Taking Back the Narrative

Black Lives Matter

Jasmine Tudor

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Signed: _____

Jasmine Tudor

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Summary

This paper, within the case study of Black Lives Matter, and through the review of literature and films from activists, journalists, historians, and media theorists, explores the impact of social media on social movements.

Before social media, mass media had been allowed to co-opt the Black narrative for the White-hetero-male colonist. Made for and by the colonist, mass media diffused the Black criminal stereotype throughout all major media sources in order to establish Blacks as a dangerous "other". In doing this, the Black narrative was misrepresented and stolen for hundreds of years. As a result, implicit racial bias against Blacks is ingrained within the American psyche.

This has had severe social and political consequences for the Black community; the era of Jim Crow and lynchings, mass incarceration and the vilification of Black victims. These racist legal and social systems have been deemed justified because of society's implicit racial bias towards Blacks.

Social media offers a new voice of influence to Black America that has allowed them to regain their lost narrative and combat some of these devastating consequences. Through enabling them to reach the same audience as mass media with the ever available smart phone, social media has put the narrative back in the hands of the Black community. This has allowed African Americans to take back their narrative, offering their own perspective and experiences on issues that effect them. These narratives, such as police violence against Black communities, is not a new narrative for African Americans. What is new is the cameras being there and having a direct and unbiased access to an audience when injustice occurs.

This new media and photo technology has brought about lasting political and social change. #BlackLivesMatter has required politicians to listen to the Black community's needs. From achieving policy that requires many policemen in Black communities to wear body cameras to Democrat presidential candidates adopting a criminal-justice platform. Due to social media the Black Lives Matter movement is achieving some of the most powerful Black activism since the '60s.

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Introduction

The impact of social media on social movements has been at the forefront of the discussion of new age activism and its effectiveness. From its use during the Arab Spring to the rise of "fake news" for activists and scholars alike the question is whether social media is hurting or helping social and political issues around the world. By looking at social media in terms of a democratic narrative sharing platform compared to traditional media like film, television and news, this paper—conducted through literature and film review—will explore the effects of social media on social movements within the context of the new age civil rights movement, Black Lives Matter.

Since its creation, traditional mass media has been co-opted by the colonist, or White-hetero-male society, resulting in stereotypes like the Black criminal, to dominate the Black narrative. The media created the perception of African Americans as a dangerous "other", outside of White society or the perceived "normal". Media driven personas confirmed a racial order by forming implicit racial bias. This bias continues to justify the abuse of African Americans as second class citizens.

Social media brought a new voice of influence to the oppressed in the 21st century civil rights movement Black Lives Matter (BLM). By using social media, BLM is able to skip the biased traditional mass media and with no traditional means of power themselves, share their narrative with millions. Although an online social movement has other obstacles, like decentralization, abusive responses from other online users, and "fake news", the power that social media has given the marginalized is revolutionary; Ultimately, for the first time in US history, African Americans control the narrative and conversation of police violence.

The goal of controlling their narrative is to expose the colonist's as false, and allow for the established "other" stereotype to be destroyed. This dismantling of implicit racial bias can eradicate the colonist's justification for dominance and expose the systematic bias throughout American political policies, bringing the U.S. closer to social equality.

Chapter One

A Narrative Not Their Own: Media Representation of African Americans

Since the beginning of media the representation of African-Americans has not been their own. From the written word to film, television and news, African Americans are weighed down by common stereotypes[1] that reinforce a negative public perception and feed a false story to the American people.

The theft of the African American narrative consistently occurs because of "colonial discourse". In order to maintain colonialism, which is the complete domination and control of government, land and people, the colonist needs to justify their control to the public. In order to do this, the colonist depends on the "fixity" of an "other" that comes in the form of the colonized. This "otherness" is established by the colonist construing "the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin" or in other words, stereotyping (Bhabha, 1999, pg. 341-342). Stereotypes must be circulated within society time and time again through communication tools, most powerfully mass media, in order to successfully establish their "otherness". Presented as reality on the news, on television or within film, this "otherness" becomes accepted by society as reality[2] (Bhabha, 1999, pg. 341-342).

For hundreds of years' African Americans were treated as not just second class citizens, but property. The horrific treatment of this community brought White America to political and economic prosperity, raising them to the status of a world leader on both accounts. During slavery, to maintain a social order where the "normal" or White community, benefits off the defined "other" or Black community, justification through stereotypes were diffused through mass media.

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[1] See appendix: Stereotypes for the historical stereotypes seen in media

[2] Additionally, the established "other" or the colonized are physically visible within society. This visibility makes the stereotypes seen through the media seem "structurally similar to Realism." Further strengthening the perception that this is a true narrative (Bhabha, 1999, pg. 341-342).

After slavery, the establishment of an "other" continues to justify African Americans as second class citizens. To maintain a racial caste system "colonial discourse" has to be established; mass media has to be used time and time again, portraying stereotypical Black characters and placing Blacks within White context, allowing for the African American narrative to be misrepresented as a dangerous "other".

In her book *The Color of Crime: Racial Hoaxes, White Fear, Black Protectionism, Police Harassment and Other Macroaggressions,* Kathryn Russel-Brown explores this perceived reality and stolen narrative through the short film *The Slowest Car in Town*. This film describes an everyday experience, and true narrative, for the Black man:

A Black man is in an elevator. The man is dressed professionally in a suit and holding a briefcase. Each time the elevator stops, another White person gets in. Instead of seeing what is there, a professional Black man, each only sees that which supports their implicit racial bias (See Chapter 2.1). A White woman gets into the elevator, once realizing the race and sex of her fellow elevator rider, the woman quickly exits. At the next stop, two White people get in and all they "see" is a stereotypical African bushman, complete with spear and African drums beating in the background. The next White passengers to get in see the man as a shackled convict. The following see him as a crack addict, dressed as a disheveled homeless man. "By the time the elevator reaches the lobby, the Black businessman no longer exists—he has been reduced to the image projected onto him by the White passengers" (Rome, 2004, pg. 4).

This phenomenon is called "entrapment by media imagery," the African American man becomes lost in the stereotypical archetypes projected on to him or her by the dominant White society. This is the manifestation of "colonial discourse"—the stereotypical narratives fed to these White passengers repeatedly, have permanently altered their perception of reality. The Black man's own narrative lost in the interaction.

Contrastingly, the White colonist remains powerful because they remain unidentifiable, resulting in no stereotype to be projected upon them or their race as a whole (Dyer, 1999). There are no such phrases as "White crime" or "White-on-White" crime. When someone White is connected to crime like serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer, his actions do not implicate the White race as a whole. He remains separate from them, crime and Whiteness unlinked (Rome, 2004).

This means, being White is defined as being nothing and everything at the same time. Being White in society is to co-opt normalcy, distinguishing everything that is not White to be the "other." The "colourless multi-colouredness of Whiteness" secures White power by being unable to tie it to any distinctive stereotype as a whole. Therefore, being White is more of a "historical accident" achieved through White domination and colonialism rather than an actual state of being (Dyer, 1999).

A consequence of this, is that White society does not have to think about race the same way that minorities do. This idea of White characteristics being indistinguishable, allowing them to separate their identity from their race is explained through the Critical Race Theory (CRT), "'CRT was born out of the reality that the formal legalistic approach to civil rights in America began but did not end the conversation about how Blacks experience racism and how Whites have the privilege of opting out of the conversation unless it provides succor to their own self-interest.'" There is a disconnect between how these two groups experience America; With African Americans their race is involved in every interaction, while White Americans are able to ignore their race. Martha Mahoney argues that "'this country is both highly segregated and based on the concept of Whiteness as 'normal.' It is therefore hard for White folks to see Whiteness both when we interact with people who are not socially defined as White and when we interact with other White people." And so, when Black narratives are continuously shown to be dysfunctional, criminal, or native to the White normalcy they are perceived by the audience to be a truthful reflection of Black society (Leduff, 2011).

Exploring the manifestation of "colonial discourse" in the U.S. this chapter will cover how mass media, by defining Blacks as a dehumanized and dangerous "other", has been used to steal the Black narrative and maintain colonial control.

1.1 African Americans in Film: The Birth of a Nation, Writing the Script on Racial Order

The beginning of this narrative can be traced back to slavery but is solidified and forever immortalized in the United States' first blockbuster, *The Birth of a Nation (BOAN)* (1915). Set in the reconstruction era, *BOAN* rewrites history by taking the story of a pertinent time in the African American narrative and telling it through the Southern White perspective. In an effort

to reduce and ridicule them, African Americans were portrayed by Whites in blackface prominently shown as "brutal Black bucks"—assaulting White men and raping White women. *BOAN* "detailed the South-should-have-won-the-war positions" that dominated representations of African Americans in all forms of media and new media "(politics, history, literature, film, popular illustrations, ephemera, and advertisements) for the better part of a century." (Wallace, 2012, p. 260).

Prior to the freeing of slaves, the "happy slave"[3] archetype was most commonly used to justify the ownership of African Americans. After emancipation, a new stereotype had to be made to rationalize the continuance of a racial caste system beyond their happiness to be property. The first justification became the Black criminal, and is fully utilized in *BOAN*. The fear of Black domination and the Black criminal is established through the infamous Gus chase scene.

Figure 1: Example of the "happy slave" stereotype ("Uncle Tom's Cabin", 1899)

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[3] "One of the most enduring stereotypes in American history is that of the Sambo (Boskin, 1986). This pervasive image of a simple-minded, docile Black man dates back at least as far as the colonization of America. The Sambo stereotype flourished during the reign of slavery in the United States. In fact, the notion of the 'happy slave' is the core of the Sambo caricature. White slave owners molded African-American males, as a whole, into this image of a jolly, overgrown child who was happy to serve his master." (Green, 1998).

Figure 2: Example of the Black criminal archetype (Birth of a Nation, 1915)

The choices made in *BOAN* from the editing, to the cinematography to the narrative were all created to pull the audience into a specific perception; Pet Sis the innocent, Brother the gallant savior, and Gus the barbaric animal. *BOAN* masterfully portrays a "Manichaean world-view of race in which Gus represents absolute evil and Little Colonel and his sister embody absolute good" (Diawara, 2012, pg. 213).

Griffith immediately evokes empathy for Pet Sis, a young White Southern girl: She is shown in loving scenes with her family, she makes up the main focus of the mis-en-scène, always pictured in the foreground of this sequence; bright, high key lighting is used when she is on screen; and she is described in cut-scenes as a naïve but sweet young woman. Griffith purposely portrayed Pet Sis as overtly innocent and good; Pet Sis could be any one of the audience's little sisters (Diawara, 2012).

In comparison, Gus is immediately defined as an outsider and an animal: Pictured outside the Pet Sis' fence, Gus is stalking about like a beast, hunched over and watching Pet Sis play; dark, low key lighting is used when he is pictured on screen; within the mis-en-scène, when sharing the screen with White characters, he is pictured in the background literally on the out skirts of "normal" society[4] (Diawara, 2012).

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[4] Even their dress defines their difference, Pet Sis' brother Little Colonel wears a proper suit, his sister is shown wearing a nice dress fit for a young girl, Gus contrastingly looks disheveled. He does not wear his captain's uniform and his broken English corroborates his inferiority and "otherness" to the audience (Diawara, 2012).

The culmination of this dynamic occurs when Gus chases Pet Sis through the woods, yelling that he is going to marry her. Compared to the rhythm of the cutting when Pet Sis is shown with her family, the editing is faster, panicked, cuing to the audience that the evil Gus means to force himself on her. Pet Sis, so filled with fear, decides to throw herself off of a cliff to avoid rape or marriage to this Black man. The editing rate slows again when Gus disappears from the screen, and the hero Little Colonel takes the, now dead, Pet Sis into his arms and weeps (Diawara, 2012).

Later, Little Colonel forms the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) in order to restore "justice" for the crime committed by the barbaric Gus. The KKK holds a "trial", meaning they capture Gus pronounce him guilty, and hang him. The audience, who was setup to empathize with Pet Sis, finds the death of Gus legitimate, even heroic. Additionally, the audience feels like the KKK was and is needed to protect them from the criminal and animalistic Blacks that are so vividly portrayed.

The racist narrative, cinematography and editing of *BOAN* lasted long after 1915, establishing a racial order within Hollywood and consequently in the spectator's perceived reality. As Manthia Diawara, author of *Black American Cinema* argues that:

> *The Birth of a Nation* constitutes the grammar book for Hollywood's representation of Black manhood and womanhood, its obsession with miscegenation, and its fixing of Black people within certain spaces, such as kitchens, and into certain supporting roles, such as criminals on the screen. White people must occupy the center, leaving Black people with only one choice—to exist in relation to Whiteness.

The racial strife that was depicted in *BOAN* led to Blacks appearing on the Hollywood screen as problems, "a thorn in America's heel" (Diawara, 2012, pg. 3).

