions rendered by appellate judges and the Supreme Court in 2018 and 2019 will lead to a new wave of public demonstrations. Scholars interested in exploring collective action and/or the BLM movement for their abilities to demand, enact, imagine, and rehearse social change and liberation, whether through the lens of performance or otherwise, may find it productive to trace the progress of these two policies as the clock winds down on their time in the courts and the potential for social action becomes clearer.

Finally, there is the issue that sparked this movement and brought it into our cultural imagination: the deaths of black men and women during confrontations with law enforcement. On the morning of March 19, 2018, a month before the completion of this thesis project, the nation awoke to the news that yet another unarmed black man had been shot and killed by police. After

receiving a call on the night of the March 18 that someone was breaking into cars in a south Sacramento neighborhood, responding police encountered 22-year-old Stephon Clark in the backyard of the home he shared with his grandparents.[10] Clark, while holding a cellphone, was confronted by officers who had only gun-mounted flashlights to see by in the dark. Believing that he was carrying a firearm, police fired 20 shots, 8 of which entered Clark's body, primarily in his back.[11] He laid in the tall grass behind his home for five minutes before officers approached his lifeless body and placed him in handcuffs. A gun was never recovered from the scene. Footage from body cameras, which were recording during the incident, captured one of the officers telling newly-arrived backup that Clark "came up, and he kind of approached us, hands out, and then fell down."[12] Clark, according the officers who killed him, showed his hands, perhaps as a gesture asking them not to shoot him.

The gesture was not enough to save Clark. The fact that he was standing on his own property and that he revealed to police his unarmed body seemingly failed to justify his right to live. Once again, as investigators pore over the videos and accounts of the incident, the country is asking what it would have taken for Stephon Clark or Michael Brown or Tanisha Anderson or Saheed Vassell's lives to be spared. Where many are left asking these questions, Black Lives Matter is demanding answers and systematic changes. The proposed changes by the movement's members include but are not limited to: the demilitarization of police; legal and cultural changes to our nation's education, housing, and employment systems that criminalize and dehumanize black youth while

simultaneously placing economic strangleholds on the ability for black adults to survive and thrive in our modern society; and a complete overhaul of the criminal justice system.[13] Furthermore, public protest performances and aesthetics as well as online activism continue to serve as generative tools for immediate action and discourse circulation in the wake of police shootings.

For example, the Sacramento chapter of BLM has quickly and effectively mobilized hundreds of activists, sometimes working with the NAACP and other racial justice organizations, in their call for legal accountability against the officers who shot Clark. These events have included marches through the streets of city led by the Sacramento chapter cofounder Tanya Faison.[14] BLM protestors also disrupted two of the Sacramento Kings' home games in late March, preventing thousands of NBA fans from entering Golden 1 Center by blocking doorways with their bodies, signs, and chants.[15] Less than a week after a family-ordered autopsy revealed the troubling placement of the entrance wounds on Clark's body, BLM Sacramento announced that they are planning to protest indefinitely. Faison explained during a march on the fiftieth anniversary of Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination that the chapter will stage demonstrations outside of the Sacramento District Attorney's office every Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday from at least 3:30 to 5:00PM "until we get justice."[16]

Scholars like myself, who are invested in the power held by performance and theater to enact social change, should engage more rigorously with the rich and provocative discourses coming out of the BLM movement. In addition to studies that undertake the ongoing protests in Sacramento and elsewhere for the

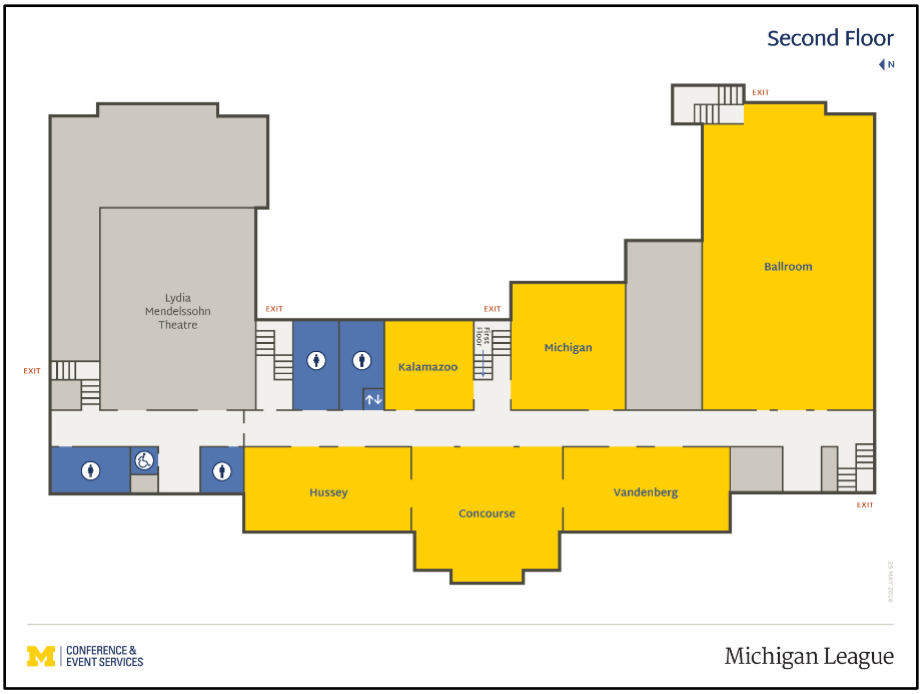
use of gesture, posture, pose, clothing, dance, and music in activist performance, analyses of theatrical works influenced by BLM can also serve as a base for future scholarship. Productions such as *Hands Up: 7 Playwrights, 7 Testaments, Every 28 Hours,* and *Shots Fired* have been explored by less than a handful of scholars, with most of the writings on these plays appearing in theater magazine and newspaper articles rather than academic texts.[17] These productions likely illuminate facets of our current social and cultural understands of racial inequity in the American landscape. It behooves us, as performance scholars, to consider these artistic products as testaments and perspectives that can only further our work on these subjects.

I did not choose to end this project with the demonstrations in Sacramento solely because of its timely and undecided nature. Rather, I was struck by a small but compelling detail hidden deep within a recent article on the Clark protests. This detail encapsulates both the spirit of the BLM movement and the premise for this thesis. During the four-hour march organized for Clark on March 30, the impassioned and peaceful protestors who showed up to demand justice and enact social change were told, first and foremost, to "follow black women."[18] Just as the Sacramento demonstrators look to the female leadership of the local BLM chapter for guidance, instruction, and visions of a future where extralegal executions of black people no longer exist, I have also focused my study of Black Lives Matter on the efficacy of black women who not only lead this movement but curate the powerful potential of black femininity and women's bodies as performative tools for freedom.

The examinations herein have purposefully centered on various women and feminine gestures so that my arguments move beyond the identities of the movement's cofounders, and whom remain some of the most visible women associated with BLM. Each chapter attends to the ways in which black women in the movement enact the postures of laying, kneeling, and standing in protest spaces. In addition, the historical and theoretical evidence I use to critique these examples of black protest performance enable wider consideration of these postures in individuals who might not identify as or appear femme but who do, I contend, embody forms of femininity in their performative tactics. Whether examining the choreographic techniques of stillness and blocking in die-in protests, past and present performances of submission enacted when black women take a knee, or the extension of viral bodily acts across the digital sphere, I have looked to the women, femmes, and femininities within the BLM movement as models for what is at stake when creativity, subversion, and performativity work in concert for social justice.

## PHOTO INDEX

*CHAPTER 1*

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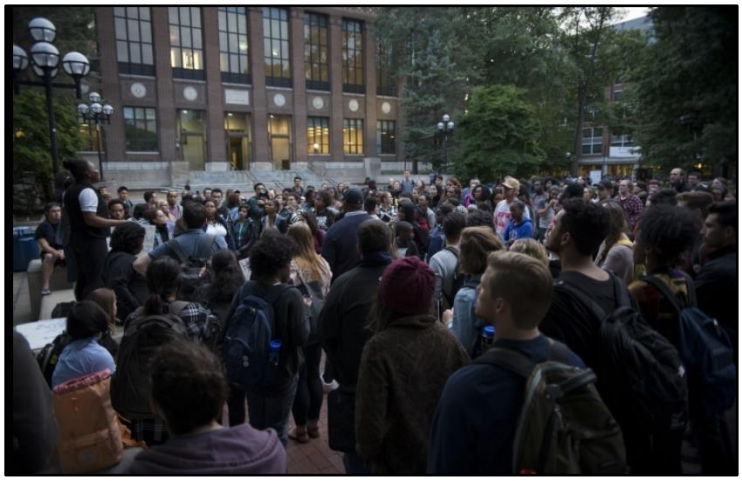

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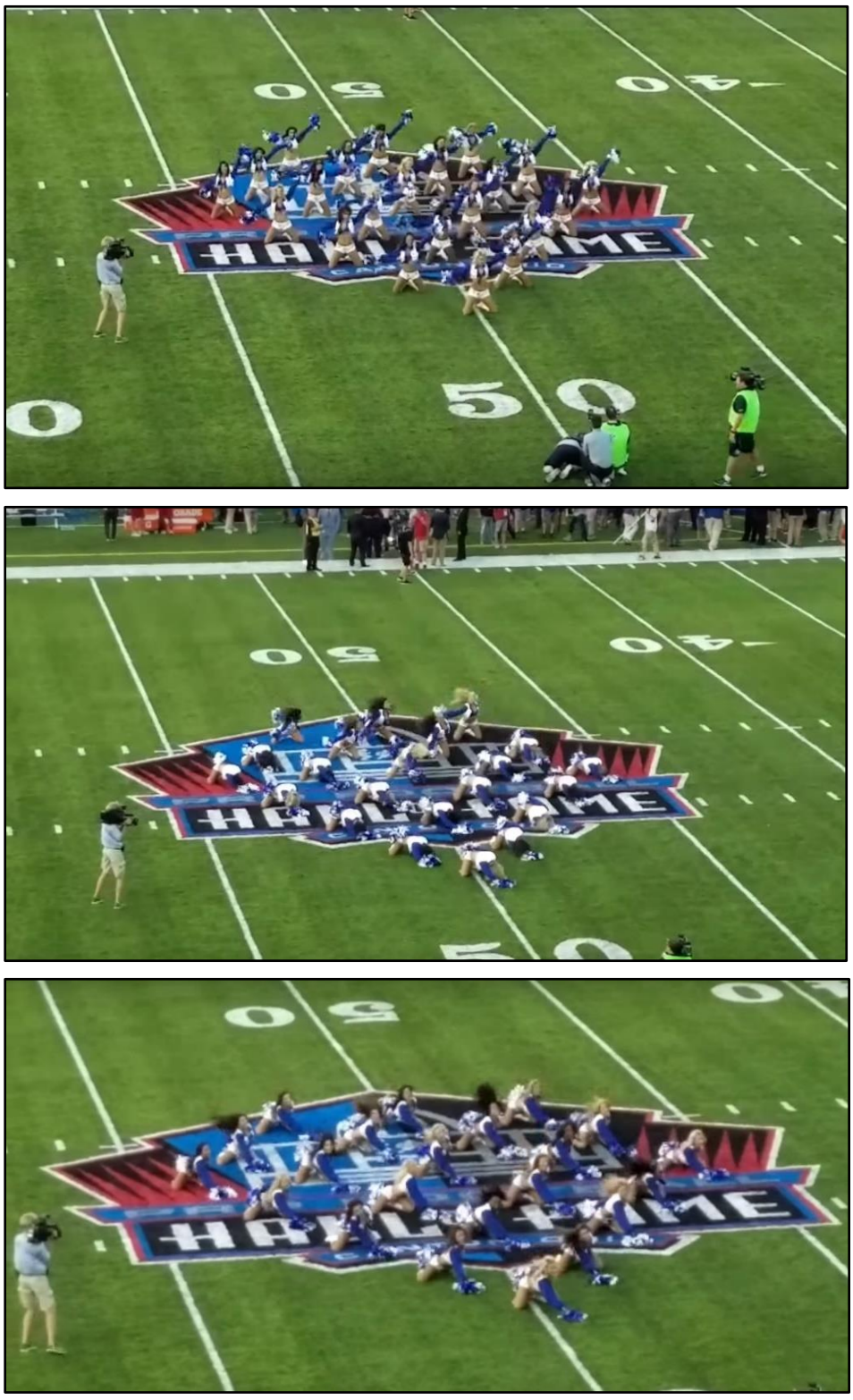

