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Black Lives Matter as Resistance to Systemic Anti-Black Violence

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Black Lives Matter (BLM) has emerged within the last five years as a significant movement for social change. Serving as an ideological and political intervention, BLM organizes to protect and advocate for Black lives and Black communities. This article will outline BLM as a movement and how it is a form of resistance as against systemic anti-Black violence. Centuries of Black resistance against epistemic, structural, and physical violence is the historical context of BLM. Two prominent aspects of the movement are intersectionality and decentralized leadership. The implications for resistance are that BLM is a new form of activism and social movement and there is a need for properly documenting resistance in the moment to inform future movements and to prevent future epistemic violence.

Keywords: Black Lives Matter | resistance activism | African Americans

The African American experience is one that is characterized by persistent resistance to systemic and state-sanctioned anti-Black violence. State-sanctioned violence is defined as legitimate because it is in the national interest; violence is prohibited except when used by state agents (Cairns & Sears, 2012). Black people face this violence on multiple fronts as various forms of racism. Critical race psychology is an important tool for understanding how African Americans experience and resist myriad forms of violence. Critical race psychology approaches racism as systemic, illuminates how neoliberalism perpetuates and reproduces racial hierarchies, emphasizes Whiteness (and other privileged identities) as property, and proposes counter-storytelling as a way pushing against dominant narratives (Salter & Adams, 2013). Influenced by Black liberation psychology and critical race theory, this perspective is more than appropriate for understanding Black liberation movements in response to systemic anti-Black violence. This perspective also broadens the scope to view race as systemic, not just individual prejudice or bias and to properly center Black people's perspectives.

Jones (1997) describes racism as consisting of a cumulative unfolding and developing of structures and processes throughout time. Racism is embedded within institutions, culture, and individuals. Culture both conditions and is a product of human action. These cultural views manifest as institutions that in turn produce values to socialized into individuals who integrate their values while developing competence in that space. These levels do not exist in a hierarchical form but are embedded within one another. Cultural racism deems a group's culture inferior (language, dialect, values, beliefs, worldviews, and cultural artifacts). This is probably the most pervasive form given that culture by its very nature is institutionalized. Institutional racism refers to policies and practices that contribute to discrimination. This structural or systematic racism continuously leads to negative outcomes for African Americans, and it is the primary reason for racial inequalities. Individual racism manifests as racial prejudice as witnessed and experienced in interpersonal interactions. This assumes the superiority of one's racial group and rationalizes the dominance and power over African Americans (Jones, 1997). On multiple fronts, the existence of African Americans is violently challenged; yet there has always

been resistance. From slave revolts to the Civil Rights Movement to the Black Power Movement, African Americans have resisted.

The Black History Knowledge Framework (Chapman-Hilliard & Adams-Bass, 2016) provides an outline for how Black people cope with and liberate themselves in the context of this systemic anti-Black violence. Collective histories play a more vital role than individual histories. People of the African diaspora experience a vulnerability based on displacement segregation, institutionalized oppression, deculturation, and destruction of capital. In the face of these oppressive forces, the framework proposes several Black liberation tasks including having an awareness of the structure of race and racism, contributions and achievements of Black people, their position in society (social, political, economic), and cultural strengths that foster empowered action. Completing these tasks through gaining awareness positively impacts mental health, protecting Black people from the deleterious psychological effects of racism. As coined by scholar Cedric Robinson (2000), this Black Radical Tradition serves as a collection of cultural, intellectual, and action-oriented labor aimed at disrupting social, political, economic, and cultural norms that denigrate Blackness and Black people. The Black Lives Matter movement is a continuation of this long tradition of resistance.

Using a critical race psychology perspective and the Black History Knowledge Framework, I will discuss how BLM engages in liberation tasks in resistance against systemic anti-Black violence. First, I will discuss epistemic, structural, and physical violence based in historical anti-Black racism. Second, I will give a brief history of the movement and discuss projects within the movement. Third, I will discuss four prominent aspects of the movement: intersectionality, decentralized leadership, youth participation, and documenting resistance.

A History of Systemic Anti-Black Violence

Frantz Fanon (1961) discussed violence as a process through which the physical, social, and/or psychological integrity of another person or group is harmed. Given the individual, cultural, and institutional nature of anti-Black racism, it becomes important to understand how this violence can occur physically, through structures and policies, and the exclusion of voices and perspectives. The purpose of this discussion is to provide historical context for the conditions that birthed BLM.