1.2 African Americans in Modern Film: Dysfunction and White Context

BOAN's racist formula for film continues throughout Hollywood[5] (Diawara, 2012, pg. 238). Today, critically acclaimed movies portray African Americans as lost in a world of chaos and

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[5] Into the 1980s, the stereotypes that viewers would have seen in the early age of film continued to resurface in films like *Caddyshack* (1980) or *The Blues Brother* (1980) with a "neo-minstrelsy" style. Hollywood's narratives for Black actors were confined to those of comedic nature or a single character presented in a White

immorality, which is always rooted in the Black community. Films such as *Training Day* (2001), *Monster's Ball* (2001) and *Precious* (2009) all picture African Americans involved in "extreme poverty, violence, dysfunction, abuse (sexual, physical and mental), criminal behavior and psychosis" (Johnson, 2012), perpetuating extensions of older negative stereotypes.

Similarly, the Black criminal who was used to successfully establish African Americans as the "other" remains influential—even amongst Black filmmakers. When you look at this year's Academy Awards, many Black films were nominated. However, there is an extreme difference between *Moonlight* (2016) and *LaLa Land* (2016); between *Fences* (2016) and *Arrival* (2016). Movies like *LaLa Land* show a relatable struggle of love unrelated to their Whiteness and instead praised for its portrayal of normalcy. According to CRT, this is because the White community—simply considered as "normal"—is able to be in a narrative without saying something about the White race as a whole. Contrastingly, *Moonlight* and *Fences* portrays dysfunction—whether its drug dealing, addiction, dysfunctional parenting or poverty. To the spectator, unable to separate the narrative from the character's race, this becomes a Black narrative representing the Black community.

The fact that movies portraying Blacks in moral chaos are the few that receive prestigious honors from the Academy should be reflected upon. This shows that American audiences perceive these portrayals as true Black narratives, so much so that the performances and/or films are considered to be worthy of the highest honors for their realism and truth (Johnson, 2012). Such persistent dysfunctional stereotypes have been so ingrained into the American psyche, they are accepted as fact.

Some may say, there are Black narratives being produced today outside of dysfunction. However, because the racist positioning of African Americans within the narrative and mis-en-scène has remained prevalent within the traditional Hollywood film, even Black written and directed Black narratives become co-opted by White context.

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context. Leaving one Black character to represent the African American community as a whole, and more often than not, in a stereotypical fashion. This can be seen in films such as *Jack Flash* (1986) and *An Officer and a Gentleman* (1982) (Diawara, 2012, pg. 238).

When it comes to mis-en-scène spectators have been conditioned from the days of *BOAN*: viewers are taught to put more importance on certain characters depending on how they are positioned on camera (Gibbs, 2007). "Space is related to power and powerlessness, in so far as those who occupy the center of the screen are usually more powerful than those situated in the background or completely absent from the screen" (Diawara, 2012). As seen in *BOAN,* Hollywood began by positioning Blacks in the background of the mis-en-scène and narrative, physically not the focus in the frame or spending little time on screen. There was no depth offered to these characters because they were not the focus. Since they spent little time with these Black characters, the audience never knew them outside of their established "otherness", and so, the audience never related or empathized with them.

This is seen even within critically acclaimed Black narratives today. The recent film *Hidden Figures* (2016), a story that focuses on a Black woman's narrative, takes place heavily within White context. Kevin Costner, playing Al Harrison, is offered to the audience as a White savior.

Hidden Figures is an empowering narrative of a Black woman, Katherine Johnson, who despite systematic racism and sexism made a notable contribution to the space program. Powerful and mostly unknown, *Hidden Figures* is a story that should be told. However, by placing White supporting characters as the dominant part of the mis-en-scène, the audience connects to the White character instead of the Black. A technique used by Hollywood since *BOAN* to connect audiences with only White characters and establish Black "otherness".

This is demonstrated in the scene where Al realizes that Katherine does not have a bathroom in the office that she can use because she is a colored woman living in the segregated South. Al confronts Katherine physically positioned above her, on a balcony outside his office, as he asks her what she is doing every day that makes her disappear for forty-five minutes.

He descends on her when he hears that she is going to the colored building in order to use the bathroom. Katherine voices her displeasure, screaming about the injustices she experiences due to the segregation of the office. She leaves disgruntled, but instead of following her, the camera pans across the White faces in the room. At this pinnacle moment in the narrative, their White reactions more important than Katherine's.

The camera then cuts to a mid-shot of Al, knocking down the colored bathroom sign within the Black building. You can see him hit the sign over and over with a crow bar until he knocks down the sign in triumph. In the background, out of focus, you can see colored women standing around him including Katherine. But the action of the scene, the person who encompasses the foreground of the shot, is Al. He turns to the White coworkers and pronounces that there are no longer segregated bathrooms.

Figure 3: Mid-shot of A (Hidden Figures, 2016)

In *Hidden Figures,* the audience, focusing on Al during this turning point in the narrative, is relating to Al. Consequently, the story becomes more about the White world's progress rather than the accomplishments of these Black women. The audience gets lost in the White character's version of the narrative.

Ultimately, 73% of main characters in film are White (Santhanam and Crigger, 2015). The spectator knows these characters; they spend time with these characters as they are the leads or, like Al, they dominate narratives with their context. Because of this, audiences are trained to relate to the White characters on screen. By continuing to allow empathy only between the audience and White characters, the age old "otherness" of Black characters is reaffirmed:

> Whether they thematize exotic images dancing and singing on screen or images construct to narrate a racial drama, or images of pimps and muggers. With *The Birth of a Nation* came the ban on Blacks participating in bourgeois humanism on Hollywood Screens. In other words, there are no simple stories about Black people loving each other, hating each other, or enjoying their private possessions without

reference to the White world, because the spaces of those stories are occupied by newer forms of race relation stories which have been over determined by Griffith's master text (Diawara, 2012, p. 3-4).

The African American narrative in film is not Black, but rather the Black experience told from the point of view of and for the White community.

1.3 African Americans on Television: Establishment of the Dysfunctional Black Criminal

African Americans are mostly shown in negative stereotypical roles on television. African American men are typically portrayed as criminals, athletes, sports commentators or entertainers. African American women are generally portrayed as household workers, in sexual roles or as sexual objects. Both are more likely to be put in comedic roles[6] (Rome, 2004, pg. 6).

Similar to film, the Black dysfunctional and criminal stereotype of African Americans is heavily diffused through crime television, one of the most popular genres on TV. M. Oliver studied shows such as *America's Most Wanted, COPS, FBI, The Untold Story,* and *American Detective*—all presented as reality crime dramas. She found that the number of violent crimes and crimes solved were overrepresented. White characters were more often than not police officers, rather than suspects. Non-Whites were most often portrayed as criminals or suspects. Oliver concluded that these programs were more likely to portray "'a cast of characters in which non-Whites are typically the 'bad guys,' and a plot that most often features the 'restoration of justice,' although often through aggressive behaviors of heroic White police officers" (Rome, 2004, pg. 74).

One of the most prolific stereotyping on television for African Americans was through daytime shows in the '90s. These shows used African Americans as guests showing them talking "in loud, profane language or Ebonics, for example, us[ing] animated gestures, and freely discuss[ing] their criminal involvement or sexual liaison, sometimes both" (Rome, 2004, pg. 7).

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[6] The continuous comedic roles are used to diffuse racial segregation and stereotypical portrayals. Thomas E. Ford noted that "'Stereotypical television portrayals of African-Americans in a humorous context increase the likelihood that Whites will perceive an African-American target in a stereotypical manner'" (Cutts, 2013, pg. 203).

The consequence of these portrayals, due to the continued physical segregation of races within the United States, is that it is more common than not the only continuous exposure to African Americans for the everyday White individual is what they see portrayed on television (Cutts, 2013). With that, portrayals become considered truth and a narrative is once again stolen from the African American community. Plaguing them as being nothing more than these dysfunctional stereotypes, and in turn, justifying White colonial power.

There are exceptions to these stereotypical portrayals. In the '70s and '80s television networks found that African Americans and Latinos were heavy consumers of television, watching more TV than their White counterparts. By trying to appeal to the African American market, television was the first to portray Black characters in roles outside of the stereotypical. Starting with daytime soap operas in the mid-1960s, moving into urban dramas like *I Spy, Rockford Files, Hill Street Blues, Miami Vice,* and *L.A. Law,* Blacks began to be shown on television as successful and strong characters such as doctors, lawyers and detectives. *The Cosby Show (1984)* epitomized this new positive portrayal of Black characters as the modern nuclear family who happened to be Black (Rome, 2004, pg. 73). The show portrayed a family whose mother and father were an ob-gyn and an attorney, who lived in a brownstone in New York with their children. Their oldest children were all educated at prestigious colleges like Princeton and NYU. They were the ideal Black family (Cutts, 2013, pg. 196).

However, with such an idealistic portrayal of the African American family in the U.S. there was as much criticism as acclaim. The Cosby show was praised for its "televisual representation of the Black family that mainstream America would like to suggest does not exist in Black communities…" However, it was "slammed for the underlying suggestion that a benefit of Black middle-class membership is void of common racial, social, and economic issues many Black families endure" (Cutts, 2013, pg. 196). Black viewers wanted to have a sitcom that not only denied common stereotypical portrayals of the dysfunctional Black family, but also did not paint the Black middle-class family's reality as perfection (Cutts, 2013, pg. 196). The Cosby show chose to "opt-out" of the race discussion (Leduff, 2011) when the true narrative of a middle-class African American, according to the Critical Race Theory (CRT), is that they can't "opt-out" (Introduction).

Later, Black family comedy shows like *The Bernie Mac Show, My Wife and Kids* and *Everybody Hates Chris* provided more of a balance between the perfect American family and confronting American racial issues (Cutts, 2013, pg. 196). Both shows broke the stereotype of crime and absentee fathers. Instead they portrayed fathers who are active in their children's lives as well as active participants in everyday society with normal jobs and experiences. However, neither of these portrayals of Black families were able to escape the stereotype of violent Black dysfunction especially over conversations of disciplining children, specifically spanking.[7] This portrayal supported the "unbalanced discipline" towards Black children in schools and men and children in the U.S. criminal justice system. "Therefore, viewing [B]lack parents as abusive diminishes the critical analysis of institutional racism and its impact on the disproportionate disciplinary actions against African Americans in society." (Cutts, 2013, pg. 196-197).

Cops, The Cosby Show and The Bernie Mac Show, all of these portrayals negates the African American narrative. Either by showing them as an "other", tainted by dysfunction, or continuing to put their narrative in White context by completely removing the burden of race from their narrative.

1.4 African Americans in News Media: Reaffirming the Black Criminal

The transformation seen in television during the '70s and '80s to appeal to the growing Black market, also spread to news media. Local news stations began to hire Black reporters and anchors (Rome, 2004, pg. 73). Despite this seemingly increase in diversity within the station, the negation of the Black narrative—seen on TV and film—also occurred in the news. In order to diffuse the social construction of crime, continue "colonial discourse" and justify colonial power, the archetype of the Black criminal was frequently used.

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[7] For example, Bernie Mac's philosophy of "'spare the rod and spoil the child' is problematic for some viewers as his disciplinary style may be interpreted as inhumane and abusive." Later, it is shown in the series that his wife Wanda also takes up "Big Mama's belt" to keep their kids in line. The use of physical discipline plays into American perception of dysfunctional Black parenting, being physically and verbally abusive, more so than their White counterparts. It also plays into the fact that African American children are seen as more aggressive verbally and physically because of their parent's behavior. (Cutts, 2013, pg. 197).

Within the colonial system, criminal justice works to satisfy the needs of the powerful. People's perception of crime is created by the colonist in order to maintain power and social order (Rome, 2004, p. 74). Christopher Campbell confirms this theory in his book *Race Myth and the News,* pointing out that news media was made by White men with a White perspective. "News supports the social order of public, business, and professional, upper-middle-class, middle-aged, and White male sectors of society." (Campbell, 1995).

This "social construction of reality" was integrated into the study of criminology by Richard Quinney; "People create the reality and the world they believe exists… [this perceived reality] is based on their individual knowledge and from knowledge gained from social interactions with other people." Because the "other" is a constant threat to colonial power, able to disrupt the existing racial order, Quinney concludes it is conceivable that one sees a higher rate of biased crime reports within news media in order to keep establishing the "other" as being a danger to society (Rome, 2004, p. 74).

A study performed by Entman and associates focused on broadcast news shows in Chicago and confirmed that this racial bias was in fact a reality. The study concluded that violent crimes committed by Blacks made up forty-one percent of all the local news stories, even though actual crime statistics were significantly less. The visuals used during the news reports studied suggested that Blacks were more dangerous and committed more violent crimes than Whites. Blacks were shown more frequently in mugshots and footage of them being taken away in handcuffs, usually by a uniformed White policeman. None of the White criminals were portrayed in mug shots or in physical custody. Additionally, it was found that the victimization of Whites by Black criminals had a higher priority during broadcasts, meaning they were considered more important than other news stories and would be shown more often (Rome, 2004, p. 74).

Continuing this trend, a study conducted in 2015 by Colorofchange.org found evidence of a racial bias on local news stations in New York. Stations disproportionately focused on crime reporting with African American criminals—on average skewing their reports to African Americans by twenty-four points (Colorofchange.org, 2015). A 2014 study by the Sentencing

Project report demonstrated that this was not limited to these specific markets, but that a racial bias continued across the United States[8] (The Sentencing Project, 2015).

