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Configurations of Blackness: Stories of British Actvists

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Abstract

Configurations of Blackness: Stories of British Activists explores the configurations of Blackness amongst contemporary Black British activists and their significance in resistance against injustice. It employs oral histories, archives, and participant observation to document narratives of Black Britons whose activism has employed varied configurations of Blackness and sits within a history of resistance amongst Black people in Britain. The thesis is particularly concerned with three primary themes: the localization of racial oppression within global anti-Blackness, the incorporation and challenging of the intersectionality of race, class, and gender, and the implications of political Blackness in Black activist realms. While Black activism in Britain has historically not garnered the same attention as activism in the U.S., it has long been a vibrant phenomenon that continues into the present. The project complicates configurations of Blackness that may be assumed and highlights activists whose stories highlight factors not often considered in popular arenas. The narratives illustrate the complexities in configuring Blackness as a basis for activism. The resurgence of the Black Lives Matter Movement in 2020 offered a glimpse into the anti-racist activism that exists in Britain today. Stories of this contemporary activism, using historical acts of resistance further illustrate how Black British activists are configuring Blackness as a. Ultimately, the work seeks to further research into Black Britons and political identities, complicating understandings about the boundaries of Blackness in activism.

Configurations of Blackness: Stories of British Activists

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List of Abbreviations

198	198 Contemporary Arts and Learning
BBPP	British Black Panther Party
BBWG	Brixton Black Women's Group
BCA	Black Cultural Archives
BLF	Black Liberation Front
BLM UK	Black Lives Matter UK
BLM U.S.	Black Lives Matter U.S.
BPM	Black Power Movement
BRT	Black Radical Tradition
BSSM	Black Supplementary School Movement
CAACO	Committee of Afro-Asian Caribbean Organizations
ESN	Educationally Subnormal
LBR	London Black Revolutionaries
RAC	Royal African Company
TST	Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade
USBPP	U.S. Black Panther Party

Introduction

> The tragedy of Floyd's death inspired ordinary people, thousands of miles away in the UK, to fight for institutional change in their communities under the banner of "Black Lives Matter[1]- Aaliyah Harris and Shama Nasinde

Contemporary Configurations of Blackness in British Activism

The stories of Black activists in Britain have gained little notoriety, despite their longstanding local and global resistance. Since the rise of Black Lives Matter in 2013, activism against global anti-Blackness, analyzing the aftermaths of slavery, colonialism, and imperialism, have erupted across the world. Britain is a site of this anti-racist activism that has traveled globally. Contemporary Black activists in Britain have continued a rich legacy of resistance within Black Britain and around the world. They are utilizing Blackness as a framework by which they have mobilized. Blackness is a social construct, thus, these varying configurations of Blackness by British activists, that have been informed by the history of Britain and its Empire, impact their resistance, and offer a complex way of understanding Blackness. The thesis explores, uncovers, and highlights how current Black British activists articulate the political environment of Blackness and oppression through their activism. It aims to underscore the contemporary agency of Black Britons, with insight from historical examples, through the personal narratives of activists. Highlighting these complex configurations of Blackness through narratives is critical to this thesis and the scholarly field to illuminate the complexities of Blackness that have impacted Black centered activism in Britain.

This project about local Black activists helps to explain the landscape of activism in Britain today as part of a global Black activism existing around the world. More specifically, the

[1] Harris, Aaliyah, Shama Nasinde, Gabrielle Smith, and Agne Jurkenaite. "How UK Protesters Are Taking the Spark of Black Lives Matter Back to Their Hometowns." CNN, December 4, 2020. https://www.cnn.com/2020/12/04/uk/uk-hometowns-black-lives-matter-intl/index.html.

stories of activism guide an exploration of local manifestations of oppression and resistance to understand a global Black activism. I engage this research question through an exploration of local activism in Britain, situating individual activists in Britain within a larger community of Black activism in Britain's history. My research frames these local acts of resistance within a global resistance to anti-Blackness through the exploration of contemporary Black British activists, something many scholars have yet to examine. In the wake of the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020, there was worldwide support and attention on anti-racist activism. I first became knowledgeable of this activism in Britain in 2020, following the death of George Floyd, when Britons mobilized to protest the anti-Black violence experienced by both Black Americans and Black Britons. As illustrated in the opening quote of this thesis, Black Britons galvanized to support Black Americans and highlight their own anti-racist struggles. Despite this introduction to Black British activism in 2020, I knew there existed rich historical and contemporary stories of resistance in Britain. I wanted to better understand the racial political landscape of Britain and the ways resistance was enacted. Thus, I felt compelled to delve deeper into the contemporary manifestations of Blackness and activism in Britain to understand the political landscape surrounding oppression and resistance.

As with any research, definitions are an important part to understanding the core of the study. For the purposes of this research, I rely heavily on the individual narrators to define their beliefs about activism, Britishness, and Blackness. While there exists many definitions and frameworks that scholars have used to define these terms, it was imperative to my research that the individual narrators I interviewed be the compass of this project. Thus, while I loosely refer to activists as individuals working to bring about change, the narrators have self-identified as activists. They participate on a wide range of media including education, curatorial spaces, and

feminist-oriented groupings. They view the work they do as activism, using their passions to address violence against Black people in Britain and work towards their respective goals. Britishness is also a term worth mentioning, as Black people's history with citizenship in Britain is a violent one. The term 'Black Britons' is deployed throughout the thesis to include Black migrants to Britain, those who are British-born and/or raised, and those currently living in Britain. While not all Black people have the same relationship to Britain and while not all self-identify themselves as British, for the purposes of this thesis, the term Black Britons includes the categories listed above. Additionally, while most of this research is situated in England's capital, London, the activists interviewed have positioned the oppressions and resistances in London to reflect a broader commentary about what is occurring in Britain as a whole. Thus, there is engagement with other parts of England and the term Britain denotes the locale of this research

Finally, as discussed thoroughly in chapter three, the term 'Black' is one of varying definitions in Britain. The goal was initially to explore the oppressions and resistance of Black people as defined as those of Caribbean and/or African descent. However, concepts such as political Blackness, which denotes Black as a larger umbrella term to describe all who face racial discrimination regardless of an African origin and ancestry, have made the definition of Black more complex. Political Blackness has been utilized to unite minority groups, originating out of labor movements in Britain, against racial oppression at the hands of the British state and White Britons who often terrorized newfound Black and Brown immigrants. Thus, in a British context, there are numerous claims to Blackness from South Asian people. Activist movements including the British Black Panther Party (BBPP) have had strong South Asian participation and even leadership within their Black movements. While Black is not defined consistently amongst scholars or activists of this region, this thesis uses the term Black to denote those of Afro-

Caribbean and/or African heritage. When referring to the grouping of people of Afro-Caribbean and African heritage alongside other racialized groups such as Asians, this thesis uses the term political Blackness.