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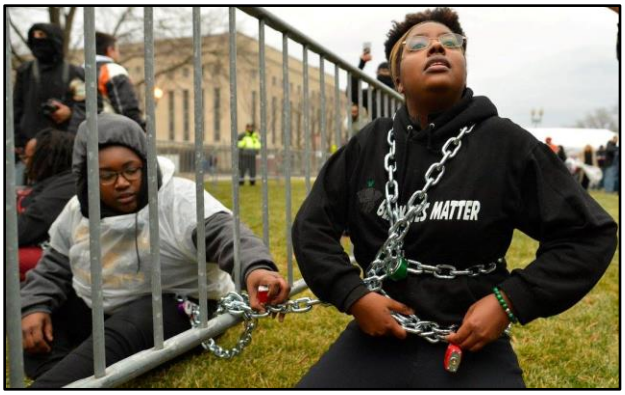


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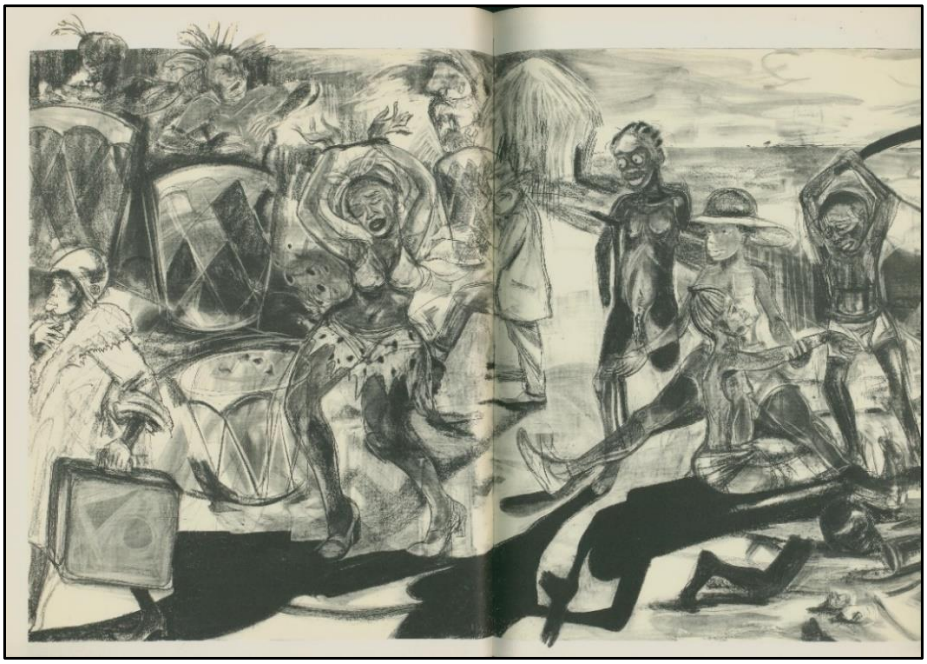

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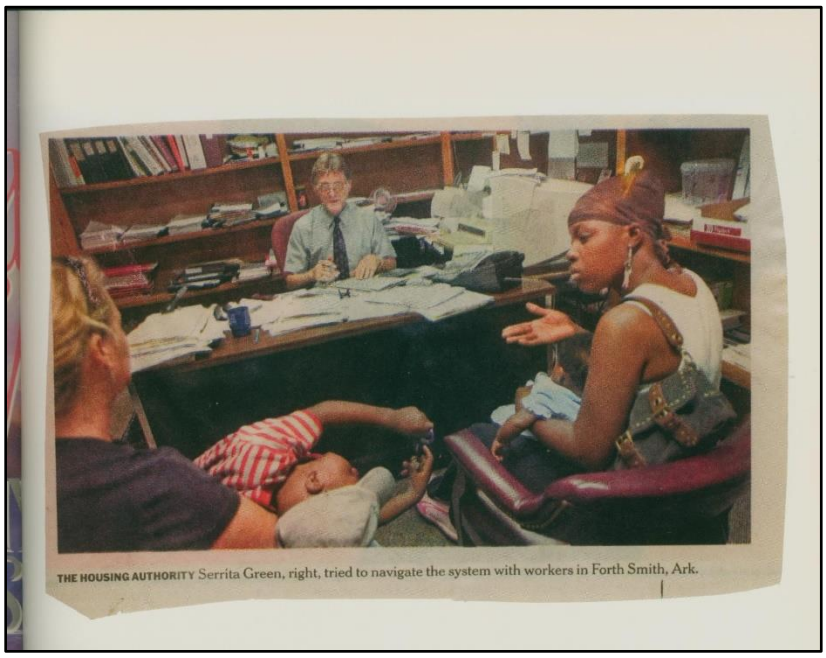


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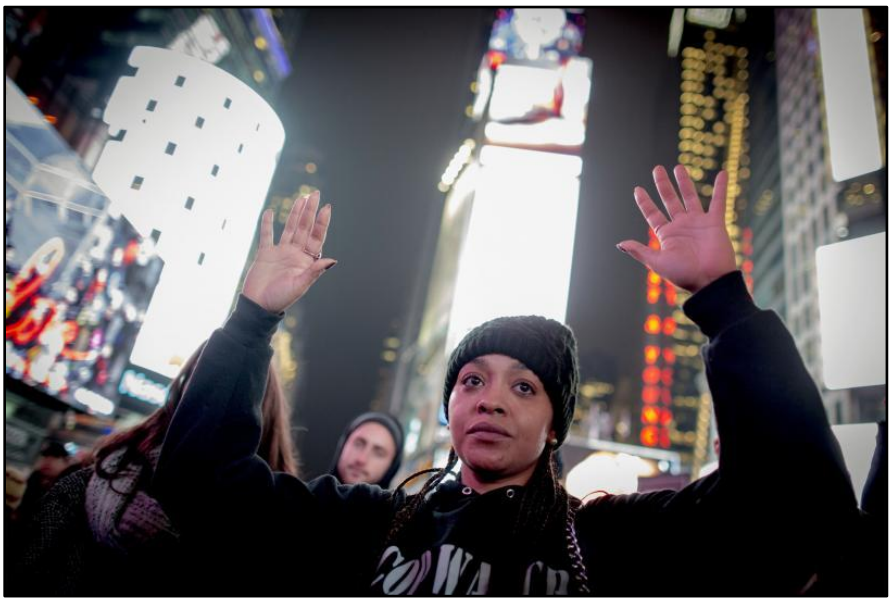

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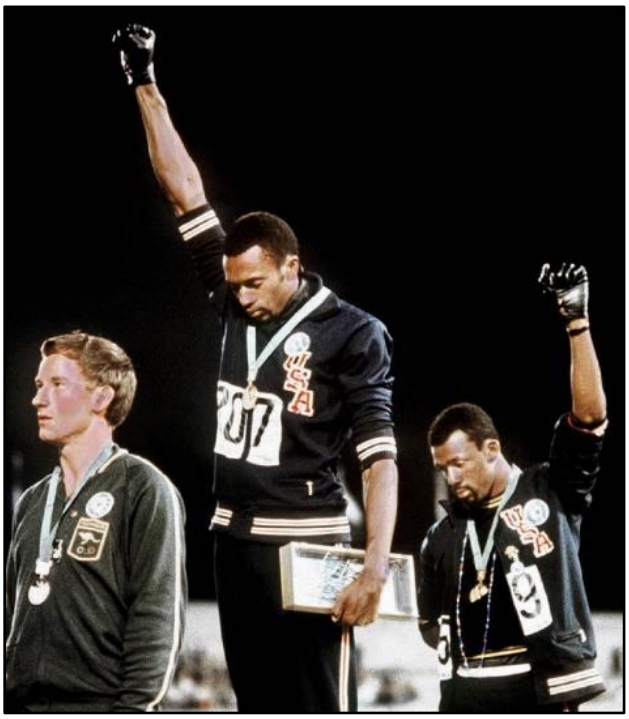


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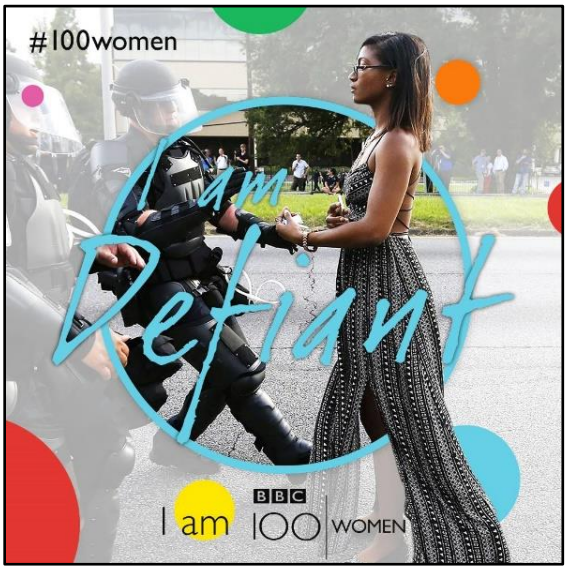