Broadcast news has been used to establish Blacks as the face of crime in America. "Ask anyone, of any race, to picture a criminal, and the image will have a Black face" (Rome, 2004, p. 4). Despite the fact that Whites account for the majority of crime[9] in America, the same link has not been established with Whiteness. On broadcasts "White-on-White-crime" and "White crime" remains meaningless as biased broadcasts—with the help of film and television—have allowed White society to escape being associated with specific crimes and crime in general (Rome, 2004, p. 4). Similar to film and television, Blacks in the news are depicted as a thorn in the heel of American society; a troubling, dysfunctional "other" outside of White normalcy.

The average person has little experience with crime, even less with violent crime, and so the supposed reality depicted within mass media is adopted as truth. Studies performed by George Gerbner and Associate's, as well as Quinney, found that "nonfiction accounts presented by what are considered to be reliable sources have more weight than fictional accounts." Compared to television and film, news media has an even higher retention rate when it comes to society's construction of reality because it is seen as being from a trusted and representative source. (Rome, 2004, p. 3-75).

Because of this, the continuous news media portrayal of Blacks as criminals has detrimental consequences in itself, labeling African Americans forever the Black criminal. A study conducted by Pennsylvania State University revealed that memories of crime stories reflects that the Black criminal archetype is perceived as reality in the American psyche. Pulling from their memories of crime on news media, participants were more likely to: misidentify African Americans as perpetrators of violent crimes; more frequently misidentify the perpetrator as African American than they were to misidentify a White suspect; to link White suspects with

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[8] A study of television news found that Black crime suspects were presented in more threatening contexts than Whites: Black suspects were disproportionately shown in mug shots and in cases where the victim was a stranger. Black and Latino suspects were also more often presented in a non-individualized way than Whites—by being left unnamed—and were more likely to be shown as threatening by being depicted in physical custody of police. Blacks and Hispanics were also more likely to be treated aggressively by police officers on reality-based TV shows, including *America's Most Wanted* and *Cops.* Mass media are therefore a major contributor to American's misconceptions about crime, with journalists and producers apparently acting based on their own or expectations of their audiences' stereotypes about crime (The Sentencing Project, 2015).

[9] Seventy percent of arrests and forty percent of the prison population are from the White community (Rome, 2004, p. 4).

nonviolent crimes; as well as link Black males to a crime instead of their actual White perpetrators. "In essence, the Penn State findings support the notion that stereotypes of Black men as violent criminals are reflected in what people recall from news reports." This is also called implicit racial bias (see Chapter Two) (Rome, 2004, pg. 4).

In addition, the participant's self-reported racial attitudes, whether overtly prejudiced or extremely enlightened, didn't affect their ability to identify the race of a suspect. "This suggests that Whites may not realize the degree to which deeply imbedded stereotypes tamper with their memories," so ingrained in society's subconscious (Rome, 2004, p. 4).

1.5 Who Owns the Media, Dictates the Media

So why have these false representations remained persistent? The participation of minorities in media has been, and remains today, extremely low. In 1978, the American society of Newspaper Editors set itself the goal of having the ratio of journalists of color to be proportionate to the population percentage within 25 years (Washington, 2008). The population of African Americans is 13.3% in the U.S. ("Population estimates, July 1, 2015, (V2015)," 2015), and they are still waiting to reach this goal. In 2014, 10.4% of the television workforce and only 4.3% of News Directors were African American (Papper, 2014). Owners of the media are also predominately White; African Americans only own 10 networks today, less than one percent of television (Zook, 2015).

James Winston, the president of the National Association of Black Owned Broadcasters explains the historical context that has led to this phenomenon:

> The FCC has been licensing broadcasting stations for 80 years. During most of that time, the only people in the position to obtain them were White males. African Americans and other minorities have come to the business world late, and without family-inherited wealth, we find ourselves with every disadvantage in terms of becoming successful entrepreneurs in broadcasting and in new technologies[10] (Zook, 2015).

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[10] As technology moved from radio to television and finally cable, the same White owned companies were able to maintain control over media as they were the only ones in the position to be able to develop technology fast enough (Zook, 2015).

African Americans rarely had a say in their own narrative and therefore representation. Because of this, African American narratives that are dispersed through mass media are made within an oppressive system, for and by White America.

These stolen narratives remain significant because these portrayals of African Americans through "colonial discourse" continually justify a political and social system within the United States that has led to African Americans being treated as less than human. George Gerbner and associates concluded that "frequent viewers of television were more likely to have a view of the world that matched the images repeatedly presented through the medium" (Rome, 2004, p. 75). With mass media so entrenched in American lives and Black stereotypes diffused so constantly through them, this has had lasting effects. Project Implicit, reported that 88% of White Americans and 48% of Black Americans have a racial bias against African Americans today ("Understanding Implicit Bias," 2015). The African American "other" has become a reality to American society.

Chapter Two

Consequences of a Stolen Narrative

The systematic criminalization of African Americans in media has caused Americans to view Blacks as inherently criminal. The last chapter discussed how the Black narrative has been lost to the White-hetero-male dominated mass media, establishing stereotypes like the Black criminal. This chapter will analyze why the theft of this narrative is important, exploring how this loss has allowed the U.S. to take advantage of the Black community as free labor, scapegoats and political fodder.

Mass media made the Black criminal stereotype so ingrained in American society that politicians were, and still are, rewarded for putting forward racist policies. A consequence of these media portrayals, these policies prop up a racial caste system that began with the first slaves, and allow for a reincarnation of a legal system that subjugates Blacks to their lower place within the social order. Although this legal system has had many names—slavery, Jim Crow, mass incarceration—it all has led to the African American community remaining unable to break colonial control.

History celebrates the Emancipation Proclamation as a wondrous achievement of freedom for African Americans. The 13th Amendment freed the slaves and guaranteed African Americans "equal protection of the law," the exception being criminals. As W.E.B Du Bois put so eloquently "The slave went free; stood a brief moment in the sun; then moved back again toward slavery" (2014). Following the Civil War, "it was unclear what institutions, laws, or customs would be necessary to maintain White [social, economic and political] control" (Alexander, 2016, p.27) Developing a new racial caste system seemed to become a new passion for most White southerners (Alexander, 2016, p. 28). The 13th Amendment offered a loophole, and so, the Black criminal stereotype was formed, providing justification for the continuous second class citizenship of the African American community.

2.1 The Black Criminal: A Stereotype That Plagues Black America

The Black criminal archetype, projected by the media since *BOAN* and portrayed in film, television, and news media, has continuously plagued the African American community. This stereotype can be summed up in one sentence: "Black men[11] [and women] are dangerous, violent and criminally inclined" (Banks, 2014).

During video game experiments, it was shown that individuals faced with a split-second judgement, no matter the race, age, or attitude of the individual, are quicker and more likely to fire at an unarmed Black man than at a White man who is carrying a gun. They are also more likely to shoot unarmed Blacks than unarmed Whites (Banks, 2014).

This phenomenon is called "implicit racial bias." Implicit racial bias is the association of certain racial groups with specific attributes such as crime, weapons or "goodness" and "badness". Processed on a subconscious level, implicit racial bias inherently contrasts with explicit racial bias, or the direct stereotyping of a certain group of people (Glaser, Spencer and Charbonneau, 2014). The frightening aspect of implicit racial bias is that "you don't have to be a bigot to have [the criminal stereotype] image [of a Black man] embedded in your psyche" (Banks, 2014). Although explicit racism has been reduced in the last century within American society, it has been shown through psychological testing that implicit racial bias is still prevalent (Glaser, Spencer and Charbonneau, 2014).

As a result of the recent numerous national reports of police shootings of unarmed Black men, psychologists have focused their research on the effect of implicit racial bias on policing decisions. It was shown that people "implicitly associate Blacks with weapons," and because of this, police participating were faster to shoot Black men holding guns than White men holding guns. During the same simulation, they were also more likely to shoot the unarmed Black man than a White man in an erroneous fashion. This, "shooter bias", is "related to the strength of one's implicit association between Blacks (vs. Whites) and weapons"[12] Shooter Bias has "been replicated with multiple, large samples of police officers…Racial bias in police use of lethal force appears to be a real and pronounced phenomenon with dire consequences

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[11] Black men especially are seen as "dangerous, interchangeable, expendable, guilty until proven innocent" (Robinson, 2013).
[12] "The weapon-recognition finding replicates with a sample of police officers, and police officers were more likely to focus their gaze on a Black face compared with a White face if they had been subliminally primed with crime-related concepts" (Glaser, Spencer and Charbonneau, 2014).

for affected victims, families, communities, and departments"[13] (Glaser, Spencer and Charbonneau, 2014).

The Black criminal stereotype has become so imbedded in the American subconscious that it is reflected within society through implicit racial bias. In the U.S., if asked to imagine the face of a criminal, people of any race, position or background, see a Black face (Rome, 2004). White crime—which makes up most of criminal activity (Rome, 2004)—does not result in the same type of bias, either being disconnected as it is considered an anomaly or excused as a humanized type of violence.[14] Blacks, on the other hand, are perceived as less than human. Therefore, the link between them and criminality has led to legal systems that plague the African American community.

2.2 Consequences of the Black Criminal: Lynchings and Jim Crow

The Black criminal has been characterized and established throughout history through mass media. The most common portrayal, as seen in the character Gus in *BOAN*, is that of oversexualized males who have a preference for attacking innocent White women. In other words, the "Black rapist"[15] (Diawara, 2012).

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[13] Similarly, in a two-year study by Stanford University, scientists looked at hundreds of interactions between the Oakland Police and African Americans when African Americans were stopped at a traffic light. It was shown that African American men were searched four times as much as their White counterparts. They also were more likely to be handcuffed within the interaction even if they were never arrested (Parker, 2016).

[14] "The Image of violent White American as social bandits was carried well into the post-World War II era. It appealed, of course, primarily to young White males. "Almost every boy in America," wrote one criminologist, "wanted to be Jesse James, the strong, fearless bandit who came to symbolize the individuality of the American West." This image effectively "White-washed" the seriousness of White violence in the American consciousness through a process of turning attention away from the blood and horror of White predatory crime and refocusing it on fabricated, overly romanticized biographies. Whereas Black violence was seen as dark and threatening, there was something quintessentially American about violence when it was rendered by Whites. Diminished in its importance, violence then became an accepted and altogether normal rite of passage for millions of American White youth…The group that defines the law and controls public opinion is the group that will define criminal images and control the punishments for all groups, not the least of which will be their own. Throughout history, White Americans have done precisely that. Through law and culture, they have created a condition whereby American violence has become imageless. Yet when viewed in the broad scope of history, they do have an image, a very clearly defined image. From the landing of the Vikings to the present day, White American males have used their dominant social status to exercise habitual cruelty against weaker and less powerful people. There is only one word for that. Alas, the predatory White criminal is nothing less than a bully" (Rome, 2004, p. 43).

[15] The Black criminal has been characterized and established throughout history through mass media. The most common portrayal, as seen in *BOAN* in the characters of the Black senators and of Gus, is that of oversexualized males who have a preference for attacking innocent White women. In other words, "the Black rapist" (Diawara, 1993).

This stereotype first began to plague the African American community during Reconstruction. As "White backlash against Reconstruction gained steam," Black people found themselves free from slavery and held within the prison of fear from mass lynchings or "relegated to convict leasing camps that were, in many ways, worse than slavery" (Alexander, 2016, p. 19). W.E.B Dubois argued that the "Black rapist" was used to legitimize these lynchings (Rome, 2004). This system maintained social control, and provided much needed Black labor to keep the Southern economy alive.

Considered to be beast-like from depictions like *BOAN*, Black criminals were seen as deserving harsher punishment than their White counterparts. The fear of the Black criminal so strong, brutal violence against Blacks was seen as justified in the name of protecting White families from the dangerous "other". The EJI "Lynching in America" project found 5,076 racial terror lynchings of African Americans in the South between 1877 and 1950 alone (*Lynching in America: Confronting the Legacy of Racial Terror*, 2015). This could not be classified as "frontier justice" carried out by a few extremists or vigilantes. All who participated in the lynching were celebrated as heroes and did so with impunity (*Lynching in America: Confronting the Legacy of Racial Terror*, 2015).[16] The African American's crime justifying the lynching could sometimes be as simple as bumping into a White person.

The era of lynchings that occurred were best understood as arising from the fear of one of the following: interracial sex; social transgressions; violent crime; or to silence community leaders who spoke out against the violent treatment (*Lynching in America: Confronting the Legacy of Racial Terror*, 2015). However, the most prevalent was the accusation of sexual assault by a Black man against a White woman (Rome, 2004, p. 47).

