

#CritEdPol: Journal of Critical Education Policy Studies at Swarthmore College

Volume 3
Issue 1 *Beautiful Experiments*

Article 2

January 2021

The Erasure of Black Women

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Recommended Citation

Anderson, Tamara D. and Anderson, Maya (2021) "The Erasure of Black Women," *#CritEdPol: Journal of Critical Education Policy Studies at Swarthmore College*: Vol. 3 : Iss. 1 , Article 2: 8-25.

DOI: 10.24968/2473-912X.3.1.2

Available at: <https://works.swarthmore.edu/critedpol/vol3/iss1/2>

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THE
ERASURE
OF BLACK WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

To what do we owe Black women? Everything. To be Black and female in America means that you are ignored, silenced, and sometimes erased. The very fabric of history would be quite different for all of us without the contributions, tears, blood, and love of Black women. As a result of the intersection of patriarchy and white supremacy, Black women are too often left exhausted, overworked, and left out of the historical narrative. This multi-modal creative work is a call to action to end the erasure of Black women with scholarship, visual art, and poetry.

Keywords: *Black women, Black feminism, art, poetry*

Introduction

To be very honest with you, to be a woman meant it got done! This kind of organizing is really a woman's thing... [Women] really carried the movement with men upfront. Many times just holding them up or standing them in position and really doing the work, doing the thinking, getting the job done. Lillie Peoples, a Chicago organizer in the 1980s¹

This quote epitomizes the legacy and ongoing practice of Black women being the fuel of organizing work that often moves the needle on racial justice. Women are written out of the narrative because the world is taught to remember the men first. In 1962, Malcolm X said, “The most disrespected person in America is the Black woman. The most unprotected woman in America is the Black woman. The most neglected person in America is the Black woman.” Black history is one filled with movements and actions led by Black women always fighting towards the goal of being granted a seat at the table despite the constant assault on Black lives and bodies. Black leaders believe that education can be the great equalizer, but most of the educational policies, local laws, and overall practices reflect the racial striations marked by each decade starting with enslavement of Africans, and continue to be influenced by a pre-existing colonial mindset. The back and forth battle in school segregation, which is one of the many tendrils of racial inequality in American schools, is just one example. Elise Boddie, a Rutgers University law professor and the founder of The Inclusion Project, which focuses on

racial inclusion, believes that “School Segregation also feeds into housing segregation, which is a major source of the racial wealth gap”² Regarding the racial wealth gap, rental and housing laws affect Black women more adversely than any other group in the United States. In Matthew Desmond’s ethnography titled, *Evicted*, he writes, “Poor Black men are locked up while poor Black women are locked out.”³ Although low-income Black women are more likely to attain employment than Black men, their wages are often lower, and children also pose a problem for working mothers when looking for suitable housing. This often leaves Black women and their families in vulnerable sub-par housing, which results in constantly moving from place to place. From physical rape, poverty, stolen children, to the lynching of their men, Black women deserve to be seen and heard. Their contribution to the work should be measured alongside the men. The reality is there is no Martin, Stokely, or Rosa without Ella, no Langston without Zora, no music for the movement without Nina, and more importantly no Blackness without Black women.

During my childhood, I started to notice the erasure of Black women as I compared books to the stories shared with me around my dinner table each night. The stories around the table were filled with the strength and power of the Black women in my family and the people they encountered. My grandmother spoke about the first time she met Mary McLeod Bethune when she was a campfire girl in Chicago. She remembered sitting in the presence of someone who was “somebody” and how that made her feel. Meeting Bethune made

1. Todd-Breland, E. (2018). *A Political Education: Black Politics and Education Reform in Chicago since the 1960s*, 133.

2. Natividad, I (2020). *Why are American Schools still segregated?*

3. Desmond, M (2016). *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*



Figure 1 - Happy Birthday Mom

her feel seen. My mother was not only a science educator for over 30 years, but she also won the local union election and was President of her IEA (Illinois Education Association –NEA) local at the age of 30. She earned her Master’s degree from Northwestern University by the age of 22. Despite all of these accomplishments, when we moved from my grandmother’s house, my mother was met with rejection after rejection for a rental because she was a single Black mother with a child. Even a favor from a police officer that my grandmother worked with resulted in her renting from a slum lord. Housing for Black women in 1983 looked very much like 2020. An award-winning educator being subject to poor housing was evidence that education did not lessen racism.