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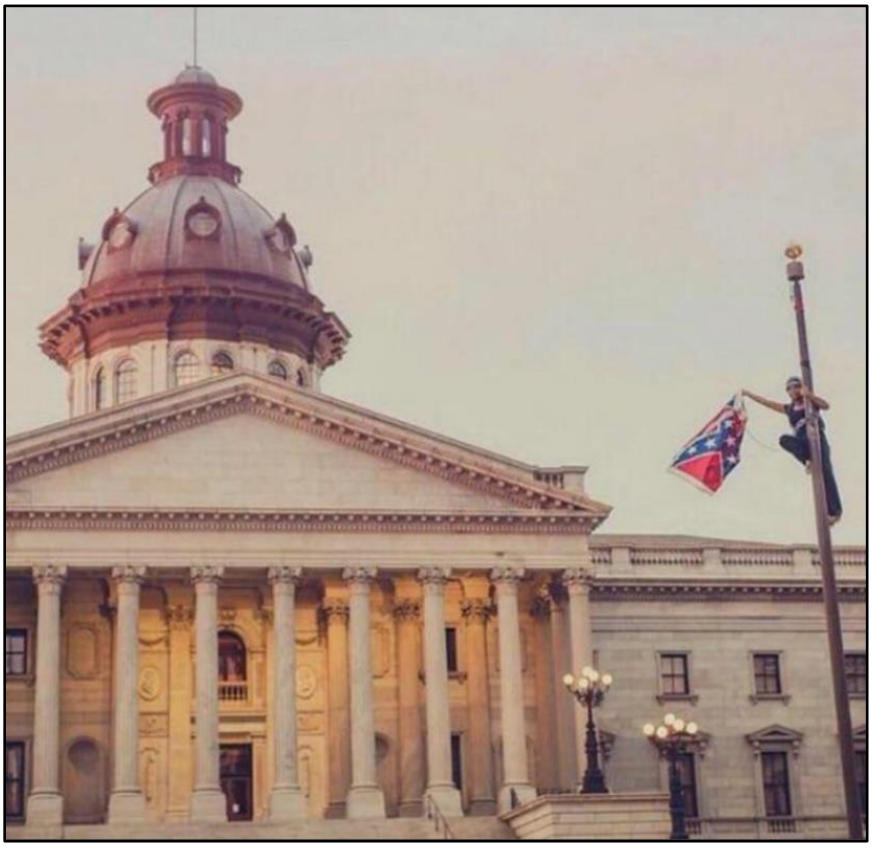

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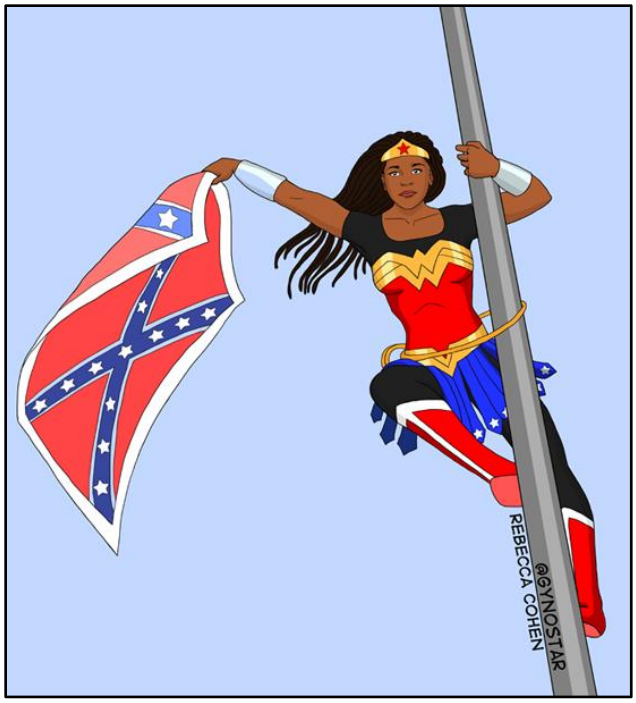


**Figure 42**

**Figure 43**

**Figure 44**

# ENDNOTES

## *Introduction*

Note: The quote found in the title of this thesis is excerpted from an interview conducted with the three founders of the BLM movement, Patrisse Cullors, Opal Tometi, and Alicia Garza, during an October 2016 TedTalk hosted by Mia Birdsong. The full statement is given by Cullors, who when asked what gives her hope and inspiration while engaging in such intensive activism stated: "I am hopeful for black futures. And I say that because we live in a society that's so obsessed with black death. We have images of our death on the TV screen, on our Twitter timelines, on our Facebook timelines, but what if instead we imagine black life? We imagine black people living and thriving. And that – that inspires me" (11:08 – 11:37). TedWoman 2016, "An Interview with the Founders of Black Lives Matter," filmed [October 2016], online video, 16:05, accessed July 26, 2017, https://www.ted.com/talks/alicia_garza_patrisse_cullors_and_opal_tometi_an_interview_with_the_founders_of_black_lives_matter.

[1] Claudia Rankine, "February 15, 2014 / The Justice System: VII," in *Citizen: An American Lyric* (Minneapolis, MN: Graywolf Press, 2014), 139.

[2] Dan Chiasson, "Color Codes: A Poet Examines Race in America," *The New Yorker*, October 27, 2014, accessed April 4, 2018, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/10/27/color-codes.

[3] Al J. Baker, David Goodman, and Benjamin Mueller, "Beyond the Chokehold: The Path to Eric Garner's Death," *The New York Times*, June 13, 2015. Accessed December 10, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/14/nyregion/eric-garner-police-chokehold-staten-island.html?_r=0.

[4] More information about the photo and Evans as an activist is found in Chapter 3.

[5] Gayle Sulik and Mindy Fried, "Feminist Reflections: Gender, Social Science, and Black Lives Matter," *The Society Pages* (academic blog), January 15, 2015, accessed August 4, 2017, https://thesocietypages.org/feminist/2015/01/15/gender-social-science-and-black-lives-matter/.

[6] Alicia Garza, "Herstory," *Black Lives Matter*, accessed October 29, 2016, http://Blacklivesmatter.com/herstory.

[7] Martha Biondi, "The Radicalism Of Black Lives Matter," *Popular Resistance: Daily Movement News and Resources*, August 21, 2016, accessed July 22, 2017, https://popularresistance.org/the-radicalism-of-black-lives-matter/.

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[10] Quote from Cullors is found in Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, "Black Lives Matter: A Movement, Not a Moment," in *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016), 176.

[11] Christina Heatherton, "#BlackLivesMatter and Global Visions of Abolition: An Interview with Patrisse Cullors," in *Policing the Planet: Why the Policing Crisis Led to Black Lives Matter*, edited by Jordan T. Camp and Christina Heatherton (Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2016), 37-38.

[12] Mychal Denzel Smith, "A Q&A With Opal Tometi, Co-Founder of #BlackLivesMatter," *The Nation*, June 2, 2015, accessed July 21, 2017, https://www.thenation.com/article/qa-opal-tometi-co-founder-blacklivesmatter/.

[13] "About the Black Lives Matter Network," Black Lives Matter, accessed October 29, 2016, http://Blacklivesmatter.com/about

[14] Biondi, "The Radicalism Of Black Lives Matter."

[15] TedWoman 2016, "An Interview with the Founders of Black Lives Matter," filmed [October 2016], online video, 16:05, accessed July 26, 2017, https://www.ted.com/talks/alicia_garza_patrisse_cullors_and_opal_tometi_an_interview_with_the_founders_of_black_lives_matter.

[16] Garza, "Herstory."
[17] Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2016), 160.
[18] Christina Heatherton, "#BlackLivesMatter and Global Visions of Abolition: An Interview with Patrisse Cullors," in *Policing the Planet: Why the Policing Crisis Led to Black Lives Matter*, edited by Jordan T. Camp and Christina Heatherton, 40 (Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2016).
As Nicole R. Fleetwood explains in the opening pages of her book *Troubling Vision*, the history of black iconicity in 20th-Century media has depicted black women as occupying internal spaces (such as the home and other domesticized landscapes) while black men have been shown in the streets and roaming through external, often urban landscapes. The un-shown traversing of Black women from the internal space of domesticity to the external landscape of protest has perhaps contributed to the belief that the fight for Black freedom has been designed and enacted by Black male figures alone. Nicole Fleetwood, "Introduction," in *Troubling Vision: Performance, Visuality, and Blackness* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), 1-32.
[19] Smith, "A Q&A With Opal Tometi, Co-Founder of #BlackLivesMatter."
[20] Michael Awkward, "Introduction," in *Negotiating Difference: Race, Gender, and the Politics of Positionality* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 3-20.
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[26] Ibid., 226.
[27] Harvey Young, "Still Standing: Daguerreotypes, Photography, and the Black Body," in *Embodying Black Experience: Stillness, Critical Memory, and the Black Body* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 27.
[28] Ibid., 28.
[29] Kara Keeling, *The Witch's Flight: The Cinematic, the Black Femme, and the Image of Common Sense* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 144.
[30] Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (New York: Routledge, 1990).
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[32] D. Soyini Madison, "Introduction," in *Acts of Activism: Human Rights as Radical Performance* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 2.
[33] Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 4.
[34] Susan Leigh Foster, "Choreographies of Protest," in *Theatre Journal* 55, no 3 Dance (October 2003), 408.
[35] Anusha Kedhar, "Choreography and Gesture Play an Important Role in Protest," *The New York Times,* December 15, 2014, accessed May 27, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2014/12/15/what-does-the-style-of-a-protest-say-about-a-movement/choreography-and-gesture-play-an-important-role-in-protests.
[36] Anusha Kedhar, ""Hands Up! Don't Shoot!": Gesture, Choreography, and Protest in Ferguson," *The Feminist Wire,* October 6, 2014, accessed June 7, 2017, http://www.thefeministwire.com/2014/10/protest-in-ferguson/.
[37] Anusha Kedhar, "Choreography and Gesture Play an Important Role in Protest," *The New York Times.;* Daphne A Brooks, "How #BlackLivesMatter started a musical revolution," *The Guardian,* March 13, 2016, online, accessed June 4, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/mar/13/black-lives-matter-beyonce-kendrick-lamar-protest.; Jeffrey C. Alexander,

"Seizing the Stage: Social Performances from Mao Zedong to Martin Luther King Jr., and Black Lives Matter Today," in *TDR: The Drama Review* 61, no. 1 (Spring 2017), pp. 14-42, accessed July 9, 2017, https://muse.jhu.edu/article/649749/summary.; André Lepecki, "Choreopolice and Choreopolitics: or, the task of the dancer," in *TDR: The Drama Review* 57, no. 4 (Winter 2013), 13-27, accessed June 7, 2017, https://muse.jhu.edu/article/526055.

[38] Daphne A Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom, 1850-1910* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 9.