Structural Violence

Much of the systemic anti-Blackness is attributed to racial capitalism (Robinson, 2000). Racial capitalism exploited people through the intersections of slavery, imperialism, and genocide; this produced a global economic system in which private individuals and corporations control the means of production, access to goods, and the value of goods. The transatlantic slave trade ripped millions of Africans from their homelands and dispersed throughout them what is now referred to as the African diaspora. This historically violent occurrence led Afrofuturist scholar Tobias van Veen (Anderson & Jones, 2016) to refer to the aftermath as “The Armageddon Effect” referencing the apocalyptic conditions in which diasporic Africans found themselves. As stated by rap group Public Enemy, “Armageddon Been in Effect” indicating an experience that is not in the future of African Americans, but one that has shaped and characterized the history of African Americans (Anderson & Jones, 2016). Once arriving in the Americas and the Caribbean they were stripped of their identities and cultures and forced into dehumanizing and tortuous labor. Slavery as a practice could only exist by nullifying Black parents’ moral claim to their

children. These policies and practices pit the interests of pregnant women and the interests of their children against one another, restricting their autonomy. Such practices forced Black women to bear children at younger ages and more frequently to “produce” more labor (Roberts, 1997).

African Americans’ second-class status was codified in law. Many of the founding fathers (including George Washington and Thomas Jefferson) were slaveowners who drafted a constitution in which only property-owning (property including both land and people) White men were eligible for citizenship and the right to vote (Robinson, 1997). Slave states often had large populations of non-citizens; the resulting 3/5 compromise counted each enslaved African as 3/5 person toward the population to determine elector votes in the Electoral College. This heavily tilted power towards slave states to drive policy. After the abolishment of slavery in 1865 and the passing of the Equal Rights (13th, 14th, & 15th) Amendments, the government began an effort to rebuild the south and provide services for newly freed African Americans. The establishment of the Freedmen’s Bureau was intended to help newly freed African American to integrate into society and to provide them with resources. However, these new gains would not last as the reconstruction effort was halted in 1872. With the end of Reconstruction came the beginning of Jim Crow as southern legislatures passed laws that further suppressed and oppressed African Americans (Alexander, 2012, Bell, 2004; Du Bois, 1903, 1924; Glaude, 2017; Taylor, 2016).

One thing that had not been changed was the value gap as articulated by Eddie Glaude (2017): Racism is in the national DNA, White people are valued more than others. Because the value gap between African Americans and White Americans was not adequately addressed, it will always inform how institutions and policies treat African Americans. Slave codes regulating enslaved Africans became Black codes regulating free African Americans. For example, Mississippi (my home state) declared vagrant “anyone/who was guilty of theft, had run away [from a job, apparently], was drunk, was wanton in conduct or speech, had neglected job or family, handled money carelessly, and...all other idle disorderly persons,” (Davis, 2003, p. 29). Such violations were punishable by incarceration which was the only legal form of enslavement as stated by the 13th Amendment. In combination with the convict leasing program (groups of prisoners were leased out to provide labor), this became “slavery by another name,” viewed by some as worse than the original incarnation (Alexander, 2012; Davis, 2003). The structural violence enacted by policy justified physical violence towards Black people to keep them in their place.

Physical Violence

Physical violence is relatively self-explanatory and is typically indicative of individual-level racism and/or institutional and cultural racism playing out in individuals. The structural devaluing of Black lives leaves them vulnerable to racist physical violence. This can occur at the hands of law enforcement officers, but also citizens. As illustrated by laws such as the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 (Davis, 2003; Robinson, 2000), Black people were targeted as a population to be managed and controlled by White society.

One type of physical violence particularly relevant to Black communities is police brutality. Police violence may include fatalities from physical injury or negligence as well as excessive nonlethal physical and psychological injury and maltreatment (Dukes & Kahn, 2017). Note how this description almost perfectly aligns with how Fanon (1961) defines violence; this shows the coloniality that remains beyond the formal colonial structure (Adams, 2017). There have been a

number of high profile cases that have brought public awareness to this issue such as the beating of Rodney King in 1991, the shooting of unarmed Black people such as Tamir Rice and Mike Brown, the mysterious death of Sandra Bland in a Texas jail, and the wrongful incarceration of Kalief Browder for a crime he did not commit nor was charged for (Jones, 2016; Taylor, 2016). Unfortunately, these cases also demonstrate how Black lives can be taken with little consequence as many of these officers have not been indicted by grand juries or significantly reprimanded by their departments.

Racism in its various forms has been associated with poorer mental health and poorer physical health (Brown & Tylka, 2011; Bynum, Burton, & Best, 2007; Paradies et al., 2015; Solórzano, Ceja, Yosso, 2000; Torres, Driscoll, & Burrow, 2010), but police violence exacerbates this: African Americans are overrepresented in cases involving the use of force such as tasers, canines, spray, hands and body use, and weapon use (Goff, Lloyd, Geller, Raphael, & Glaser, 2016). According to *The Guardian*, in 2015-16 African Americans made up 12-15% of the U.S. population, but accounted for almost 30% of unarmed individuals killed by police officers (Swaine & McCarthy, 2017). Such violence does not only happen at the individual level, but at the community level as well such as the case of the Tulsa Race Riots in 1921 and the centuries-long violence inflicted on Black communities rooted in the structures and policies of America.

