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### Beyond “Respectability”: An Examination of the Discourse of Respect as Legitimacy as a Frame to Deny Truth and Immediacy to Silent Anti-Racist Protest

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Beyond “Respectability”: An Examination of the Discourse of Respect as Legitimacy as a Frame  
to Deny Truth and Immediacy to Silent Anti-Racist Protest

An Undergraduate Thesis presented to:  
Department of Sociology & Anthropology  
Illinois State University  
Normal, Illinois

In Partial Fulfilment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Bachelor of Science Anthropology

By:

Tyler S. Smith

May 2019

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*Dear white knucklers of the status quo,*

*I live in a world where everyone thinks they are better and more important than I am,  
that is the burden of being Black,  
of being woman.*

*If you don't feel this way in every aspect of life,  
in every powered relationship,  
you've not earned the right to cry oppression  
like it's the big bad  
wolf,  
stamping out your agency*

*Every time anyone pulls the oppression card it  
diminishes  
the investigation  
when anyone afterwards calls  
it  
especially if they are Black or Brown*

*It's having your needs scoffed at  
like they don't matter because someone else has already decided you are irrational  
and*

*You don't know what you need  
your needs are framed as wants that are scrutinized as*

*greedy  
asking for too much*

*You've said:*

*"I get that it's not fair you're treated this way by virtue of being born colored, but you have to be*

P A T I E N T

*Patient because we have only just begun to see you as a full 5/5ths of a person.*

*Patient because it takes a while for everyone to treat you that way"*

*You say:*

*"if it was a generation ago, you wouldn't even be allowed to SPEAK, racism is not that big of a deal today"*

*I hear:*

*"let's go back to simpler times where that was still the case."*

*HE said: "we cannot sit idle and wait, we are done,*

*Tired of waiting,*

*We were born in wait, the time is now*

*Power is never given freely, it can only ever be  
taken."*

*he resisted like a son-of-a-bitch*

*Then they put the bullet in his head,*

—Tyler Smith, *A Radical Debater's Manifesto*, 2018.

## I. Introduction

Sodium, one of the major components of human blood, has a residence time of 260 million years. It will take 260 million years for the blood of the countless beings tossed off countless ships during the Atlantic slave trade to leave the ocean (Sharpe 2016, 41). The physical tolls of slavery are not even a percentage of the way forgotten by the Earth, if this is true, how can we expect that within seven or maybe eight generations the social consequences of enslavement have been ameliorated? Using the example of the denial of voting rights we can very much still see the legacies of Black non-being continued to this day.

If we understand that human social interaction is so much more intricate and difficult to study than the physical sciences, might we contend that legislation cannot be a one-size-fits-all solution? The neoliberalism, in which the Western world is very much inscribed, cleaved our world into two. For the purposes of this study, I will focus examination of this topic on the color redacted illusory sheen the state places over the ugly enduring truth that Black and white race relations are still informed by slavery's social, psychological, and economic legacy (Alexander 2012, Tatum 2017, Wang 2018).

Anthropologist Carol Anderson (2017) asserts, that by 1860, millions of enslaved people built 80% of the wealth of the United States. In return for those 250 years, "African Americans had received nothing but rape, whippings, murder, the dismemberment of families, and forced subjugation, illiteracy, and abject poverty" (2017). Anderson also argues that American courts transferred the control of Black persons from the plantation owner to the carceral state, meaning a new form of Black capture emerged following the abolishment of slavery, in the form of the birth of the prison industrial complex. Today this is continued under the guise of the drug war

and the relatively recent construct of illegal immigration, which continues to rhetorically equate Black/Brown life to criminality.

I was always fascinated by the role early anthropology played in perpetuating racist notions of inferior and superior, it was this origin that initially drew me to the discipline. I wanted to see for myself the basis of the pseudo-scientific proof, and how far of a leap had to be taken in order to draw such conclusions. I needed to know how much Black persons were hated just on the basis of how much melanin we possess, to know just how much of a threat we have historically been framed with.

As a policy debater, I had great difficulty grasping that once the data was collected and initially interpreted, I was not allowed to say much more, I was not allowed to get into the critical implications and fully warrant out why anything mattered or should matter. After three years, I abruptly shifted from physical to cultural anthropology because I needed my work to be of both the present and the future and not rooted, trapped, in the past. Aside from work in ethics there were no policies I could prescribe, I needed to be doing something about the world we live in and look to solutions, because by virtue of being born with Brown skin I was born a target, born sublegal; policies affect me and the people who look, think and act like me, exponentially more so than anyone of the majority.

I did not have much of a voice until I started debating my first semester in college and found that I had things to say that were actually worth listening to. I was born restless and uncomfortable, struggling even to articulate my own needs, because I was raised to be passive, small, and docile. My dad raised me this way in order to keep me safe, alive in a world against Black persons; my mother, because that is what Asian women have always been told was their role.

I became a debater in order to realize my own voice and agency and it awakened a passion for critical literature and theory that was far greater than my reverence for science and medicine.

Four years of college have transformed me into a professional agitator; I teach critical and performative debate in an effort to transform the everyday spectator into the requisite agents of change the world so desperately needs. This path, however, has not been a completely idealistic and error-free one, I did not become a debate superstar overnight, it took me almost two years to find the right way to frame my conversations about race in a way that did not make white people so uncomfortable that they papered new frameworks over my advocacies so they did not have to confront the ways debate and academia are inherently white and conservative, which perpetuates the systemic inequality both institutions claim to solve for.

In a straight white male dominated activity, I never quite felt like I belonged, like anyone saw or heard me until I made them. Until I took it upon myself to understand the insidious ways knowing was delegitimated based on the geo and body politics of the articulator. I saw first-hand the ways Whiteness protects itself by prioritizing knowledge that does not question or seek to disrupt their point of stasis.

Unconsciously it seems I have been in preparation of this thesis since the fall of 2015 when I entered the arena of collegiate debate and discovered the vast literature of critical scholarship devoted to race and performativity. As a participant in a white male dominated activity, I began to question my initial lack of success as an innate result of Whiteness, or my lack of it, that exists within Western institutions like academia. Even spaces meant for evaluation and solutions for racialized violence and inequality are not exempt from what has been termed “polite white supremacy” (Brown 2015). Polite white supremacy is the way in which race-based



societal inequalities are hidden beneath the veneer of neo-liberal political correctness, with the effect of sidestepping accountability for ongoing racial inequalities. Empirically, this can be seen in the normative way knowledge is arranged in a hierarchy of production with the white Western male academic on the very top and everyday Black/Brown persons on the bottom (Mignolo 2009, 2011).

It is due to the belief that whites can somehow produce knowledge that is neutral, they are simply vessel through which argumentation for the “other” can be made. It led me to question then, why Black/Brown academics are less mainstream? Are there really so few of us, or are we silenced? Why is it that in order for our narratives to matter it has to be echoed by a white person?

Last season my advocacy authors George Ciccariello-Mahr, who I will draw from in this thesis, a political theorist formerly of Drexel University was forced to resign amid a year of death threats from white supremacist groups wishing to silence him and his advocacy, and his university did very little to protect him. This was personally and professionally significant to me in that reading his book *Decolonizing Dialectics* (2016), was the first time I would have to explicitly confront and be inspired by the rhetoric and discourses both inside and surrounding social movements as my framework. It would be this anti-racist work that would inspire and inform so much of my academic interests and catalyze me towards a career in academia, and his own university, his platform towards legitimacy said nothing to help him. It led me to consider the words of Martin Luther King when he said “he who says nothing against atrocity is really in agreement with it,” if this is true, might we understand that nowhere is it safe to be Black and Brown in this world and work openly towards equality (Harriot 2015).

I embarked on this study for the following objectives: 1) Can our perceptions/conceptions of legitimacy illuminate a racial divide we refuse to openly discuss?; 2) How can we ensure the everyday citizen understands the insidious and pervasiveness of contemporary casual racism?; and finally 3) How are the merits of anti-racist arguments transformed and interpreted by society based on the geo-body-political positionality of the articulator?

This thesis aims to illustrate the ways Black/Brown bodies are still widely and prolifically framed as sublegal and less legitimate, by examining the rhetorical racialized violence committed against persons of color who are considered to be the most respected and accepted by mainstream society; the respectables, Black/Brown academics and professional athletes.

Simply put, my thesis is about using the way we respond to social movements as a lens to understanding the ways “colorblind” policies have failed in bridging our racial divide and have instead relocated the same problems under new terms. I will argue here that this does nothing more than create monuments for American chattel slavery and racial inequality within the minds of mainstream society. I contend that Black capture is ongoing and not past, and here I look to the racialized subjugation within academia and the NFL as microcosm and artifact that America is not the post-racial place it claims to be.