While in high school, my aunt was approached by recruiters from Kirkland College (Hamilton College) and was given a full scholarship to attend.

When she shared the good news with her mother, she was aghast because the money was coming from Harris Bank. At the time, Harris Bank was considered a racist establishment that did not open accounts for Black families in Chicago. This was 1971. When my aunt arrived at the bank she was met with enthusiasm by the white men who helped her sign her financial papers because they were all alumni of Hamilton College. When she arrived on campus in Clinton, New York far away from Chicago, she took advantage of every opportunity. She served as an intern on Capitol Hill in Washington D.C., attended the University of Heidelberg and Schiller College in Germany for three years, and after graduation she received a full scholarship to the University of Wisconsin Law School in Madison. My aunt received an invitation to the inauguration of President Jimmy Carter in 1977 simply because she wrote a letter requesting one. Similar to my mother, when my aunt moved out of my grandmother’s house she also rented a sub-par apartment in a very violent neighborhood due to what was available to single Black women.

The legacy of Black women in our family working, being engaged in the community and being seen made the narrative that we did not deserve to be there simply fade into the background. But, in school, I only heard stories filled with men and their accomplishments. In school, it appeared as if women were not a part of the narrative. My teachers in elementary and middle school were Black and female, and yet, they were not a part of the stories they were sharing. At home and church, my examples were the opposite. My grandmother was born in Mississippi and when she was 8 an uncle in a drunken stupor tried to suffocate her while she slept. Her father with the help of her cousin sent her the next day to join her mother in Chicago.

My great-grandmother worked as a domestic for a wealthy white family. My grandmother sang gospel music for a local radio station as a teen. When she became an adult she started as a crossing guard and later was the Administrative Assistant to the District Commander at the Chicago Police Department in the 2nd District, and nothing happened without her say. Aldermen (Chicago City Council Members) came to my house for dinner and we had a special invitation to Harold Washington's Mayoral Inauguration, Chicago's first Black mayor. She was also a pastor at the Temple for Metaphysical Teachings for over 35 years. Yet, it was a white woman from her church that made it possible for her to purchase her first home in 1968 because she could not get a mortgage. I saw Black women making sure that work happened and taking care of family and their communities, but I never heard them mentioned in my educational settings or my books. So here I am floundering to find myself in the Blackness of my stories. I am struggling to see the truth that is often hidden in plain sight and to renegotiate the work of Black women that often prop men up so that they can be remembered.

As an organizer, I am constantly reminded of my importance but also how quickly I can be relegated to the back. As one of the core organizers for the Black Lives Matter Week of Action in Philadelphia, I have seen firsthand how the ideas of the men are transformed by the work of women. All of the work for the week of action was planned and executed by the Racial Justice Organizing Committee in 2017 and it quickly morphed into being led by majority Black females, despite the umbrella organization, the Caucus of Working Educators, being predominately white and female. And much of the participation of the umbrella

organization was adjacent or invisible from the core work. The week in Philadelphia was inspired by a Black Lives Matter day of action organized in Seattle in the fall of 2016 and now it has become the National Black Lives Matter at School movement, which continues today. And yet, the work that I have put in is constantly being silenced or erased mostly by myself because I believe in training and supporting new leaders. When the work first started, only four people were on the initial call, and I was the only female, the only Black female, the only one who proposed and uplifted the 13 guiding principles, which to this very day are the national and local pillars that center and ground the work. But, I question if that should be included in the narrative because as women, we are taught to stand in the back and as Black women we are often sent to the sidelines even when our voice rings the loudest screaming, no more.