Sewell, Horsford, Coleman, and Watkins (2016) discuss the hyper-surveillance of Black communities and the immediate and long-term effects on individuals and their families. This hyper-surveillance perpetuates the breakdown of social cohesion in Black communities and is an environmental stressor that harms the psychological and physical health of Black people. Once again, we see the connections to Fanon's (and others') conceptualization of violence as being both physical and psychological; the threat of police brutality places Black communities under a state of psychological stress, which in turn leads to worse physical health. Hyper-surveillance becomes a public health concern for Black communities (Sewell et al., 2016).

The hyper-surveillance and threat of physical violence toward Black communities is also rooted in structural policies that further political and economically exploit Black communities. The 2014 killing of 18-year-old Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri took place within a broader context of hyper-surveillance and economic exploitation of the predominantly Black community of Ferguson. Wang (2018) cites this and similar cases as examples of carceral capitalism, another form of racial capitalism that is characterized by predatory lending and parasitic governance. Unfortunately, violent policing of Black people was not solely the domain of official state agents. The Fugitive Slave Act called on all White citizens to do their part in recovering fugitives and returning them to the plantations from which they escaped. Vigilante terrorist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan were informally deputized to keep Black populations disempowered and in terror. In many cases, their ranks consisted of citizens, ministers, and lawyers (Davis, 2003). This form of violence toward African Americans demonstrated the devaluing of Black lives.

Epistemic Violence

Epistemic violence erases, excludes, marginalizes, and delegitimizes voices and perspectives of already marginalized groups. One of the most dominating forms of this violence is colonialism. During the 19th century, as much as 90% of the world was controlled or colonized by western nations (Young, 2003). This subjugation and domination was justified using the construct of race, using "theories" that portrayed non-white populations as infantile, incompetent, primitive,

savage, and needing the Western power to civilize them and bring them into modernity (Cairns & Sears, 2012). White/European culture remains regarded as the standard of civilization: science, arts, literature, economics, etc. Although the formal empire ended when African, Asian, and Latin American countries gained their independence, many nations remained dependent on their former colonizers (Young, 2003). The result is the destruction of viable ways of thinking that are rooted in their natural context with ways of thinking that are maladaptive for their native contexts (Adams, 2017).

A more specific form of epistemic violence is known as epistemological violence. Epistemological violence involves interpretations of social science on “the Other” that problematizes them or proposes their inferiority to the exclusion of other equally viable interpretations. These actions are epistemologically violent because the academic context legitimizes these interpretations as knowledge (Teo, 2010). Many of the dominant psychological theories and frameworks have been and are normed on college-educated White Americans (Henrich, Heine & Norenzayan, 2010). Many theories or frameworks that mentioned African Americans were comparative and deficit-based, framing Black people as having little cognitive ability and low mental functioning (Terman, 1916). Individuals who believed in the inherent inferiority of African Americans pushed “science” that supported their pre-conceived notions. The intellectual inferiority of African Americans would be justified through knowledge production rooted in racial biases.

Systems of domination often through language as well. A group’s social and political power typically coincides with the status of their language within the society (Baldwin, 1979). A byproduct of colonialism is the fact that millions of people around the world speak languages not indigenous to their lands, but former colonial powers (England, France, Spain, Portugal, etc.). Native cultures and languages were supplanted by the culture and language of the colonizers. Translation works both as a language tool and as an instrument of power. Power is used when languages are translated and when people are transformed (or translated) by changing their sense of their place in society (Young, 2003). When a group is disconnected from their culture and language, they are disconnected from their history, knowledge of themselves, and their own sense of reality. An alien reality is imposed on them.

For French theorist Foucault (1980), this type of control over language and information is referred to as power/knowledge. In his view, power is inherently tied to control over and access to information and vice versa. Baldwin similarly refers (1979) refers to language as a political instrument. The language a person uses communicates their status within that society. According to Baldwin, the development of Black English is a result of particular relationships of power.

Control of information is an issue as well with the negative stereotypes of African Americans that perpetuated by media; media that is often not controlled by them or produced for them. The media has a monopoly has over the means to project cultural symbols. Many television images on television portray African Americans as either entertainers or criminals and not enough that show African Americans as lawyers, doctors, or any other profession. Because the major media are owned by transnational corporations, the bottom line/ratings become a determining factor as to what is put out there (Pilisuk, 1996). Social identifications can be manipulated by the individuals in power, too often signaling the end of grassroots organizations that attempt to change the status quo or improve conditions (Bettencourt, 1996).