It is a goal of this thesis to imagine solutions to our current racial divide and analyze the viability of current methods of challenging the status quo, such as political institutions and actors and social movements. I posit that intersectionality offers part of the solution, in that colorblind legislation and societal practices will be examined here by someone not of the majority disposition and world view, and with an entirely different identity composition than all the scholars presented here in this work. I also contend intersectionality can prove to be

advantageous in allowing people of differing world views and experiences to view and examine the same information and offer different interpretations of the drawbacks and advantages of specific policy in order to minimize the amount of inequality that has been politely yet not unconsciously encoded into everyday life. This is a call to action to increase diversity not only in politics but academia as well, to signal a shift for accountability ensuring that no instance of whitewashing goes unchecked.

## II. Background

Jarvious Cotton cannot vote. Like his father, grandfather, great-grandfather and great-great-grandfather...Cotton's great-great-grandfather could not vote as a **slave**. His great-grandfather was **beaten to death by the Ku Klux Klan for attempting to vote**. His grandfather was prevented from voting by **Klan intimidation**. His father was barred from voting by **poll taxes and literacy tests**. Today, Jarvious Cotton cannot vote because he, like many black men in the United States, has been **labeled a felon** and is currently on parole. (Alexander 2012, 1)

This is but a single linear story of the historic and present inability for Black men in this country to ever be able to meaningfully participate in American democracy. The United States has a long history of denying Black men the right to vote. Legislatively, slaves were not fully human, obviously they were not allowed to vote, after the Civil War, the Ku Klux Klan emerged as a white supremacist vigilante group meant to restore order by disrupting government actions towards Black integration into mainstream society. Following the death of the Reconstruction era of American history the KKK got their wish and Black life was again allowed to be legislatively restricted and an era of legalized segregation known as Jim Crow had begun; poll taxes and literacy tests were created to stem involvement in political life.

Violence in protest is theorized to happen “because members of disadvantaged groups do not merely use politics to secure greater access to material resources; they perceive politics as a means of reinstating the relative worth of their groups” (Arriola 2013, 149).

Americans and American institutions have a long history of never meaningfully addressing white supremacy, this thesis aims to expose and illustrate the varied ways that in 2019 this is still the case by looking to the ways white supremacy is currently politely expressed in

what is not explicitly said. In post-racial colorblind America, Black persons who want a piece of the everything controlled by the white elite are forced to contort themselves into the modern equivalent of the house slave, known as the agent of white supremacy. That is, in conforming to and adopting white notions of success we are in turn maintaining white supremacist power by performing and perpetuating Whiteness and adding additional levels of subjugation to the everyday Black person (Brown 2015). This means becoming agent of our own domination.

### How Does the State Divide in Order to Conquer?

Since capitalism necessitates there to be a winner, it also necessitates exclusion, legal and illegal immigration are merely constructions for divisiveness and did not appear in the national discourse, or law, until the Civil Rights Era when it became time for white Americans to make concessions to meet the goals of the movement (Little, 2017). This worked two-fold, first by calling for the majority to openly condemn an entire group of people, and secondly by creating agents of white supremacy; creating a struggle for superiority between Black and brown persons (Brown, 2015). This would act as insurance minority populations would be too busy fighting over who would be second best to realize we are stronger together.

The structure of citizenship is key to this exclusion and runs counter to the state's goal of maintaining a white majority. Without this barrier, migrant workers would be free to return to their families after the harvest season until the next year, but due to their "illegal" status it is too dangerous or risky to go back home (Holmes 2013, loc. 106). Migrant workers are then forced to bring their families and stay in America, living in deplorable conditions in fear of authority, which makes them appear as criminal and resistant to US authority or way of life that feeds the popular American discourse.

## The Structures of Violence

Discussions of state violence as illustrative of lack of legitimacy, will not be limited here to direct physical violence but will also and most importantly include political violence like structural, symbolic and every day violence.

Structural violence will be defined here as social inequalities and hierarchies that are inscribed along lines of social categorization like class, race, gender, and sexuality. Symbolic violence, as the internalization of forms of structural violence through the unconscious consent of those being dominated by the power structures. Everyday violence, to the uninitiated eye, is even more insidious and harder to mitigate. Holmes understands it to be the “bureaucratic dysfunction of health care and the lenses of perception used by well-meaning and idealistic healthcare and social service workers” (Holmes 2013, 109).

These forms of violence produce, conceal and legitimize each other, so it is imperative to include them in our analysis (Holmes, 2013).

It is the aim of this thesis to illustrate the varied ways that the media, law, and order, in America are instruments of social control and profit, rather than necessary protections of the right to life and liberty. The social consequences of slavery which I will refer to here as the ongoing-ness of Black capture (Sharpe, 2016), are very much at play in the everyday despite what this “colorblind” post-Civil Rights society might want you to think.

### Constructing and Maintaining the “Other” Through Dehumanization

While examining the global phenomenon of Black non-being, journalist Richard Prince (2017) posed the following question: “Capitalism’s most urgent question [is]: What’s more valuable—a human life or the fraying concept of the sanctity of state borders?”

This is going to be a very important question when discussing the social forces that legitimize the police brutality and misconduct aimed at Black and Brown persons in America. We should first note here that within this nation there are two borders: that which delineates the bounds of the nation state, and the insidiously silent epistemic one that separates “us” and “them,” ethically.

This separation is supported by our nation’s capitalist values and Social Darwinism, in which life is reduced to a game, a simulation in which we must all compete to have the most money at the expense of all others (Wang, 2018). This is the condition that necessitated the horrors of human chattel slavery and the ongoing conditions of Black capture, which will be discussed more in depth later (Sharpe, 2016). We can reduce this quote further by looking at the lack of success the state has in their efforts to control their increasingly militarized borders through the military and police, and how this spurs conservative lawmakers to consider more discriminatory laws in order to protect those willing to accept the status quo without question from the “criminal, domestic terrorists” who demand reform.

If we can use words to strip the humanity from a person and hide behind the saying “sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me”, inflicting unimaginable violence against what was formerly known as a human being can be justified, applauded and denied in the same breath. Psychologist David Livingstone-Smith says:

In dehumanizing others, we exclude them from the circle of moral obligation. We can then kill, oppress, and enslave them with impunity. Taking the life of a dehumanized person becomes of no greater consequence than crushing an insect under one's boot (2011).

This means that society isn't going to feel compelled to help the "terrorists" reintegrate into society, by giving them a second chance through jobs and supporting prison and justice reforms. If we look at these observable truths of the denial of Black *human* status in America, we will see that Black is still sublegal and under attack; it is visceral and should make sympathetic people work to stop it.

### Katrina, Michael, Trayvon & the Birth of BLM

Five years ago, saw the emergence of Black Lives Matter in response to the shocking verdict of one of the first widely circulated instances of an innocent young Black man being murdered, the court basically said the death was justified because the perpetrator feared for his life due to the bag of candy in Trayvon's hand (blacklivesmatter.com, "herstory" accessed May 2019).

For many Americans, both white and Black, this was the first time our "colorblind" society had to confront that racism was still a barrier to justice. Black Lives Matter wanted to make explicitly clear that Black lives mattered too, and Black death should weigh equal to white death on society's conscience. The movement aims to make other instances of the enduring dehumanization and violence against Black people visible.

When people try to take government accountability into their own hands the state always finds a way to criminalize them, to silence their message, so that it doesn't have to change.

In order to adequately frame the terms in which rhetorical criminalization leads to silent unrecognized secondary victimization, I find it best to begin with the apathy Americans have been conditioned to display to ethnic and social groups that are not our own.



In order to unpack the above statement, let's go back to the morning of Trump's inauguration, in an underpublicized act, instead of allowing the constitutional freedoms to protest and assemble, 234 protesters were arrested in a field outside Washington D.C. (Leven 2017). If you looked up photos of the Inauguration Day protests you will see tens of thousands of people protesting Donald Trump's presidency, peacefully and civilly, and only a few depicting the limited instances of the violence that often accompanies protesting (Rossman 2017; Brown 2015). The idea of Black protesters being criminalized has been naturalized into the discourse surrounding the legitimacy of social movements and protests in contemporary America. Long before any physical violence or vandalism ensues, Black protesters are already labeled "thug", "looter", "criminal", and "complainers", while white people can freely without consequence go out and destroy public property following the victories of their favorite sports team, the media does not criminalize them, they call them "revelers" (Brown 2015). This reduces peaceful Black activism and resistance to criminal activity and white celebrants who go too far to good old-fashioned fun. Calling protesters criminals in the media conditions mainstream society into believing the movements do not have legitimacy, so the American people can justify standing by and with apathic eyes watch while the same militarized tactics used during the Civil Rights Movement are resurrected without once questioning the use of force.