The use of media to establish the Black criminal stereotype was so effective, even the abolitionist W.E.B Dubois as well as journalist and African American activist Ida B. Wells began research into the lynching phenomenon believing that it was an aggressive community

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[16] Discerning who and what type of person took part in lynchings is made difficult by the fact that those who carried out extralegal punishments were pointedly anonymous. This was both practical—it protected lynchers from arrest and prosecution—and symbolic, in that lynchings was seen as a conservative act, a defense of the status quo. The coroner's inevitable verdict, "Death at the hands of persons unknown," affirmed the public's tacit complicity; no *persons* had committed a crime, because the lynching had been an expression of the community's will (Rome, 2004, p. 47).

response due to the "lasciviousness on the part of Negroes" (Millhiser, 2016). They later came to the conclusion that this perception was fiction, created by the White community and supported by the media who shared their lies portraying them as known facts.[17] (Rome 2004, p. 48-50).

One of the most notable examples Wells found in her studies was in Indianola, Mississippi, where it was reported in newspapers that a "big burly brute was lynched because he had raped the seven-year-old daughter of the sheriff." When in actuality the daughter was in her late teens and the Black man, a life-long servant of the family, was her consensual lover (Rome, 2004, p. 49).

These gruesome lynchings that occurred during Reconstruction, were a large factor in maintaining colonial control, supported through Jim Crow and segregation. "Jim Crow laws, governing virtually every aspect of Black people's lives, were instituted while lynching increasingly were directed at those who posed a social, not just a political, threat" (Rome, 2004, p. 48). This system of colonial control, helped the White community "put Black people nearly back where they began, in a subordinate racial caste" (Alexander, 2016, p. 20).

2.3 Consequences of the Black Criminal: The Criminalization of Civil Rights Leaders

This racial propaganda continued well into mainstream media in the '50s and '60s as the Civil Rights movement began. Although now looked on as heroes, Civil Rights leaders in the '60s were considered by the majority to be nothing more than dangerous criminals looking to uproot the "normal" White community's way of life. In the words of the then Vice-President Richard Nixon "the increasing crime rate 'can be traced directly to the spread of the corrosive doctrine

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[17] Ida B. Wells investigation into lynchings began with claims by the media and Southern White community that they were justified because of the White man's need to protect their family and women from the evil Black criminal. Her "personal investigations of lynchings convinced her that almost invariably the charge of rape concealed a more complex truth" (Rome, 2004, p. 49).

Wells concluded that the fear of "race pollution" that manifested in the "talk of chivalry and beastlike Blacks ravishing White girls was largely fallacious, and that such ideas were being used to help maintain a permanent hysteria to legitimize lynchings because it reinforces the notion that the races must be kept separate at all costs." This mythology was especially successful at bringing together the entire community against the common enemy of the "Black demon." Even moderate Whites, who disapproved of lynching began to believe it necessary to save the community from their common enemy, the established and believed dangerous "other" (Rome, 2004, p. 48).

that every citizen possesses an inherent right to decide for himself which laws to obey and when to disobey them'" (Alexander, 2016, p. 40).

Mass media imagery established a "threat of crime" that helped to build support for a law and order justice system that prayed on the African American community. Within media in the '60s and '70s, political militants "became emblematic, fear-inspiring 'criminals.'" Images that represented said threat of crime were plastered all over newspapers and television dominating mainstream depictions of African Americans.

Headlines like "Armed Negroes Protest Gun Bill" were frequently used. This article from New York Times read, "with loaded rifles and shot guns in their hands, the antiwhite [sic] Black Panther party marched into the state Capitol today" (Russonello, 2016). It failed to report that the Black Panthers during this protest "called upon the American people in general," not just Black America. This criminalization included members from "Black Panthers, political prisoners such as George Jackson and Angela David, and participants in urban rebellions in Watts, Detroit and Newark" (Kilgore, 2015).

Figure 4: Examples of Depictions of Black Panthers in Media (Russenello, 2016)

This criminalization of leadership had lasting political ramifications for the Black community. Reporter and activist Van Jones notes, "You can tell the story of White leadership in America,

and never mention the FBI one time. You can't tell the story of Black leadership, not one, without having to deal with the full weight of the criminal justice system weaponizing [sic] it's Black dissent" (Dubravney, 2016).

The consequence of establishing Black leadership and activists as criminals, justified the colonist to search out and destroy this power: Dr. King was dubbed one of the most dangerous people in America by the head of the FBI (Christensen, 2008); Malcolm X was continuously watched by the police, his entourage infiltrated eventually leading to such tension with the Nation of Islam that they assassinated him (Ali, 2015); At a national press conference President Nixon referred to Black activist Angela Davis as a "dangerous terrorist" (Aptheker, 1975); FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover called the Black Panthers the greatest threat to American Democracy ("Desert Sun 16 July 1969 — California Digital Newspaper Collection," 1969); Fred Hampton was killed in his bed while his pregnant wife slept next to him (Gates, 2011).

The heavy use of Black criminal propaganda against Civil Rights leaders was believable to a public whose implicit racial bias towards African Americans was already established through years of mass media diffusing the Black criminal archetype. As a result, the arrest, murders, and fleeing of almost all major African American Civil Rights leaders were excused as just. This absence of leadership, additionally, left the African American community vulnerable;[18] with little political representation. As Jim Crow was dismantled by these Civil Rights leader's work, the colonists or White politicians took advantage of this vulnerability to pass laws that established a new legal system that would continue to prop up the existing racial order and justify colonial power.

2.4 Consequences of the Black Criminal: Republicans Establish Mass Incarceration

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[18] Propaganda began to spread that increasing crime could be blamed on the movement of Blacks to the North. This argument continued to be supported by the mass media and politicians after the killing of Martin Luther King Jr., as riots sprang up around the nation. "The racial imagery associated with the riots [on the news] gave fuel to the argument that civil rights for Blacks led to rampant crime". Cities like Philadelphia and Rochester were dubbed victims of their own "generosity," meaning because they welcomed in Blacks during a period of Black migration—which was caused by the mass terror and killing of Blacks in the South during Reconstruction and Jim Crow—they were now being rewarded "with crime-ridden slums and Black discontent" (Alexander, 2016, p. 41).

This vulnerability marked the beginning of mass incarceration. As Bryan Stevenson notes, "instead of talking about it we just tried to move on after the Civil Rights act was passed. And because we didn't deal with it[,] that narrative of racial difference continued. And it turned into this presumption of danger and guilt that follows every Black and brown person wherever they are" (Johnson, 2015).

Rhetoric of tough on crime[19] would lead to a realignment of political parties in the United States—all backed by fear of the Black criminal. In his 1964 presidential campaign, Barry Goldwater, aggressively exploited the fear of Black crime laying down the foundation of the tough on crime movement. In a famous campaign speech, Goldwater warns voters "'Choose the way of [the Johnson] Administration and you have the way of mobs in the street.'" Civil Rights activists who argued that riots occurring were due to widespread police harassment and abuse were dismissed by conservatives as being the criminals they saw on mass media every day. "'If [Blacks] conduct themselves in an orderly way, they will not have to worry about police brutality,'" commented West Virginia Senator Robert Byrd (Alexander, 2016, p. 41).

The Republican party adopted this strategy in full fold, learning quickly that by playing on people's ingrained fears and implicit—and at times explicit—racial bias they could gain a majority.[20] H.R. Haldeman, one of Nixon's key advisers, recalls that "Nixon himself deliberately pursued a Southern, racial strategy: '…[President Nixon] emphasized that you have to face the fact that the whole problem is really the Blacks. The key is to devise a system that recognizes this while not appearing to" (Alexander, 2016, p. 43-44).

During this period the mass media imagery and political discourse of Black "welfare cheats" emerged for the first time.[21] By 1967, 72% of photos in news stories about poverty featured

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[19] Succeeding the Civil Rights act, racial wording became known as insensitive—mostly with Northerners. Following suite from popular media[19], segregationists began distancing themselves from the explicitly racist agenda developing "instead the racially sanitized rhetoric of 'cracking down on crime.'" Rhetoric that is still used today (Alexander, 2016, p. 41-42).

[20] Keving Phillips, Republican strategist, argued in *The Emerging Republican Majority* (1969) "if Republicans continued to campaign primarily on the basis of racial issues, using coded anti-Black rhetoric…" they could easily persuade Democrats "to switch parties if those racial resentments could be maintained." (Alexander, 2016, p. 44).

[21] With this new found political gold mine, a school of thought was created by Conservatives throughout the 1960s and early 1970s that argued poverty was caused not by systematic inefficiencies and racism but by the inherent lazy and criminal Black culture. This was supported by Daniel Patrick Moynihan's infamous report on the Black family attributing "Black poverty to a Black 'subculture' and the 'tangle of pathology' that characterized it" (Alexander, 2016, p. 45).

Blacks, increasing dramatically from 27% in 1964 (Black and Sprague, 2016). This imagery was so prominent that the 1968's Gallup Poll showed that 81% of those who responded believed that law and order was broken in the U.S. and that the blame lay with "Negroes who start riots" and "Communists" (Alexander, 2016, p. 45).

Continuing this propaganda, racial lines were used during the 1980s presidential election by Reagan and Bush. The media taking part in the creation of "politically motivated criminal personae, legendary or fictional characters who reinforced the linkages between Blackness and crime." The two most prevalent and influential characters used within the media were the "welfare queen" and "Willie Horton" (Kilgore, 2015, p. 32).

The "welfare queen" became the "not-so-subtle code for the 'lazy, greedy, Black ghetto mother.'" [22] (Kilgore, 2015, p. 33). Praying on people's ingrained fears, this was once again the Black criminal who was targeting "normal" White society by cheating the system. Proving extremely effective, Reagan's racially coded rhetoric won him 22% of Democrats as a Republican candidate (Alexander, 2016, p. 47-48).

To keep the strong support from his new found Republicans, Reagan hired publicists to showcase the emergence of crack in Black neighborhoods, kicking off a large War on Drugs campaign to justify the fear he had benefited from during his presidential campaign. By diffusing imagery of "crack whores," crack dealers" and "crack babies", the media took part in the War on Drugs by criminalizing in Black communities a "whole class of ordinary people"[23] (Alexander, 2016, p. 47-48). "The media campaign was an extraordinary success," inundating mass media—from commercials, news and even film and television roles—with Black criminal

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[22]Although Reagan did not use the specific term "welfare queen," he named the woman Linda Taylor—an alleged resident of South Chicago. He claimed that she had "eighty names, thirty addresses, twelve Social Security cards and is collecting veteran's benefits on four non-existing deceased husbands…She's got Medicaid, getting food stamps, and she is collecting welfare under each of her names. Her tax-free cash income is over $150,000." With Reagan's help, it became such a frequently used stereotype in mass media and political speech that the perception of food stamps no longer was of aid, but a vehicle to let "some fellow ahead of you buy a T-bone steak" (Alexander, 2016, p. 47-48).

[23] Cocaine was sold in the suburbs to Whites; Crack was sold in inner cities and ghettos to Blacks. Crack cocaine, is pharmacologically identical to powder cocaine, however because of the way it is used, it could be sold in smaller doses and at more affordable prices. By showcasing Black communities as being full of dangerous Crack criminals, the Reagan administration jumped on publicizing this increase of Crack sales to build support for his drug war and a major increase in federal law enforcement (Alexander, 2016, p. 51).

archetypes (Alexander, 2016, p. 49-50). With this use of Black communities as scapegoats, the era of mass incarceration began.[24]

Figure 5: Time Magazine's Use of "Crack Kids" (Rickman, 1991)

Following this, the strongest media symbol of the Black man became "Willie Horton," the Black criminal and rapist. Willie Horton was a young man serving a life sentence in Massachusetts. In 1988, Horton received furloughs from prison. During one of his furloughs, he went on a crime spree that included the rape and robbery of a young White woman. The then governor of Massachusetts, Michael Dukakis, had supported the criminal release program that let Willie Horton out. He also became the Democratic presidential candidate in 1988. His opponent, George H. Bush, jumped on this story, playing on the "racialized fears of White voters" that stem from a hundred years of the Black Criminal stereotype (Kilgore, 2015, p. 34).

A poll taken by CBS News/New York Times demonstrated "that Willie Horton ads had more impact than any other commercials aired during the 1988 presidential campaign."[25]

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[24] "Researcher Melissa Hickman Barlow summarized this phenomenon: "Evening news broadcasts, television crime dramas, and the 'real' crime stories of programs like *Cops* and *L.A.P.D.* bombard the American public with images of 'young Black male' offenders under authoritative police control. The message is that the police are the thin blue line protecting the law-abiding citizens from dark and dangerous street criminals" (Kilgore, 2015).

[25] In late October 1988, 61 percent of respondents "felt that Bush was 'tough on crime'" compared to 23 percent in July. Comparatively, participants responded that Dukakis was 49 percent in late October compared to 36 percent in July.

Commercializing on the public's implicit racial bias and fear of the "Black criminal," the ads helped win Bush the election, overcoming Dukakis' 17-point lead in opinion polls (Kilgore, 2015, p. 34).

2.5 Consequences of the Black Criminal: Democrats Join the Mass Incarceration Bandwagon

Entering into the 1990s this new system of racialized social control spread across political spectrums. With there being political benefits from feeding on public fear and perception of the Black criminal, Democrats who fought for Civil Rights began jumping on the mass incarceration band wagon[26]. In order to win an election Presidential candidate Bill Clinton exclaimed that he would never allow a Republican to be tougher on crime than him.[27] Clinton escalated Reagan's War on Drugs raising the number of federal and state prison inmates more than any president in American history[28] (Alexander, 2016, p. 70). All his actions were justified and supported by the public's fear of this elusive "Black criminal," made infamous and established forever in the American public's mind through "colonial discourse" and the tool of mass media[29].