[39] I borrow this notion of "imagined alternatives" from Susan Leigh Foster, whose work I draw upon in the first chapter. Foster, 412.

[40] Jennifer C. Nash, *The Black Body in Ecstasy: Reading Race, Reading Pornography* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014). Mireille Miller-Young, *A Taste for Brown Sugar: Black Women in Pornography* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014). LaMonda Horton Stallings, *Funk the Erotic: Transaesthetics and Black Sexual Cultures* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2015).

[41] Raianna Brown, the Georgia Tech dancer whose #TakeAKnee tweet went viral in September 2017, describes the erasure of women in movements for social change during an interview with *New York Magazine*'s *The Cut:* "I think a lot of the times women actually are the catalyst for a lot of social-justice change and movements, and unfortunately that is not necessarily portrayed in history all of the time. So I feel that this is most definitely one of those cases where the men tend to get more of the attention. Which, it happens. It's fine. But it's important to know that it's not a one-sided thing. The issue itself is not one-sided. It's not just black men who are seeing this as an issue." Further explication of the gender imbalance in historical depictions and descriptions of racial justice activism is explored in the first section, "But What If Instead We Imagine Black Life."
Caitlin Moscatello, "The Cheerleader Behind the Viral #TakeAKnee Photo," *The Cut,* September 26, 2017, accessed online November 20, 2017, https://www.thecut.com/2017/09/georgia-tech-cheerleader-kneeling-nfl-kaepernick-raianna-brown.html.

[42] The notion of control, that BLM protestors are "out of control" or need to be brought "under control," is an easily identifiable troupe found in online materials posted by right-wing and mainstream media sources alike. For example, Philly.com columnist Dom Giordano wrote September 12, 2017 online article with the title: "It's time to bring Antifa and BLM protesters under control." Implying that these activists are dangerous troublemakers at best (if not willful rioters at worst) feeds into some of our culture's most deeply-seated stereotypes of the angry black man/woman, which continues to contribute to the criminalization of black residents in the U.S.
Dom Giordano, "It's time to bring Antifa and BLM protesters under control," *The Philly,* September 12, 2017, accessed online December 4, 2017, http://www.philly.com/archive/dom_giordano/its-time-to-bring-antifa-and-blm-protesters-under-control-20170830.html.

[1] Sema Kaz, "Black Lives Matter Netroots Mob: Burn Everything Down," September 20, 2016, YouTube, 02:35, accessed March 3, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EWdxP6Vz0Hc.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Taryn Finley, "#IfIDieInPoliceCustody: Twitter Responds To Sandra Bland's Death With Heartbreaking Hashtag," *The Huffington Post,* July 17, 2015, accessed March 3, 2018, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/twitter-responds-to-the-suspiciousness-of-sandra-blands-death-with-ifidieinpolicecustody_us_55a8feeee4b04740a3dfa386.
[4] Nicholas D. Mirzoeff, "#BlackLivesMatter Is Breathing New Life Into the Die-In," *The New Republic,* August 10, 2015, accessed March 3, 2018, https://newrepublic.com/article/122513/blacklivesmatter-breathing-new-life-die.
John Eligon, Julie Bosman, and Monica Davey, "In Ferguson, Tactics Set for Grand Jury Decision in Michael Brown Case," *The New York Times,* November 16, 2014, accessed March 3, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/17/us/groups-in-ferguson-prepare-for-grand-jury-decision.html.
[5] My exploring into stillness, meaning a lack of movement or physical arrest, is based on the work of Harvey Young in his book *Embodying Black Experience.* More information on Young's study and the theories I draw from it are detailed later in this chapter.
"Blocking," as it is used in this chapter, is theater terminology used to describe the "careful choreography of actions on the stage… when the actors move stage left or stage right, upstage or downstage, enter or exit, sit, stand, faint, kiss, and all the thousands of other moves actors can make." The portion of this study focused on blocking examines where demonstrators' bodies are placed in the protest space and why. The theatrical term blocking and the ways in which protestors' bodies are used to obstruct the flow of movement and traffic during BLM demonstrations do create an appropriate and useful double entendre for this study's purposes.
Lesser America, "Blocking," tdf theater dictionary, dictionary.tdf.org, February 15, 2015, accessed March 4, 2018, http://dictionary.tdf.org/blocking/.
[6] Dom Giordano, "It's time to bring Antifa and BLM protesters under control," *The Philly,* September 12, 2017, accessed online December 4, 2017, http://www.philly.com/archive/dom_giordano/its-time-to-bring-antifa-and-blm-protesters-under-control-20170830.html.
[7] Associated Press writers Michael Biesecker, Alan Suderman, Matthew Barakat, Alanna Durkin Richer and Luis Alonso Lugo, "Smashed windows, chaotic confrontation near inauguration," *Fox 5 (Washington D.C.),* January 20, 2017, accessed March 4, 2018, http://www.fox5dc.com/news/smashed-windows-chaotic-confrontation-near-inauguration.
[8] Anusha Kedhar, "'Hands Up! Don't Shoot!': Gesture, Choreography, and Protest in Ferguson," *Feminist Wire,* October 6, 2014, accessed June 3, 2017, http://www.thefeministwire.com/2014/10/protest-in-ferguson/.
[9] T.V. Reed, "ACTing UP against AIDS: The (Very) Graphic Arts in a Moment of Crisis," in *The Art of Protest: Culture and Activism from the Civil Rights Movement to the Streets of Seattle* (Minneapolis, MN: The University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 195.
[10] Ibid.
[11] "HIV and AIDS in the United States of America (USA)," AVERT: Global information and education on HIV and AIDS (website), last updated April 4, 2018, accessed April 7, 2018, https://www.avert.org/professionals/hiv-around-world/western-central-europe-north-america/usa.
[12] Ibid. 406.
[13] Albert Salazar, "Protesters Stage Die-in During Annual MLK March," *San Antonio Current,* January 19, 2015, accessed March 4, 2018, https://www.sacurrent.com/the-daily/archives/2015/01/19/protesters-stage-die-in-during-annual-mlk-march.
[14] WCNC staff, "2 Arrested After Kerrick Trial: Protests Take Violent Turn," *WCNC* (North Carolina), August 22, 2015, accessed March 4, 2018, http://www.wcnc.com/article/news/local/randall-kerrick-trial/2-arrested-after-kerrick-trial-protests-take-violent-turn/275-213119647.

[15] Connie Wun, "Against Captivity: Black Girls and School Discipline Policies in the Afterlife of Slavery," *Education Policy* 30, no. 1 (2016), 171.
[16] Ibid., 179.
[17] Susan Leigh Foster, "Choreographies of Protest," *Theatre Journal* 55, no. 3 (2003), 406.
[18] Marcel Mauss, "Techniques of the Body," *Economy and Society* 2, no. 1 (1973), 85. (70-87).
[19] Foster, 408.
[20] Tyler Kingkade, "College Students Stage 'Die-In' Over Ferguson Decision At Several Campuses (PHOTOS)," *The Huffington Post*, December 4, 2014, accessed March 4, 2018, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/12/02/college-students-die-in-ferguson_n_6257134.html.
[21] Throughout this case study I refer to the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor as "U Mich." According to the most recent figures available on the University's website, of the 37,370 graduate and undergraduate students that attended U Mich in the fall of 2015, 1,801 were black (4.8% of the student population) and another 1,343 identified as bi-racial (3.6%). "Ten Year Enrollment by Ethnicity: 2015," University of Michigan Office of the Registrar website, accessed April 5, 2018, http://ro.umich.edu/enrollment/ethnicity.php.
[22] Alexa McMenamin, "How University of Michigan Students Are Fighting Racism on Campus," *Teen Vogue*, October 23, 2017, accessed March 5, 2018, https://www.teenvogue.com/story/university-of-michigan-racism-on-campus.
Dylan Roof, the individual being supported in the fliers and graffiti near or at the U of M, is the white supremacist who shot and killed nine black parishioners during a prayer meeting at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina in June 2015. Roof was convicted for the murders in December 2016.
"Make America White Again" is in reference to the slogan "Make America Great Again," under which now-President Donald Trump campaigned for office. The anti-immigrant tenor of Trump's presidential campaign has been attributed to a rise in white nationalist visibility and rhetoric, like that on the U of M fliers.
[23] Emily Miller and Neil Schwartz, "Hundreds of students protest over planned debate on merits of Black Lives Matter," *The Michigan Daily*, September 27, 2016, accessed March 4, 2018, https://www.michigandaily.com/section/campus-life/hundreds-students-protest-planned-debate-over-merits-black-lives-matter.
[24] Red Alert Politics, "BLM stage die-in protest at the University of Michigan," September 28, 2016, YouTube, 03:44, accessed August 10, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lB9t1N5ZB2A.
[25] The *Teen Vogue* article by Alex McMenamin suggests that one of the three women leading the protest is Jamie Thompson, a then-Senior at U Mich and co-founder and organizer with the campus group Students4Justice. However, Thompson is not identified by name in any other new coverage of the event.
[26] "BLM stage die-in protest at the University of Michigan," YouTube.
[27] "Michigan League Building Second Floo,." University of Michigan Conference and Events Services website, accessed March 14, 2018, https://conferences.umich.edu/wp-content/uploads/image-floorplan-lg-2.png.
[28] The number of protestors that attended the event meant that the volume of their bodies impeded the ability to fully lay down. In the video, it appears some demonstrators, especially those in the hallway, had to squat rather than lay down. This extraordinary amount of bodies in lowered positions, however, serves as a visualized reminder of the countless black men and women who have been rendered lifeless through the violent mistreat of their bodies, which is traced through our country's history of slavery, lynching, oppression, and state force. The visual evidence of so many "dead" black bodies at the BLM event subverts the characterization proposed by the MPU debate that BLM "hurts" race relations in the U.S.
[29] Foster, 403.
[30] Martin Slagter, "Black Lives Matter protesters at U-M: 'Black lives are not up for debate'," *MLive Media Group* (online), September 27, 2016, accessed March 4, 2018, http://www.mlive.com/news/ann-arbor/index.ssf/2016/09/black_lives_matter_protesters_1.html.
[31] Miller and Schwartz.
[32] Foster, 401.
[33] Ibid., 402.

[34] The BLM protest against MUP is described as having "disrupted" and "halted" the debate in numerous news articles about the event, per Slagter, Miller and Schwartz, and the AP.
The Associated Press, "Student protesters halt debate about Black Lives Matter," *Detroit Free Press,* September 28, 2016, accessed March 4, 2018, https://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/2016/09/28/student-protesters-halt-debate-black-lives-matter/91210666/.

[35] Top image in Figure 4 is a screenshot from the UMich YouTube video. Th bottom image is: Amanda Allen, "Protesters lie on the floor as a part of a die-in protest at a Black Lives Matter debate held by the Michigan Political Union at the Michigan League on Tuesday," in Miller and Schwartz.