In both instances of protest the government chooses to respond with the same iron fist. Instead of acting as peacekeepers, the police took to militarized tactics while the military was deployed to stand guard as if signs and chanting are somehow tantamount to destroying property and pillaging.

The court would go on to say that even those swept up in the mass arrest who did not personally throw bricks into windows were still guilty by association by not leaving when a few

people went violent, for wanting to be a part of the protesting anyway (Rossman 2017). They were charged with multiple felonies including that of rioting; if convicted they each stand to spend decades in jail (Rossman 2017). The collateral consequences of being labeled a felon means lifelong stigma, the inability to drive, get a job, housing or welfare and keep their children, almost ensuring recidivism happens (Alexander 2012).

The victimization that results from these additional sanctions is unrecognized as punishment by the courts. This means it does not have to be disclosed before a person pleads guilty, which is the most likely course of action for a person, even one who is innocent, who must use an overburdened public defender who is likely to pressure them to take the plea bargain by telling them how daunting the minimum sentence may be (Alexander 2012). It also means no one is trying to reduce the residual effects of incarceration, the full extent of which many judges or lawyers know very little about before they encourage and sentence people to that fate. The severity of the consequences sends the message that those who attempt to protest the rhetoric of white nationalism in America will never be safe or free under this new administration.

Emory University professor Carol Anderson boldly asserts to the contrary of the aforementioned misrepresentation, that when slavery officially ended:

Southern courts transferred full control of black people from the plantation owner to a carceral state. The instrument of re-enslavement was a brutal deployment of sheriffs, judges, and hard-labor punishment for black only offenses such as carrying a firearm, making an insulting gesture, or stealing a pig. African Americans were then swept into the prison system to have their labor fill the coffers of the state and line the pockets of the plantation, mine, and lumber mill owners (2016, 28).

This claim is bold in many ways, first by daring to point out a very obvious fact that opposes the mainstream narrative that the primary function of policing is to keep the peace. Empirically we

know that this is a smokescreen, as the majority of arrests made are drug related, and since most countries view addiction as a health problem these are superfluous arrests (Alexander 2012). Alexander says that the media that perpetuates these falsehoods, is a “fictional gloss placed on a brutal system of racialized oppression and control” (2012, 59). Trials, the key to “justice” are rare, most people arrested in the name of the Drug War will never even meet with a lawyer and when they do go to trial witnesses are coerced or paid by the government to give testimony for the prosecution. Clinton’s drug policies made penalties so severe it made it easy for overworked public defenders to coerce their clients into pleading guilty, especially if they were innocent, believing it would allow them to quickly get back to their lives only to find out that the effects of a “felony” designation will be an impediment for the duration of their lives (Alexander 2012).

### Terrorist Designation

Political opponents of BLM have worked to re-colonize the oppositional energy of the movement by exploiting instances when Black protesters have broken windows or shown any kind of vandalism as justification for their campaign to have the movement designated as domestic terrorism (Ciccarriello-Maher 2017, Khan-Cullors & Bandele 2017). This would have the effect of making all anti-racist movements in this country illegal.

In the case of BLM, the state labeled them “violent black nationalists”, and domestic terrorists. This political designation works to discredit all anti-racist movements in the US (Khan-Cullors & Bandele 2017). If it is a terrorist organization, then so are its members and the people who look like them. If you are a terrorist you cannot also be a victim which denies Black people sympathy and the many auxiliary services being a victim entails.

Who has ever heard of a terrorist being arrested and charged with a misdemeanor? This is empirically proven by looking comparatively at Black and white sentencing for the same crime. To the knowledge of the BLM founders, not a single white supremacist group has ever received this same designation, despite the senseless violence and murder that they have inflicted upon marginalized groups since the abolishment of slavery (Khan-Cullors & Bandele 2017).

### NFL Kneeling Protests

I focus my research questions here on social movements within the NFL as microcosm and artifact that America is not the post-racial place it claims to be. In our colorblind post-civil rights world, it is no longer appropriate to openly discriminate against someone who is innocent. Today, we hide our racial biases under the guise of upholding justice, accountability and respect for one's country, but as I will illustrate these standards only matter in relation to Black/Brown bodies (Alexander 2012, Bonilla-Silva 2003, Illing 2018, Carrington 2018).

Professional football is considered an arena where masculinity is best observed. It is a hotbed for exercising American nationalism. It is violent and full of military metaphors: it's played on a "gridiron" there are "blitzes" and "bombs thrown into the end zone" teams "march" down the field to conquer one another (Illing 2018).

Ben Carrington (2018), professor of sociology and journalism at the University of Southern California says, "people like to talk about sports as a post-racial space in American society" as one of the first integrated arenas of American society it would make sense that this is true. However, he goes on to say "but it's probably the most racially tinged spectacle in modern society." This is substantiated by the language commentators and analysts use to talk about white and Black athletes and shows that race is always there, always looming. White quarterbacks are

referred to as “heady” or “hard-working” or a “coach on the field,” and Black quarterbacks are “mobile” or “athletic” or “explosive.” These descriptors are merely stereotypes that are constantly reinforced with coded language. This is why sports concerns and confirms the notion of racial difference more than any other cultural medium (Carrington 2018 & Illing 2018).

The real objection to the NFL protests is not the awareness it sought to bring or that it actually offended anyone for undermining the importance of country and the sacrifices made by the military in upholding our freedoms until the conservative media told them it did, rather it is the result of power dynamics, in this protest, “Kaepernick has shown agency and power in speaking about political issues... this is about an organization trying to reassert its power over the player” (Carrington 2018 & Illing 2018, no page number).

Many sports psychologists look to the intersection of race and professional athleticism because it very much is a Black male dominated “industry” (Illing 2018). In taking a closer look to this word industry, it implies that profit is to be had and since most professional sports teams are white owned and the majority of players are Black, many scholars liken this power and economic structure to modern slavery this comparison has only been made stronger in the response to this protest movement.

Colin Kaepernick has essentially been blacklisted from the NFL for expressing dissent with the state, our very fine president responded by saying, “Wouldn’t you love to fire those sons of bitches?” and Houston Texans owner Bob McNair responded: “we can’t have the inmates running the prison” (Blackistone 2017). The prison—there is no clearer link to Black capture and contemporary notions of inferiority and inherent criminality than this statement which sees McNair equating himself as master and jailer.

These instances of flagrant demonization helped to convince and convert those without an opinion to believe that the primarily Black professional athletes have no place in politics or reason.

As outlined by Arriola (2013) there is a causal relationship between violence in protest and police actions in the context of the multiethnic authoritarian state of Ethiopia. Contrary to the popular belief of general society, violent protest does not lead to violent responses of the police, in fact Arriola (2013) points that this is the opposite of what happens, protest is transformed in real time in response to the actions of society that includes the police and the citizenry.

Arriola states that

governments will attempt to suppress protests as quickly as possible, lest they become more threatening forms of dissent that destabilize the entire political system. But some scholars claim that escalating levels of repression can lead to a backlash among citizens by stoking a sense of outrage that feeds further antigovernment mobilization and thereby greater violence (2013, 149).

Absent understanding for why violence transpires within protest, it is easy for society to write protest off as illegitimate.

### III. Literature Review: Illustrating Black as the American Imaginary's Positionality of Guilt

Though the white liberal imagination likes to feel temporarily bad about black suffering, there really is no mode of empathy that can replicate the daily strain of knowing that as a black person you can be killed for simply being black: no hands in your pockets, no playing music, no sudden movements, no driving your car, no walking at night, no walking in the day, no turning onto this street, no entering this building, no standing your ground, no standing here, no standing there, no talking back, no playing with toy guns, no living while black (Rankine 2015). (Sharpe 2016, 16).