Each story shared throughout in the thesis fits inside the larger paradigm of Black Britons who exercise political agency to redress systems of oppression and domination. The stories of Black Britons and the agency they employ are rarely, if at all, shared in formal educational settings. The aim of this thesis is to share these stories. The narratives and experiences of Black Britons are critical to understanding the instances of racial violence and acts of political agency that exist amongst Black people globally, even when obscured. Black British activists working toward anti-racist struggles deserve a platform to share their stories and experiences, not for the purposes of sympathy, but because their resistance is one of empowerment and creates radical change to longstanding powerful systems. As a scholar, I have a duty to continue a platform for these activists to share their stories and further reveal the masked oppression of Black Britons, highlighting the courageous individuals and organizations doing the work.

Literature Review

While the lives and resistance of Black people in Britain is still a growing field of literature, there exists research published in the past decades that illustrate the lives of Black Britons. One of the most prominent pieces of literature in the field is Peter Fryer's *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain*. This book is one of the first historical depictions of Black people's presence in Britain, dating back to the Roman Empire. *Staying Power* details, the historical recounts of Black people in Britain and acts as a genesis of the lives and histories of Black people. *Staying Power* is valuable to this thesis, as it offers a comprehensive historical account and analysis of Black people's presence in Britain, even beyond my scope of the

contemporary with insights from the 1940s Windrush generation and beyond. However, the book rarely engages issues of intersectionality through the oppressions of Black women and primarily engages Black presence in Britain historically. Fryer's lack of inclusion of Black British women is illustrated in *Heart of the Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain* by authors Beverley Bryan, Stella Dadzie, and Suzanne Scafe which focuses on the livelihoods and activism of Black women in Britain. Rather than a historical recount of Black people dating back to the Roman Empire as Fryer wrote, the authors of *Heart of the Race* primarily focuses on the periods after the Windrush migration in the 1940s. In addition to this, they also share the stories of traditions developed from the West Indies and Africa pre and post slavery to illustrate the history of resistance to racial and gendered oppression embodied by Black women in Britain. While this book offers significant insight into the violence experienced and resulting activism by Black women in Britain, the book does not address contemporary issues. While great insight into the resistances of Black women, *Heart of the Race* leaves room for contemporary accounts of Black women's experiences and resistance in Britain, post the 1980s.

The project illustrates how Black Britons conceive of local actions as transnational activism. This phenomenon is illustrated in the article "U.S. Negroes, Your Fight is Our Fight": Black Britons and the 1963 March on Washington" by Kennetta Hammond Perry. This article, as part of a larger book that engages the relationship between Black America and Black Briton. Perry's article particular focus on transnational activism, which details the March on Washington and the international support and activism that concurrently happened in Britain. As Perry illustrates, the activists in Britain capitalized on the March on Washington to bolster demands for civil rights for Black Americans and to make illuminate similar injustices that existed in Britain. Overall, this text offers great insight into the relationship Black Britons have with resisting

global anti-Blackness and their alignment with anti-racist movements in the U.S. While important to the thesis' discussion of transnational activism, this literature again disregards the contemporary activist relationships between the U.S. and Britain. Rather, this book primarily explores the mid to late twentieth century, leaving room for the contemporary acts of transnational activism to be explored.

Perhaps two of the most profound pieces of literature and research pertaining to this thesis is the doctoral dissertation " 'Black was the Colour of Our Fight.' Black Power in Britain, 1955 – 1976" by Rosalind Eleanor Wild and the documentary *Generation Revolution* developed in 2016 by directors Cassie Quarless and Usyad Younis. " 'Black was the Colour of Our Fight.' Black Power in Britain, 1955 – 1976'" is the first and only book length study of Black Power in Britain. This thesis specifically explores the Black Power Movement (BPM) from the 1950s and 1970s and the conditions of oppression that led to the rise of radical activism in Britain. It places the BPM in Britain alongside the Black Power Movements in other countries, including the U.S. and illustrates the rise and fall of the movement. Although short lived, as Wild argues, the BPM in Britain, had major implications on protests.[2] While an important piece of literature, as this thesis engages the history of resistance amongst Black people in Britain and relies on the activism of the twentieth century for further analysis of violence and resistance, Wild's thesis also has a lack of engagement with contemporary activism in Britain. Though outside the scope of her thesis, contemporary accounts and analyses of resistance movements and activism are an important step in uncovering narratives of Black British life and activism. This thesis engages

[2] Wild, Rosalind Eleanor. "Black Was the Colour of Our Fight: Black Power in Britain, 1955-1976." *Black Was the Colour of Our Fight: Black Power in Britain, 1955-1976*. Thesis, University of Sheffield, 2008.

contemporary acts of resistance and leans on historical examples, like that of the BPM in the twentieth century, to continue narratives of resistance amongst Black Britons.

Despite most literature surrounding Black British life and resistance primarily situating their research before the twenty first century, *Generation Revolution* is a documentary involving contemporary anti-racist activism and resistance that has aided in the analysis of this thesis. The documentary focuses on two main activist groups, both of whom have varying tactics, membership, and internal challenges surrounding racial redress in Britain and the world. It places the next generation of activists in the forefront of a political landscape and illustrates the work and resistance that occurs on Britain's front lines and in community spaces. It offers great insight into the ways young people mobilize towards activism and become active political participants through their resistance to oppression. While novel through its engagement with contemporary activism in Britain, the documentary shares little about the history of resistance amongst Black Britons and the subsequent continuation of this tradition of activism and does not place contemporary activism within the larger framework of anti-racist resistance occurring across the world.

The thesis engages with existing scholarship to trace the historical contexts of the lives and activism of Black Britons. However, it also relies on the narratives obtained for this study to explore contemporary configurations of Blackness amongst Black Britons missing from current scholarship. The project is not an anomaly but rather a part of a growing discourse about contemporary Black British experiences and activism. It specifically looks to share narratives of modem day Black activists in Britain with hopes to connect these very stories to a broader recount of Black British resistance, global Black activism, and to better understand the configurations of Blackness in which these activists are grounding their resistance in. The

research seeks to further the discourse about the complexities of Blackness and activism of Black Britons and to be thought of alongside existing scholarship as scripted accounts of resistance to the powers that be that perpetuate anti-Black oppression.

Methods

To explore the central research question, this thesis employs mixed qualitative methods in pursuit of engaging with contemporary configurations of Blackness amongst activists in Britain. It incorporates ethnographic oral histories, archival research, and participant observation to illuminate the narratives of oppression and resistance. Each method offers a unique lens into the stories of Black British activism. Oral histories are a qualitative method of gathering and preserving the memories and stories of individuals and communities.[3] Oral histories illustrate the narrators' control over their experiences, making them the expert of the story. The narrator is extremely knowledgeable because the interview reflects their personal lived experiences. It gives credence to truths that have yet to be legitimized and those that may not be found in more traditional interview methods. For Black people who have historically been misrepresented as docile or written out of narratives altogether, oral histories allow for individual stories of resistance to illustrate the landscape of Blackness and broader Black activism in Britain. Through this research, I conducted four oral histories, one with an activist of the 1970s and 80s, and three with current activists living in Britain. While the older activist interviewed was found through personal connections, the other three activists were found through social media and word of mouth.[4] Oral histories were employed as a primary method in this research because of its ability

[3] "Oral History: Defined." Oral History Association. Accessed May 1, 2023. https://oralhistory.org/about/do-oral-history/.