The original organizers of #BlackLivesMatter are three Black women, Patrisse Cullors, Alicia Garza, and Opal Tometi. After the murder of Trayvon Martin and the acquittal of George Zimmerman in 2013, these women created an organizing platform. In 2014, after the murder of Michael Brown protests transformed Ferguson, Missouri into Ground Zero for change. In 2016, the Black Lives Matter Global Network⁴ was created along with 13 guiding principles, one being Black Women, which is the label provided to ensure that part of the work is dedicated to the centering of Black female voices. When the work started here in Philadelphia, it was imperative to highlight and center Black Lives Matter in schools and communities using the 13 guiding principles that together create the blueprint

4. *Black Lives Matter Global Network official website* <https://blacklivesmatter.com/what-we-believe/>

for a better society. Yet, many people have to still be reminded of the names of the original organizers, and the 13 guiding principles are often overlooked or never mentioned. I attribute this to the fact that we do not always practice the Black Women principle, which states, “We build a space that affirms Black women and is free from sexism, misogyny, and environments in which men are centered.”⁵ It is vital that my daughter and other Black girls can see themselves in the work and that they are included when we shout, all Black Lives Matter!

The Invisibility of Ella Baker

Ella Baker understood that laws, structures, and institutions had to change to correct injustice and oppression, but part of the process had to involve oppressed people, ordinary people, infusing new meanings into the concept of democracy and finding their own individual and collective power to determine their lives and shape the direction of history⁶

If strength and power emanate from Black women then it began with Ella Baker. Ella’s grandmother was whipped because she refused to marry the man that her slave master chose for her. This started the legacy of rebelliousness that was evident in her work with Dr. Luther King, Jr and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Ella became the first Black female president of the NAACP New York branch, and yet her history continues to be overshadowed by King and Carmichael. She trained a young Rosa Parks in 1940, and in 1958 she trained leaders in organizing,

resistance, and planned protests. “Radical change for Ella Baker was about a persistent and protracted process of discourse, debate, consensus, reflection, and struggle” and she believed in her spirit and practice that “Strong people don’t need strong leaders.”⁷

*Her mouth had been trained from birth to say no
Her ears had been trained to listen and seek out
the truth
Her heart had been trained to include those she
organized in the process
With only \$800 she grew a few students into SNCC
They sat
They protested
They paved the way for Civil Rights to come
She trained their mouths, their ears, and their
hearts to do the work
And a movement was born
Yet, she is silenced and erased by the men, in the
shared stories
Her invisibility is so palpable that we have to be
reminded that she even existed
Ella was the voice behind King and the fuel within
Stokely
She believed in People Power
The power behind those who had nothing giving
them the strength to fight for what they always
deserved
And today more young Black girls are able to find
themselves in the historical record and achieve
greatness because WE refuse to continue the
legacy of erasure*

5. “Herstory” (2020). *Black Lives Matter Global Network official*. <https://blacklivesmatter.com/about/herstory/>

6. Ransby, B. (2003). *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision*

7. Ransby, B. (2003). *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision*

The Adultification of Black Girls

*Schools can either reinforce dominant ideas that are present in society, or they can actively work to develop skill sets among young people to be critical participants in the process of developing the society they want to be a part of and live in.*⁸

The adultification of Black girls is another way to erase them. It diminishes their childhood and the natural milestones necessary for positive development by thrusting them violently into adulthood. Black girls comprise 16% of the student population at public schools. They are often victimized and suffer racial and gender bias from their home and school environment.⁹ Many of them cry out and are often not believed or they seldom encounter compassionate adults. According to Monique W. Morris, the author of *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in School* states, “They also described being repeatedly victimized in community and in schools, and having that victimization either rendered secondary to the pain and victimization of their male counterparts or not believed in their spaces of learning and in their homes.”¹⁰ Some of the mistreatment, negligence, and abuse can be countered by the presence of more African - American educators and staff, but it can also be helped by Black girls being allowed to grow into women safely and without encountering harm or toxicity.