This perception that the Black criminal was out there praying on White society led to the prison population to increase dramatically from 360,000 in 1970 to 1,180,000 in 1990 to 2,015,000 in

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[26] "A century earlier, a similar political dynamic had resulted in the birth of Jim Crow. In the 1890s, Populists buckled under the political pressure created by the Redeemers, who had successfully appealed to poor and working-class whites by proposing overtly racist and increasingly absurd Jim Crow laws…As had happened before, former allies of African Americans—as much as conservatives—adopted a political strategy that required them to prove how 'tough' they could be on 'them,' the dark-skinned pariahs" (Alexander, 2016, p. 54).

[27] Clinton was so serious about this position that the night before the critical New Hampshire primary, he flew home to Arkansas to oversee the execution of Ricky Ray Rector. Rector was a mentally impaired Black man, so unaware of what was happening to him that he asked his executioners to save the dessert from his last meal for the morning for him. Clinton remarked afterward "'I can be nicked a lot, but no one can say I'm soft on crime'" (Alexander, 2016, p. 55).

[28] He endorsed the "three strikes and you're out" law, creating dozens of new federal capital crimes, mandated life sentences and increasing state prison budgets by more than $16 billion. Most of this budget was used to terrorize Black neighborhoods. His many lists of tough on crime accomplishments include: ending substantial welfare; making it easier for public housing to discriminate against those with a criminal record; and finally, introducing a one strike and you're out initiative when it came to drug related crimes. All of which affected the African American community more than their White counterparts (Alexander, 2016, p. 70).

[29] The 1990s saw a huge increase in the coverage of crime on local and national news. During a time where crime rates were actually falling, the number of crime stories appearing on the three major network news programs increased from 542 per year to 1,392 (Kilgore, 2015, p. 35).

2000. One in four African American men were being—and still are—incarcerated compared to one in seventeen White men. "Banished to a political and social space not unlike Jim Crow, where discrimination in employment, housing, and access to education [is] perfectly legal, and where they could be denied the right to vote" (Alexander, 2016, p. 56).

The continuing Propaganda being fed to the public normalized political and systematic means of discrimination. Decades of stereotyping the African American as a criminal led to the continual adoption of a legal system that allowed African Americans to remain second class citizens. Neither Democrats nor Republicans were showing the inclination to lead the fight in ending this system, the political rewards too great. In the eyes of American society, it seemed like the right political move to send thousands of African Americans to jail because, as far as they were told—as though it were fact—African Americans were criminals. The Black criminal became and remains a justification for the colonist White society to keep subjugating Blacks.

2.6 Criminalization of the Victim: Criminalization of Black Victims

As explored in Sections 2.1-2.5, the stereotype of the Black criminal causes implicit racial bias that effects Black lives daily. This has manifested for hundreds of years in racial violence against the Black population. In the last four years, many narratives of unarmed Black men being shot have surfaced in the national news. The first large scale example of this was the shooting of Trayvon Martin and consequent freeing of his killer without punishment:

Trayvon Martin was killed on the night of February 26th, 2012 as he walked home from a convenience store to his father's girlfriend's house. He was a seventeen-year-old Black teenager carrying with him that night only a bag of skittles and a soft drink. He was shot and killed by George Zimmerman, a self-appointed neighborhood watchman. Zimmerman was arrested that night, his firearm confiscated. However, he was never charged with the crime because of an alleged lack of evidence. (Benash, 2014).

Implicit racial bias was evident throughout the police investigation. "When Sanford, Fla., police arrived on the scene, they encountered a grown man who acknowledged killing an

unarmed [seventeen]-year-old boy," however they conducted a "less-than-energetic search for forensic evidence." They never tested Zimmerman for drug or alcohol use and hardly even looked for witnesses (Robinson, 2013).

The story of Martin's death remained a local news story from February 26th through the first week of March. Trayvon Martin's family hired a publicist trying to get this narrative to national media coverage, to encourage and pressure authorities to charge Zimmerman with the crime of killing their son. Eventually, the story was brought to national news, first appearing on CBS (Benash, 2014).

Once again a Black man was turned into the Black criminal. Martin was vilified in the media. "Pictures of him smoking marijuana were published; media outlets dug through tweets for profanities—seizing on rap lyrics they suggested somehow proved the teen's propensity for violence. He shouldn't have been wearing a hoodie, some said. He shouldn't have been out at night, others added" (Lowery, 2016, p. 82-83).

U.S.

Defense in Trayvon Martin Case Raises Questions About the Victim's Character

Figure 6: Example of Coverage of Trayvon Martin (Alvarez, 2013)

As seen in Chapter One, according to CRT, White America had the option to "opt out" of acknowledging the role that race played in this murder. Additionally, the implicit racial bias ingrained in the American psyche from mass media made them view Martin as not a teenager, but a criminal. Consequently, it was difficult for White America and media to empathize with

Trayvon Martin, and so, one saw the racial stereotypes seen throughout the history of American media seep into this case.

It took the subsequent outcry by the Black community for the police department and state to take this case seriously. After six weeks of investigating the case, Zimmerman was charged with second-degree murder on April 11th, 2012. "But the chance of dispassionately and definitively establishing what happened that night was probably lost. [Because of the police's lack luster investigation,] [t]he only complete narrative of what transpired [that night] was Zimmerman's." Trayvon Martin's narrative, with no witnesses, died with him. Stolen not only by Zimmerman's implicit racial bias but the bias of the cops that caused them not to investigate and fight for Martin's justice (Robinson, 2013).

During the trial the jurors were told many facts[30]. To many who watched the arguments, "the fact that Zimmerman recklessly initiated the tragic encounter was enough to establish, at a minimum, the crime of manslaughter." However, the six women jurors disagreed, exonerating Zimmerman.

Martin was seventeen, a boy, but because of implicit racial bias the police, the jurors and the media did not see him as a murdered child; He was seen as a murdered man and a suspicious one at that, prone to violence and crime. "Trayvon Martin was fighting more than George Zimmerman that night. He was up against prejudices as old as American history, and he never had a chance" (Robinson, 2013). These prejudices that excused this injustice, are direct consequences of the narrative of the Black criminal.

Some argue that implicit racial bias did not come into account during this case. George Zimmerman himself was Hispanic, a minority that is also plagued by criminal stereotypes. Despite their race, unfortunately, implicit racial bias affects all people even if they are the victims of it themselves. As set forth in Chapter One, everyone is exposed to the colonist's stereotypes over and over again in order to establish colonial control. Even minorities are

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[30] The summary of it being: that Zimmerman was an "overeager would-be cop, a self-appointed guardian of the neighborhood who carried a loaded gun"; that Zimmerman profiled Martin as a Black criminal because of his youth, and hooded sweatshirt, and, of course, the color of his skin; that Zimmerman stalked Martin despite the direction of the 911 operator to not follow him; that Zimmerman shot Martin in the chest and killed him; that Martin was carrying only Skittles and a soft drink; that Martin was coming from a 7-Eleven to his father's girlfriend's house when he noticed a stranger in a SUV following him (Robinson, 2013).

effected by media stereotypes that create within their subconscious an implicit racial bias. African Americans themselves, are still shown to have an implicit racial bias against African Americans ("Understanding Implicit Bias," 2015). This is because the Black criminal stereotype is ingrained through communication tools, no matter the color of the audience's skin.

The criminalization of the Black victim is a consequence of "colonial discourse" that has left a deep wound in the Black community. This loss of one's own narrative, body[31] and self is an everyday experience for Black America. Ta-Nehisi Coates describes in his novel *Between the World and Me* the fear[32] that surrounds this sense of loss, the fear that your body will be the next to be broken in a system that constantly dubs you the villain (2015).

2.7 Reclaiming The Narrative

Looking at these consequences, one sees the pertinent and lasting effects of the Black criminal stereotype. Centuries of racial propaganda has affected our political perspective. It is important to understand this loss of narrative has led to the same argument to continue to be used when Black men are being shot in the streets by policemen in 2017, as a West Virginia senator in the 1960s Jim Crow South: if they were behaving the way they ought too, Black people wouldn't have to worry about the police. Racial propaganda has been so ingrained in American media that the resulting racist systems have become second nature. This is why the theft of the African American narrative for hundreds of years is significant, even today. The stolen narrative has

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[31] "The institution of lynching is of interest to the present study because it was for many decades an awesome destructive power, murderous to some, menacing to a great many, a daily reminder of their defenselessness. Hence, it is not possible for White America to really understand Blacks' distrust of the legal system, or their fears of racial profiling and the police, without understanding how disposable a Black life was for so long a time in our nation's history" (Rome, 2004).

[32] To be Black in the Baltimore of my youth was to be naked before the elements of the world, before all the guns, fists, knives, crack, rape and disease. The nakedness is not an error nor pathology. The nakedness is the correct and intended result of policy, the predictable upshot of people forced for centuries to live under fear. The law did not protect us. And now…the law has become an excuse for stopping and frisking you, which is to say, for furthering the assault on your body. But a society that protects some people through a safety net of schools, government-backed home loans, and ancestral wealth but can only protect you with the club of criminal justice has either failed at enforcing its good intentions or has succeeded at something much darker. However you call it, the result was our infirmity before the criminal forces of the world. It does not matter if the agent of those forces is White or Black—what matters is our condition, what matters is the system that makes your body breakable (Coates, 2015).

allowed for "colonial discourse" to continue, propping up a racial caste system that plagues the African American community and their social movements.[33]

Beginning to change this political system that allows for colonial control of African Americans begins with reclaiming this narrative. By destroying the justification for colonial power, the United States can begin to reduce implicit racial bias in the hopes of bringing social equality. The next chapter will explore how the Black Lives Matter Movement is taking back the African American narrative from the White-hetero-male media. Offering a flicker of hope in establishing a true African American narrative in the American psyche.

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[33] One saw this in the Civil Rights movement. The defamation, killing and deportation of some of the greatest leaders in African American history was directly related to the Black criminal stereotype, forever plagued by the mark of the Black criminal despite their fighting against a true injustice (Kilgore, 2015).

Chapter Three

#BlackLivesMatter

Social media has brought a new voice of influence to the marginalized. This voice has enabled those oppressed to bypass the power structure of traditional mass media that has previously and consistently dubbed them as a lesser "other". Social media has enabled the people's narrative to be created and shared by the people. As easy as clicking a button, this narrative has the opportunity to reach millions allowing for a representative narrative to be diffused through society on the same scale as mass media and combat their false narrative. This has allowed, for the first time, marginalized groups, such as African Americans, to reclaim a narrative lost through hundreds of years of racial oppression. The only obstacle, breaking through the noise on people's newsfeeds.

This phenomenon is exemplified in the 21st century civil rights movement: Black Lives Matter (BLM). By using social media BLM, with no initial funding or traditional media backing, has been able to direct their own narrative. Although online social movements have limitations, like decentralization, abusive responses from other online users and "fake news", the power that social media has given the marginalized is revolutionary. Oppressed minorities for the first time in U.S. history have the ability to control how their narrative is portrayed.

3.1 Civil Rights Movement and Mass Media

The 1960s Civil Rights movement was driven and encouraged by images like that of Emmet Till's bloodied and broken body after a group lynching[34], High school student Walter Gadsden being attacked by police dogs in Birmingham, or hoses being turned on protestors in Ingram

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[34] In 1955, when Emmet Till's body was found bloody and bloated in the river, his mother had his body shipped home to Chicago and displayed during an open casket funeral, knowing that once seeing her son, a young innocent boy who was beaten beyond recognition that it would be difficult to deny his narrative. She also allowed for his photograph to be taken, and published in *Jet,* a Black magazine. "Mobley's refusal to keep private grief allowed a body that meant nothing to the criminal-justice system to stand as evidence. By placing both herself and her son's corpse in positions of refusal relative to the etiquette of grief, she 'disidentified' with the tradition of the lynched figure left out in public view as a warning to the Black community, thereby using the lynching tradition against itself. The spectacle of the Black body, in her hands, publicized the injustice mapped onto her son's corpse." (Rankine, 2016).

Park. These images impassioned the public by displaying a narrative that had never been exposed before, the unfair legal treatment of African Americans in the Jim Crow South (Davis and Barat, 2016).