[4] I was first exposed to contemporary activists through the documentary film *Generation Revolution*. After speaking with one of the creators of the film, he put me in contact with Aliyah Hasinah, creator of Black Curatorial and former member of Black Lives Matter UK. I sought out to find other contemporary activists through social media including Instagram and Twitter. Through these social media platforms, I connected with and interviewed Siana

to center the activists and their stories. This work is primarily centered on the voices and narratives of Black activists in Britain and how their configurations of Blackness impact their activism. Thus, oral histories were an appropriate way to allow the activists as narrators of their stories to guide the narratives of racial oppression, Blackness, and resistance in Britain. Rather than have the research shape the narrative; their narratives have shaped the research. This entire thesis is informed by the stories of Black people in Britain, with specific attention and highlight to the activists who participated in the oral histories.

Archival research furthered the understanding of the impact configurations of Blackness had on activism in the mid to late twentieth century. Although the focus of this thesis is primarily on contemporary Britain, the insight gained from the archives offered a lens to consider how the past has influenced the concepts currently explored in modern day Britain. The archival research came from the Black Cultural Archives (BCA) in the Brixton community of London, England. The BCA was first established in 1981 and its current building opened to the public in 2014. It became Britain's first heritage center dedicated to Black people as it devotes itself to the historical preservation of Black people, specifically those of African and Caribbean descent in Britain, documenting their stories and narratives. With over 10,000 archival documents, the BCA offers a site of rich information and history of Black people in Britain, spanning five centuries.[5] The BCA offered a more comprehensive look into the Windrush generation of the 1940s and how the migration of Afro-Caribbeans to Britain led to the development of the BPM. I engaged with primary documentation from the rise of the BPM from the 1950s to 70s, which in

Bangura, founder of No Fly on the WALL, and an activist with the pseudonym Kayla, a radical organizer in the North London community. Oral history interviews were employed as a primary method in this research because of its ability to center the activists and their stories.

[5] Owen, Paul. "Boris Johnson and Lottery Fund Announce £5m Funding for Black Cultural Centre in Brixton." The Guardian, October 11, 2010. https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2010/oct/12/boris-johnson-lottery-fund-black-cultural-centre-brixton.

conjunction with other methods, helped to fill in the gaps of Black British history from the 1940s to the present. These archives contextualize the lives of Black Britons and the ways they have responded to racial oppression in Britain. The historical connections to contemporary configurations of Blackness and traditions of activism found in the BCA has been invaluable to this thesis.

Furthermore, participant observation allowed for further access to activist spaces alongside historical and contemporary Black spaces that complicated narratives of resistance. I attended events and museums including Marxism 2023: A Festival of Socialist Ideas in London, a slavery installation at the Museum of London Docklands, and an event hosted by Black Curatorial, which showcased other Black curators who use their art as a medium of activism. Employing participant observation techniques allowed further access to activist spaces and further knowledge about the racial political landscape of Britain. All in all, the mixed methods approach that have specifically engaged contemporary activism and the twentieth century, has allowed for this thesis to further its intention of exploring configurations of Blackness amongst Black British activists.

Historical Context

The discrimination experienced by Black Britons date back to a history of violence the British Empire has enacted against Black people, dating back to the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade (TST). Britain has a violent and unique relationship with slavery and its aftermath that have affected Black Britons to this day. Britain was not only one of the most successful empires involved in the TST but continued to execute hegemonic control over its colonies in the Americas, Africa, and Asia until more than a century later. An influx of Black immigrants into Britain in the mid twentieth century was complimented with acts of resistance and political

activism against the discrimination of Black people, notably observed in the BPM of the mid to late twentieth century.[6] Despite this long relationship with anti-Blackness, Britain has yet to truly contend with their slavery and colonial past. The mid twentieth century saw a sizeable migration to Britain from many of those former colonies, including the West Indies, commonly referred to as the Windrush Generation, and South Asia. This new wave of migration to Britain from then British colonies developed Britain's racial stratification. Many immigrants experienced violence, terror, and second-class citizenship, often leading to resistance and activism to combat these experiences.

In 1948, the Windrush generation from British colonies in the Americas began immigration to Britain for work following the passage of the 1948 British Nationality Act, which allowed those in Britain's colonies to migrate to Britain to help rebuild it following the end of World War II.[7] However, employment for Black immigrants was not always guaranteed and the unemployment rate amongst Black immigrants was unproportionate compared to other racial and ethnic groups. Those that were able to find work, received manufacturing blue collar jobs, specifically in London Transport and the Health Services. These jobs were mainly reserved for unskilled, uneducated immigrants. Since the initial migration of West Indians in the twentieth century, their wages have rarely increased, and Black Britons have continued to face economic inequalities.[8] Employment for Black people has been a concern since early immigration to Britain. The deindustrialized nature of cities in the late twentieth century resulted in many Black

[6] Narayan, John. "British Black Power: The Anti-Imperialism of Political Blackness and the Problem of Nativist Socialism." *The Sociological Review* 67, no. 5 (2019): 945–67. https://doi.org/10.1177/0038026119845550.

[7] "British Nationality Act 1948." Legislation.gov.uk. Accessed May 3, 2024. https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Geo6/11-12/56/enacted.

[8] Owusu, Kwesi, ed. *Black British Culture and Society: A Text Reader*. London: Taylor & Francis Group, 1999. Accessed December 17, 2021. ProQuest Ebook Central.

immigrants in London losing their jobs and remaining in poverty. The unemployment of Black people during this time was vast, resulting in impoverished neighborhoods being mostly occupied by Black residents. Statistics show that by the mid 1990s, "40 percent of African-Caribbean people in Britain were in the poorest fifth of the population. In London, by the mid 1990s, almost 70 percent of the residents on the poorest housing estates were Black."[9] The racial violence experienced in the colonies and the continued discrimination faced by Black people living in Britain made it clear the racial stratification of their former empire. Their experiences with violence in Britain occurred on a multitude of levels, including racial, economic, and xenophobic violence, furthering the desire to resist against the injustices experienced. This discrimination and violence was at the hands of White vigilantes and the British government who did little to support Black Britons, passing legislature that aimed to stop Black migration into Britain and design second class citizenship.[10] The British capitalized on their colonial relationship with the commonwealth to provide Black labor during the labor shortage following the second World War but did little to end the violence and oppression of Black people in Britain.[11] As previously mentioned, Black migrants faced a great deal of discrimination and oppression in the realm of work, housing, and education, despite Britain's encouragement in migration in 1948 for its own benefit. All these factors led to Black activists' clear understanding of Britain's racial violence and oppression, furthering the belief in Britain existing a violent and racist nation with examples in Africa, Asia, Americas, and at home in Britain. The history of resistance is evident through the role as political actors in the abolition of slavery, colonialism,

[9] Power, Anne, and Rebecca Tunstall. *Swimming Against the Tide: Polarisation or Progress on 20 Unpopular Council Estates: 1980-1995*. York: J. Rowntree Foundation, 1995.