Black women or more likely to be raped, murdered by a partner, or sexually abused as a child. There exists a “Sex Abuse to Prison Pipeline”

8. Watson, Hagopian & Au (editors). (2018). *Teaching for Black Lives*.

9. “How K-12 schools Push Out Black Girls: An Interview with Monique W. Morris by Kate Stolfus.

10. Morris, M. (2016) *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in School*.

for Black girls that no one speaks of.¹¹ According to the report, “girls involved in Oregon’s juvenile justice system, for example, 93% had experienced sexual or physical abuse; 76% had experienced at least one incident of sexual abuse by the age of 13.”

An additional study published in 2017 by Georgetown Law concluded that Black girls are assumed to require less help and assistance than White girls. Hypersexual myths and stereotypes like “Jezebel” and some traditional African clothing which bared more skin as a result of the climate justified enslavement and rape during global colonization and American enslavement. “Perhaps she remembers her great-great-grandmother who wanted to protest but only rolled her eyes and willed herself not to scream when the white man mounted her from behind.”¹² During slavery, mulattoes were often sold into prostitution for generous sums due to the hypersexualized views that surrounded them. Those who were of a lighter hue and born free often became “willing” concubines to wealthy white Southerners. This arrangement was called placage and was a formal agreement where the white man would provide financially for the woman and her children in exchange for sex. These feelings and myths surrounding sex and Black womanhood continue today with the myth that “Black women are sexually immoral”¹³ while White women are often considered the pinnacle of sexual purity and decency. Sex trafficking and sexual assault result in missing Black girls and no one seems to care.

11. Saar, M; Epstein, R; Rosenthal, L; & Vafa, Y (2012). “*The Sexual Abuse to Prison Pipeline: The Girls Story*”

12. Thompson, C.V. (2006). *Eating the Black body: miscegenation as sexual consumption* in African-American Literature and Culture

13. Thompson, C.V. (2006). *Eating the Black body: miscegenation as sexual consumption* in African-American Literature and Culture.

I have students who have lost female siblings and cousins only to have them found a year or more later either dead or scarred from ongoing sexual abuse and trafficking. My daughter spoke often of the girls in her high school who confided in her about sexual assault. This is not simply a new problem; it is one that continues to be pervasive as a result of white supremacy, toxic masculinity, patriarchy, and misogyny. Yet it also remains invisible and hidden in plain sight simply because it involves Black girls, teens, and women. This is why the work of Rosa Parks as a sexual assault investigator must be told so that we can stop and bring all of these stories to the light to protect our Black girls and women from the darkness.

The Truth of Rosa Parks

Rosa Parks was a sexual assault investigator for the NAACP and this is the work that she should also be known for.¹⁴ On September 3, 1944, Recy Taylor was gang-raped by six white men who also lived in Abbeville Henry County, Alabama. Death threats followed after a grand jury dismissed the case. Recy was afraid to leave home, and her story reached the ears of the NAACP and they sent their best sexual assault investigator, a young Rosa Parks. She created the “Committee for Equal Justice for Mrs. Recy Taylor.” None of the men were ever charged despite her ability to identify each one. Another similar rape case went to court a year later and it was also dismissed. While investigating the case Mrs. Parks was physically thrown from the house of the local sheriff while trying to ask questions. Recy Taylor received a formal apology nearly 60 years later in 2011 from the Governor of Alabama,

14. Brinkly, D. (2011) “*Rosa Parks Account Describes Attempted Rape*” NPR interview

“The apology...is all Taylor really wanted.”¹⁵ She died six years later. The history of Rosa Parks’ activism includes much more than refusing to take a seat on a bus, or being the field secretary of the NAACP. She brought to light the rape of Black women in the South who were often silenced and never received justice. The sexual assault of Black women continues to be shoved into the darkness time and time again.



Figure 2 - Jessica aka Red Fury

15. Davis, W (2018). “*How Recy Taylor Spoke Out Against her rape decades before #MeToo*” NPR Interview

On the Backs of Women- Damage

Hit, Strike, Water

Hit, Strike, Water

Each time we stand with elbows locked

Stand together.