[36] Miller and Schwartz.

[37] Uri McMillan, "Dossier: Theorizing Queer Inhumanisms - Objecthood, Avatars, and the Limits of the Human," in *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 21, no. 2-3 (June 2015) pp. 225-226, accessed August 9, 2017, https://muse.jhu.edu/article/581600.

[38] Ibid. 226-227. (Emphasis made by McMillan)

[39] Literary scholar Christina Sharpe articulates the duality and resilience of the Black body in the introduction to her book, *Monstrous Intimacies:* "Those black and blackened bodies become the bearers (through violence, regulation, transmission, etc.) of the knowledge of certain subjection as well as the placeholders for freedom for those who claim freedom as their rightful yield." Christina Sharpe, "Making Monstrous Intimacies: Surviving Slavery, Bearing Freedom," in *Monstrous Intimacies: Making Post-Slavery Subjects* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 4.

[40] Austin McCoy (@AustinMcCoy3), "@dorothyk98 at UM die-in today. @umich #UMSolidarity #BlackLivesMatter #ICantBreathe," Twitter, December 5, 2014, https://twitter.com/AustinMcCoy3/status/540949120094334977/photo/1?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw&ref_url=http%3A%2F%2Falumnus.alumni.umich.edu%2Fstudents-stage-die-in-protests%2F.

[41] McMenamin.

[42] Students4Justice at the University of Michigan @students4justice, "OurCampus Walkout - University of Michigan," Facebook, https://www.facebook.com/events/1344064758951310/.

[43] Figure 6 is an image by Amanda Allen, "Protestors gather for a Black Lives Matter protest that would march from the Diag to the Michigan League where a debate on the movement was being held by the Michigan Political Union on Tuesday," found in Miller and Schwartz.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Students4Justice at the University of Michigan @students4justice, "Student Sit-In!" Facebook, https://www.facebook.com/events/765008210329607/.

[46] The November student walk out suggests that megaphones were used in that event to lead chants and direct the crowd. It is worth suggesting that explaining logistics and safety to the large crowd on September 27 would have also required these amplification tools.

[47] Foster, 406.

[48] Miller and Schwartz quoting Allison Hellman.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Pat Pheifer and Claude Peck, "Aftermath of fatal Falcon Heights officer-involved shooting captured on video," *The Star Tribune* (Minnesota), July 7, 2016, accessed March 4, 2018, http://www.startribune.com/aftermath-of-officer-involved-shooting-captured-on-phone-video/385789251/#1.
Camila Domonoske and Bill Chappell, "Minnesota Gov. Calls Traffic Stop Shooting 'Absolutely Appalling At All Levels'," *NPR,* July 7, 2016, accessed March 4, 2018, https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2016/07/07/485066807/police-stop-ends-in-black-mans-death-aftermath-is-livestreamed-online-video.

[51] Staff Report, "Rally shuts down traffic in St. Paul during Monday rush hour," *The Star Tribune,* August 11, 2015, accessed August 10, 2017, http://www.startribune.com/in-st-paul-solidarity-with-ferguson/321343461/. Image in Figure 8 by Richard Tsong-Taatarii.

[52] Pat Pheifer and Ricardo Lopez, "Black Lives Matter protest diverts light-rail traffic to buses on Green Line in St. Paul," *The Star Tribune,* September 20, 2015, accessed August 10, 2017, http://www.startribune.com/light-rail-riders-brace-for-delays-as-black-lives-matter-group-vows-to-shut-down-station-before-vikings-home-opener/328388321/#1. Image 9 by Ricardo Lopez.

[53] Kevin Duchschere, “Black Lives Matter protesters stage 4-hour march to Capitol,” *The Star Tribune* (Minnesota), February 9, 2015, accessed August 10, 2017, http://www.startribune.com/jan-19-black-lives-matter-protesters-march-to-capitol/289059321/.
[54] Ibid. Figure 10 image by Richard Tsong-Taatarii.
[55] Mara H. Gottfried and Marino Eccher, “Black Lives Matter’s Twin Cities Marathon protest peaceful,” *Twin Cities Pioneer Press* (online), October 28, 2015, accessed August 10, 2017, https://www.twincities.com/2015/10/03/black-lives-matters-twin-cities-marathon-protest-peaceful/. Image 11 by Craig Lassig, “Police officers use bikes as a barrier as Black Lives Matter protesters stage a "die-in" near the finish line of the Medtronic Twin Cities Marathon, in St. Paul on Sunday, Oct. 4, 2015,” in Gottfried and Eccher.
[56] Foster, 400.
[57] Counter protestor Jason Thomas quoted in Pheifer and Lopez.
[58] Foster, 404.
[59] Harvey Young, “Still Standing: Daguerreotypes, Photography, and the Black Body,” in *Embodying Black Experience: Stillness, Critical Memory, and the Black Body* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 60.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Foster, 404.
[62] Anna Martine Whitehead, “Expressing Life Through Loss: On Queens That Fall With A Freak Technique,” *Queer Dance,* edited by Clare Croft (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 285-86.
[63] Ibid., 286.
[64] Young, 27.
[65] Kedhar.
[66] Young, 28-29.
[67] Whitehead, 283.

[1] Sean Gregory, "The Perilous Fight," *Time Magazine*, October 3, 2016. Print.

[2] Though much attention has been focused on Kaepernick and the NFL, Tom Ziller and Mike Prada point out that WNBA, the Women's National Basketball Association, were among the first professional athletes to protest racial injustice, beginning in the summer of 2016. On July 9, 2016, four members of the Minnesota Lynx, Maya Moore, Seimone Augustus, Lindsay Whalen, and Rebekkah Brunson, donned black t-shirts that said "Change Starts With Us: Justice & Accountability," after the team had already held a pre-game press conference to discuss the recent shooting of Twin Cities' resident Philando Castile. Players on the New York Liberty Phoenix Mercury, and Indiana Fever followed suit with their own clothing-based protests, only to have the WNBA leadership threaten the activists with fines for uniform violations. While the WNBA organization eventually rescinded the fines, after public outcry, players from the Fever, Mercury, Los Angeles Sparks and Washington Mystics continued to protest white supremacy by kneeling by either kneeling during the national anthem or standing together with locked arms. Tom Ziller and Mike Prada, "The WNBA has been at the forefront of protesting racial injustice," *SB Nation* (online), September 24, 2017, accessed April 6, 2018, https://www.sbnation.com/2017/9/24/16357206/national-anthem-protest-wnba-history-donald-trump.

However, the centering of Kaepernick in the narrative of #TakeAKnee and the practice of athletes kneeling in sports arenas for racial justice continues to circulate, as evident by *Sport Illustrated* bestowing the former '49er with the Muhammad Ali Legacy Award during its December 5, 2017 Sportsperson of the Year telecast. News of the award spread quickly because, in no small part, it was presented to Kaepernick by global superstar Beyoncé. Although receiving the award puts Kaepernick in the company of other prominent athlete/activists like Magic Johnson, Bill Russell, and Ali, it does not absolve the fact that he has yet to be signed to any NFL team after being released by the 49ers following the 2016/2017 season. Kaepernick has been, as *SI* writer Michael Rosenberg points out, effectively blackballed by the NFL, despite his strong passing and touchdown record.

Michael Rosenberg, "Colin Kaepernick Is Recipient of 2017 Sports Illustrated Muhammad Ali Legacy Award," *Sports Illustrated*, November 30, 2017, accessed online December 20, 2017, https://www.si.com/sportsperson/2017/11/30/colin-kaepernick-muhammad-ali-legacy-award.

[3] D. Soyini Madison, "Introduction," in *Acts of Activism: Human Rights as Radical Performance* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 1-10.

[4] My use of the phrase "national stage" for this project describes locations and mediatized forms where there is a reasonable expectation that many viewers/audiences will witness the performance or digitized versions of it. This study treats the space of the football field and other sports arenas as a "national stage" because of the high number of fans that attend the live event, in addition to those who watch via television or online streaming broadcasts.

[5] The perception that BLM demonstrations and those who participate in them are in some way "disorderly" or "out of control," was discussed in the previous chapter using evidence from editorial commentary by Philly.com columnist Dom Giordano. Other suggestions that BLM is "out of control" also appears in blog posts and online articles, such as an essay that appeared on the culture site SoCawledge.com under the headline "Ferguson "Black Lives Matter" Movement Spins Out of Control." Furthermore, the criminal charge of "disorderly conduct" sometimes placed against those arrested at BLM and non-BLM protests contributes to the linguistic labels placed on the movement.

Dom Giordano, "It's time to bring Antifa and BLM protesters under control," *The Philly*, September 12, 2017, accessed online December 4, 2017, http://www.philly.com/archive/dom_giordano/its-time-to-bring-antifa-and-blm-protesters-under-control-20170830.html.

"Ferguson "Black Lives Matter" Movement Spins Out of Control," *SoCawledge.com*, 2017, accessed January 17, 2017, http://socawlege.com/ferguson-black-lives-matter-movement-spins-out-of-control/.

[6] Rosalind Bentley, "Georgia Tech dancer took a knee during the anthem, now tells why," *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* (online), September 27, 2017, accessed December 4, 2017, https://www.ajc.com/news/local/georgia-tech-dancer-took-knee-during-the-anthem-now-tells-why/699jN9IAyM2mCkp06EfsNL/.
Image by David J. Griffin, appeared Bentley. "Georgia Tech dancer took a knee during the anthem, now

[7] W.J.T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 1-2.

[8] W.J.T. Mitchell, *Image Science: Iconology, Visual Culture, and Media Aesthetics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 17.

[9] Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1968), 57-58.

[10] Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology,* 3.

[11] Mitchell, *Image Science*, 121.

[12] Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology,* 56-62.

[13] *Ibid.* 159

[14] Along with the 1.7K comments made on Brown's post, the image and caption have been retweeted by 35,860 accounts and received 130,390 likes; these figures are as of December 5, 2017. The viral photo was not taken during the 2017 season but captured during an October 2016 Georgia Tech football game. Despite having posted the same photo last year, it gained traction online this fall when Brown posted it "to just stand in solidarity with the NFL players who would be kneeling…"
Raianna Brown, *Proudest & scariest moment as a yellow-jacket happened at the same time. Thank you @Kaepernick7 for inspiring to #TakeAKnee to take a stand*, Twitter, September 23, 2017, https://twitter.com/freeSPIRIT_5678/status/911801140693659648.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Zora Neale Hurston, "Characteristics of Negro Expression," *Negro: An Anthology,* edited by Nancy Cunard (New York: Continuum, 1994), 26.

[17] Susan Manning, "The Female Dancer and The Male Gaze: Feminist Critiques of Early Modern Dance," in *Meaning in Motion: New Cultural Studies of Dance,* edited by Jane C. Desmond (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 154.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Manning, 164.