[10] Evans, J. M. "Immigration Act 1971." *The Modern Law Review* 35, no. 5 (1972): 508–24. http://www.jstor.org/stable/1094478.

[11] Ramdin, Ron. "The Migrant Workers' Story." In *Reimaging Britain: 500 Years of Black and Asian History*, 211–38. Pluto Press, 1999. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt18fs3vc.11.

and imperialism.[12] This resistance and rebellion against oppression in Britain and globally continues in modern times by a new generation of Black activists.

Chapter Summaries

The organization of this thesis is into three main chapters: Localizing the Problem, Class, Gender & Blackness, and No Political Blackness. Each chapter offers specific insight into the way Black people in Britain are configuring Blackness, oftentimes challenging what is believed to be finite categories of identity and displaying its impact on their activism. While each chapter explores a specific configuration of Blackness, all are intertwined to overall illustrate the landscape of race and activism in Britain. These chapters emerged from themes explored in oral histories, archives, and participant observation. They were created out of the activists' experiences and rely on the information collected through the research methods to develop this overarching narrative about Black Britons and how their configuration of Blackness informs their activism today.

Chapter one explores how British activists are localizing issues of anti-Blackness and framing it within this larger phenomenon of global racial oppression. This chapter elucidates how British entities, including the British press and system, have heightened the idea of a U.S. domination over racism and resistance to obscure Britain's role in global and local instances of racial violence. By illuminating narratives of violence and illustrating the racial conflict occurring in the U.S., Britain has concealed the racial violence occurring in their own country. To address this concealment of wrongdoing, Black activists historically and contemporarily have participated in simultaneous transnational activism to highlight the racial injustices happening globally and in Britain. This chapter examines the Black Lives Matter protests in 2020 in Britain

[12] Adi, Hakim. *Pan-Africanism: A History*. London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021.

as an example of this simultaneous transnational activism and uses a historical example of the concurrent activism of the Committee of Afro-Asian Caribbean Organizations (CAACO) with the U.S. Civil Rights Movement to further illustrate a tradition of transnational activism amongst Black Britons. While these are two case examples, Black Britons continue to be at the forefront of local and global activism and have mobilized in support of Black people within the British community and globally.

Chapter two explores the intersectionality of class and gender in Black activist spaces. While class, gender, and race are often believed to be fixed categories of identity, this chapter illustrates how activists historically and presently define for themselves these social categories and create the idea of membership and belonging within Black activism. While not all utilized to the same degree, this chapter signifies how activists have historically and are presently contending with the issues of class and gender within configurations of Blackness. Black people in Britain have a unique relationship with class and race, as illustrated through the combined racial and economic oppression of the commonwealth and the extended combined oppression experienced while in Britain. This chapter uses Marxism 2023: A Festival of Socialist Ideas and the manifesto of the London Black Revolutionaries (LBR), a socialist based movement, to illustrate how activists contend with class struggles in their configuration of Blackness. Additionally, the role of Black women in male dominated activist spaces continues to be a site of debate. The chapter illustrates how Black women complicate notions of intersectionality in activist spaces through an analysis of the oppression of Black women, of whom are not represented within Black activist spaces, as apparent in the BBPP, or working class activist spaces, as apparent in the Communist Party. Black women activism critique particular assertions of Blackness as manhood, through their forming of women centered activist spaces and through

their use of varying methods of resistance including militancy, nurture, and healing to illustrate the gender politics of activism. Both class and gender struggles have been an important aspect to Black movements in Britain, thus its engagement is imperative to understanding contemporary activists' configuration of Blackness and activism.

Chapter three explores the concept of political Blackness, and the ways Britons contend with the idea of Blackness being extended to those who face racial oppression who are not of African descent. While political Blackness is by no means exclusive to Britain and can be seen in other countries including Trinidad & Tobago, Guyana, and South Africa, it has a specific history in activist spaces in Britain. While it has often been categorized as both a racial identity and an organizing tactic, political Blackness continues to have a controversial standing in Britain. This chapter articulates how activists of the past and present confront the ideals of political Blackness in their activism, regardless of their personal and organizational beliefs. Some configure Blackness through a definition of political Blackness while others challenge the concept's effectiveness as a configuration of Blackness in which to resist. This chapter particularly engages both scholarly and activist perspectives on political Blackness and observes this phenomenon from a historical context, with a continued modern existence. This thesis could not explore configurations of Blackness without highlighting the varying definitions of Black that exist amongst activists in Britain While political Blackness lost momentum in activist spaces in the 1990s, it still has a legacy that both informs and generates activism amongst Britons. Thus, an engagement with the way historical and contemporary activists are interrogating and configuring the definition of Black is imperative to the overall function of this thesis.

Finally, the conclusion of this thesis offers commentary about how my analysis complicates configurations of Blackness and calls for further research into Blackness and what it

means as the basis of activism. It illustrates the need to think of these global movements with more complexity and utilizing storytelling and narratives of activists as a site for understanding these varying configurations of Blackness. Ultimately, this conclusion addresses the complexities of activism established throughout the thesis.

Chapter One: Localizing the Problem

> When you mention the civil rights movement, what comes to mind for most people is the struggle for equal rights under the law that took place in America… but the racism and discrimination faced by African Americans was echoed in post-war Britain[13] – Windrush 75 1948-2023 Souvenir edition issue no. 1943 June 2023

Introduction

The dominant imagery of American acts of racial oppression and of the activism against it often overshadow discrimination in other parts of the world. It obscures past and present transnational activism targeting racial injustices. The discourse surrounding discrimination in Britain highlights this problem. Despite its prominent role in the TST, colonialism, and imperialism, representations of British racial oppression and struggles against it have never earned the notoriety associated with American developments. Silences in mainstream British media outlets and education curricula have limited access to stories of racial violence in England and mobilizations against it. Individuals committed to remembering and publicizing the experiences of the Windrush generation point to this problem. This group, which comprised one of the largest migrations of Black people to Britain in the early to mid-twentieth century, faced brutal racial violence and organized to confront it. As illustrated in the opening quote, the 75th anniversary of the arrival of the ship *Windrush* from Britain's then Caribbean colonies was used as an opportunity to uncover narratives that have been obscured. The stories detail suffering and resistance in a country that rejected the identity of Black migrants. One of the first articles in the anniversary newspaper illustrates the invisibility of the Windrush generation and the civil rights movements that ensued later in Britain. The authors challenge the problem of visibility of the past, which has continued into the present, thus signaling a broader issue of visibility amongst

[13] "Windrush Generation's Battle for Civil Rights." *The Voice*. June 2023.

Black people in Britain. The Windrush generation and subsequent generations of Black activists in Britain continue to take up agency, condemn, and rectify systems of racial oppression.