The Black Radical Tradition: Historical Examples of Black Resistance

What must be stated is that even with these forces conspiring against them Black people resisted and continue to resist. Resistance came in many forms and were each under particularly sociohistorical contexts. While many Black people could not rely on electoral politics and voting to save them; they turned to other forms of resistance. Many of the changes toward progress have been pushed forward by the protest and resistance of everyday Black people, not only the great male leaders. Enslaved Africans revolted through rebellions such as those led by Nat Turner or removed themselves from the colonial systems by setting up Maroon societies, some times with poor White people and Indigenous peoples (Du Bois, 1924; Robinson, 1997, 2000). These societies were endangered as they constituted a threat to the colonial order; at times these societies were violently wiped out by colonial powers (Robinson, 1997, 2000). Haiti became an independent nation after more than a decade of revolt and revolution (Du Bois, 1924; James, 2001). Frederick Douglass and others were in the forefront of abolition efforts. Others decided to use their intellectual gifts: Radical intellectuals spoke out against the physical violence inflicted on Black people and conducted research that pushed back against the structural and epistemic violence inflicted on Black communities (Robinson, 2000).

Radical Intellectuals

Black radical intellectuals have historically produced scholarship and engaged in activism on behalf of Black people (Johnson & Lubin, 2017; Robinson, 2000). Ida B. Wells-Barnett's investigative journalism and activism highlighted and documented the rampant lynching of Black men in the south. She started the first Black women's organizations and help found other organizations including the National Association for Colored Women and the NAACP (Davis, 2003; Wells, 1970). One of her NAACP co-founders was W.E.B. Du Bois. He argued that race was socially constructed and that social conditions cause inequality. His multidisciplinary talents were put on display in his seminal work *The Souls of Black Folk* (Du Bois, 1903). Similarly, Fanon's (1970) *Black Skin, White Masks* posits that racism creates harmful psychological constructs that inhibit psychological health. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, he states that a new world must constructed that destroys the Black-White binary and that an African revolution must come from the people (Fanon, 1961). His work has been instrumental in understanding the psychological consequences of oppression and the plight of oppressed people. Continuing in this tradition, Angela Davis has been a decades-long advocate for the oppressed and exploited, writing on Black liberation, women's liberation, prison abolition, and international solidarity with Palestine (Davis, 2003, 2005, 2016).

Civil Rights Movement

This resistance continued into what we now refer to as the Civil Rights Movement. The Civil Rights Movement, as most know it, emerged from events such as the murder of Emmett Till, the Montgomery bus boycotts, and the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court case. The landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) case involved the citation of Mamie and Kenneth Clark's famous doll studies to demonstrate the psychological harm that segregation inflicted on African American children (Belgrave & Allison, 2018). Centered at this movement was the attainment of civil rights, especially voting rights. Resistance came in the form of protests, marches, sit-ins, speeches, and boycotts. This mass movement of resistance resulted in gains,

such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which supposedly ensured formal political equality (Taylor, 2016). Many of these gains would receive a backlash.

Backlash

The FBI's Counterintelligence Program (COINTELPRO) sought to eliminate, delegitimize, and subvert (structural, epistemic, and physical violence) Black organizations such as the Black Panthers and members of the Civil Rights Movement such as Martin Luther King, Jr. (Taylor, 2016) and even surveilled Black student unions at universities (Rogers, 2012). King's assassination in 1968 proved a turning point; riots broke out as anger, frustration, and grief poured out into the streets. King himself would refer to such emotional outbursts as the "language of the unheard," (King, 1966). The response to urban rebellions of the time period was to frame them as being the cause of crime, which would require additional and more forceful policing (Alexander, 2012). The use of racially coded language (epistemic violence) by politicians promoted systemic anti-Black violence under the guise of "law and order" (Alexander, 2012). Republican party strategist Lee Atwater outlined this "southern strategy" in a 1981 recording: "Now you're talking about cutting taxes, and all these things you're talking about are totally economic things and a byproduct of them is, blacks get hurt worse than whites... 'We want to cut this' is much more abstract than even the busing thing... and a hell of a lot more abstract than 'Nigger, nigger,'" (Perlstein, 2012).