Hit, Strike, Water

Black women ride the bus to work and toil for White women

Their “other” families

Losing theirs

Hit, Strike, Water

Children, Teen girls being arrested and beaten

Mothers losing children with each hit and strike

Wombs damaged

Backs broke

Bruises

Lynching

Death

Hit, Strike, Water

It did not start with Rosa

Claudette

Emmett

Black mothers and dead children

“I wanted the world to see what they did to my baby”¹⁶

They remember and refuse to ride the bus sparking a movement

So they walked

New laws - change

2020 Black children still murdered

The truth remained hidden

Rewritten, repackaged, and retold

Now the story has been corrected

Go and empower other Black girls to stand up instead of sitting down.

16. Till, Mamie

Silencing of Zora

Zora Neale Hurston was unapologetically Black before it was a catchphrase. She lived her life in a manner that defied rules and conventions. She was simultaneously celebrated and silenced often by other Black male writers. She was a part of the Harlem Renaissance where Black writers, artists, and music were celebrated and uplifted into the mainstream culture. The NAACP (National Advancement for Colored Peoples), the National Urban League, and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and Maids (Pullman Porters) were also birthed during this time. Names like Langston Hughes, Richard Wright, and Alan Locke were literary experts in Black life. The argument between her and Langston Hughes over the authorship of *Mule Bone* was legendary and never assuaged, but it was Richard Wright who cut Zora the deepest. He wrote this about *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, “The minstrel technique that makes the ‘white folks’ laugh.”¹⁷ Zora was also not a fan of Wright’s character Bigger Thomas either. She believed like James Baldwin that Wright had created a character based on racial stereotypes as opposed to “robust and nuanced characters.”¹⁸ Protagonists that illustrated the pain and complexities of Black life including love and love loss mired in racism and white supremacy. *The Street* by Ann Petry and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* feature a Black female protagonist and lens, and are both set in a community where either Black people are in charge or adversely affected by whiteness or a combination of both.

17. Pierpont, C.R. (1997). *A Society of One: Zora Neale Hurston, American Contrarian*. *The New Yorker*

18. Mathis, A & Mishra, P. (2015). *James Baldwin denounced Richard Wright’s ‘Native Son’ as a ‘Protest Novel.’ Was he right?*

Zora lied on her application for Morgan College and said that she was 16 when she was actually 26 to complete her high school diploma. This was her only option after her father remarried a very violent woman who thrust her into leaving school and working menial jobs just to take care of herself until she ended up in Baltimore at the age 26. She then attended Howard University and earned her associate’s degree and co-founded their famous campus newspaper, *The Hilltop*. By 1927, Zora graduated from Barnard College with her Bachelor’s degree in Anthropology, which she earned in three years thanks to a scholarship. Before 1930, Zora was an award-winning writer and after the publication of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* she was nearly penniless. Wright’s book sold over 200,000 copies while Hurston’s book quickly went out of print, erased. When she died in 1960 money had to be raised to have a funeral and bury her in an unmarked grave. In 1973, it was a woman, another Black writer — Alice Walker — who resurrected her words and provided a marker for her remains. Zora was not only a writer of fiction and drama, but she also contributed greatly to Black anthropological study with her collections of interviews and artifacts of Black culture that are housed in the Library of Congress. She was a public critic of the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision and her interview of the last enslaved person who was brought over from Africa was not published in 1927 and quickly shelved. It did not see the light of day for 90 years.

¹⁹Silenced. Zora had a sharp intellect combined with an even sharper tongue. She always led and finished with truth — unapologetically.