Black British activists address the exacerbated representations of racial terror in the U.S. through articulating local instances of anti-Blackness alongside global examples that the British have acknowledged and sometimes condemned. This articulation, which connects the local to the global, forces Britain to address local instances of anti-Black racism, despite their choice in obscuring violence. This U.S. dominant narrative encouraged by British media and the education system overshadows the visibility of Black oppression in Britain and oversimplifies the transnational activism that has taken place to address racial oppression and global ant-Black violence. The simultaneity of British activism with the U.S. displays global resistance by enhancing the visibility of local actions, further connecting racial oppression in Britain with racial oppression experienced globally. The opening quote for this chapter articulates perfectly how activism has had transnational undertones for decades and how Black Britons configure Blackness to engage the local with a global foundation.

This chapter demonstrates how Britain has attempted to render invisible the oppression of Black people in Britain by an intentional representation of the U.S. as the dominant culprit of racial violence. In response to this effort, Black activists in Britain have focused their endeavors on localizing instances of anti-Blackness and articulating it within instances of global anti-Blackness. This articulation is one that prompts Britain to reckon with their own violent culpability in historical and contemporary acts of anti-Black racism. This tradition of transnational advocacy has not only allowed for Britain to acknowledge the instances of oppression and resistance amongst Black people in Britain but has also continued a rich history of embodying transnational activism. Black British activists are choosing to highlight global

anti-Blackness by attesting to how Black British oppression fits into the narrative. While the activists who shared their stories for this chapter and past Black British activists recognize a need to unite and resist against global anti-Blackness, they have also used their local experiences to bolster the argument that Black people all over the world are one and if some have yet to gain freedom, they all have yet to gain freedom. This chapter elucidates two cases of simultaneous transnational solidarity: the CAACO solidarity with the U.S. civil rights movement's March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom (March on Washington) in 1963 and the Black Lives Matter UK (BLM UK) protests and demonstrations in solidarity with Black Lives Matter U.S. (BLM U.S.) and Black Americans in 2020. While these cases are mere examples of the simultaneity of transnational solidarity, further examples can also be seen through the U.S. Black Panther Party (USBPP) and BBPP and the Montgomery Bus boycotts alongside the Bristol Bus Boycotts of the 1950s and 1960s.[14]

Black British activists, past and present, have positioned their activism against a backdrop of a global fight against anti-Blackness, colonialism, and imperialism. Scholars Robin D.G. Kelley and Stephen Tuck articulate this ideal as they describe the ways in which Black British activists drew upon their own understandings and groundings in "anti-imperial and domestic protest traditions," while unearthing examples of anti-Blackness in the U.S. to serve their own purposes of resistance.[15] Black British activists have created a tradition that allows for

[14] England, Historic. "The Story of the Bristol Bus Boycott." The Historic England Blog, April 27, 2023. https://heritagecalling.com/2023/04/20/the-story-of-the-bristol-bus-boycott/#:~:text=The%20Bristol%20bus%20boycott%20was,to%20employ%20non%2Dwhite%20people.&text=Following%20the%20peaceful%20boycott%2C%20the,the%20UK%20civil%20rights%20movement.

[15] Kelley, Robin D.G, and Tuck Stephen G N. *The Other Special Relationship: Race, Rights, and Riots in Britain and the United States*. Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

the localizing of issues of Black Britons while simultaneously positioning themselves in solidarity with the global Black diaspora.

Obscuring Britain's Racism

While anti-Black oppression and resistance have often been classified as a problem of the U.S, it is a problem that transpires globally, including within Britain. This concocted U.S. hegemony over racial oppression and resistance is not a narrative fabricated by accident, but one the British media and government have promoted as means to make invisible anti-Black oppression and activism that exists in Britain.[16] These entities have weaponized the racial oppression and terror of Black people in the U.S. to veil the racial oppression Black people in Britain face. This is evidenced by Britain's media response to the Little Rock Nine incident in the U.S. in 1957 following the Supreme Court verdict in *Brown v. Board of Education*. *Brown v. Board of Education* declared that state sanctioned segregation within public schools infringed upon the 14th amendment and was ultimately unconstitutional, thus beginning the integration of public schools.[17] Despite this verdict of the highest court of the U.S., Black school children still faced racial discrimination, oppression, and intimidation from state officials and public citizens. This intimidation came to a head in 1957 in Little Rock, Arkansas when then Governor, Orval Faubus, positioned the Arkansas National Guard to create a perimeter around the school, preventing Black students from entering. Following Governor Faubus' actions, then U.S. President, Dwight D. Eisenhower, ordered federal troops to Little Rock to uphold the federal ruling of *Brown v. Board of Education* and allow the Black school children to enter and complete

[16] Mason, Rowena, and Haroon Siddique. "Ministers Face Backlash after Claiming Britain Is Not Racist." The Guardian, June 7, 2020. https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/jun/07/ministers-face-backlash-over-suggestions-that-britain-is-not-racist.

[17] Warren, Earl, and Supreme Court Of The United States. *U.S. Reports: Brown v. Board of Education, 347 U.S. 483*. 1953. Periodical. https://www.loc.gov/item/usrep347483/.

a full day of school at Central High School.[18] The narrative of this incident highlights the violence Black Americans faced while participating in mundane acts in life, including attending school. This echoes a narrative of violence that has continued since slavery of the public lynching's Black people endured in the U.S. Just a mere two years before the Little Rock Nine incident and one year after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, 14-year-old Emmett Louis Till was kidnapped and brutally beaten to death in Mississippi. His mother, Mamie Till bravely chose to reveal her son's unrecognizable body at his funeral and to the world, displaying the imagery of racial oppression in the U.S.[19] Emmett Till's violently beaten body and the Little Rock Nine student's experiences of racial terror from the state and its citizens was viewed all over the world.[20] This imagery of racial oppression in the U.S. was transatlantic and the British media capitalized on this imagery as means to minimize their active participation in racial oppression at the time.

Kennetta Hammond Perry denotes this as an example of British fascination with American racial matters. She draws on the work of scholar Mary Dudziak who highlights Ida B. Wells' transatlantic lynching campaign, which developed an interest of America's narratives of racial lynchings in the early twentieth century, following Wells' travels to Britain in the 1890s.[21] This fascination, as Hammond Perry puts it, was evidenced in the oldest British national magazine, *The Times,* in a 1957 article that described "lonely isolated negro children whose

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[18] Perry, Kennetta Hammond. "'Little Rock' in Britain: Jim Crow's Transatlantic Topographies." *Journal of British Studies* 51, no. 1 (January 2012): 155–77. https://doi.org/10.1086/663017.

[19] "The Murder of Emmett Till: Articles and Essays: Civil Rights History Project: Digital Collections: Library of Congress." The Library of Congress. Accessed April 3, 2024. https://www.loc.gov/collections/civil-rights-history-project/articles-and-essays/murder-of-emmett-till/.

[20] "The Little Rock Nine." National Museum of African American History and Culture, March 28, 2024. https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/little-rock-nine.