The use of coded language allowed politicians to promote racist agendas under plausible deniability that their actions were intentionally racist (structural and epistemic). This also served to discipline rebelling African Americans and to stamp out protests and demonstrations as a means of lodging complaints at the state (Brown, 2016; Taylor, 2016). Such increasingly punitive and disempowering policies led many to question the utility of electoral politics and voting. African American communities would vote for Black politicians who would presumably serve in the community's interest, only to see those elected officials' efforts stymied by White-dominated committee and legislatures. Alexander (2012) points out that in 1870 (five years after the Civil War), 15% of southern representatives were Black while in 1980 (15 years after the Voting Rights Act of 1965), only 8% of southern representatives were Black. This made it much more difficult for Black communities to resist this systemic violence given how much the burden of proof lies on victims of discrimination to prove in court that it happened. Police units became much more militarized and many Black communities began to resemble places of military occupation and surveillance (Alexander, 2012). The rise of mass incarceration and the War on Drugs (structural and physical violence) devastated countless African American communities and families, the effects of which are still felt to this day. Morsy & Rothstein (2016) found that African American children were six times more likely to have/had an incarcerated parent even though African Americans were no more likely to use drugs; yet, they still were more likely to be arrested. Imprisonment creates a host of additional problems and barriers for families and communities such as more economic instability and worse health outcomes (Morsy & Rothstein, 2016).

The 21st century has brought a host of new issues to consider for African Americans. Police brutality and shootings of unarmed African Americans have gained more attention in the media due to cell phone videos and the internet. While such evidence may be necessary to convince others to enact change, one has to wonder the effect on African Americans of consuming numerous stories such as these. Many believed, despite the warnings from many Black people, that the election of Barack Obama in 2008 signaled the dawn of a post-racial society (Taylor,

2016). Although his election galvanized young voters and African Americans, disillusionment settled in after high-profiled cases of police brutality, shootings of unarmed Black people, and an increasing awareness of mass incarceration and the prison-industrial complex. Given the present-day political climate, African Americans feel especially vulnerable, and there has been an increasingly frequent string of police calls on African Americans minding their own business, leading to a new hashtag #livingwhileBlack. African American communities are over-policed and over-surveilled, producing negative effects on the health and well-being of African American communities (Sewell et al., 2016). The intersection of physical, structural, and epistemic forms of anti-Black violence required a response that was radically intersectional.

Black Lives Matter

Brief History

BLM is “an ideological and political intervention in a world where Black lives are systematically and intentionally targeted for demise. It is an affirmation of Black folks’ contributions to this society, our humanity, and our resilience in the face of deadly oppression,” (Garza, 2014, p. 23; Herstory, n.d.). In this statement, BLM is positioned as resistance against systemic anti-Black violence. Their mission also invokes the liberation tasks of the BHK Framework. These tasks are characterized by intersectionality (awareness of position in society), decentralized leadership (cultural strengths that foster empowered action), participation of youth (BHK framework focuses on Black youth; explains how youth may get involved at an early age), and documenting resistance (awareness of the structure of racism and race; contributions and achievements of Black people), (Chapman-Hilliard & Adams-Bass, 2016). Framing BLM as both an ideological and political intervention highlights the cultural, institutional, and individual levels of anti-Black systemic violence and the need to address it on multiple fronts. This stance asserts the intersectional praxis of BLM working to end all violence against Black people: “Black Lives Matter, all Black lives, regardless of actual or perceived sexual identity, gender identity, gender expression, economic status, ability, disability, religious belief or disbeliefs, immigration status or location,” (Khan-Cullors & Bandele, 2018, pp. 202-203).

In 2012, 17-year-old Trayvon Martin was killed in an altercation with George Zimmerman, a neighborhood watchman (Alvarez & Buckley, 2013). Questions quickly surfaced about the events when Zimmerman was not immediately arrested and charged with a crime (Ransby, 2018). After much media attention and protest, charges would be brought forth, and a trial would ensue. Through the proceedings, it became clear to many Trayvon Martin was on trial for his murder as much if not more than George Zimmerman (Ransby, 2018). On July 13, 2013, the jury returned a not-guilty verdict citing Zimmerman’s right to stand his ground (Alvarez & Buckley, 2013). Outrage and protests were immediate (Ransby, 2018). This would be another example (and not the last) of unarmed Black people being gunned down with the perpetrator not being held responsible.

In response to this, Alicia Garza wrote these words in a Facebook post: “btw stop saying that we are not surprised. That’s a damn shame in itself. I continue to be surprised at how little Black lives matter. And I will continue that. Stop giving up on black life. Black people, I will NEVER give up us. NEVER (Khan-Cullors & Bandele, 2018, p. 180).” Her friend and fellow organizer Patrisse Cullors responds with the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter (Khan-Cullors & Bandele, 2018). For the next several days, the two discuss their ideas and begin planning an online platform (Khan-Cullors & Bandele, 2018). They reached out to Alicia’s friend Opal Tometi, another

organizer who runs Black Alliance for Just Immigration (Khan-Cullors & Bandele, 2018). The three agreed that it should be a political project with the goal to build power and build a movement (Khan-Cullors & Bandele, 2018). From that point, BLM began to spread and grow.