[20] Figure 14 image from "Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders," *Quarterbacks.org*, accessed December 21, 2017, http://quarterbacks.org/dallas-cowboys-cheerleaders/.

[21] Top image from Figure 15 from (Top) Michael Kelly, "Members of Niskayuna football kneel for National Anthem," *The Daily Gazette* (New York), September 28, 2017, accessed November 21, 2017, https://dailygazette.com/article/2017/09/28/members-of-niskayuna-football-kneel-for-national-anthem.
Bottom image from Figure 15 from Louis DeLuca, "DeSoto cheerleaders take a knee during the playing of the national anthem before the DeSoto High School Eagles vs. the Cedar Hill High School Longhorns high school football game in Cedar Hill, Texas on Friday, September 23, 2016. The teams were not on the field at the time the anthem was played," in "DeSoto and Cedar Hill cheerleaders kneel during national anthem before game," *Sports Day: Dallas Fort Worth*, September 2016, accessed November 21, 2017, https://sportsday.dallasnews.com/high-school/high-schools/2016/09/23/desoto-cheerleaders-kneel-national-anthem-game-vs-cedar-hill.

[22] Mireille Miller-Young, *A Taste for Brown Sugar: Black Women in Pornography* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 1-6.

[21] Ibid., 5. Emphasis made by the author. Miller-Young, indeed uses the term "imago" in her text to describe the idealized mental image of feminine desirability.
Cultural critic Anne Helen Petersen works along similar lines as Miller-Young in her feminist critique of rapper Nicki Minaj. Minaj, well known for provocative dance styles that include getting down on her hands and knees, is described by Petersen as celebrating "the fractured, performative nature of femininity" that allows her to code-switch from being motherly to sexually aggressive to anywhere in between, depending on the audience's desires in that

moment (79). Anne Helen Petersen, "Too Slutty: Nicki Minaj," in *Too Fat, Too Slutty, Too Loud: The Rise and Reign of the Unruly Woman* (New York: Plume, 2017).

[24] Miller-Young, 5.

[25] Ibid. 10-12.

[26] Although I normally do not consult the online website, *Urban Dictionary,* for the purposes of this explanation, it provides two definitions related to a woman "on her knees." The first entry falls under "Hoe on her knees," and defines such as phrase as "A very slutty girl who always seems to be blowing guys in a library…" The second option explains that "Good on her knees" means "skilled at fellatio (usage applied only to women)." This site appears to be authored almost entirely by male contributors who regularly include derogatory terms for women but does also illustrate a known social use for the term "on her knees" that supports Nash's assertion that some black sex workers manipulate these assumptions and attitudes towards women for their own benefit.
tman, "good on her knees," *urbandictionary.com,* March 11, 2004, accessed January 5, 2017, https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=good%20on%20her%20knees.
Aye Yo Willis, "Hoe on her knees," *urbandictionary.com,* July 29, 2011, accessed January 5, 2017, https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=good%20on%20her%20knees.
Image for Figure 16: "Sexy silhouette kneeling," *Vector Stock.com,* accessed January 3, 2017, https://www.vectorstock.com/royalty-free-vector/sexy-silhouette-kneeling-vector-893.

[27] Image 17 and description of the VHS box for Pepper's film from xxxvideo_1, "xxx (vhs) Jeannie Pepper, Sahara, Angel Kelly, Billy Dee," *eBay.com,* accessed January 3, 2017, https://www.ebay.ie/itm/xxx-vhs-Jeannie-Pepper-Sahara-Angel-Kelly-Billy-Dee-/162660823588.

[28] Miller-Young, 13.

[29] Jennifer C. Nash, *The Black Body in Ecstasy: Reading Race, Reading Pornography* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), s27.

[30] Ibid, 52.

[31] Ibid.

[32] The uniform consists of a blue, collared blouse with a faux white, tasseled vest over it. The blouse is tied together just under each woman's bust to accentuate their décolletage. The ensemble is completed with a pair of shorts, a belt with blue stars, and a pair of white cowboy boots. The dancers' midriffs are exposed, as are most of their legs. "History," dallascowboyscheerleaders.com, accessed December 4, 2017, https://web.archive.org/web/20090725075923/http://www.dallascowboyscheerleaders.com/history/history.cfm.

[33] All images in Figure 19 of the Dallas Cowboys Cheerleader's Pro HOF performance are screenshots from Dashers Demise, "Dallas cowboys cheerleaders pre game performance 2017 pro HOF Game," August 8, 2017, YouTube video, 03:25, accessed November 21, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ddsuPz-dP0.

[34] Brad Tuttle, "6 Things You Didn't Know About the Careers of NFL Cheerleaders," *Time Magazine – Money* (online), February 1, 2018, accessed April 4, 2018, http://time.com/money/5127457/nfl-cheerleaders-career-pay-salary/.

[35] Elissa Strauss, "This Is Why NFL Cheerleaders Haven't Taken a Knee," *Elle*.com, October 5, 2017, accessed November 21, 2017, http://www.elle.com/culture/a12786986/why-nfl-cheerleaders-dont-protest/.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Cody Benjamin, "Cheerleaders' protests reportedly shut down by Georgia sheriff, lawmaker," *CBS Sports,* October 26, 2017, accessed November 21, 2017, https://www.cbssports.com/college-football/news/cheerleaders-protests-reportedly-shut-down-by-georgia-sheriff-lawmaker/.

[38] Figure 20 by Kelly J. Huff, "Four of the "Kennesaw 5" cheerleaders who, took a knee three weeks ago during the Kennesaw State University football game, took a knee once again out of sight of the fans under the visiting bleacher, during the National Anthem at Fifth Third Bank Stadium in Kennesaw, Georgia. The cheerleaders are kneeling in protest police brutality," in Shaddi Abusaid, "KSU reverses course, to allow cheerleaders back on field during national anthem," *Marietta Daily Journal,* November 8, 2017, accessed November 21, 2017,

http://www.mdjonline.com/news/ksu-reverses-course-to-allow-cheerleaders-back-on-field-during/article_d254e634-c4ce-11e7-9076-9380dd4327b0.html.

[39] André Lepicki, "Choreopolice and Choreopolitics: Or the Task of the Dancer," *The Drama Review (TDR)* 57, no 4 (Winter 2013), 14.

[40] Additionally, in the wake of the scandal, Olens resigned as President of KSU in December 2017 with his departure set for February 2018.
Abusaid.
"KSU Cheerleaders stand during National Anthem, some lock arms," *Fox 5 Atlanta,* November 11, 2017, accessed November 21, 2017, http://www.fox5atlanta.com/news/ksu-cheerleaders-stand-during-national-anthem-some-lock-arms.

[41] It is worth noting that during a live segment by *Democracy Now,* the field journalist, Carla Wills, identifies those chained together and to the barrier as "women." This gender description is not contested by the BLM organizers with whom the journalist is speaking.
"Black Lives Matter Activists Chain Themselves Together to Block Inauguration Checkpoint," *Democracy Now,* January 20, 2017, accessed online November 21, 2017, https://www.democracynow.org/2017/1/20/black_lives_matter_activists_chain_themselves.
Andrea Noble, "Black Lives Matter activists crash checkpoint to disrupt Donald Trump's inauguration," *The Washington Times,* January 20, 2017, accessed online November 21, 2017, https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2017/jan/20/black-lives-matter-activists-crash-checkpoint-disr/

[42] Top image in Figure 21 from AJ+, "#Blacklivesmatter protesters have chained themselves to fences at an #inauguration access checkpoint in Washington, DC," Facebook, January 20, 2017, accessed December 4, 2017, https://www.facebook.com/ajplusenglish/photos/a.883296121811896.1073741897.407570359384477/883296205145221/?type=3&theater.
Bottom image in Figure from Quincy Ledbetter, "BLM protesters chain themselves together to form a human blockade to the inauguration," in Natasha Noman, "26 photos show Black Lives Matter protesters barricading an inauguration entrance," *Mic,* January 20, 2017, accessed July 31, 2017, https://mic.com/articles/166116/26-photos-show-black-lives-matter-protesters-barricading-an-inauguration-entrance#.t5F5ISbO7.

[43] The assumption that the video was watched in real time by audiences across America comes from the anchor's description that the video of BLM demonstrators chaining themselves together is "what we are seeing outside on the streets right now." Fox Business, "Black Lives Matter chain themselves together at inauguration checkpoints," January 20, 2017, YouTube video, 0:48, accessed November 21, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ddsuPz-dP0.

[44] This is a reference to a well know African American spiritual song "I Shall Not Be Moved," which was adapted in the 1930s by unions, newly titled "We Shall Not Be Moved." "We Shall Not Be Moved" was also used during the Civil Rights Movement and continues to be enacted as a protest song.
Robert V. Wells, *Life Flows on In Endless Song: Folk Songs and American History* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 95.

[45] "Black Lives Matter Activists Chain Themselves Together to Block Inauguration Checkpoint," *Democracy Now.*

[46] George Bourne, *Slavery Illustrated in Its Effects Upon Women and Domestic Society* (Boston, MA: Knapp, 1837), 5, accessed online November 22, 2017, <http://find.galegroup.com.ezproxy.library.tufts.edu/mome/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=MOME&userGroupName=mlin_m_tufts&tabID=T001&docId=U105570885&type=multipage&contentSet=MOMEArticles&version=1.0&docLevel=FASCIMILE>.

[47] I suggest that "AM I NOT A MAN AND A BROTHER?" is the inspiration for the female turn because the former dates back to 1870s abolitionist societies in England, as described in the summary provided by *The Library of Congress.* The same source states that the "MAN AND A BROTHER" image also appeared in an 1837 antislavery poem. Clearly, it can be suggested that the image was circulating in the U.S. prior to 1837 and that the "WOMAN AND A SISTER" version may also precede the Bourne manuscript.
John Greenleaf Whittier, *Our Countrymen in Chains,* facsimile, 1837, The Library of Congress online, accessed September 28, 2017, http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2008661312/.