[21] Dudziak, Mary L. *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2011.

pictures have touched and shamed millions."[22] Hammond Perry writes the following to describe the impact this article and subsequent articles had on Britain's fascination with U.S. racial politics:

> The British Press showcased… an analysis of the Little Rock "crisis" as a harrowing example of the distinctively American – and more precisely, purportedly "southern" – problem of entrenched "racial tension.[23]

The narrative of racial oppression being one that is distinctively U.S. by the British press, advances the veiling of racial violence they have enacted. It was advantageous for Britain to bolster this argument of a U.S. hegemony over racial oppression and resistance, as they aimed to distinguish themself from the U.S. and overlook their liability in global racial terror and discourage the activism of Black Britons who resisted their claims of innocence. Despite this assertion of innocence, racial violence also existed in Britain, with tensions peaking in the summer of 1958, a mere one year after the Little Rock Nine 'crisis', during several riots in London and Nottingham.

While Britain chastised the U.S. for its racially oppressive Jim Crow legislation, Britain was experiencing its own racial upheaval in August 1958 when the Notting Hill and Nottingham riots erupted. A group of vigilante White boys and men went to the predominantly Black community of Notting Hill, London, to attack the Black residents. Shortly after the riots took place in Notting Hill, hundreds of White men in Nottingham attacked Black residents after it was rumored a Black man assaulted a White woman outside a pub in Nottingham.[24] The *Daily*

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[22] "Guard Withdrawn from Little Rock School," *The Times,* 23 September 1957

[23] Perry, Kennetta Hammond. "'Little Rock' in Britain: Jim Crow's Transatlantic Topographies." *Journal of British Studies* 51, no. 1 (January 2012): 155–77. https://doi.org/10.1086/663017.

[24] Wild, Rosalind Eleanor. "Black Was the Colour of Our Fight: Black Power in Britain, 1955-1976." *Black Was the Colour of Our Fight: Black Power in Britain, 1955-1976*. Thesis, University of Sheffield, 2008.

Express wrote of the horrors of this riot in 1958 with a headline of 'Race riots terrorise a city' with the following verbiage:

> Hundreds of Englishmen, West Indians, Pakistanis and Africans fought a bloody,90-minute pitched battle… Dozens of men and women were injured by bottles, knives, razors and sticks.[25]

These attacks continued in the following weeks, while crowds of White mobsters prepared to inflict even more violence on Black residents, as they armed themselves with additional knives, razors, and other weapons. Concurrently, in Notting Hill, London, there were thousands of White mobsters reported, marching down the streets chanting and demanding the lynching of the Black residents of Notting Hill.[26] The racial violence that ensued in both Notting Hill and Nottingham in 1958 during the weeks long summer riots was one of chaos rooted in racial domination. Even though these riots garnered international attention, Britain positioned them as distinct from developments in the U.S., which the Foreign Office echoed by releasing multiple statements, including the following:

> Organized racial discrimination has never been part of the pattern of British life, nor the laws of the country… and that violence could have hardly been considered a "race riot" as relatively few people had been injured.[27]

This statement illustrates Britain's disregard for the racial violence experienced by Black Britons. The assertion that the violence did not constitute a race riot because "relatively few people had been injured," is a gross undertaking by the Foreign Office. Black Britons were violently attacked and to conceal the true nature of the violence, the British government dismissed Britain's discrimination against them both regarding to the race riots and past incidents of racial oppression. Yet, the British press publicly condemned the racial violence

[25] 'Race Riots Terrorise a City', Daily Express 25 August 1958.
[26] 'New Riot Terror, The Daily Herald, 1 September 1958
[27] Telegram from Foreign Office to HMG Representative, 3 September 1958, DO 35/9506, TNA.

experienced in the U.S. While Britain has tried to detach itself and their actions from the global racial oppression and terror Black people experience, they remain a contradiction to both their legislative policies and the actions of their White citizens, who brutalize the Black community in Britain. Britain has continued to concoct a narrative of U.S. domination over racial oppression as means to exonerate themselves from culpability. However, history and current examples of anti-Black racism and the activism of Black people in Britain will always prevail as a reminder of the existence and power of Britain's racial oppression.

Through my conversations with activist Siana Bangura, it became clear that there was an intentional lack of educational consciousness surrounding Black British resistance in the British education curricula. Siana explained her experiences at Cambridge University, one of the most prestigious universities in the world; that further illustrated the calculated nature of Britain's education system in concealing violent discrimination against Black Britons. While at Cambridge, Siana was placed into Peter House, one of the oldest colleges of the University. During her time at Peter House, Siana was the only Black woman in her class and noted there never existed more than ten Black people in the college at a given point during her tenure in the early 2010s. She recalled rarely, if ever, seeing her voice and experiences as a Black African woman in the curriculum. The curriculum did not engage with any Black scholars, let alone any Black women scholars and she remembered feeling that she didn't exist in the scholarship. This took a toll on Siana and she worked to proactively uncover Black narratives in the literature to combat its inclusion in the curricula. Through this endeavor, she discovered the works of authors including Audre Lorde, Bell Hooks, and Angela Davis, whom she credits for giving her the language to describe her experiences as a Black woman. Despite these narratives and authors offering her an in-depth analysis of her identity and experiences, she still felt the desire to

uncover the stories of Black British and African people, particularly women, which she declared was incredibly challenging in the early 2010s.[28]

Siana gave further context as to how this neglect of Black Britons in education began in her primary schools through the British education system, as she was not made conscious of Black British history in school. The minute Black history she was educated on was U.S. Black history, furthering a belief that "African Americanness is a primary standard for Blackness across the world because of the dominance, accessibility and prominence of it."[29] There was a sole focus on the U.S. civil rights movement in the mid twentieth century and no mention of Black British history in the British curriculum. There were no mentions of Black activists in Britain, like that of Olive Morris and Althea Jones-LeCointe, who were instrumental in the BPM in Britain, but rather a focus on popular U.S. activists like Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X, whom Siana recalled completing a project on. Despite this lack of exposure in her youth and young adulthood, Siana believes herself and other Black Britons to be exercising agency and taking up space that are specific to their contexts as Black British people contemporarily.[30]

The concealment of Black resistance in Britain's education system and media is something activists have had to grapple with as they work to construct their visibility against a British agenda to obscure it. While at the BCA in Brixton, London, I heard the oral history interviews of BBPP leaders in 2013. When asked what she believed were the primary differences between the U.S. and Britain, Leila Howe, a member of the Party, expressed multiple differences, one being that Black people in Britain were mainly recent immigrants while Black Americans were historically enslaved in the U.S. Many Black people in Britain, especially those

[28] Siana Bangura, (Founder of No Fly On the WALL), Oral History Interview, London, England, June 2023.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid.