BLM Work and Projects

Scholars such as Roberts (1997) and Hill Collins (2004) discuss how African American women and LGBTQ African Americans face systemic anti-Black violence. In Roberts' (1997) *Killing the Black Body*, she examined the relationship between reproductive liberties and racial politics. She found that African American women experiences with the criminal justice system were substantially different from those of African American men because of their gender and their experiences with reproductive rights were substantially different from those of White women because of their race.

Collins' (2004) *Black Sexual Politics* posits that Black sexual politics of a set of ideas and social practices shaped by gender, race, and sexuality that frame Black men's and women's treatment of one another. They also shape how African Americans are viewed and treated by others. These politics are at the center of beliefs about Black masculinities and Black femininities, gender-specific experiences of African Americans, and forms that racism takes in the post-civil rights area. One of her arguments is that institutionalized rape (women) and institutionalized lynching (men) are gendered expressions of the same type of social control over African Americans (Collins, 2004). She also points out that heterosexism is a system of power that suppresses heterosexual and homosexual African American men and women in ways that perpetuate Black subordination (Collins, 2004). Such politics serve to inform those socializing agents, in turn influencing African Americans in gendered and sexualized ways. Much of the discourse centers on the state-sanctioned violence experienced by African American men, but BLM highlights the need to consider the experiences of African American women and African American LGBTQ communities and how they, too, experience state-sanctioned anti-Black violence (Furman, Singh, Darko, & Wilson, 2018; Matthews & Noor, 2017).

Expansion continued when BLM along with several racial and social justice organizations created the Movement for Black Lives platform. The coalition is aimed at racial justice for Black people and released a policy brief that outlines demands such as “the end to the named and unnamed wars on Black people – including the criminalization, incarceration, and killing of our people,” (Movement for Black Lives, 2016, End the War on Black People, 1).

BLM as an organization has engaged in several projects over their short history. The Mama's Day National Bailout raised more than \$500,000, bailing out more than 100 Black mothers to be reunited with their families on Mother's Day (Matthew & Moor, 2017). In a similar vein, BLM-Toronto staged an intervention at Toronto Pride to re-center Black queer and trans experiences. They demanded police officers be barred from future Pride events and that pride increase its Black staff and commit to actively supporting Black events (Furman et al., 2018; Matthews & Moor, 2017). This intervention causes a ripple effect that resulted in other BLM chapters shutting their local Pride marches and making similar demands. These two interventions illustrate resistance against physical and epistemic violence inflicted on African American women and LGBTQ African Americans (Matthews & Moor, 2017).

Their Channel Black program trains future Black leadership to “construct, optimize, and implement strategic interventions on race,” (Matthews & Noor, 2017, Other Work and Campaigns, 1). In the short term, their goal is to diversify the faces of people identified as experts and featured in media discussing and intervening in vital issues that impact Black

communities. Their long-term goals are to overcome barriers to emphasizing with and understanding Black communities, developing the skills of Black millennial leaders, and supporting organizing tactics with empirically backed interventions leading to a reduction in implicit racial bias and prejudicial treatment (Matthews & Noor, 2017). Through increasing the number of Black experts called upon to discuss Black communities, BLM is resisting against the epistemic/epistemological violence inflicted on African American communities that silences and erases the Black experience.

Themes of Resistance

These programs demonstrate the ways in which BLM resists the various forms of violence experienced by Black communities. Through recentering marginalized groups in the discourse of social justice, BLM engages in resistance against epistemic violence. Their organizing efforts also serve as resistance against structural and physical forms of violence. Given that BLM resists on multiple fronts, what are the broader implications for resistance against violence, specifically systemic anti-Black violence? How do the projects of the organization reflect broader trends of Black activism?

BLM represents a new form of activism and social movement. There has been a resurgence of activism by African Americans demonstrating BLM as a contemporary strategy for mass protest and struggle (Rickford, 2016). Livingston and colleagues (2017) found that 41% of participants considered themselves activist, 52% were involved in organizations within the African American community, and 53% held leadership positions in their respective organizations. Psychological empowerment and racial centrality predicted increased activism (Livingston et al., 2017). This is consistent with the findings of Godsay and Brodsky (2018) in which they found BLM influenced resilience and empowerment in young Black men by providing awareness of racism, promoting racial pride, offering resources, and providing an opportunity to enact change within their local context. This indicates that the resurgence may be in part due to increased attention brought on by movements such as BLM and the current political climate (Godsay & Brodsky, 2018). Based on the BHK framework (Chapman-Hilliard & Adams-Bass, 2016), four important characteristics of the broader movement are evident in their work: intersectionality, decentralized leadership, the participation of youth, and documenting resistance.