I, like most other Black Americans, was raised under the mentality that the key to surviving and thriving while Black was to conform: speak the white man's respectable form of English, go to school and get good grades, go to college, maybe graduate school, then get a well-paying job and contribute to society so that you can *maybe* be seen as an equal. So that we might survive white suspicion. I mention this to foreground the ways in which we are conditioned to accept the lower status we are assigned at birth without question. I mention this tightly held belief Black persons are raised to uphold, in juxtaposition to the narratives of racialized violence against the "Black respectables," this chapter details. I will argue here that a "Black respectable" is a mythological positionality, it is a moving target imbedded within the societal imaginary that says there is an end date to racialized subjugation through embodying Whiteness and laying waste to what we know is true. To simply chose to forget slavery and its legacies, but as you know, in the split second it takes to assign guilt to another man and decide that pulling a trigger is acceptable and warranted; there is no flashing sign that says "I actually live here," "PhD holder," "neurosurgeon," or "behavioral aide." No. The only thing that registers in the single second that changes everything, that shatters and forever alters the lives of every loved one, acquaintance, and fellow community member, is skin color.

In 2014, British journalist Reni Eddo-Lodge published a blog entry entitled: “Why I’m no longer talking to white people about race,” the response and support was immediate and spurred a follow-up in the form a 2017 book of the same title. Eddo-Lodge argues that because white people never have to be conscious of what it means to be white in the same way a Black person understands their Blackness, “anytime they’re vaguely reminded of this fact, they interpret it as an affront” (2017, x). That is, white people often become defensive to the point that they shut down when a person of color indicates that their behavior is problematic and unbecoming of an ally.

It is unproductive then, for my purposes, to begin dialogue from within a majority white space about the dynamics of race by widely proclaiming that my project concerns the institutional racism I posit we here, are all complicit in. Instead, as Eddo-Lodge states because “[t]he journey towards understanding structural racism still requires people of color to prioritize white feelings” (2017, x), it is fruitless to explicitly address our current issues in justice as a racial one. This is due to the implicit dangers of discussing race with someone who refuses to see color lest it offend us. To be Black or Brown and expose your humanity, to show your rightful anger and frustration in regard to someone’s blatant refusal to attempt to understand that another less talked about narrative about “equality” exists, is to re-inscribe in the white imaginary the stereotype of the angry Black person. Instead of being framed as advocate and educator, we are re-imagined, re-framed, as a bully, a threat to their personal safety; anything we said previously has now lost all merit.

It is necessary then, that we re-frame, re-locate, the beginning of our discussions on racialized violence through exposing the lack of legitimacy that Black voices, social movements and activism have in the eye of the state and society. Acts of silent protestation and civil disobedience will be used here in order to illustrate the ways the media is able to build counter-



narratives from the silence, as this will expose the racialized biases capitalism allows and necessitates (Kunreuther 2016).

Eddo-Lodge goes on to say being Black or Brown is a life of “self-censorship”, “[your] options are: speak your truth and face the reprisal or bite your tongue and get ahead in life (2017, xii).” This last quotation can be exemplified within the hallowed halls of academia, George Ciccariello-Mahr, Henry Louis Gates Jr., and Marc Lamont Hill were not exempt from being victims of racialized violence, the distinction here between their stories and those of Freddie Gray, Michael Brown, Trayvon Martin, and countless others; they are still alive, by virtue of being Black/Brown respectables (Eltagouri 2017, Lamont Hill 2017).

In the post-Civil Rights Era, it is now understood that racism is unfashionable and has no place in our societies, so we find little covert ways to sow division along racial lines by focusing on credibility. Today Black persons are denied legitimate agency in the political sphere under the logic that criminals are less than human, and therefore should be excluded from the conversation (Alexander 2012). Instead of fixing the problems and sources of racism the people point to in articulating the ways society needs to change, the conservative media coopt the conversation and shift the narrative away from the state and towards the individual. Those willing to speak out against things like racism and systemic inequality, are stigmatized using labels and false counter narratives to undercut any efforts meant to bring reform. We can see this most evidently in the way protesters are treated and framed as enemies of the state, in the way they are greeted by militarized tactics in order to ensure the peace, long before any actual violence or disorder occurs (Brown 2015; Arriola 2013; Ciccariello Maher 2017).

Much of contemporary and mainstream anti-racist work focuses on finding the prejudiced individuals in societies and attempting to change them through re-education initiatives (Bonilla-

Silva 2003). I contend that this framework is ineffective and instead point towards institutional reform as basis for anti-racist work. I posit that this reform would best come from the grassroots as opposed to imposing new legislation using the same institutions and actors that created the current issues in codified racism (Mignolo 2009). Here I offer grassroots mobilization as a decolonial project in the form of social movements and a Truth and Reconciliation Commission for human chattel slavery in America.

If the agent of change is not a traditional institutional actor, questions of legitimacy will inevitably become part of the question (Mignolo 2011). Legitimacy is a huge factor in determining the success of a social movement. It is for this reason that our discussions of a social movement's viability must begin on the level of public perception, namely, what are the largest factors that contribute to the idea of legitimacy? Discourse on the level of the media and government actors have the largest effect on shaping public opinion especially about things like crime and criminality, which I will argue is the largest impediment to social reform efforts (Wang 2018).

We think we know how the justice system works because of all the images that are readily available in the media, television is overloaded with fictional dramas about crime, police and the court systems. These dramas, like the evening news, are told from the point of view of law enforcement, while focusing on individual stories of crime and punishment. This perpetuates the myth that the only function of the criminal justice system is to keep our streets safe from dangerous criminals and punish them.

This has the effect of orienting the public into viewing the police as the only sympathetic and valid perspective. It also has the effect of falling prey to Bonilla-Silva's (2003) critique that focusing on the level of the individual denies deeper understanding of the bigger phenomenology

surrounding why things happens. Crime, particularly drug crime, under this framework can be reduced to a problem of the Black community, but if we were to look at it on a macro level that takes legislation and discriminatory policing practices into account should be viewed as a failure of the system rather than Black individuals. Empirically we can see this in the way the oppositional energies of anti-racist movements are re-colonized by the powers that be, through criminalization and flooding the conversation with other narratives (Ciccariello-Mahr, 2017). In the case of Black Lives Matter, we can see this in numerous ways: the petitions to make the White House recognize the movement as a domestic terrorist organization; and the creation of counter narratives meant to silence their activism by framing that Blue Lives Matter and All Lives Matter more, because these lives are innocent.

Michelle Alexander (2012) contends that police television shows, “are the modern-day equivalent of the old movies portraying happy slaves, the fictional gloss placed on a brutal system of racialized oppression and control” (59). In painting policing in such a positive light, we rob ourselves of important conversations regarding the ways the system of policing and incarceration are actually harmful to society. Specifically, in this thesis I contend that in failing to address problematic institutions such as policing (as opposed to targeting racist individuals) a secondary victimization of Black/Brown persons occurs. When high crime rates are framed as an issue of the Black community as opposed to an issue of the nature of corrections as an instrument of control over Black persons, beginning with fugitive slave laws and now as the War on Drugs, the stigma and criticism falls on the person as opposed to the power dynamics and laws that discriminately contribute to oppression (Anderson 2016, Alexander 2012).

Castro-Gomez (2002) argues that understanding contemporary race relations in the U.S. means examining the "alterity-generating" properties of the state, that “excludes from its

imaginary the hybridity, multiplicity, ambiguity, and contingency of different forms of life” (citation with page number). By nature, the state is a conservative institution, it wishes to maintain and reproduce its ideologies through the creation of perceived and ambiguous social categorizations that exist on a hierarchy. These categories include but are not limited to race, religion, sexuality and gender identity, and have the function of imposing binaries in which there is a singular right way to be, to live, and everything else is wrong or immoral by contrast. This binary removes from the official narrative the possibility that people can be more than one thing; a person can be convicted of a crime yet also not necessarily be dangerous and immoral. A person can question the bounds of gender and sexuality and its fluidity and still ascribe to religion. Identity is not zero sum, that is, rarely are aspects of who we are mutually exclusive to each other. This idea, “intersectionality,” was first introduced into conversations of combating race, hegemony, and patriarchal hierarchies by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), which focuses on utilizing the lived experiences of “marginalized subjects” in order to solve for oppressive power structures (Nash 2008). Intersectionality materialized out of critical race theory in the late 80’s and early 90’s as a movement from within academia meant to highlight the failings of neo-liberalism’s fixation with neutrality, objectivity and “colorblind” policies.