[48] Emphasis made by original author. Bourne, 5.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Yasmil Raymond, "Maladies of Power: A Kara Walker Lexicon," in *My Complement, My Enemy, My Oppressor, My Love,* edited by Philippe Vergne (Minneapolis, MN: The Walker Arts Center, 2007), 348.
[51] Kara Walker, "Daylights (after M.B.)" in *Dust Jackets for the Niggerati--and Supporting Dissertations, Drawings Submitted Ruefully by Dr. Kara E. Walker* (New York: Gregory R. Miller and Co, 2014), 82-83.
[52] This hair style contextualizes her placement in time as anywhere between the 1960s and now. Noliwe M. Rooks, *Hair Raising: Beauty, Culture, and African American Women* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 6.
[53] Kara Walker, "Chronology of Black Suffering: Images and Notes," 1992-2007, in *My Complement, My Enemy, My Oppressor, My Love,* edited by Philippe Vergne (Minneapolis, MN: The Walker Arts Center, 2007), 75-111.
[54] Ibid. 89.
[55] Globe Staff, "What's happening at the Cambridge protest," *The Boston Globe,* August 31, 2016, online, accessed July 28, 2017, https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2016/08/31/images-reports-from-scene-cambridge-protest/uvaMvoJIehmRmA8elV0LcM/story.html?p1=Article_Related_Box_Article. Photos, including that in Figure 27, by Steve Annear.
[56] Figure 28 from Brendan McDermid, "'I Can't Breathe' Eric Garner Protesters March From New York's Times Square To Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony," *International Business Time*s, December 3, 2014, accessed December 10, 2016, http://www.ibtimes.com/i-cant-breathe-eric-garner-protesters-march-new-yorks-times-square-christmas-tree-1733288.
[57] Michelle Hee Yee Lee, "'Hands up, don't shoot' did not happen in Ferguson," *The Washington Post,* March 19, 2015, accessed November 21, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/fact-checker/wp/2015/03/19/hands-up-dont-shoot-did-not-happen-in-ferguson/?utm_term=.9d8192a68f92.
[58] Mike Bivins, *#handsupdontshoot is the chant as the protesters march northbound on sw 4th, passing Wells Fargo*, Twitter, February 16, 2017, 6:40 PM, https://twitter.com/itsmikebivins/status/832419484560289792.
[59] Diana Taylor, "Acts of Transfer," *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 4.
[60] Image 29 from Damian Dovarganes, "'Hands Up, Don't Shoot' becomes rallying cry despite questions whether hands were raised high," Fox News, November 27, 2014, accessed December 10, 2016, http://www.foxnews.com/us/2014/11/27/hands-up-dont-shoot-becomes-rallying-cry-despite-questions-whether-hands-were.html.
[61] Figure 30, included here as imagery of "getting happy" in contemporary Baptist worship, is not described by Telia but found by this author to provide a visual depiction of the practice. The image is from the Facebook page for Beulah Missionary Baptist Church in Decatur, Georgia, posted on November 12, 2017.
Telia U. Anderson "'Calling on the Spirit': The Performativity of Black Women's Faith in the Baptist Church Spiritual Traditions and Its Radical Possibilities of Resistance," in *African American Performance and Theater History: A Critical Reader,* edited by Harry J. Elam and David Krasner (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 115.
Beulah Missionary Baptist Church, Untitled, Facebook, November 12, 2017, accessed January 3, 2017, https://www.facebook.com/BeulahBaptist/photos/a.693661294002516.1073741844.146592015376116/1526840150684622/?type=3&theater.
[62] Sarah D. Park, "How Lifting My Hands in Worship Became My Protest to God," *Christianity Today,* January 16, 2017, accessed December 22, 2017, https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2017/january-web-only/how-lifting-my-hands-in-worship-became-my-protest-to-god.html.
[63] Figure 31 from Getty images, "At one point during the performance the dancers raised their arms in the air in a gesture referencing the black power salute by Tommie Smith and John

Carlos at the Mexico City Olympics," in Justin Enriquez, "Beyoncé slays the Super Bowl! Leather-clad Queen Bey brings new song Formation to the Super Bowl in super slick performance with Coldplay and Bruno Mars," *The Daily Mail* (UK), February 7, 2016, accessed November 21, 2017, http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-3432666/Coldplay-start-Super-Bowl-50-Halftime-Beyonce-Bruno-Mars-join.html.

[1] These instructions to the Zimmerman trial jury were found in full within a larger article by author and journalist Ta-Nehisi Coates in his July 2013 article for *The Atlantic* titled "How Stand Your Ground Relates To George Zimmerman." Coates article was published three days after the same jury delivered decisions of "not guilty" on all counts filed against Zimmerman. Ta-Nehisi Coates, "How Stand Your Ground Relates To George Zimmerman," *The Atlantic,* July 16, 2013, accessed online February 2, 2018, https://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2013/07/how-stand-your-ground-relates-to-george-zimmerman/277829/.
Greg Henderson and Scott Neuman, "Jury Acquits Zimmerman Of All Charges," *NPR,* July 13, 2013, accessed February 2, 2018, https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2013/07/13/201744637/jury-in-zimmerman-trial-enters-second-day-of-deliberation.

[2] Karen Grigsby Bates, "Stand Your Ground Laws Complicate Matters For Black Gun Owners," *NPR,* February 27, 2017, accessed February 2, 2018, https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2017/02/27/517109271/stand-your-ground-laws-complicate-matters-for-black-gun-owners.

[3] Bates.

[4] The elongation of these athlete's activism was not contained to the single gesture of listing their arms. In addition to their raised fists, "as Carlos and Smith walked to the podium, they took off their shoes to protest poverty. They wore beads and a scarf to protest lynchings" (DeNeen). The Black Power salute, gloves and all, would make an appearance on the NFL field in 2016, when world superstar Beyoncé and her backup dancers enacted the same gesture during the Super Bowl Halftime Performance, as discussed in the previous chapter.
Surprisingly little performance scholarship has been produced about the '68 metal podium salute. The performance has been the topic for numerous graduate dissertations, such as Clyde Posley, Jr.'s *The Embodiment of the Black Male Student-Athlete Political Voice 1964-1968: A Case Study of the 1968 Summer Olympic Medal Stand Protest.* The protest is also at the center of the third chapter of *Spectacular Mexico: Design, Propaganda, and the 1968 Olympics* by Luis M. Castañeda. Finally, Amy Bass' 2002 book N*ot the Triumph but the Struggle: The 1968 Olympics and the Making of the Black Athlete* explores the historical web of politics and race that played into the podium salute although not through a performance-studies-centric lens.
DeNeen L. Brown, "They didn't #TakeTheKnee: The Black Power protest salute that shook the world in 1968," *The Washington Post,* September 24, 2017, accessed February 2, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/retropolis/wp/2017/09/24/they-didnt-takeaknee-the-black-power-protest-salute-that-shook-the-world-in-1968/?utm_term=.884101439669.

[5] "Hashtag activism" or "social activism" is more broadly defined as: "the act of fighting for or supporting a cause that people are advocating through social media like Facebook, Twitter, Google+ and other networking websites. This is the kind of activism that does not require any action from the person other than sharing or "liking" a post or "retweeting" tweets on Twitter." Further discussion of hashtag activism in the contexts of BLM can be found in section two of this chapter.
"Hashtag Activism," *Techopedia.com,* accessed February 14, 2018, https://www.techopedia.com/definition/29047/hashtag-activism.
Guobin Yang, "Narrative Agency in Hashtag Activism: The Case of #BlackLivesMatter," *Media and Communications* 4, no. 4 (2016), 13-17, accessed December 10, 2016, http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.tufts.edu/docview/1816873053?pq-origsite=summon.

[6] Quote from Garza's Facebook post found in Elizabeth Day, "#BlackLivesMatter: the birth of a new civil rights movement," *The Guardian,* July 19, 2015, accessed February 4, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jul/19/blacklivesmatter-birth-civil-rights-movement.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Jelani Ince, Fabio Rojas and Clayton A. Davis, "The social media response to Black Lives Matter:
how Twitter users interact with Black Lives Matter through hashtag use," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 40, no.11 (2017), 1814-1830, DOI: 10.1080/01419870.2017.1334931.

[9] Day.
[10] Twitter is also supports 35 languages worldwide. "Here's How Many People Are on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Other Big Social Networks," *Ad Week* (online), April 4, 2016, accessed April 5, 2018, http://www.adweek.com/digital/heres-how-many-people-are-on-facebook-instagram-twitter-other-big-social-networks/.
[11] Dustin Kidd, "Black Lives Matter: Racial Perspectives on Social Media," in *Social Media Freaks: Digital Identity in the Network Society* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2017), 169-91. The portion of Kidd's chapter referenced here is found on page 181.
[12] Ibid. emphasis by original author. These figures are based on a study by Aaron Smith in 2011 titled "13% of Online Adults Use Twitter, and Half of Twitter Users Access the Service on a Cell Phone," Pew Internet and American Life Project, Pew Research Center, http://www.pewinternet.org/files/old-media/Files/Reports/2011/Twitter%20Update%202011.pdf.
[13] Kidd, 180.
[14] Ibid., 181.
[15] Jason Maderer, "The Social Media Profile of the Black Lives Matter Movement: Study identifies online indicators of upcoming protests," *Georgia Tech News Center,* June 7, 2016, accessed February 14, 2018, http://www.news.gatech.edu/2016/06/07/social-media-profile-black-lives-matter-movement.
[16] Jessica Guynn, "Meet the Woman Who Coined #BlackLivesMatter," *USA Today,* March 4, 2015, accessed February 3, 2018, https://www.usatoday.com/story/tech/2015/03/04/alicia-garza-black-lives-matter/24341593/.
[17] Kidd, 173.
[18] Bijan Stephen, "Social Media Helps Black Lives Matter Fight the Power," *Wired,* November 2015, accessed February 14, 2018, https://www.wired.com/2015/10/how-black-lives-matter-uses-social-media-to-fight-the-power/.
Stephen's point is evidenced by the fact that social media sites like Twitter and Facebook played an important role in organizing the hundreds of thousands who protested in Tahrir Square in 2011, calling for and ultimately pushing out then-Tunisian president Hosni Mubarak.
[19] Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture,* 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2008), 7.
[20] Auslander, *Liveness,* 56.
[21] Philip Auslander, "The Performativity of Performance Documentation," *PAJ: The Performance Art Journal* 28, no. 3 (2006), 9.
[22] Auslander, "The Performativity of Performance Documentation," 2.
[23] Auslander, "The Performativity of Performance Documentation," 1 and 4. Auslander includes the following footnote in the *PAJ* essay to differentiate and clarify the meaning of the terms "reconstruct" and "recreate": "To speak of recreating a performance suggests the reconstruction of an object. By contrast, the term revival used in English to describe theatrical productions of existing plays suggests the reawakening of an organic entity rather than the rebuilding of a lost object."
[24] Sarah Bay-Cheng, "Theater Is Media: Some Principles for a Digital Historiography of Performance," *Theatre* 42, no. 2 (2012), 31.
[25] Bay-Cheng, 32.
[26] Jessica Wyman, "Object Lessons and Performative Relations: Residue, reliability and self-sufficiency," *Performance Research: A Journal of the Performing Arts* 12, no 4. (2007), pp. 5.
[27] Amelia Jones, ""Presence" in Absentia: Experiencing Performance as Documentation," *Art Journal* 56, no. 4, Performance Art: (Some) Theory and (Selected)Practice at the End of This Century (Winter, 1997), pp. 12.
Bay-Cheng makes a similar assertion about critiquing performance that is captured on video in her 2016 article "Unseen: Performance Criticism and Digital Recordings," that appeared in a 2016 issue of *Theatre* 46, no. 2.
[28] Jonathan Bachman, "Taking a Stand in Baton Rouge," *Reuters,* August 11, 2016, accessed June 2, 2017, https://widerimage.reuters.com/story/taking-a-stand-in-baton-rouge.