apart of the Windrush generation, were indeed immigrants, but they too experienced a legacy of chattel slavery, like that of Black Americans, in addition to experiences of British colonialism and imperialism. Enslavement in the British colonies primarily consisted of sugar cane plantations. While the slave trade was abolished in 1807 in Britain, it was not until 1833 that parliament would pass the Emancipation act and not until violent resistance that Black people in the West Indies would be emancipated.[31] Though Howe did not further discuss this distinction, I believe she made note of this difference to highlight the ways in which Britain has attempted to conceal their role in slavery and how that concealment has led to a specific view of anti-Blackness as existing as an American problem as experienced through U.S. slavery, rather than a problem of the initial slave trading countries including Britain. When asked why she believed the BBPP was not readily recognized as compared to the USBPP, despite their prolific impact in Britain, she expressed a lack of publications and media attention towards their resistance as a reason. She reasoned that, despite their resistance over the years, there was an overall lack of media coverage about them that would inform people in Britain and around the world of their activism. In a world before the internet, there was little publicized about the BBPP, and the information that has since been made public about the organization has often come through narrative means including oral history interviews, and biographies. Leila added that the infrastructure of the U.S. through Historically Black Colleges and Universities have allowed for the stories and histories of Black people in the U.S. to be passed down from generation to generation. She juxtaposed these U.S. institutions with the lack of Black British history education, let alone designated institutions with the goal of educating Black people and

[31] Sherwood, Marika. "Britain, Slavery and the Trade in Enslaved Africans." History in Focus, May 1, 2007. https://archives.history.ac.uk/history-in-focus/Slavery/articles/sherwood.html#:~:text=In%20the%20British%20colonies%20the,at%20least%20rapeable%20human%20beings.

documenting their history. Such goals of education and documentation on an institutional level have only recently been gaining traction, making it difficult to educate on the lived experiences of Black British people, their oppression, and their resistance movements.[32] Despite this lack of institutional support, as illustrated in chapter two, Black Britons resisted this lack of institutional support for Black British history through avenues like the Black Supplementary School Movement (BSSM).

There are rudimentary examples of how Britain has made visible their role in anti-Blackness, namely through the slave trade. In London, England, the Museum of London Docklands has a permanent installation on Africa and Slavery. The primary focus of the installation is to highlight the British Empire's role in the TST and colonialism. It notes how the maintenance of Britain's colonial labor systems required complete subjugation of enslaved Africans through terror and the "undermining of communal identity."[33] This was achieved in many ways, including through changing names of enslaved Africans to break their sense of identity, the intentional separation of families, the discouragement of permanent relationships amongst slaves, the separation of village communities, and the prohibition of African cultural practices. To instill this terror, enslaved Africans faced many crude acts of violence, including physical, sexual, mental, and spiritual harm. The installation draws specific attention to weapons of terror, including the punishment collar, which was used on enslaved Africans as discouragement from escaping the planation. The installation has specific mentions to London, as London was the sight of great trade and extensive profit from the slave trade. While small, the installation illustrates the role slavery and anti-Blackness had on Britain. It traces the history from the beginning of the slave trade into the twentieth century, even narrating the lives of the

[32] Darcus and Leila Howe, 2014, ORAL/6/5. Oral Histories, ORAL. Archives Collection.
[33] *London, Sugar & Slavery*. The Museum of London Docklands, 2007. Exhibition Catalog.

Windrush generation through an oral history segment. The objective of this installation was to make highlight Britain, and specifically London's role, in the TST, however, it lacked a comprehensive analysis of continued racial oppressions experienced by Black Britons and their subsequent activism. The installation itself showed the history of racial violence in London but neglected further analysis on the ways this violence has continued into the modern day. Within the stories of the Windrush generation section of the installation, is wording alluding to London having made significant progress in its acceptance of non-White people, as seen through the following excerpt:

> London was the cosmopolitan capital of an empire of hundreds of millions of people. Colonial subjects from all over the globe made London their home. But London was not always a welcoming place: many new arrivals were forced to live in the city's poorest housing and take badly paid jobs. They often faced explicit racism.[34]

While London is a diverse city, the proclamation there exists significant progress seems mindless at best and harmful at worst. This installation had an opportunity to further the conversation about Britain's influential role in racial oppression and anti-Black racism, both historically and contemporarily, prioritizing the stories of enslaved Africans, the Windrush generation, and current generations of Black Britons. This was an opportunity to confront Britain for what it is, a conglomerate that has historically exercised racial terrorism on Black people that has continued into the contemporary. The museum denotes London as a place that embraces multiracialism, juxtaposing London's unwelcoming past with what they claim to a be a welcoming present, whilst Black people continue to be the target of anti-Black racism. The specific use of the past tense in the phrase 'was not always' asserts a claim that the racial violence that occurs in Britain is one of the past. The oversight of the museum further perpetuates Britain's distancing from

[34] Ibid.

current instances of anti-Black racism. Furthermore, the museum has again ignored the Black people in Britain that have taken up agency as means to redress racial violence and their invisibility in the narrative from since the slave trade.

Two Cases of Simultaneous Transnational Activism

Despite this fabricated U.S. dominance over racial oppression and resistance the British press, education curricula and government office has promoted, Black Britons have continued to advocate for their experiences to be made visible to Britain and the world. This has been cultivated through a tradition of Pan African ideals, which has inspired a transnational advocacy tradition. These very ideals connect the slave trade, colonialism, and imperialism to the racial violence faced by Black people all over the world. The fifth Pan African conference was held in Manchester, England in 1945. This conference had strong undertones of supporting the African continent and their quest for independence from European colonial rule which garnered large support from BPM's across the diaspora.[35] Adi Hakim particularly links the rise of the BPM in Britain to the fifth annual Pan African congress in 1945 in its adoption of political Blackness, a configuration of Blackness encompassing those of both African and Asian origin.[36] The BPM echoed sentiments of Pan Africanism which holds the belief in a 'global struggle' for the end of anti-Blackness and for Black power. This grounding in Pan Africanism that activists and organizations had in Britain has allowed for transnational Black activism to exist and grow amongst Black activists. These ideals ground Black activists around the world, who are fighting for their local examples of racial redress, to relate their experiences to the global. It is an adoption of the belief that racial violence occurring in Britain, is not separate from the racial violence occurring in other parts of the world because of the global nature of anti-Blackness.

[35] Adi, Hakim. *Pan-Africanism: A History*. London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021.
[36] Ibid., 178

Thus, this shared connectedness of both oppression and activism has allowed activists to adopt Pan Africanism as a tradition and has created the space for transnational Black activism to simultaneously exist amongst Black activists fighting for the same goal.

The ideals of Pan Africanism lean on this concept of a communal Black diaspora that have shared experiences of collective oppression. British activists throughout time have leant on this idea of Pan Africanism as a critical framework in which to view the suffering of Black people in Britain and the suffering of Black people globally. For instance, the BBPP in rallies across London branded signage that embraced Pan African ideals, despite their protests centering British policing. One example was evidenced in a protest rally in 1971 which displayed 'Black Oppressed People All Over the World Are One.'[37] The BBPP viewed their local oppressions with British policing as inextricable from the oppressions of the global policing of Black people. While anti-Blackness has variations across diverse geographical areas, the BBPP galvanized to protest their local instances of anti-Blackness while placing these instances within a larger global foundation of anti-Blackness. They interpreted their oppression and freedom as contingent on the oppression and freedom of Black people globally. Althea Jones-LeCointe, de facto leader of the BBPP, discussed the vastness of anti-Blackness in an oral history interview conducted in 2013. In the interview, LeCointe, explained the impact anti-Blackness has had on the Black community globally.