Understanding the “ambiguity” or imaginativeness of racial categorization has the effect of subverting racial and gender binaries; this destabilization of what it means to be of a specific site of cultural being allows a space for deeper exploration of the role of identity and experience (Castro-Gomez 2002, Nash 2008). This means that it allows a framework to examine the role identity, like race and gender, have in shaping personal experience. Solvency here, looks towards reconciliation of intra-group differences that prevent solidarity by explicitly speaking of the differences in experiences based on the varied ways color, sexuality and gender identity,

undercuts cohesion within larger more macro groups such as “biological race” and religion. Scholars posit that the notion of race as a biological reality is subjective, and nothing more than a political tool meant to polarize (Wang 2018). Amin Maalouf (2003) takes this a step further in asserting what is more important than this linear “vertical” notion of heritage through descent, is the idea of a “horizontal heritage” that says: “men are more the sons of their time than their fathers.” In forensic anthropology we are often tasked to uncover “racial” markers in human remains in order to aid law enforcement in identification, unlike television one cannot simply look at a skull and determine “race”, instead metric analysis is used to compare the remains to known samples. It should be noted here that “race” is not something that can be determined, an ancestral place of origin is found instead (Saur, et al., 2016). Scientifically “race” means very little; it is a political positionality rather than a biological one.

Nash (2008) argues that intersectional theory “has become the primary analytic tool that feminist and anti-racist scholars deploy for theorizing identity and oppression.” Nash later goes on to present “four tensions” with this one-size fits all framework: the term is nebulously defined; there is no fixed intersectional research methodology; Black women and their narratives are idealized and exploited as the epitome of an intersectional subject; and there is a lack of empirical evidence that its application is actually solvent. This thesis aims secondarily to position and realize intersectional theory through utilizing narrative theory in academia.

### Narrative Theory & Qualifications

We live in a world where qualifications have never mattered more, largely due to economic competition and debates about the legitimacy of social movements and protest.

Rosa Parks was nowhere near the first Black person to be arrested for not giving up her seat on a bus in Alabama, so what was it about her that catalyzed a community into action? She

was a good, church going granny with no prior record, no children out of wedlock and no problematic immediate relatives (Alexander 2012). Previous Black people who tried to oppose the status quo who did not have a perfect past did not receive support or elicit sympathy from equal rights activists because even in this line of work Black criminals need not apply. The Montgomery bus boycott organizers were waiting for the perfect person to be the face of their movement; anyone with a blemished past would undermine the legitimacy, and political agency of the protest.

Today we do not view unwed mother as unfavorably, today we delineate worthiness along terms such as criminal and terrorist.

Applied linguistics researchers Elinor Ochs and Lisa Capps (1996) say that narratives are a universal and fundamental genre of storytelling and persuasion because it emerges early in children's communicative development.

Scholars within the fields of culture and gender studies have made appeals that the normative objective lens academic scientific writing utilizes should be reformed to include subjects in order to "situate themselves with respect to the objects they are visualizing" (Ochs & Capps 1996). This is in order to implicate the personal as a means to inviting new forms of critique and imagining new ways of being, intersectionally. Ochs and Capps (1996), state that using the personal and inserting the self in all arenas of academic discourse could solve for sexism and racism within academia because "narrative and the self are inseparable" (20). That is things like racism, sexism and misogyny are always encoded in academic writing, and because it is framed as objective there is no avenue to critique such linguistic choices for what they are.

Personal narratives have the potential to help solve for hidden hierarchies within academia, because personal narratives have the ability to "shape how we attend to and feel about

events...narratives are versions of reality. They are embodiments of one or more points of view rather than objective, omniscient accounts...narratives are tales that tellers and listeners map onto tellings of personal experience...even the most silent of listeners is an author of an emergent narrative” (Ochs & Capps 1996, 21). This thesis argues that it was the work of narrative theory that allowed conservative media outlets to transform those without opinions about the protest movement Colin Kaepernick ignited within the NFL against police brutality, into virulent opposition to the protests as a movement against the national anthem and thus America as a whole.

This thesis makes an argument for the normative use of personal narratives as qualifications and testimony within academia in an effort to unabstract the everyday violence inflicted upon academics of color, the Black and Brown respectables society tells us we must become in order for racism to reach its end point.

#### Dialectics & Decolonial Theory: a Differential Framework for Solving Status Quo Issues

Much analysis has been done in dialectics and decolonization that focuses on social movements, but it is limited almost exclusively to the context of South and Central America (Mignolo 2009, Mignolo 2011, Ciccariello-Maher 2017). Very few studies locate their analysis in the context of the United States, those that do, limit their analysis to the Occupy movement and even more brief discussion of Black Lives Matter (Mignolo 2011, Ciccariello-Maher 2017, Wang 2018). Few scholars have attempted to linguistically decolonize in either Israel or the United States, those who have shown solidarity for Palestinian citizens have their efforts silenced by being labeled anti-Semitic, due to the perceived myth that the oppressed cannot in turn also act as oppressors (Tabar & Desai 2017). We see this enacted not only on the streets in Israel but especially within Israeli and American Universities where much activism is centered. It is

because the academy is the source of legitimate knowledge that our efforts to epistemically decolonize should begin here.

To decolonize academically is to break from old ways of knowledge gathering and qualification as these ways inscribe Black inferiority and as Sharpe says, this causes the Black academic to commit epistemic violence against the self (2016). What is meant by this is since academia is predicated off past scholarship, how do we begin to move towards new scholarship that cannot be supported because past scholarship or historic records have been destroyed or falsified? The key to moving forward, she posits lies in the introduction of personal experience in the Wake of slavery, illustrating the many ways our lives are always caught in past conditions of Black capture. This thesis attempts to embody this using personal narrative in conjunction with scholarship.

### Methods

Qualitative research on racism, frames and locates the problem of racism as structural rather than individualistic. These scholars say that racism is the collective result of all actions and thoughts of all individuals of a society, “for these analysts ‘racism’ is not a free-floating ideology but intrinsically connected to the field of racialized social relations.” Instead of surveys, their research focuses on “ethnographies, interviews, discourse analysis, and focus groups which allow them to get a deeper understanding of respondents’ views” (Bonilla Silva 2003).

“The flexibility of the dominant racial ideology enhances its legitimizing role because it allows for accommodation of contradictions, exceptions, and new information” (Bonilla Silva 2003). The post-civil rights era saw a shift in the conversations surrounding the legitimacy of biological race on intellectual capacity, the inappropriateness of racialized statements in public discourse, and equality for all to name a few, the shift being including these ideals in the public



discourse in a way that does not threaten white supremacy. This new “colour blind racism” is now inscribed along cultural deficiencies as opposed to biological, that is, racist ideas are centered on notions that Blacks are economically behind because they do not want to work, and would rather take the easy route to money by becoming criminals and selling drugs; as opposed to simply saying Black people are generally unintelligent and therefore they cannot get the good high paying jobs. The victims of structural racial inequality, here, are re-envisioned within the majority’s imaginary as the product of their own making thus sidestepping from any sense of accountability of the role of white supremacy in everyday life (Bonilla Silva 2003).

This study aims to understand racism as something with a collective nature “and thus affects the consciousness of all actors in any society” (Bonilla-Silva,2003). This was accomplished through the utilization of qualitative data collected from communications students at ISU, this entailed asking open ended neutral questions and doing analysis of the general themes and views that were continually expressed that point to the fact racist sentiments still exist on a prolific level that we cannot grasp because of the way we dance around what we want to say due political correctness.

The collateral consequences of law and governance do not equally burden all men and women in this country, and due to capitalism and cultural hegemony those most effected by political decision making are primarily Black and Brown (Wang 2018, Anderson 2017, Alexander 2012).

#### IV. Survey Results and Analysis

The majority of current studies of contemporary racism focus on the utilization of surveys in order to understand how racism operates currently, Bonilla-Silva (2003), states this premise is ineffective because it underestimates the true extent of race-based beliefs among white survey respondents in colorblind America. Bonilla-Silva sites two main reasons for this: First, following the Civil Rights Movement researchers failed to adapt their Jim Crow Era questions to measure racial attitudes, to reflect the change in social consciousness and shift towards race neutral terms. This had the effect of miscalculating the level of tolerance whites had for Blacks. Second, the interpretation of ‘agree’ and ‘disagree’ answers are subjective in that there is no consensus on how to rate your feelings on a spectrum. “In sharp contrast to survey researchers, most qualitative researchers conceive of ‘racism’ as having a structural foundation (Bonilla-Silva 2003).” This study aims to understand racism as something with a collective nature “and thus affects the consciousness of all actors in any society” (Bonilla-Silva 2003).