[29] Sophie Evans, "Powerful Black Lives Matter photo shows brave young woman in flowing dress stand silently before armed riot police," *The Mirror,* July 11, 2016, accessed July 17, 2017, http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/powerful-black-lives-matter-photo-8395123.

[30] Ieshia Evans quoted in "Woman in iconic Baton Rouge standoff photo breaks silence," *CBS This Morning,* July 15, 2016, YouTube video, 04:49, accessed August 3, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LFC6l0DjDF0.

[31] Bachman quoted in Mazin Sidahmed, "'She was making her stand': image of Baton Rouge protester an instant classic," *The Guardian,* July 11, 2016, accessed August 3, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/jul/11/baton-rouge-protester-photo-iesha-evans.

[32] Jonathan Bachman quoted in Oliver Laurent, "Meet the Photographer Behind Baton Rouge's Iconic Protest Image," *Time,* July 12, 2016, accessed August 2, 2017, http://time.com/4403635/ieshia-evans-jonathan-bachman-baton-rouge/.

[33] Sidahmed.

[34] Laurent.

Evans, the woman who made the photo, was released on the evening of July 10 by the Baton Rouge authorities, after having been charged with obstructing a roadway. Meanwhile, Twitter users reacting to the publication of the photo were scrambling to identify the captivating figure. The earliest known tweets to include the tag #IeshiaEvans alongside the image appeared on the afternoon of July 10. These early tweets and reactions sometimes misspells Evans' name due to lack of information, with some referring her as "Iesha" or "Leshia." Some of the earliest information about Evans on Twitter include her release time from custody per other sources on Twitter.

LeeInNC, *Found as Iesha (as India) Evans on the East BR Parish Sheriff site. But all seem to call her Leisha. Don't know her.,* Twitter, July 10, 2016, 7:00PM, https://twitter.com/CogniKoi/status/752321734603378688.

The Source Magazine, *Iesha Evans. Baton Rouge, LA, USA. #NoJusticeNoPeace #BlackLivesMatter https://www.instagram.com/p/BHtGJr6h535/,* Twitter, July 10, 2016, 7:35PM, https://twitter.com/TheSource/status/752330471267119104.

[35] Joel Franco, "Photo of Baton Rouge police in riot gear arresting woman in dress goes viral," Twitter, July 10, 2016, 4:31 PM, https://twitter.com/OfficialJoelF/status/752284111146917888. "'Gorgeous, legendary': Black woman in flowing dress facing police in Baton Rouge wows social media." *RT.com,* July 11, 2016, 10:07 AM, Accessed via Twitter account Cinzia @CCKKI, July 11, 2016, https://www.rt.com/usa/350626-woman-dress-baton-rouge/.

[36] Vanessa Friedman, "A Sundress in an Age of Riot Gear," *The New York Times,* July 18, 2016, accessed online February 14, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/18/opinion/a-sundress-in-an-age-of-riot-gear.html.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Jason N. Parkinson, "Baton Rouge robocops defenceless against a summer evening dress. #BlackLivesMatter," Twitter, July 10, 2016, 11:53 AM, https://twitter.com/JasonNParkinson/status/752214170343448576.

[39] Comment made by Jeff Reid on a post by José James, "Baton Rouge #BlackLivesMatter," Facebook, July 11, 2016 via Instagram, https://www.facebook.com/josejamesmusic/photos/a.295183208794.143759.11873648794/10153919886073795/?type=3&theater.

[40] Matt DeLong and Dave Braunger, "Breaking down the dashcam: The Philando Castile shooting timeline," *Star Tribune* (Minnesota), June 21, 2017, accessed February 21, 2018, http://www.startribune.com/castile-shooting-timeline/429678313/.

[41] Su Zie, 💁*#Powerful #ThePowerOfABlackWoman #IeshaEvans* 💫✨*Look at her posture. She is balanced,… https://www.instagram.com/p/BHs0DGuh8V3/,* Twitter, July 10, 2016, 4:57PM, https://twitter.com/suzannapomade/status/752290663639592960.

<< >> @RheaKyra, *After Seeing This Photo From #BatonRouge I only have 1 word. "Powerful!" #blacklivesmatter,* Twitter, July 10, 2016, 3:14 PM, https://twitter.com/RheaKyra/status/752264766115180545.

Senrab, @WillHBarnes, "EPIC. #Blacklivesmatter #BatonRouge," retweeting The Atlantic, @TheAtlantic

"A single photo that captures race and policing in America http://theatln.tc/29q5amo," Twitter, July 10, 2016, 225 PM, https://twitter.com/WillHBarnes/status/752252311754473472.

[42] Nicole R. Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision: Performance, Visuality, and Blackness* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), 9.

[43] Fleetwood, 111.

[44] Daphne A Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom, 1850-1910* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 7.

[45] Fleetwood, 105.

[46] Jami West comment posted at 12:04 PM to "POWERFUL photo from Baton Rouge. (Photo by Jonathan Bachman of Reuters.) UPDATE: She was just released." Shaun King Facebook page, July 10, 2016, accessed February 14, 2018, https://www.facebook.com/shaunking/photos/a.799605230078397.1073741828.799539910084929/1085592334813017/?type=3&comment_id=1085595698146014

[47] Attached to the @Only1Oflowers' Tweet is an Instagram link that connects the same message and image as they appear on both social media platforms, a feature that Instagram makes available during the final steps of "posting" a user's image. O. Flowers, @Only1Oflowers, "Stand in your POWER! #ieshaevans #blacklivesmatter #blacklivesmattertoo #endpolicebrutality https://www.instagram.com/p/BHwlUYmDobA/," Twitter, July 12, 2016, 4:05 AM, https://twitter.com/Only1Oflowers/status/752821260388794368.

[48] Shelly Bee comment posted to "POWERFUL photo from Baton Rouge. (Photo by Jonathan Bachman of Reuters.) UPDATE: She was just released." Shaun King Facebook page.

[49] Sheena (@PhotoNutrients), "make murica what again?make it like Iesha Evans,mother of a 5yr old #endpolicebrutality #thepowerofphotography #WCW," Twitter, July 13, 2016, https://twitter.com/search?l=&q=Iesha%20Evans%20%23endpolicebrutality%20from%3APhotoNutrients%20since%3A2016-07-13%20until%3A2016-07-14&src=typd&lang=en.

[50] 100 Women, "Iconic protester and New York nurse, Ieshia Evans is on the #100women list! Learn more about her story at: bbc.in/ieshia Discover the other amazing women who made it to this year's list at bbc.in/2fnwUXW," Facebook, November 22, 2016, https://www.facebook.com/BBC100women/photos/p.1215265015205441/1215265015205441/?type=1&opaqueCursor=AbpG1MYb-clPkute3sQpoaDj7qwCnIfnQUnwDS3cn9XzzwQSrFzXw3gVzuZqUw_1HO-eysjxUkEsnVbq6Fplxlet_GolffnKnUkA3nSldLlAkvZZZAWj0PK7qfdLhsh9PNuXhtP5jF3RKeJipS51QU8vjBDdsRiUh7bSecEPUyPwfc3cFTUqBhFwAMoPxUK7yjFSj8GO3O7LC6g3ISUeZ4AUw6nelTJ-95uEQaG2HncMt6JWz-7CEmslK-prCC4f4a2sCd4pD25KqHgMF8OV4yXfRF2iVMm2Scm0MRQQtLkU2HpxF8PJAptWKeWAmi32pwIdazbNmDem_H5OuHjWu8k-fl6Y3XKqj7qVfcbfqmVbPsRHdt_WFYles93tqswwwiv-9s4OMAui5vJq1ZOPMcYGcAcHygEzurjpxKw5RKBvUXceWZhAj9Xgt3ZOwF9DSr0&theater.

[51] Image of October 2016 Hofstra University BLM protest taken by Brian Sommer and posted in an article he wrote called "Covering A Black Lives Matter Protest: A Photojournalist's Perspective," *Odyssey,* October 4, 2016, accessed February 21, 2018, https://www.theodysseyonline.com/covering-black-lives-matter-protest-photojournalists-perspective.

[52] This is in reference to a Tweet posted by @Job_Truniht on July 13, 2016 that included an image of a monk self-immolating and the following text: "When #blacklivesmatter thinks #ieshaevans can be compared to the real heroes." Evans was called a hero in countless posts, although not all of the information included with this praise was accurate in regard to Evans' name spelling or age.

Paul Nehlen @Job_Truniht, "When #blacklivesmatter thinks #ieshaevans can be compared to real heroes," Twitter, July 13, 2016, https://twitter.com/Job_Truniht/status/753461546576076801.

Dzifah R. Hiatsi @dzifah, "This hero Black #woman who defied #PoliceBrutality is 36 yr old #nurse & #mother. #IeshaEvans #BlackLivesMatter," Twitter, July 11, 2016, https://twitter.com/dzifah/status/752497354826215424.

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https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2017/07/10/permanently-disabled-baton-rouge-officer-sues-black-lives-matter-for-2016-ambush-shooting/?utm_term=.441ffcd367f9.

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The troubling rhetoric towards black immigrants has only been compounded by the President's alleged "shithole countries" comment used to describe Haiti and Africa during a January Oval Office meeting on immigration reform. I recognize that Africa is not a country and am basing this description on the information reported by news outlets; much discourse circulated as to whether the President indeed understands the differentiation between Africa as a continent not a country. Following reports that Trump used this racially tinged terminology to describe black nations, the President released a statement denying that he had used "derogatory" language in such a way although, as Geneva Sands and Lauren Pearle point out, he did not address that comment specifically.

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The efforts by BLM Sacramento and its female leadership to protest on behalf of Stephon Clark was troubled by some who located misogynistic tweets posted by Clark. However, BLM has continued to stand and fight for Clark despite this, which only serves to demonstrate, as Kimberly Foster rightly points out, that BLM is an intersectional organization that can be invested in both police brutality and gender justice: "Stephon Clark was not a perfect victim. He didn't need to be. The queer black women who sparked the Black Lives Matter movement ushered in a sea change where respectability is no longer necessary for community support. Alicia Garza, Opal Tometi and Patrisse Cullors continued the legacy of heroic black women's activism that refused to leave anyone behind." Kimberly Foster, "Don't Tell Black Women How To Feel About Stephon Clark's Tweets," *The Huffington Post* (online), April 4, 2018, accessed April 4, 2018, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/opinion-foster-stephon-clark-misogynoir_us_5ac3dcb7e4b063ce2e56b6ec.

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