19. Hurston, Z. (2018). *Barracoon: The story of the last “Black Cargo*.



Figure 3 - Mi Gente de Mujeres

Unapologetically Black

I want to “jump at da sun” as my mother told me to

I want my place to be where I choose and when I like

I want my complexion and womanhood to demand its own space and value

I do not need respectability because I have nothing to be ashamed of

Living in a Black town taught me that one-way integration is ridiculous

My teachers, the mayor, and the storekeeper were Black like me

That is what I have always known and I have no reason to celebrate or seek whiteness

I will be Black, female, unapologetic, fierce, loud-talking, and honest

Always and forever

Mississippi Goddam

The Audacity of Nina

“Liberals who claimed to believe in racial justice and yet also embraced American exceptionalism and empire held irreconcilable commitments”

*Imani Perry*²⁰

Before the documentary *What Happened, Miss Simone* was released on Netflix in 2015; we only had Nina Simone’s music and some news clips about how she was “difficult,” “angry,” and “worldly.” But she was all of those and so much more. She provided the music for the work and the movement. Once she found her “I am not non-violent” voice, she provided the necessary lyrics for what no Black person dared to utter aloud.

Nina Simone was born Eunice Kathleen Waymon in Tryon, North Carolina in 1933. She was a piano prodigy by the age of 3. Her mother was a church minister and Eunice went with her to revivals and churches to play piano, she never sang. She started studying classical music by traveling to the other side of the tracks to take lessons with a white woman who saw her play at one of the church revivals. Her childhood began to be filled with practice sessions that lasted six to eight hours each day, and she started to feel isolated from the other children her age. This started the constant loneliness that followed her into adulthood. After high school graduation, she applied to the prestigious Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, the City of Brotherly Love. Her application was denied and her pathway to being a famous classical musician was dashed. Two days before her death, Curtis Institute awarded her an honorary diploma, attempting to

20. Perry, I. (2018). *Looking for Lorraine: The radiant and radical life of Lorraine Hansberry*

close the loop on the fact that her rejection was racially motivated – a symbolic but empty gesture.

After the rejection, all of the money that was donated for her to attend school dried up leaving her entire family in a state of financial distress. She always expected to be the first Black classical piano player to play at Carnegie Hall, never the performer that she became. That disappointment becomes more evident later.

She eventually got a summer gig in Atlantic City where she started playing in local bars for money. To hide this secular life from her mother, she transformed into Nina Simone, inspired by a nickname given to her by a boyfriend and the actress Simone Signoret. Her renditions of tunes like “Porgy and Bess” and “My Baby Just Cares for Me” made her a household name. In the former, she refused to sing the lyrics in the stereotypical Black vernacular and humanized the love story by infusing it with pain and sorrow. During this time is when she met her husband Andy Stroud, a former cop who retired and dedicated himself to managing Nina’s career. This brought them both financial comforts, but it also started a cycle of abuse. Their daughter Lisa remembers once when they were driving and Andy reached across her tiny body and slapped her mother in the face. His ring caught on her eyebrow and caused it to bleed. This was one of many beatings. Not to mention she was constantly feeling exhausted or overworked due to a relentless tour schedule that kept her away from her family. The loneliness continued. Once Nina received a note from a fan while they were out dancing and Andy responded violently. He not only beat her, but also put a gun to her head, tied her up, and raped her.

²¹22% of Black women have been raped and 40%

21. Garbus, L. (2015). *What Happened, Miss Simone?* (Documentary)

will experience domestic violence in their lifetime.²² Black girls and women are constantly viewed as somehow deserving of abuse or it is erased in plain sight. Everyone knows and is helpless or silenced to do anything about it so it continues. The High Priestess of Soul who walked into every room like royalty was having a battle with her very soul and heart when it came to her volatile relationship with her husband. She sought happiness despite all of the public accolades.

Soon she met a group of people who provided her some refuge in the storm, some peace. Lorraine Hansberry, the playwright, essayist, and agitator became one of her dearest friends and her daughter's godmother. She taught Nina the nuances and politics of what it meant to be Black in America. Their sisterhood and friendship also included James Baldwin and Langston Hughes, an A-list of Black contemporaries of her time. They encouraged her to get engaged and to use her voice as a platform.