Intersectionality

Their radical intersectionality is a defining characteristic that is prevalent throughout their various projects (Ransby, 2018). BLM activists engage in Black feminism through social media and other online platforms. Jackson (2016) points out lessons of radical intersectionality that can be learned from BLM activists. It is a continuation of the larger Black resistance that also learned lessons from previous iterations. They have insisted on introducing intersectionality into mainstreams discourse in a way that values and centers all Black lives. This is contrasted with many traditional movements that historically have centered the experiences of and been led by cisgender Black men, leaving out the experiences and concerns of women and LGBTQ individuals within Black communities. Furman et al. (2018) discuss these tensions and intersections between the BLM and LGBTQ movements. BLM-Toronto protested the 2016 Toronto LGBTQ Pride to demand more resources, access to space and removal of police presence at future pride events. Even with this tension, they point out there is promise for racial

justice coalitions with BLM and LGBTQ groups to engage in radical activism for social transformation (Furman et al., 2018).

Activists have learned from the radical Black feminist tradition including Audre Lorde, Kimberle Crenshaw, bell hooks, Fannie Lou Hamer, Ella Baker, and Marsha P. Johnson, engaging in an intersectional praxis (Carruthers, 2018; Collins and Birge, 2016; Ransby, 2018). Black Youth Project 100 (BYP 100) founder Charlene Carruthers (2018) defines a Black queer feminist lens as a praxis in which people bring their full selves into dismantling all oppressive systems. She cites influences from the Black Radical Tradition such as the Combahee River Collective, the Haitian revolution, Caribbean Maroon societies, quilombos of Brazil, and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (Carruthers, 2018). The founders of BLM (Garza, Tometi, & Cullors) each engaged in intersectional activism before BLM became a named movement. This intersectional approach allows for collaboration with other social justice organizations. For example, BLM directly coordinated with Standing Rock organizers to stand in solidarity with and generate resources for water protectors; they engaged in conversations about anti-Blackness, defending Indigenous sovereignty, and their shared struggles for liberation (Matthews & Noor, 2017). Their intersectional approach ensures that all lives matter when Black lives matter and Black lives matter when all Black lives matter.

Decentralized Leadership

The movement also emphasizes decentralized leadership. While Garza, Tometi, and Cullors are founders of the movement and BLM exists as an organization, the movement spreads much wider. The organization is chapter-based and member-led, meaning that individual chapters can tailor their strategies to their specific context. There are also other organizations part of the larger BLM movement such as Dream Defenders, BYP 100, Million Hoodies Movement for Justice (Carruthers, 2018; Ransby, 2018; Taylor, 2016). By having a decentralized leadership structure, this helps to ensure that everyone is brought to the front of the movement. Historically, such organizations have been led by a charismatic leader and have faltered when that leader has left or been replaced (Carruthers, 2018). Robinson (2016) points out that too often organizations are presumed to succeed because of good leadership or in spite of bad leadership, but failures are never attributed to the possession of leadership. Carruthers (2018) reiterates a warning from Ella Baker on the dangers of building movements around and valorizing charismatic leaders, especially those who may not be rooted in the communities they serve (Carruthers, 2018; Mueller, 2004). Decentralized leadership allows for everyone involved to have a voice and to be a leader.

Youth Participation

Like any other iteration of the Black Radical Tradition, the youth participation within BLM takes place within a broader ecosystem of Black youth activism. Hope, Keels, and Durkee (2016) found that engagement with BLM was accompanied by participation in several kinds of political activism. One could assume that being introduced to the radical intersectionality of BLM illuminates the interconnectedness of multiple forms of oppression and marginalization, leading activists to attach themselves to multiple interconnected causes. Young people have traditionally played vital roles in Black social movements, particularly students.

College campuses have consistently been sites of resistance for Black college students (Anderson & Span, 2016; Rogers, 2012). The Black Panther party was founded because Huey

Newton and Bobby Seale's campus Black student union (BSU) did not follow the vision of Malcolm X; many future BSUs would be modeled after the Black Panther Party (Rogers, 2012). Students became radicalized partially due to radicals and militants such as Fannie Lou Hamer, Stokely Carmichael, and Dick Gregory frequently speaking at campuses (Rogers, 2012). Students paid severe prices for their activism: suspension, jail, and even death (Rogers, 2012). This activist spirit has continued into the 21st century with BLM (Anderson & Span, 2016). For example, in 2015, University of Missouri graduate student Jonathan Butler performed a hunger strike to protest the campus racial climate at the school (Johnson, 2017). Soon after, the football team boycotted a game and students pressured forced the president of the university to step down. Decades of research has supported the protests of Black students, citing negative campus climates (Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000; Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Hagedorn, 1999; Chavous, 2005; Rankin & Reason, 2005; Tynes, Rose, & Markoe, 2013). These negative racial climates provide another arena in which Black students inspired by BLM engage in activism.