In order to meet my study objectives, I utilized survey data collected from communications students at Illinois State University, this entailed asking open ended neutral questions and doing qualitative analysis of the general themes and views that were expressed. This was done for a few reasons, first, that this examination would point to or illustrate the ways racist sentiments still exist on a prolific level we are unaware of because of the way we dance around what we want to say due political correctness. Second, I chose to survey students in the Communications department because the curriculum involves media and source criticism from COM 110 and upwards, with some professors and therefore also courses in the department that are dedicated to media studies and criticism as well as social movements. This background lead to the asking of a secondary question: what extent, if any, does curriculum play in challenging

epistemology? That is, I wondered if taking a few courses in the department was enough to raise to the level of consciousness the extent of negative racialized thinking, and if there would then be a lower level of prevalence for internalizing counter framing narratives meant to silence minority activism. To what extent would my study participants understand the purpose and agency of the NFL kneeling movement, and what inaccuracies would be repeated when asked what they understood about the movement.

I chose not to focus on race as a metric for analysis because I did not want to be biased in my qualitative analysis and read too much into perceived “racetalk”, further, minorities are also susceptible to falling prey to these colorblind race strategies and I did not want to be able to overlook those trends due to race (Bonilla-Silva 2003). Instead, the only personal information I asked was their year in school, major and minor, and the number of communications courses taken at the 100, 200, and 300 level.

I posed the following questions to assess beliefs about the role of inequality, civil disobedience, peacekeeping efforts by the police, Colin Kaepernick and the political agency of individuals in society:

1. Are we all seen as equal in the eyes of the law? Is there a demographic you believe is treated unequally? Provide examples for why or why not you believe so if you can.
2. Should personal principles matter in terms of the law, for example, if individuals think a law is unjust is it important for the health of society that they follow it anyway?
3. If you can, share an image you recall of police action in keeping the peace during a protest or political demonstration. Do you think the response was appropriate? Why or why not?

4. What do you understand/know about the NFL kneeling protest movement that was begun by Colin Kaepernick? Do you think society and/or the NFL responded appropriately, why or why not?
5. Do you think political demonstrations during the national anthem is appropriate for protest, or a sign of disrespect, and why do you think so?
6. What do you think is the most appropriate way to protest state actions we don't agree with? Why?

Before I delve into the survey results and unpack them, I would first like to introduce the four colorblind racism frames that I will use for discursive analysis.

Bonilla Silva (2003) presents four main frames colorblind racism is hidden behind:

1. Abstract liberalism: framing race issues in the language of liberalism, white people appear reasonable and moral while denouncing the most realistic approaches to ameliorating systemic racial injustice. “For instance, by using the tenets of the free market ideology in the abstract, they can oppose affirmative action as a violation of the norm of equal opportunity.”
2. Naturalization: Naturalization is a frame that allows whites to explain away racial phenomena by suggesting that they are natural occurrences. For example, in claiming that people gravitating towards other people who are like them, segregation can be justified; a white person's preference for whiteness can then be made non-racial since “black people do it too”
3. Biologization of culture: “uses culturally-based arguments such as ‘blacks do not put much emphasis on education’ or ‘they have too many babies’ to explain blacks’ position in society. Because this cultural rationale is discussed as something that is somewhat

fixed” culture is thus politely transformed to a biological reality, it is unchanging just like your DNA.

4. Minimization of racism: minimizing the significance of discrimination in the United States (‘It’s better now than in the past’ or ‘There is discrimination, but there are plenty of jobs out there’). Therefore, whites can accept facts such as the racially motivated murder and accuse Black people of being hypersensitive and “playing the race card” or “using race as an excuse.” Yes, racism still exists within this frame, but its such a small thing isolated to a few bad individuals it should not stand in the way for Black people to do what they need to do to succeed in life.

The first three questions were not meant for deep rhetorical or discursive analysis, but rather to get a snapshot of how my study participants openly view the role of racism in the world at large, and how amenable they are to non-violent protest tactics by way of introducing and then questioning their support of civil disobedience and protester’s rights to assemble non-violently. The responses to these questions would be significant in that they would hopefully illustrate the ways media has actually led to the lessening of legitimacy for social movements. If I contend that media sells the best when forged in greatest opposition, then anti-racist protests would feature most prominently in the news than even feminist or climate change protests.

If I had utilized traditional surveys and statistical analysis, the responses to the first question would have very easily yielded a bimodal curve, there were two stories presented here. First, at around half of responses, participants stated that they did not think every race was seen as equal under the eyes of the law, citing “African Americans,” “immigrants,” “women, people of color, LGBTQ+, Arabs/Muslims” as being treated unfavorably and unfairly by the state. Of these respondents, only three people cited the reality of the difference in punishment between

people of different races for the same crime. The second narrative can be broken down further into two camps, and very easily falls under the guise of “racetalk” strategies. One focuses on the personal stating that they “personally have never encountered inequality in the perspective of law,” the second plays innocent stating something along the lines of “we are all equally bound to the same laws.” Bound to the same laws, the participants are very agile in their deflection of racism, this answer implies that we will all face some kind of judgment from the law regardless of skin color, this narrative technique explicitly ignores whether the participant believed laws equally protected and work towards the defense of everyone in society, which is the larger charge of the question. This looks towards Bonilla Silva’s (2003) fourth frame, the minimization of racism.

If we look back towards both the background and literature review sections, we can see that this is not true. It is a way of reframing the question so as not to have to have to answer for or admit to white racial privilege (Bonilla-Silva 2003). This is a significant assessment in that this is the opening question and does not even come close to actively making the participant confront race as the following questions increasingly do. Of those who fell under this second strategy of denial of race based differences in law, not a single person provided an example to substantiate this claim, whereas those who disagreed with the notion of equality readily supplied at least one example, but usually multiple, of who they thought was unfairly treated and were disadvantaged by society.

Questions two and three did not yield very much information. Almost every single response to question two regarding civil disobedience said some version of, “it is absolutely important that all laws in society were followed regardless of how we personally feel about them,” this response is telling and important when we get into the discussion of the responses to

the sixth question. A few participants said things along the lines of “if the law is unjust don’t follow it” or “if the law is unfair to anyone in society no one should follow it.” Question three was unfruitful because only a handful of respondents could recall an instance of police interaction with protesters. Almost 50 out of 59 survey respondents could not think of a time where they saw police interact with protesters in the media, not mention of a contemporary or historic example like the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. This could indicate a few things, 1) my study participants did not care about the survey enough to recall an instance, 2) public education systems whitewash and water down these kinds of images that point the state in a negative light in order to abstract this kind of violence, or 3) my survey questioned failed in pointing participants towards the fact they could use historic examples. Three respondents were able to recall instances they saw the police interact with protesters, one stated that it was appropriate because “the police have to do what they have to do in order to ensure the safety of the people.” The other two participants depicted militarized tactics of “peacekeeping” and stated that “it was absolutely not okay behavior to use physical harm via batons or shooting beanbags at protesters”.

Question four was meant to understand how pervasive and effective the media campaign to coopt the narrative from Colin Kaepernick was and whether it could expose the full extent racial inequality still plays in society by looking towards the first racially integrated part of American society, sports. I wanted to see how distorted Kaepernick’s argument became after two years of television, newspaper and social media coverage, as well as, what, if any, key phrases of the counter narratives meant to delegitimize Kaepernick’s efforts, would be repeated.

Quite a few people answered that they were unsure about any of the details of the NFL protest movement. While the rest of participants were able to outline what their conception of the

movement that has stuck with them. About one quarter of these responses stated that Kaepernick was within his constitutional rights to protest in this way, of these people only about half were accurate about the movement he started. The other three quarters of people said something about how disrespectful they found his protest due to the inaccuracies of what they had been told about it. It was disappointing but also very illuminating, that the majority of people in this group said some iteration of “it was where he protested *against the national anthem*”. Many people had no idea that Kaepernick was protesting against police brutality, they simply believed that since he was protesting during the national anthem, that was the subject of the protest. The majority of students surveyed who had an opinion about Kaepernick’s protest movement did not even understand the actual merits of the protest. This points to the notion that the counter-framing campaign that arose in response to his movement received so much more media coverage than did the actual words that came out of his own mouth and was effective in positioning people against anti-racist protest. This could point that people do not care about the truth if it challenges what they already believe or that the conservative campaign through the media was very effective.

This kind of campaign could be very damaging to racial equality efforts in that it ignores systemic inequality in order to side step the conservative narrative that they have succeeded because “they were able to just pull themselves up from their bootstraps” and make something of their lives. Instead of confronting that their success is rooted in someone else’s domination, they instead to layer more domination to silence and ignore the historic constructions of it. This works because it is difficult to contend that their success is not their own and instead is part of a collective thread, that of the success of their family. This allows so many people to ignore the fact that eight generations ago Black people did not own the property needed to build wealth,



they were that property. The people that continually ask why they should have to deal with affirmative action and have to pay for reparations when they themselves never owned slaves, ignore the fact the legacy of being owned and processes to justify this ownership as part of the natural order of things still endures in every aspect of life.