Figure 7: Photo of Emmett Till, His Mother Looking On (Latson, 2015)

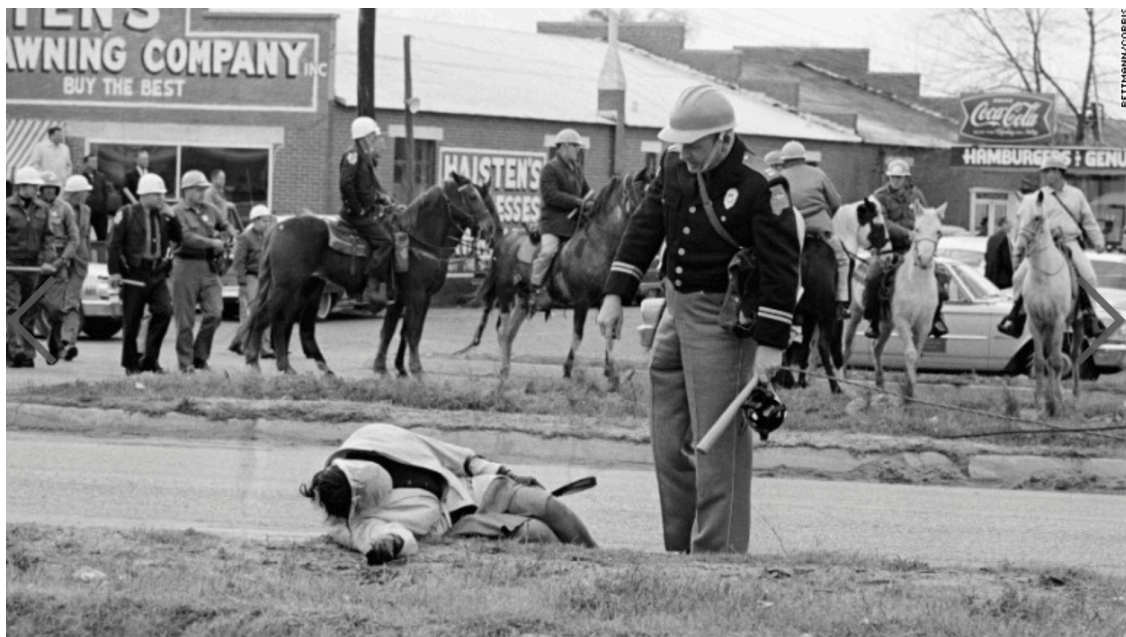*Figure 8: a Still Image of a Beaten Black Woman from the Coverage of the Pettus Bridge Beatings (Jones, 2015)*

When a marginalized group has little to no access to share their true narrative, they turn to other means of communication to tell it. In the 1960s, when a Civil Rights' participant needed to get out the news of a gathering, horrific beating or an activist's arrest, they would have run to a

telephone to call a national Civil Rights' organization while in the inhospitable, and often dangerous, Jim Crow South[35] (Stephen, 2015).

Once the Civil Rights' activist got through, there would be someone at the end, who would take down the report along with hundreds of others that were coming in simultaneously from the South. The reports would be bundled together and sent to organization leaders, the media, Justice Department lawyers and civil rights workers across the country. "In other words, it took a lot of infrastructure to live-tweet what was going on in the streets of the Jim Crow South" (Stephen, 2015).

In 1965, when voting-rights marchers in Selma, Alabama were brutally beaten by police at the Edmund Pettus Bridge, exactly this happened. But the really powerful tool of technology, the moving images that would later be seen by 48 million Americans on the nightly news and change the course of the Civil Rights Movement, was not located in the hands of the activists but in "film canisters being ferried past police blockades on Highway 80 by an ABC News TV crew, racing for the Montgomery airport and heading to New York for an evening broadcast" (Stephen, 2015).

New media has always played an influential role in Black activism. The photos of Emmet Till's broken and beaten body at his open casket funeral encouraged huge numbers to join the movement. "'If Rosa Parks showed the potential of defiance, [some historians] say, Emmett Till's death warned of a bleak future without it" (Latson, 2015). After the Pettus Bridge beatings were portrayed on national news, support from White and Black America increased (The Learning Network, 2012).

These images served their purpose and the Civil Rights movement was able to, with heroic effort, overcome media obstacles and achieve their goal of "the legal eradication of racism and the dismantling of the apparatus of segregation" (Davis and Barat, 2016). The activists were not in control of this narrative, however, they were dependent on the biased traditional media to get their narrative of injustice to the public[36]. Because of this, the perception of the Black

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[35] Special numbers that were prepaid by the organization were used to patch them right through to the organization's headquarters. This was done because placing a standard long distance phone call would most likely be blocked by the local White, Southern switchboard operator (Stephen, 2015).
[36] The images of Emmet Till were able to get around traditional mass media purely by being published by the Black Publication *Jet*, and diffused through the Black community (Rankine, 2016). It took extremes like the

community and the systematic racism that leads to violence against the Black community is still alive and well[37] (Chapter One and Two). The Civil Rights movement did not end the root cause of racism but only its visible artifacts.[38]

Today, the means of sharing the African American narrative has changed significantly. Powerful moving images and stories exposing a true African American narrative are still utilized by civil rights activists in the Black Lives Matter movement, but are published instantaneously and to a wider audience—all from their perspective and outside of the control of mainstream media. Their goal, ridding the perception of African Americans as a supposed "other" and attacking the root cause of racism with a representative narrative of the African American experience. The BLM movement epitomizes this new Black activism. "If the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr.'s Civil Rights movement made demands that altered the course of American lives and backed up those demands with the willingness to give up your life in service of your Civil Rights, with Black Lives Matter, a more internalized change is being asked for: recognition" (Rankine, 2016).

3.2 Black Lives Matter: A Movement Begins

The BLM movement emerged from a feeling of loss and disappointment from Black America. Obama's election in 2009 was a symbol of hope to the Black community that implicit racism was finished and that decades of community struggle would be validated. However, the "nation's grappling with race and the legacy of its original sin—ongoing since the first slaves arrived in Jamestown in 1619—was and is far from over." After Obama's election, the hope

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graphic brutality of the Pettus Bridge beatings to make it on White national news. The images of the beatings so bloody and violent they were deemed shocking enough to be worthy of the nightly news once they got past the physical barriers (Gates, 2011).

[37] The oppression of Blacks did not start with the Civil Rights movement, it originated with slavery and has been persistently ingrained into our society, and therefore is more complex than simply gaining legal rights (Davis and Barat, 2016, p. 17). "The legacy of Black bodies as property and subsequently three-fifths human continues to pollute the White imagination" (Rankine, 2016). There may no longer be lynchings and Ku Klux Klan violence in the same way as during the terror of Jim Crow, however, there is still state, police and military violence targeted onto the Black community daily (Chapter Two). "The problem is that it is often assumed that the eradication of the legal apparatus is equivalent to the abolition of racism. But racism persists in a framework that is far more expansive, far vaster than the legal framework." (Davis and Barat, 2016, p. 17).

[38] Although discrimination was now illegal the negative perception of African Americans remained to fester. This implicit racial bias would continue to be diffused through society by stereotypes within mass media and consequently plague the African American community with racist violence and policies (Davis and Barat, 2016, p. 17).

that America had finally reached a post-racial society was quickly revealed to be a fantasy. This loss of hope, led the Black Community to take action in the form of a new civil rights movement (Lowery, 2016, p. 14).

The culmination of this loss occurred the day Trayvon Martin was murdered. The frustrations of another Black life lost without recourse, gave rise to the realization that the Black community could no longer allow their narrative to be controlled. And so, a movement began; "Within days the initial details of the shooting, and Trayvon's face, filled my Facebook and Twitter feeds as friends from high school and college debated the case and expressed their outrage" (Lowery, 2016, p.82-86).

One of the most influential posts was put up by Alicia Garza on Facebook, her status titled "A love note to Black people":

> 'The sad part is, there's a section of America who is cheering and celebrating right now, and that makes me sick to my stomach. We GOTTA [sic] get it together y'all…Stop saying 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 love you. I love us. Our lives matter.' (Cobb, 2016).

Her response to Martin's death quickly went viral. Garza's friend and activist Patrisse Cullor inspired by this post and the phrase "Black Lives Matter," reposted the love note with the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter. Soon, the pair of female activist's reached out to Opal Tometi who set up a Tumblr and Twitter account under their new slogan. This was the first steps of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement (Cobb, 2016). Since its inception, it has become one of the most used hashtags and "the banner under which dozens of disparate organizations, new and old, and millions of individuals, loosely and tightly related, press for change" (Stephen, 2015).

The BLM site describes their social movement:

> #BlackLivesMatter was created in 2012 after Trayvon Martin's murderer, George Zimmerman, was acquitted for his crime, and dead 17-year old Trayvon was posthumously placed on trial for his own murder. Rooted in the experiences of Black people in this country who actively resist our dehumanization, #BlackLivesMatter is a call to action and a response to the virulent anti-Black racism

that permeates our society. Black Lives Matter is a unique contribution that goes beyond extrajudicial killings of Black people by police and vigilantes (2017).

Created to share the Black narrative of police violence #BlackLivesMatter works to enlighten America to the false narrative of the Black criminal that has been ingrained within American society.

3.3 Black Lives Matter: Growth and Manifestation into Protests

The choice to first use Twitter and Tumblr was "strategic genius." The two platforms allow for a more democratic, organic growth of the movement as opposed to the more popular platform at the time, Facebook. Where Facebook is based on structural algorithms, that only allow a few key players to break through their newsfeed noise, Twitter and Tumblr allow growth based on simply compelling content. "Twitter and Tumblr is determined directly by how compelling a given message, post, or dispatch is." Thus allowing for a phrase like #BlackLivesMatter, #Ferguson or later #BaltimoreUprising to "in a matter of moments transform a singular sentence typed on an individual user's iPhone into an internationally trending topic" (Lowery, 2016, p. 88). These social media platforms allowed for #BlackLivesMatter to go around traditional news sources, reaching people because a community related to the narrative told and, as a result, were inspired to click, like or share the post.

Why is this organic growth through social media so influential for a social movement like #BlackLivesMatter? Today, 38% of U.S. adults receive their news predominately through online resources, for millennials, that number jumps to 50% (Mitchell, Gottfried, Barthel and Shearer, 2016). There were a total of 1.91 billion social media users in 2016, projected to grow to 2.67 billion by 2018 ("U.S. population social media penetration 2017", 2017). This is the audience that African Americans have been yearning to tell their narrative to. In 2016 civil rights leaders through this technology hold the power literally in their hands, able to send their message immediately around the world. No longer were their powerful images subject to blockades, seizure or media bias as were the vulnerable Pettus Bridge film canisters in 1965. With no obstacles but a Wi-Fi connection, the activist can post in seconds the true narrative of their injustices to Twitter, Facebook, Instagram or Periscope to a possible 1.96 billion witnesses (Stephen, 2015). This audience is exactly what #BlackLivesMatter utilized in 2014 when

Michael Brown was killed in Ferguson, and Black America said enough was enough, combining offline and online efforts in order to share Brown's narrative.
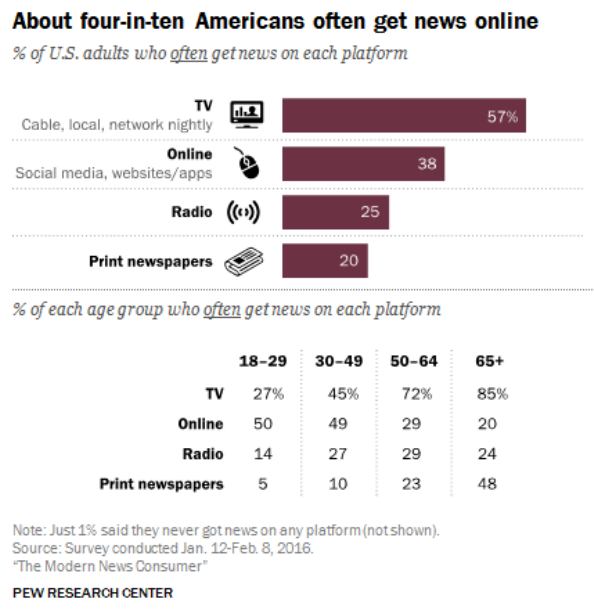

About four-in-ten Americans often get news online
% of U.S. adults who often get news on each platform

TV Cable, local, network nightly	57%
Online Social media, websites/apps	38
Radio	25
Print newspapers	20

% of each age group who often get news on each platform

	18–29	30–49	50–64	65+
TV	27%	45%	72%	85%
Online	50	49	29	20
Radio	14	27	29	24
Print newspapers	5	10	23	48

Note: Just 1% said they never got news on any platform (not shown).
Source: Survey conducted Jan. 12-Feb. 8, 2016.
"The Modern News Consumer"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Figure 9: (Mitchell, Gottfried, Barthel and Shearer, 2016)

On August 9th, 2014 Darren Wilson, a White Ferguson police officer, shot and killed an unarmed eighteen-year-old named Michael Brown.[39] The young Black man was left lying on the street for six hours after he died. It was difficult for the Black community of Ferguson and the World not to be reminded of the time of lynchings and Jim Crow, when Black bodies were left hanging in trees as a warning to them all (Lowery, 2016, p. 37).

On November 24th, 2014 the St. Louis county prosecutor reported that the grand jury decided not to indict Wilson (Buchanan, 2015). Writer and historian Jelani Cobb described in the *New Yorker* the Black community's reaction to this case:

> Within a few weeks of Michael Brown's death, hundreds of people who had never participated in
> organized protests took to the street, and that campaign eventually exposed Ferguson as a case study of

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[39] From physical evidence and witness testimony, the events of that night have been described as the following: Brown and his friend Dorian Johnson leave a Ferguson liquor store. Surveillance shows that Brown had stolen cigarillos. Wilson later sees Brown and Johnson, Brown fits the description of a suspect in a local convenience store theft. There is an altercation between Wilson and Brown, Wilson fires two shots one likely grazing Brown's thumb. Brown runs with Wilson chasing him on foot. Brown eventually stops and turns toward Wilson beginning to approach him. Wilson fires several shots into Brown, fatally wounding him (Buchanan, 2015).

structural racism in America and a metaphor for all that had gone wrong since the end of the civil-rights movement (Lowery, 2016, p. 86-96).