Besides the formal BLM organization, other Black youth organizations under the umbrella of BLM have engaged in activism. BYP 100 is an organization of 18-35 year old organizers who work from a Black queer feminist lens. Dream Defenders was founded in 2012 by youth of color after the shooting death of Trayvon Martin (Carruthers, 2018; Ransby, 2018; Taylor, 2016). These organizations maintain the tradition of young Black people engaging in activism for transformative social change, yet this resistance has to be documented and passed on to future generations.

Documenting Resistance

Finally, there is a need to properly document the current resistance to inform future movements and to prevent future epistemic violence. BLM has to fight against negative narratives (Ray, Brown, Fraistat, & Summers, 2017) and does not seem to enjoy the same academic attention as other movements such as Occupy Wall Street (Hunter & Polk, 2016). Hunter and Polk (2016) discuss the differences in academic responses to BLM and Occupy. While Occupy received public and vocal academic support, the same cannot be said for the BLM movement. Taylor (2016) makes the point that Occupy gained momentum from Black activists protesting the execution of Troy Davis, a Black man executed for killing a police officer even though several witnesses recanted their statements. The momentum from that movement fed into Occupy and garnered it more attention. Without these facts being known, there is the risk of BLM ending up like many historical movements: either forgotten/erased or white-washed. In their call to action: BLM asks supporters to amplify messages of the organization to be "ambassadors" to push back against false narrative in their own circles (Matthews & Noor, 2017).

Social media has served as a significant site for this epistemic intervention. Much of mainstream media perpetuates anti-Black violence through harmful practices such as individualizing racism, falsely equating incomparable acts, diverting from race, portraying the government as overreaching, prioritizing intent over impact, condemning through coded language, and silencing history (Apollon, Keheler, Medeiros, Ortega, Sebastian, & Sen, 2014). Many of these narratives reflect the narratives passed along by politicians and mainstream educational spaces. Social media provides a democratized space in which marginalized voices typically ignored by mainstream narratives to provide their own commentary, critique, and activism (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015). This hashtag activism serves as resistance against epistemic, structural, and physical violence in an age in which marginalized people have more access to tools to use for documenting state-sanctioned violence and contesting negative media

representations (Ray et al., 2017; Yang, 2016). BLM uses social media much like the Civil Rights Movement used television (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015; De Choudhury, Jhaver, Sugar, Weber, 2016). It is no surprise that many those whose bodies are constantly targeted as criminal, violent looters and rioters in the media take to other platforms to resist these narratives.

This epistemic resistance does not only occur in organizing and activist spaces. Activists, organizers, and scholars in the Black Radical Tradition have historically documented the work to pass along information: books, research, social documentaries, archival records, autobiographies/memoirs, manifestos, and other literary forms. This is no different for BLM. Several key organizers and activists have written memoirs, autobiographies, and anthologies to educate people on systemic anti-Black violence and to provide case studies and strategies for resistance (Carruthers, 2018; Khan-Cullors & Bandele, 2018; Ransby, 2018; Schenwar, Macare, & Price, 2016; Taylor, 2016). Black parents have also participated in this resistance through the racial socialization of their children. This racial socialization can serve as a counternarrative to mainstream representations. Parents may engage in cultural socialization that educates youth on the history, culture, and heritage of Black people. Parents may also prepare their children for future racial barriers and bias. Parents attempt to prepare their children for an anti-Black world (Hughes et al., 2006). Black parents have to shift and adjust their socialization in response to killings of unarmed Black people (Threlfall, 2016; Thomas & Blackmon, 2014). The way to ensure that is to adequately document this resistance against systemic anti-Black violence so that the problem can eventually be eradicated at its root.

Discussion/Conclusion

The Black Lives Matter movement emerged as a political and ideological intervention for resistance against systemic anti-Black racism. Based on critical race psychology and the BHK Framework, BLM engages in liberatory tasks that are characterized by radical intersectionality, decentralized leadership, youth involvement, and documenting resistance. These characteristics allow for BLM to partner with many different organizations and groups towards transformative social change. Interracial solidarity is vital. Tran, Nakamura, Kim, Khera, and AhnAllen, (2018) discuss the multilayered relationship between Black and Asian American and Pacific Islander communities. They call to challenge the miseducation of Black and AAPI histories and communities and to prioritize the preservation and healing of communities of color, especially Black lives (Tran, Nakamura, Kim, Khera, & AhnAllen, 2018). BLM has garnered support from many corners of the world. Ferguson activists and Palestinian activists shared strategies and tips with each other through social media (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015). Through these liberation tasks, BLM provides a strategy or platform for Black people to seek liberation while ensuring that they are psychologically and physically healthy. The promotion of healing justice by BLM and similar movements reminds those involved in activism and social change that their health has to be attended to both during organizing and after.

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