Question five was meant as a follow up, I wondered if I removed race from the question of legitimate protest, would some study participants contradict themselves on the appropriateness of silent protest during a public event like the national anthem or draw a response from the people that did not know much or anything about the protests within the NFL. It was interesting enough to note that people who stated they personally liked Kaepernick either thought his protest was appropriate or they expressed they did not understand why people cared. Some stated that they were okay with his message but did not agree with the timing of the protest and said that his “backup quarterback talent” was not worth the effort to keep him in the NFL, given the controversy he stirred up. Many people stated that it was inappropriate, parroting the exact same statements used in answering the question before, “it is disrespectful to the flag, our country, freedom, and the troops.” This does not take into account that before Kaepernick started the protest he asked soldiers and veteran’s how they would feel about it and they were fine with it, they could not conceive of how exercising the freedoms they fought to preserve could be viewed as the anti-thesis of how grateful Kaepernick was to have these freedoms. Yet the oppositional energy was still coopted, and people became offended and upset because they were told that it had to make them feel that way. If it was so offensive, it would not have taken months and Donald Trump bringing greater attention to it, that the disrespect to the flag and country began.

The final question asked on the survey is what I will focus most analysis on as it gets to the point of the study. The answers given in response to this question most clearly exemplifies

colorblind America's casual racist speech strategies as outlined by Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2003). I saw many of these themes and patterns emerge during data analysis, the first was the issue of respect, peace, and non-violence in protest.

One-third of respondents wanted to make absolutely clear they believed violence had no place in protest. The most concrete language that was offered in response was used in delineating what they absolutely thought was inappropriate in protest, words like rioting and destruction were widely used, whereas abstract words like peaceful and respectful were most often used while describing protest that was the most legitimate. Peaceful and respectful are still abstract words despite the images they conjure in our minds because they are subjective, they represent different things to different people. This shows that the media only really gives attention to protest in the few instances it goes violent, further, and perhaps consciously or they too play a large role in how society conceives of the appropriateness and legitimacy of protest.

In answering the survey question regarding participant's perceptions of the most appropriate way to protest state actions, the top four keywords mentioned are, non-violence, attention, peaceful, and respectful. We can begin to conceptualize by understanding the ways race has been politely folded into a larger seemingly more neutral discussion about respect, in order to strip the legitimacy and political agency of the articulator. In broader context, this means respondents assume that protest will devolve into violence and therefore are inherently not peaceful. They also asserted that a key function of a successful social movement and protest is the ability to bring attention to them. To them violence is equated to attention, this is a reflection of the way the media only covers and discusses in depth, the images and instances of violence and destruction that only periodically arise from generally peaceful protestation. Of the respondents who provided a location they believed protest had a right to take place,

overwhelmingly they gave places like parks and fields that were out of the way, so as not to disrupt everyday life. This gives the idea that the agency of protest in the people's imaginary is that it provides the illusion that individuals under democratic regimes have an actual say in our governance. I came to these conclusions that the general perception of protest is negative due to the way qualifiers were used at the beginning of most responses in order to first frame what protest should not be, followed by what they thought protest should be that usually followed the opposite of what they first outlined as de-legitimate.

To best exemplify this, are some survey responses that were given: "Peaceful protest. Violent protest is unproductive and many people join in unknowing of the cause, just to create destruction whereas members of peaceful protest are more likely to be supportive of the cause." This is a really interesting response to the question that seemed to summarize where all the other survey responses to this question were leading to when they stated that protest needed to be peaceful. This points to the notion that society may view the beginnings of protest as either inherently unchanging once they began, either peaceful or violent. Might this answer point to the vehemence in articulations that protest has no place in modern society? That protesters use the venue of protest in order to offer legitimacy to endless violence. Could this only be indicative of anti-racist protest because the majority of protesters are Black, therefore already framed as guilty? Could this point towards Bonilla Silva's third frame, of biologicalization of culture, that Black persons are still framed as biologically violent?

It is interesting enough to include in the analysis here that no one seems to equate the civil disobedience of question two to the Civil Rights movement non-violent protest discourse they used in order to define what they believed as the only legitimate way to register our dissent with the state. This could point towards deficiencies in the way students are educated to believe

that voting is the end of the road for our civic engagement. One, such as myself, might contend that this points to the fact that as the “originators” of modern democracy we believe that we have ultimate say over what happens to us via political involvement, we do not necessarily think there is more for us to do. We passed Civil Rights amendments and redacted explicit color from our laws, collectively so for many of us, we think we have already reached the end of the road to equality, so at this point protest seems to most to be unnecessary and unwarranted. So, it is easier to demonize protesters if you think their objectives have no purpose, if you believe that racism is past and historic, you do not have to feel bad about what is happening currently.

#### IV. Conclusion

*Dear brothers and sisters,*

*Black, white, grey or purple,*

*Stay woke,*

*And*

*Stay conscious*

*Stay forever fighting*

*For when we turned our backs to the happenings of the world:*

*we didn't see that the Chinese had discovered a new medicine,*

*gunpowder,*

*that the white man used to load into his new guns,*

*which he places at your*

*temple*

*Forcing you on a boat away from your families, friends and accomplishments,*

*your identity, and especially*

*your humanity.*

*And*

*We don't see now that the war on drugs is giving the police free rein*

*Incentivizes them for*

*Every arrest  
Rounding up people in poor voiceless communities  
Nobody*

*Sees*

*Or listens to*

*Anyway. Is completely sanctioned by the Supreme Court*

*We don't know to fight for ourselves, pleading guilty to avoid mandatory minimums reduces you  
to*

*A*

*Civic*

*Death*

*Imposed isolation,*

*Forcing you in a cell away from your families, friends and accomplishments,  
identity,  
eventually eroding your humanity once more.*

*We must all know to be:*

*a voice,*

*Not*

*An*

*Echo.*

*We gave them the tools for our own domination*

*We taught them to educate all of their people  
That cleanliness reduces the risk and spread of disease*

*Then we turned our backs,  
our job was done  
The world had order until  
  
the word of King James was taken as the rule of the land  
Words meant to soothe  
turned us  
by the decree of God  
into  
Slaves.  
Property,  
nothing of consequence.*

—Tyler Smith, *A Radical Debater's Manifesto*, 2018.

#### Prescriptive solutions: The American Truth and Reconciliation Commission

The problem with social mobilization for solvency is evident in the news, Black protesters and allies have met violent and brutal resistance by the status quo keepers since the dawn of America. The question here remains, how do we resist loud enough to be heard without the threat of death? Despite the aforementioned horrors of being a minority within the academy, this could very well still be the best, safest place to begin the processes of truth and reconciliation. Here, testimony for atrocity can be legitimized and naturalized into fact by (re)creating parts of the historical record the state would like to pretend does not exist by destroying it (Inwood 2017, Collins & Watson 2015, Sharpe 2016).

The question here that remains to be answered, is how we move forward as a society in light of the aforementioned conditions? How do we imagine and enact change while reconciling with a past that is not yet past? The future of equality lies in Truth and Reconciliation for the atrocities of slavery and Black capture that are still ongoing under new terms (Sharpe 2016, Alexander 2012, Ciccariello-Maher 2017). An American Truth and Reconciliation Commission modeled off those in South Africa, Canada, South America and previous small community based American TRCs for race-based violence could be the next step (Collins & Watson 2015).

Past TRC's were not completely effective largely due to the fact that they were looking to solve systemic problems by focusing on individual perpetrators instead of the laws, and structures that created a market or opening and maintenance for said atrocity to occur.

The necessary modifications for an American TRC include:

The examination of government structures and political actors need to be included in the process of truth gathering, this work should be rooted to the structures and actors that maintain inequality as opposed to individual civilian actors. The nature of this work means that the TRC should not be undertaken by the government as that would allow the commission to fall victim to the problems of past commissions, so that we can deny the state yet another chance to define equality by loosening what 'truth' and 'reconciliation' should mean (Collins & Watson 2015). Due to past precedence it has been recommended that an American TRC would work best as a part of a grassroots mobilization, by the people being affected, sort of like a social movement that aims to collect and therefore legitimate testimony by people who have historically never had a voice.