Similar to Trayvon Martin, mass media's perspective on Brown was no different than what had been shared in the past through traditional mass media; they chose to establish him as the Black criminal by vilifying and putting the Black victim on trial. Media tended to choose photos of him holding up what looked to be gang symbols, rather than a photo that would later be used by activists of him smiling in his graduation cap and gown. Reports focused on whether Brown was an honors student or dropout, whether he smoked weed or listened to vulgar music, whether he was a thief or just a gang banger. Instead of treating Brown as a victim, and realizing based on the facts of the case, that this was an officer stepping over the line of reasonable force, the media jumped to the assumption this was simply another Black criminal needing to be punished. The direct result of focusing on the Black victim's character is that "we inadvertently take the focus off the powerful and instead train our eyes and judgement on the powerless" (Lowery, 2016, p. 36).
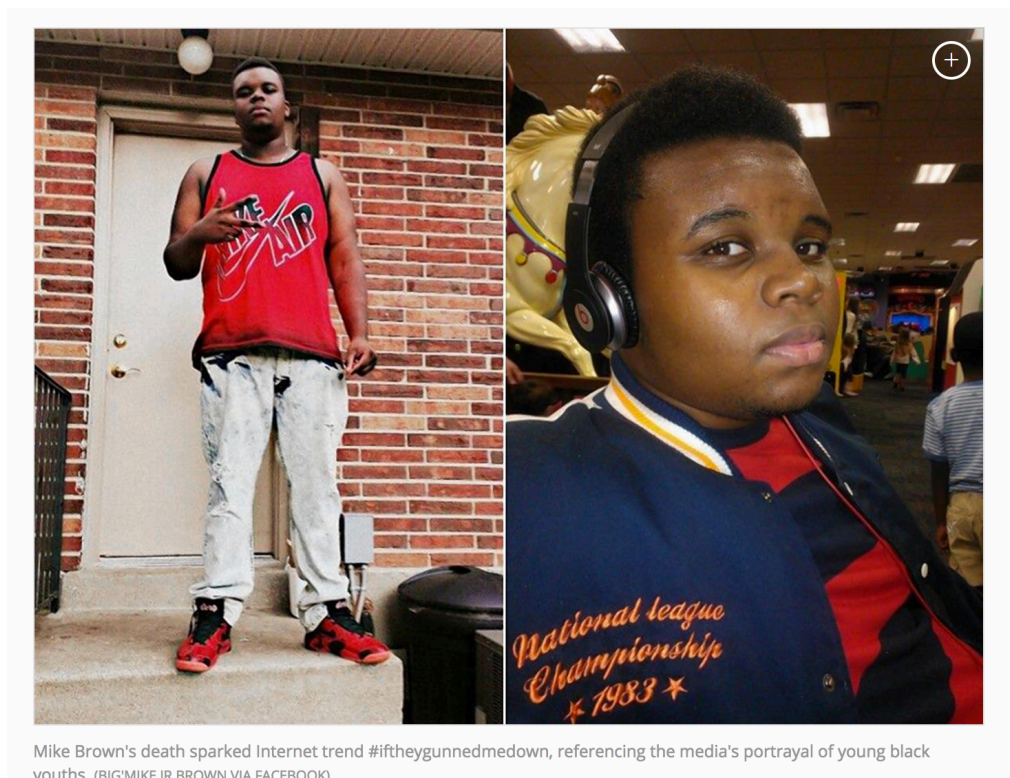

Mike Brown's death sparked Internet trend #iftheygunnedmedown, referencing the media's portrayal of young black youths. (BIG'MIKE JR BROWN VIA FACEBOOK)

Figure 10: Portrayal of Brown in National Media (Walsh, 2014)

Black America contrastingly knew that this narrative was false, and decided to share their own. Nationwide protests were inspired as social media was flooded with the stories and reactions to this case. These protests, under the banner of the Black Lives Matter movement, resulted in a prolonged campaign against racial injustice (Kirabo, 2017). Unlike protests in the '60s, organized in churches and sometimes shared on the national news, this protest was organized online and diffused on newsfeeds:

> The movement of the '60s needed a big institutional structure to make things work—in part because of the limitations of the tech at the time. Now that kind of structure has come to seem vestigial. After Michael Brown was shot dead in Ferguson, Missouri, and the city became a lightning rod of activism, [DeRay] Mckesson[, an activist who handles messages of injustice that come in to him from Facebook and other social media sites,] says he had a kind of epiphany about movement-building: 'We didn't need institutions to do it,' he says. Social media could serve as a source of live, raw information. It could summon people to the street and coordinate their movements in real time. And it could swiftly push back against spurious media narratives with the force of a few thousand retweets' (Stephen, 2015).

Wesley Lowery describes the power of regaining the Black narrative for young Black activists on the frontline, online and in protests:

> Now we were able to share what we saw and how we felt about it instantaneously with thousands of others who were going through similar awakenings. Conversations once had at Bible studies and on barroom stools were happening on our phones and on Facebook, allowing both instant access to information and a means of instant feedback. Social media made it possible for young Black people to document interactions they believed to be injustices, and exposed their White friends and family members to their experiences (2016, p. 15).

Directly resulting from the protests in Ferguson were "new legislation, police training, body cameras, use-of-force policies, civilian review boards and court reform." It also has forced Ferguson politicians to listen to the Black community, feeding their campaigns with the promises that the problems in Ferguson, spurred by racism, will be fixed. A vast change from the Black criminal dominated political campaigns that were seen nationally up into the '90s (Chapter Two). Ferguson proved that social media could take back a narrative and through its wide reach, demand for a lasting change (Deere, 2016).

The protests in Ferguson, organized and shared with the #BlackLivesMatter movement, would impact and spread across the United States. Ferguson "would birth a movement and set the

nation on a course for a still-ongoing public hearing on race that stretched far past the killing of unarmed residents—from daily policing to Confederate imagery to respectability politics to cultural appropriation." (Lowery, 2016, p. 13-18).

3.4 Black Lives Matter: The Importance of Moving Images

Even after these narratives of violence against the Black community diffused through society, the media and skeptics continued to question the authenticity of these narratives. Just as the '60s movement needed the moving images played to White America of the Pettus Bridge beatings, modern White America needed the same proof that these narratives were true before they could internally confront their implicit racial bias; particularly because the narrative BLM was sharing challenged every narrative they had witnessed before (Chapter One).

This turning point in the Black Lives Matter movement was at the expense of another Black life. On April 4, 2015, in South Carolina, officer Michael Slager attempted to pull over a car with a missing taillight. When trying to scan the registration and license plate of the man, the Black man made a run for it bolting from the driver's seat and toward a field approximately a half block away. That day Slager not only shot and killed the Black man as he ran away, but also planted evidence on him[40] (Lowery, 2016, p. 114-115).

The Black man's name was Walter Scott. He was a fifty-year-old Marine Corps veteran. It was later discovered that he owed child support and feared going to jail. Slager had been on the force for five years by the time he murdered Scott. He told his superior that Scott had taken his stun gun and was about to use it on him when, in fear for his own life, he fired at the criminal (Lowery, 2016, p. 114-115).

Neither of the men knew that during this struggle, Feidin Santana[41] had been a few feet away recording the entire thing. Santana waited initially before releasing the tape. He wanted to see

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[40] The officer first tried to use a stun gun on the Black man, but it was ineffective. The two men struggled for the stun gun, and then the Black man continued to run. Somewhat harmed from the struggle, the Black man moved with a "limp-jog that didn't get him very far." That is when Slager drew his gun, and shot the man in the back multiple times. Afterward, Slager picked up the stun gun and placed it by the man's body in order to support his narrative of the shooting (Lowery, 2016, p. 114-115).

[41] Feidin describes what he witnessed that day "Before I started recording, they were down on the floor. I remember the police [officer] had control of the situation…he had control of Scott. And Scott was trying just to

the narrative the police and media would set forth before getting involved. Once it was looking as though they were moving toward a narrative that contradicted his video, he handed the tape over. Under the banner of Black Lives Matter, the video and reactions to this injustice inundated social media (Lowery, 2016, p. 115). Once again, the BLM narrative co-opted the narrative being set forth by the colonist—government authority could no longer hide its actions in the shadows of the Black Criminal archetype. They were caught on tape.

This type of video evidence whether body camera on a policeman, security camera or a phone video recording brought the realization of the colonist's false narrative to reality for many. Similar to the moving images of news media, film or television, these images were more powerful than simply hearing a community talk about injustices. The spectator had their full focus on Scott, in this scene he was not hidden behind White context, he was the lead character and the audience watched horrified as he was murdered. American Society felt as though they were witnessing this first hand and, consequently, felt empathy for the Black community:

> As protests propelled by tweets and hashtags spread under the banner of BLM and with cell phone and body camera video shining new light on the way police interact with minority communities, America was forced to consider that not everyone marching in the streets could be wrong. Even if you believe Mike Brown's own questionable choices sealed his fate, did Eric Garner, John Crawford, Tamir Rice, Walter Scott, Freddie Gray and Sandra Bland all deserve to die? (Lowery, 2016, p. 86-96).

The moving images of BLM have made a lasting and significant difference to the movement. With every piece of visual proof against the colonist's narrative, White America is forced to confront their own bias, and as a result, it becomes increasingly difficult to justify the colonist's narrative.

3.5 Black Lives Matter: Not a New Narrative, But a New Audience

When Black Lives Matter first gained attention after Michael Brown was killed there was no federal or state government reporting on police shootings, and therefore, no statistics on how many Black victims there have been. The *Washington Post* stepped into the gap and dug into

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get away from the Taser. But like I said, he never used the Taser against the cop. As you can see in the video, the police officer just shot him in the back" (Lowery, 2016, p. 115).

official records reporting that there were 990 in 2015 alone, almost all concluded as being legally justified. "Each day, it seemed, there was another shooting" (Lowery, 2016, p. 17). For Black communities around the United States, "justice is a hard concept to wrestle[42] with when your eyes are filled with scenes of death" (Lowery, 2016, p. 17).

This narrative of police brutality is a Black narrative that has always been around, but now can be told from the Black perspective because of BLM's utilization of social media. As Ta-Nehisi Coates, a prominent Black activist and author, poignantly summed up when discussing recent police shootings:

> It seems like there's a national conversation going on right now about those who are paid to protect us, who sometimes end up inflicting lethal harm upon us. But for me this conversation is old, and I'm sure for many of you the conversation is quite old. It's the cameras that are new. It's not the violence that's new (Goodman, 2016).

The killings of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown and Walter Scott, and the countless other Black men and women's stories who have been brought to the forefront of national news with the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter, "represent an unbroken stream of colonist on Black violence, both official and extralegal" (Davis and Barat, 2016). The tie that binds all these stories, implicit racial bias that causes danger to Black Americans. "Each case an innocuous behavior—walking home in the rain carrying a packet of Skittles, sitting at a gas station listening to music, jaywalking on a suburban side street, playing with a toy gun in a park, or sitting around a church table for a prayer meeting—suddenly lead[ing] to a fatal encounter, seemingly only because the person involved was Black" (Lowery, 2016, p. 176).

These stories are the true stories of the Black community. Hidden by mass media's bias, unheard for too long. #BlackLivesMatter exposes these true narratives "Our story is just one of the many threads that [weave] through the larger problem of how we view race, guns, violence, bias…Every one of these stories, they're all so completely relevant for what we have to deal with in this country; every time there is a story, that's another thread. For so long these

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[42] Distrust of the criminal justice system is ingrained within the Black community[42]. When reporting in Ferguson, Wesley Lowery, a criminal justice reporter for the *Washington Post*, described a continued distrust for people of power, especially law enforcement. Protesters explained to Lowery that they were in Ferguson because Brown's death went beyond the experience of a single man but symbolizes the frustration from the community of being fearful of those who are supposed to serve and protect them. Reminiscent of the time of slave patrols, lynchings or segregation, the law has never worked for them but rather only against them (2016).

have been our stories…and they've never been told outside of our communities,'" until now (Lowery, 2016, p. 176).

3.6 Black Lives Matter: Accomplishments and Criticisms

Since its inception, the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag and social profile has inspired hundreds of thousands of stories and videos of injustices to be shared. By controlling the conversation on social media, BLM controlled the conversation on- and offline enabling, for the first time in U.S. history, the national debate on policing to be driven from the Black perspective.