It was more than I could take, and I sat struck dumb in my den like St. Paul on the road to Damascus: all the truths that I had denied to myself for so long rose up and slapped my face. The bombing of the little girls in Alabama and the murder of Medgar Evers were like the final pieces of a jigsaw that made no sense until you had fitted the whole thing together. I suddenly realized what it was to be black in America in 1963, but it wasn't an intellectual connection of the type, Lorraine [Hansberry] had been repeating to me over and over --- it came as a rush of fury, hatred and determination. In church language, the Truth entered into me and I 'came through' ”²³

Nina was angry and needed to say something. She poured all of that energy into the writing of

Mississippi Goddam, which changed her life forever. She had seen enough and there was no turning back. Dick Gregory, the comedian and civil rights activist, Goddam, which changed her life forever. She had seen enough and there was no turning back. Dick Gregory, the comedian and civil rights activist, stated “Not one black man would dare say Mississippi Goddam,” and Miss Simone paid the price professionally, spiritually, and emotionally. Her voice technically changed after singing Mississippi Goddamn, and never returned to its original octave range. *Brown Baby, Pirate Jenny, Sinnerman, Young Gifted and Black,* and *Mr. Backlash* quickly replaced the traditional protest songs that Nina always thought didn't fully represent the energy of the Civil Rights Movement. And they soon became the songs for the Black Power Movement. Her concerts and engagements started to dwindle and her records stopped being played on the radio. She never went back to the music that made her a mainstream commercial hit. “I'll tell you what freedom is to me, no fear,” Nina Simone.

22. Finoh, M. & Sankofa J. 2019). *The legal system has failed Black girls, women, and non-binary survivors of violence.* ACLU

23. Gwin, M. (2013). *Remembering Medgar Evers: Writing the long Civil Rights Movement*



Figure 4 - Nina

Nina shouted even when she was quiet.

She was beaten and still wept when she lost Evers, Lorraine, King, and Jimmie

*It broke her into pieces and yet she still gave us the gift and power of her music
that shook the truth loose*

“Sinner man where you gonna go to” when there is nowhere left to hide.

Shouting “Mississippi Goddamn!” As the radio stations refused to play

It became the rallying cry at Selma

Her music made us brave enough to keep on fighting

*“Young Gifted and Black” inspired by Lorraine gave us reason to hold our head
high*

*There was always a light and darkness in her tone each time she opened her
mouth and her fingers touched the keys*

Miss Simone transformed all of us

**The exhaustion of holding up men -
families and communities**



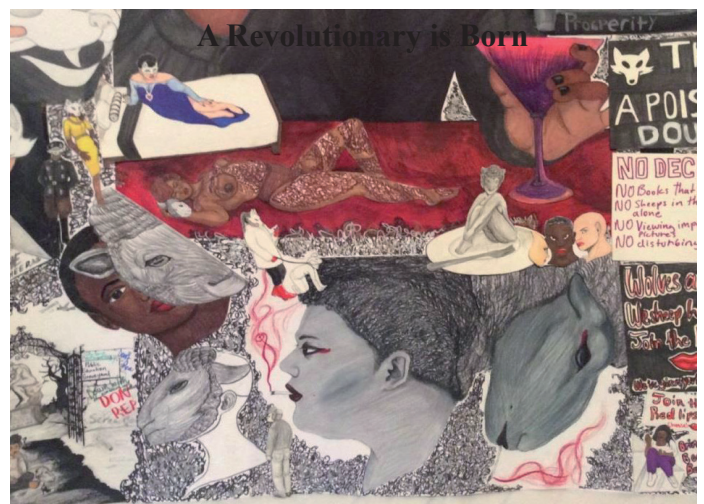
Figure 5 - Black Girls

This image was drawn to illuminate the beauty and ease of Blackness. One woman is standing in a pose as if she is taking a picture and the other is leaning into her friend to demonstrate closeness. A necessary relationship is a sisterhood that exists in a world that loves Black women the least. “Black women know what it means to love ourselves in a world that hates us. We know what it means to do a lot with very little, to ‘make a dollar out of fifteen cents,’ as it were.”²⁴ Black women are also more apt to be evicted at a higher rate than any other ethnicity.²⁵ Being the heads of households and taking care of entire families often falls on the shoulders of women leaving them exhausted and with toxic levels of stress. Even Rosa Parks spoke about how important it was for her husband to be recognized in his work at the NAACP despite her