The process of Truth and Reconciliation would be best supported by simultaneously decolonizing rhetorically (Ciccariello-Maher 2017); a refusal to refer to the perpetrators of



atrocities on their own terms, no more media reports about the Alt-Right, we will call them the neo-Nazi's and white nationalists they are. This will mean utilizing counter discourses that will constitute differing political identities slamming into each other, and in the process transform themselves and their worlds in the process. Body-political identities are forged through struggle, and it is here they can be re-forged (Ciccarriello-Maher 2017). This means we will no longer allow ourselves to be placated by utopian ideals of assimilation; it is a myth, a smokescreen, absent the reconciliation this can bring us. The process of creating new intersectional identities lies in these counter discourses, previous attempts to enact change legislatively have failed due to the dichotomous good or bad that is supported by law (Mignolo 2009).

This paper then, chooses to turn to the ontological to name and resist the “colonial disqualification of certain subjects from humanity” (Ciccarriello-Maher 2017, 118), this has the effect of rupturing the border between “us” and “them”.

This includes changing the normative framework/narrative that is being pushed on schools (Castro-Gomez 2002, Tatum 2017), by demanding schools that receive government funding teach our children a full, uncensored, non-white washed version of history, to ensure that the horrors of the past be unimaginable to perpetrate again (Sharpe 2016, Mitter 2017).

Legislatively, we can end minimum sentences for non-violent crime, tax cuts for companies that use prison labor, and make for-profit prisons illegal (Alexander 2012; Wang 2018).

Last but not least we need to end the stigma of incarceration, this means destroying the felony designation and its secondary consequences (Alexander 2012). We can also place a moratorium on building new prisons that are funded by budget cuts to the social reform programs and public housing that are taken away from felons (Wang 2018). It is interesting to

note here that these cuts are not “felt” to the expected degree because some of the hidden consequences of a felony designation is the loss of access to public services like housing and food stamps.

I am not so naive as to believe I have the potential to change all of the hearts in the world, or alone force the government to acknowledge the grievous wrongs of the past, but maybe I can begin this long denied conversation on race. It is within academia I think this is possible, the place of resistance or the front of the revolution by this I mean this could be the forum for an American Truth and Reconciliation Commission of sorts. I humbly offer this thesis as my testimony that Black life and knowledge is still under attack and less legitimate.

These problems are ongoing, there are not enough books or peer-reviewed articles published due to recency because no one knows what the end of the road looks like. There is no consensus on how begin to undertake corrections for a problem so many Americans refuse to admit is a major issue plaguing our society.

It is easy to claim the moral high ground when you can ignore the effects of all the policy decisions you voted for have on underprivileged communities, by refusing to acknowledge that these effects are symptoms of a society that refuses to make a space for us, and instead frame it as self-inflicted. Mainstream media is conditioned to ignore things that do not fit the needs of the of their benefactors and sponsors, and it is this reason we should also look to smaller lesser known independent news sources and personal narratives to get a fuller picture of violence in the everyday. The challenge here it that sadly, academia has played a large role in conditioning us to deny these sources as fact and therefore less legitimate; non-credible, it has allowed people to ignore the educational merits of slave narratives.

The images created by the labels used against Black/Brown people played a large role in how Donald Trump got elected; if the international protest against his presidency are any indication, the entire world is a secondary victim to the legalized violence inflicted upon Black persons in America. It should be everyone's job to counter the racialized dehumanizing rhetoric that was able to mobilize and inspire a mass following of people who never before cared about civic engagement.

This study shows that college students do not know any way to interact with our democracy than by voting, but other studies show that the majority of Americans only vote in presidential elections and students of this generation vote even less than the previous ones. Occupy Wallstreet movement co-founder posits that maybe the time of the American protest might be over and maybe it might be for activists to consider running for local and small-town politics and seeking to reform the system legislatively from the bottom up.

The largest question this thesis aimed to answer, is how do we move us to a point in history in which "respectability" which we can understand will never include Blackness is not the only qualifier for the right to live and be and produce knowledge without doing epistemic harm to the self (Sharpe 2016).

Further study here could involve undertaking more research on a larger scale than one department in order to define what peace and respect look like to most individuals as these were major questions left hanging after the conclusion of this study. If we can get a more in depth understanding of what society views as legitimate modes of publicly displaying dissent, we might be able to curate the perfect protest in order for individuals to realize the agency needed to change the problems with the status quo that maintains structural violence and inequality. It could also seek to answer the following questions that arose during work on this project: How do

we define or delineate how respect is defined and allocated across different bodies? What is the role of violence in our society? Why is it okay for political disagreements to be resolved by war and war metaphors by the state, but not the individual trying to get the state to hear them using any means necessary because we understand that writing letters to our representatives isn't going to change the way we were raised and indoctrinated, it will not solve racism on an institutional level?

These problems are ongoing. There are not enough books or peer-reviewed articles published due to recency because no one knows what the end of the road looks like. There is no consensus on how begin to undertake corrections for a problem so many Americans refuse to admit is a major issue plaguing our society.

All of the above-mentioned points to the very real fact that the greatest barrier to realizing equality for all is the link between Blackness and exploitation. Black labor is exploited and extracted to this day under the guise of punishment, prison labor. Black pain is coopted by white artists and voices for profit and attention; it is a form of mobilization to move the public consciousness from what is really happening. This is evident in the use of Emmitt Till as artifact, in order to disrupt the running narrative that the state does not value Black lives, Jeff Sessions orchestrated a cover up, a cynical play in reopening the murder investigation of a Black teenager, from 63 years ago (McLaughlin & Grinberg 2018, Tyson 2018, Newkirk 2018). This was an act meant to show that this administration is not racist, but instead showed us the only Black life they framed as worthy of sympathy is one so far dead, accountability is only symbolically available, because Emmitt's killers are long dead, and the woman who accused him of flirting with her leading to his death, she has already been framed as too old and fragile to face repercussions for her role.

This paper has been shaped and prefaced by my own personal experience and complicity in the preservation of the “colonial matrix of power” (Mignolo 2009), as the child of a 20-year veteran cop from a liberal college town, I thought the world was simple, that racism did not extend beyond rural towns in the former confederacy, and Black people should just stop resisting, but then George Zimmerman was found innocent by a jury of his peers. George Zimmerman’s fear of a Black kid in a hoodie holding a piece of candy was enough reasonable doubt. I was around Trayvon’s age when this happened, I had a little brother who would soon be a target if he was not already one, these factors urged me to become a better more civic minded citizen. I realized Black children didn’t have the same luxuries their white peers do, we cannot ignore current events or politics because they were negative, our lives and positionalities are up for debate, our premature deaths current and palpable.

I humbly offer this thesis as my testimony that racialized violence will exist into perpetuity until we, the individuals place enough pressure on institutions to change. We are all waiting for a singular great unifier of the people like King, Mandela and Ghandi to save us from ourselves, but change has to begin somewhere with a single voice to be picked up and heard and amplified by the masses. If we are all waiting for someone to speak first liberation and salvation will never appear.

I also offer this thesis as a challenge to be accountable to something beyond ourselves, families and people to look think and act like us. Accountable a power and order so much higher, to humanity.

My adulthood was forged through a childhood of hardship and pain, a father who only wanted the best for us, who militaristically challenged my brother and I to be the best humans we could so that we may help break, rupture the bounds of Whiteness keeping the rest of Black

people behind and in chains just as his father had done before him. A father who bullied us into learning how to read at the age of four, by yelling and challenging us to read before school started so he could prove to the world that Black kids are capable too, that we can more than compete intellectually with our white peers. One who imposed bedtimes on us so early the only thing that would allow us to stay up later to a reasonable time, was the time award for finishing a book. I was raised to be voiceless so as not to deviate from the norm, what was acceptable because to be different in this world is to suffer. I started debating because I knew that to keep everything bottled up inside is far greater suffering. It is through academia and interaction with the literature that I am reclaiming my voice and discovering the full extent of my agency.

While my father's tactics inadvertently curated a critical race theorist and a computer engineer in the making, this is not the norm, this is not to say that we are any better or more intelligent than anyone else just more well read, mannered, with a greater capacity for quickly synthesizing complex information simply because we have had more practice than most. Turning towards academia and knowledge as escapism is far from normative, this kind of upbringing in my experience leads to thoughts of alienation to white modes of being. This is to preface that Black respectables don't just fall into the lap of society, we are made; forged through fire. My father much like that of Tiger Woods and the Jackson 5, brutally pushed us towards excellence in order to prove a point to Whiteness, we have the same mental capacities and we matter too.

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