For their tenth anniversary, Twitter published their top hashtags of all time for social movements. #Ferguson was number one, #BlackLivesMatter was number three. The study "Beyond the Hashtags" carried out by the Center for Media and Social Impact at American University found dozens of Twitter communities who participated in the conversation of police brutality including: BLM, Anonymous, Mainstream Media, Conservatives and Black Entertainers. However, in 2014-2015 BLM activists and supporters were the ones who controlled the conversation on policing because they were able to drive the most content "more often, and with wider reach, than mainstream news outlets or the conservative Twitter users who push[ed] a counter-narrative." With online and social being a main source of information for people (Section 3.3), the study concluded that this phenomenon "enabled the Black Lives Matter activists to control the narrative on specific police cases, protests, and the movement as a whole, independent of mainstream news outlets" (Patterson, 2016).

Their control over social media allows Black activists to dominate the narrative on the web as well. The most widely circulated tweets are shown at the top of Google searches, so when searching police brutality or the news on the latest police shooting the results are "'influenced by the volume of activity of Black voices.'" Charlton McIlwain, an NYU professor of media, culture and communications comments, "'I think that's where you get your impact—both in terms of the visibility, but also of the framing of events'" (Patterson, 2016).

Deen Freelon, the co-author of "Beyond the Hashtags" and professor of communications at American University, agreed that the BLM movement was able to effectively circulate their

narrative and did not have to rely on mainstream media to do so. He comments that social media has "to a great extent removed the middleman—the mainstream media—and allowed activists to talk directly to the public that they are interested in communicating with" (Patterson, 2016).

Their strength comes from the movement's massive participation[43], that is derived from the decentralization and diffusion of the movement. This diffusion and decentralization is viewed by many Civil Rights leaders as a "source of energy," with local leaders and members tailoring their message to their community's racism. For example, University of Missouri has a strong BLM movement that was taken on by the students, not civil rights leaders, when they wanted to react to the administration's systematic racism. Utilizing social media to organize and share their message, the students of the campus led marches, hunger strikes and the football team even threatened to boycott games. This utilization of social media to organize as well as share their protests and narrative was so effective, national news picked up the story. All of which led to the president and chancellor of the college resigning (Eligon, 2015).

Figure 11: Coach of University of Missouri Joins in the BLM Conversation with Thousands of Likes and Retweets (Pearson and Sutton, 2015)

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[43] #BlackLivesMatter is bigger than sharing one narrative, but is about bringing the voice and narrative of all Black lives to the public by utilizing these communication tools that are not controlled by a colonial system. BLM tries to get to the root of racism that was left to grow after the Civil Rights movement. "They recognize, for example, that those who counter the slogan "Black Lives Matter" with what they assume is a more all-embracing slogan, "All Lives Matter," are often embracing a strategy that glosses over the particular reasons why it is important to insist quite specifically on an end to racist violence." Understanding that for most of American history, African Americans have not been in the category of "human," "its abstractness has been colored White and gendered male" (Davis and Barat, 2016, p. 86).

Despite this "energy", many have criticized decentralization as ultimately a limitation on the groups message and goals. This little phrase turned hashtag took on a life of its own. #BlackLivesMatter became the banner under which thousands of activists and groups began to protest online and in the streets, whether the founders intended it or not. [44]

Being an open social movement means that anyone can claim membership, leading to deviations from the ideals of the movement. At some protests and marches activists have chanted for violence against the police (Stephen, 2015).[45] Although never mentioned in any of the mission statements of the movement, this has been the fodder for the movement's main critics (Stephen, 2015). From Governor Christ Christie, to online sensation Tomi Lahren, conservatives focus on these few protestors instead of the main movement's mission, allowing them to spread the false narrative that BLM is a militant group trying to cause violence and hate (Eligon, 2015).

Additionally, people are concerned that this type of social movement leaves activists extremely vulnerable, producing another platform where African Americans can endure abuse—especially if actively involved. Although the racist comments that are played out on social media may seem to be another opportunity to bring to light the still pervasive racism in the United States, unfortunately when it occurs online the abuse remains somewhat private. "Bystanders don't seem to take them as seriously. Plus, the full experience of receiving a thousand threats may only really be felt by the recipient. Even in the panopticon of social media, mobs aren't all that visible" (Stephen, 2016).

Lastly, people criticize the democracy of social media pointing to the phenomenon of "fake news" which is enabled by the democratic and accessible nature of the platform. This phenomenon, however, is a good reminder that social media is not news media. Social Media

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[44] Because of the open nature of the movement, it is allowed at times to be co-opted from its original purpose whether it was mis-remembering that the movement was born from Black-queer-female activism, or the phrase being changed by White groups to All Lives Matter or vigilantes using violent means. As an open, online movement, it is open to vulnerability (Lowery, 2016, p. 86-96).

[45] Within a protest in Dallas, a single gunman took advantage of the crowd targeting White police officers. A week later, in Baton Rouge another vigilante attacked officers killing three. This in turn, increased tensions between police officers and the Black community. The criminal justice community was angered, as they feared attacks like this for years and stalled police reform as they pointed to attacks like this as justification for harsh punishments. "Opponents of the protest movement blamed the rhetoric of the Movement for Black Lives for the murders of the officers in Dallas and Baton Rouge—a tactic not unlike the one employed by those who blamed Martin Luther King. Jr., and other Civil Rights leaders for the riots of the 1960s" (Lowery, 2016, p. 225).

is a source for people to share their own narrative. On a democratic platform like this, the narrative that people connect to will rise to the surface. As BLM takes ownership of the police violence narrative, social media is succeeding in exposing this true.

As for the other criticisms, these are not limited to this civil rights movement nor social media. Trying to excuse systematic racism and the bullying of Black activists occurred in the 1960s and will not change until society is changed. As for now, this demoralization isn't enough to prevent BLM in making a lasting difference through its political influence. Their political clout is seen from: demanding Democratic presidential candidates release a detailed criminal-justice platform; to inspiring major protests across student campuses; to another trending hashtag, #SayHerName, bringing awareness to police brutality specifically toward Black women; to the removal of the Confederate Flag from the South Carolina statehouse; to the awareness of the Black-Trans narrative; to students demanding the University of California pull $30 million from private prison investments; to the launch of Campaign Zero focusing on police brutality; to the Police Union Contract (Workneh, 2015); to helping pressure Ferguson and Baltimore to investigate police shootings (Stephen, 2014); to body cameras being required for many police departments; to causing the Justice Department to call on Ferguson to completely renew its criminal justice system (Buchanan, 2015). The BLM movement has established some of the most powerful Black civil rights activism since the '60s, helping to work towards eradicating the racist policies seen in Chapter Two.

This is a revolution for African American social movements and has been accomplished because of social media. Brittany Packnett, an organizer of Campaign Zero summarizes its effects on the African American community, beautifully:

> What social media and new media have allowed us to do is to control our own narrative instead of relinquish that power to other people—other people who don't live in our communities, who weren't on the ground in Ferguson, who have not faced these challenges is significant not only in the actual resulting narrative but in what it says about what this movement stands for: self-determination—not just controlling our own narrative but controlling our own destiny (Patterson, 2016).

Conclusion

For hundreds of years, the African American narrative has been co-opted. The White dominated media has spread the image of the Black criminal so effectively that the consequences of this misrepresentation are still witnessed in today's society. The Black criminal is reflected in social biases, and in turn, racist policies.

Using social media to take back the Black narrative, the Black Lives Matter movement works to combat the justification for White superiority—the perception that African Americans are innately a dangerous "other"—and the implicit racial bias that has been ingrained within the American psyche because of "colonial discourse". In tackling racism and the inequality that is created from this implicit racial bias, the Black Lives Matter movement has successfully worked towards social equality. They have made a lasting impact by disrupting the colonist's narrative as well as compelling political change.

In his speech after the 2008 election, Obama reminds us, that rooted in the realization that our past generations have failed, there is hope for a better America to come:

> Tonight, in this election, you, the American people, reminded us that while our road has been hard, while our journey has been long, we have picked ourselves up, we have fought our way back, and we know in our hearts that for the United States of America the best is yet to come (Lowery, 2016, p. 178-179).

By allowing the oppressed to regain their narratives that have long been lost and told only from the colonist's perspective, social media in the form of the Black Lives Matter movement has brought the U.S. closer to this future.

In this way, social media is a powerful tool for social movements. However, this analysis is limited to the effectiveness of social media for the Black Lives Matter movement. In future research it would be important to analyze if the effectiveness of social media is replicated within other digital social movements.

Appendix:

Stereotypes

The Tom is the first of the socially acceptable "Good Negro" characters. Toms are always "chased, harassed, hounded, flogged, enslaved, and insulted, they keep the faith, n'er turn against their white massas, and remain hearty, submissive, stoic, generous, selfless, and oh-so-very kind" (Bogle, 2001, p. 6). In their submission to the racial order, they are in fact endearing to the audience and often emerge as a "hero of sorts" (Bogle, 2001, p. 6). The most infamous representation of this character is Tom in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1909, 1913 and 1927).

The Coon came in three subtypes: the pickaninny, the pure coon and the uncle remus. They first appeared in a series of Black films representing the African American "as amusement object[s] and black buffoon[s]" (Bogle, 2001, p. 6). The pickaninny was usually pictured as a child and was a "harmless, little screwball creation, whose eyes popped, whose hair stood on end with the least excitement, and whose antics were pleasant and diverting" (Bogle, 2001, p.7).

This stereotype is also epitomized in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1909, 1913, and 1927) in the character Topsy. Topsy was used solely for comic relief. Described by one critic as "'a wonderfully bright youngster who seems to have the comedy of her part in extraordinary fashion…her eyes roll back and forth in alarm. She also evinces no liking for her plight when she is found by Miss Ophelia while dabbing powder on her ebony countenance'" (Bogle, 2001, p.7). Topsy's pickaninny behavior became so popular with audiences in her ridiculousness that she later gained her own movie in *Topsy and Eva* (1927).

After the pickaninny won over audiences, the pure coon was developed in 1905 with *Wooing and Wedding of a Coon (*(1905). A short film simply picturing a honeymooning Black couple stumbling around and acting like fools. These coons would later develop into the as "no-account niggers, those unreliable, crazy, lazy, subhuman creatures good for nothing more than eating watermelons, stealing chickens, shooting crap, or butchering the English language" like Rastus in *How Rastus Got His Turkey* (1910) (Bogle, 2001, p. 8). The first in a series of slapstick comedies, these films centered around the idiotic, "unreliable, no-account nigger fashion" (Bogle, 2001, p.8).

The final coon, uncle remus, is "harmless and congenial, he is a first cousin to the tom" distinguishing himself with his "quaint, naïve, and comic philosophizing" (Bogle, 2001, p. 8). The uncle remus stereotype was not fully developed until *The Green Pastures* (1926) and *Song of the South* (1946). Similar to tom's contentment with his lesser place and the coon's comedic antics, remus was used "to indicate the Black man's satisfaction with the system and his place in it" (Bogle, 2001, p. 8).

The tragic mulatto story is that of a mixed race woman who, because of her White lineage is empathized with, but ultimately ends in tragedy because of her Black inheritance. Her earliest appearance was in *The Debt* (1912), based in the Old South. In this film a White man's wife and his Black mistress both birth him a child. Growing up in the same family, raised together, the White son and mulatto daughter eventually fall in love and decide to marry. It ends with their lives in ruin. The tragic mulatto is always portrayed in a way that her life could be happy if only she wasn't a "'victim of divided racial inheritance'" (Bogle, 2001, p. 9).

Finally, we end with the brutal black buck. Made infamous and forever ingrained in the U.S. psyche from the first blockbuster—*The Birth of a Nation (1915) (BOAN)*. The brutal black buck can be divided into two categories: the black brutes and the black bucks. The black brute "was a barbaric black out to raise havoc" (Bogle, 2001, p. 13). The audience usually can assume that sexual repression is the cause for the barbaric hostility displayed, as black men were labeled as sexual deviants. In *BOAN*, the black buck rampages the innocent White community. They assault white men in the town, aggressively flaunt interracial marriage placards, and flog faithful servants. These characters can be seen in the congress scene as Black congressman take off their shoes, openly drink, put their bare feet on tables, and aggressively look at White women when they announce the legalization of interracial marriage (Bogle, 2001, p. 13).

The pure black bucks are "always big, baaddddd [sic] niggers, oversexed and savage, violent and frenzied as they lust for white flesh" (Bogle, 2001, p.13). Griffith's portrayal of the black buck played on the myth of the African American's "high-powered sexuality" and the White fear that every Black man truly desired dominating White women. "Consequently, when Lillian Gish, the frailest, purest of all screen heroines, was attacked by the character Lynch—when he put his big black arms around the pale blond beauty—the audiences literally panicked" (Bogle, 2001, p. 14).

Griffith attributed the attraction of his black bucks to White women to the "animalism innate in the Negro male" (Boggle, 2001, p. 14). In this way, Griffith makes them out to be almost psychopaths "one always panting and salivating, the other forever stiffening his body as if the mere presence of a White woman in the same room could bring him to a sexual climax" (Bogle, 2001, p. 14). He played up the bestiality of the villainous black buck, evoking rage and hatred each time they come on screen. Bogle points to the most influential representation in the film to be the immortalization of the "brutal black buck". (Bogle, 2001).

Appendix:

Abbreviations

BLM – Black Lives Matter

BOAN – Birth of a Nation

CRT – Critical Race Theory

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