24. Cooper, B. (2018). *Eloquent Rage: A Black Feminist Discovers her Superpower*. St. Martin’s Press.

25. Desmond, M. (2016). *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*

being more in the limelight to create balance in the household. Ella Baker often had heated arguments with King about the direction of the work, which pushed her to solely work with the students. Nina Simone’s daughter describes the often volatile relationship between her parents and when she finally left him she fled the country leaving her daughter behind. Zora had many husbands and society ridiculed her for such unwomanly behavior. My grandparents separated when my mother was 4. I never met my father, and my daughter has very few memories, if any, of hers. This practice of putting men first, being forced to consider their feelings as tantamount, or simply being abandoned by them continue to perpetuate the misogyny fueled by white oppression and gender racism. It continues to silence and suffocate Black women or even worse makes them appear angry or bitter, instead of being celebrated and shown kindness, or just simply understood. It continues to simply be understood the practice of Black women being the backbone of society, the community, the home, and the family without any balance or anyone or any system to hold them up.



**Figure 6 - Welcome to the Land of Wolves:
where we play Sheep**

Who are the wolves and sheep in reality? The wolves in our reality are the conservatives, the presidents, the elite class, and the officials who hold more power than the working class. Their actions are to ensure that those who are lower than them stay in their place to maintain their power over them. They live easy and they make sure that their lifestyle is impossible for the sheep to obtain. The sheep are the people, the masses of society that follow under their leaders' rule. They are oppressed, subjected, and stuck in their place, and don't fight or protest. The sheep who protest and act against the wolves are the revolutionaries who take off their masks. Most of those without masks are depicted as black women because of their strength and because every fight starts and succeeds through the efforts of black women, who played major roles in fighting for civil rights for

Blacks from the 60s to now. They promote and practice empowerment for women of all races. They tell the other sheep, "We are strong and resilient against oppression and push through it." revolutionary is born...

Black women can radiate your entire spirit with a single word or gesture. And yet, there are times that I feel lost in the mediocrity and bullshit. I forget our collective beauty and get mired in the dirt and grime that comes with life. The dirt and grime that comes with the loss of a loved one and the death of a relationship. The dirt and grime that comes from an ungrateful child trying to find their way. The dirt and grime that comes from the rules of society. I forget that like a diamond covered in coal, there is still beauty there. Beauty that is rock solid and never changing. It can never be diminished, and it will never be hidden for long. She can finally escape from the wolves.



Figure 7 - Grosses Beutes

Celebration

It is time to reclaim my Blackness and my womanhood without shame or animosity. It is time to make space for Black girls in our classrooms, homes, and public spaces. They need to know that they matter. #SayHerName is just as important as every unarmed Black boy or man that is murdered. When work is being done in our neighborhoods and schools, and you see Black women getting lost, speak up for them. Celebrate their presence and their ingenuity. This is a call for balance and healing, and not for arguments over who is the most oppressed and why. Black women can be visible in the historical context when we teach the truth without leaning into patriarchy. Use the lessons of Rosa, Ella, Zora, and Nina to share the possibility of what can be. Allow each Black girl the opportunity to grow into her fullest potential without ever being erased...

Also remember Ida B. Wells, the Stolen Girls of 1963, 4 Little Girls, Fannie Lou Hamer, Georgia Gilmore and all of the Black women that we continue to erase and silence

So celebrate Black Girl! Shout with glee and joy! Run in place and run to the water! Surround yourself with beauty so that you can always remember how amazing you are in the face of adversity and hopelessness. Embrace and hug your inner Black Girl and let her come out and play. The women we have become need her to survive. Stop telling folks, "Those women don't like me especially other black women." Leave that shared hate in someone else's cup because it never had a place with us. And whoever put that on your step sold you a bad penny and it is time to bury it for good. Black women know

nothing but love because they have birthed all of our pain. And they continue to live and breathe through it, which means shadiness and pettiness are for another hue. Do not let it live in your village or circle. Reach for each other and hug every Black woman and girl tightly and never let go.

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