> We have so much in common. What is challenging for us (west Indian and west Africa) we have been shielded from that history, allow us to pretend America is different, British is different, and we love the veil. Veil to say the British are different but at the time of Jonathan Jackson's death we must rip that veil and we are in pain irrespective if we live in Britain, USA, Trinidad. We are in pain because that history still haunts us and we need to face it individually, family, in

[37] Pien, Diane. "British Black Panther Party (1968-1973)" Black Past, June 15, 2021. https://www.blackpast.org/global-african-history/british-black-panther-party-1968-1973/.

> our communities. We hate ourselves; we have emotional and practical problems let us deal with it.[38]

In this message, Le-Cointe embodies the ideals of a collective unity and struggle amongst all Black people. This collective unity also underscores the brutality of anti-Blackness, which shapes and alters the mindset of oppression amongst people. Despite the representations of anti-Black racism existing as a U.S. phenomenon, Le-Cointe argues to the contrary. Early in the interview she speaks of a difference of violence experienced by Black Americans, who endured chattel slavery that lasted over 200 years, compared to that of Black people in Britain from the West Indies who experienced chattel slavery, colonization under the British Empire until the mid-twentieth century and coerced migration to Britain in the 1940s. She articulates this point to make clear that despite varying designs of anti-Black racism experienced by Black people, it is one that is all rooted in anti-Blackness, violence, and oppression and affects all Black people. Thus, transnational unity and activism, which 'goes beyond national borders' she argues, is imperative to achieve the liberation of all Black people.[39]

Kennetta Hammond Perry reiterates these groundings in Pan Africanism through what she describes as "displaying the global by focusing on the local."[40] Hammond Perry discusses the specific nexus activism holds in how it allows the engagement of Black people from all over the world to unite under a common belief and goal. She goes on to suggest the following:

> Activism represents an important site of engagement for understanding the ways in which Black UK activists… invoked and built upon a long tradition of Black internationalism emanating from the heart of the British Empire.[41]

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[38] Althea Lecointe-Jones, 2014, ORAL/6/1. Oral Histories, ORAL. Archives Collection.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Perry, Kennetta Hammond. "'U.S. Negroes, Your Fight Is Our Fight': Black Britons and the 1963 March on Washington." *The Other Special Relationship: Race, Rights, and Riots in Britain and the United States*, 2015, 7–24. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137392701_1.
[41] Ibid.

In this quote, Hammond Perry specifically links the activism of Black Britons to one of a history of simultaneous transnationalism that both serve them in local contexts and bolsters the argument for a global unity against anti-Blackness. While representations of the March on Washington specifically focused on Martin Luther King Jr. and other key members of the U.S. civil rights movement, there were few representations of the simultaneous transnational activism that subsisted around the world that transpired to support and bolster the fight for civil rights in the U.S. and abroad. As an act of symbolism, Black Britons who aligned themselves with the goals and missions of the March on Washington mobilized to the U.S. embassy in London as an act of political and racial alliance and to connect the injustices of the U.S. to the injustices of Britain.[42] While this march was used as a site of allegiance to their American counterparts, Black British activists also used this site as a nexus of engaging Britain's role in racism and colonialism. On August 31, 1965, a mere three days after the March on Washington, a march was organized in London, England to the U.S. embassy by organizers of the newly formed CAACO. The CAACO was spearheaded by Claudia Jones, a Trinidadian born, and U.S. raised communist who was exiled to Britain from the U.S. for her participation in the communist party during the cold war.[43] This march was an act of simultaneous transnational activism in solidarity with Black Americans, whom the CAACO advocated also suffered from racial oppression. Hammond Perry argues that issues of decolonization, liberation movements, and human rights were key issues of transnationalism. These issues helped articulate the issues of racial domination for Black Britons, who then had a framework in which to analyze the racial terror in the U.S. and Britain as being

[42] Ibid., 8
[43] Davies, Carole Boyce. *Left of Karl Marx the Political life of Black Communist Claudia Jones*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007.

connected.[44] The CAACO, led by Jones, had many petitions to the U.S. government to redress the racial violence during the civil rights movement as means of transnational solidarity. They saw the direct correlation between the dismantling of Jim Crow in the U.S. with the racial plight of Black Britons.[45] At the time of Jim Crow in the U.S., Black Britons themselves were facing racial terror in Britain, with proclamations of 'Europeans Only' and 'No Coloured' preventing access to equal employment, housing, and citizenship.[46] The CAACO and other organizations alike capitalized on the racial oppression in the U.S. to both align with freedom struggles of Black Americans, and to demonstrate the interconnectedness of racial oppression in the U.S. and Britain. They continued a tradition of Pan African ideals of unity through concurrent transnational solidarity and activism to redress the issues of global anti-Blackness.

The reinvigoration of the Black Lives Matter Movement in 2020 following the death of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery in the U.S. is another example of the simultaneous transnational solidarity and activism for anti-racism that occurred in Britain and the U.S. This revival of the movement allowed British activists and protesters to leverage this moment in history to illustrate both the global injustices of Black people and the local injustices faced by Black Britons. BLM U.S. was originally created in 2013 by three queer Black activists following the murder of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin in Sanford, Florida. It was created to illustrate the connectedness of oppression that Black people face in the U.S. and has since transformed into a global network, transgressing national borders.[47] While BLM UK is not

[44] Perry, Kennetta Hammond. "'U.S. Negroes, Your Fight Is Our Fight': Black Britons and the 1963 March on Washington." *The Other Special Relationship: Race, Rights, and Riots in Britain and the United States*, 2015, 7–24. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137392701_1.
[45] Ibid., 12
[46] Ibid., 13
[47] Ransby, Barbara. *Making All Black Lives Matter: Reimagining Freedom in the Twenty-First Century*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2018.

formally affiliated with BLM U.S., it has undoubtedly taken influence from the latter, as it began its dedication toward racial equality and social justice following the creation of BLM U.S. in 2013.[48] Despite its name implying a local understanding of the notion that 'Black lives matter,' BLM UK is a self-proclaimed "international and human rights movement."[49] This global lens that BLM UK grounds itself in is evident in their public branding, including their website, which highlights a 'Free Palestine' pop up followed by a quote from the late Nelson Mandela that "[w]e know too well that our freedom is incomplete without the freedom of the Palestinians."[50] Moreover, the main page on the website features the statement "What side of history will you be standing on? Free Palestine. Free Congo. Free Sudan. Free Tigray."[51]

Whilst BLM UK is supporting freedom struggles of those in the middle East and Africa, it is concurrently illustrating the local instances of anti-Blackness in Britain. In a highlighted section on their website, they feature a link to donation page entitled 'Justice for Chris Kaba' who was shot and killed by Metropolitan Police in London, England on September 5, 2022.[52] BLM UK is situating itself and its mission within this global framework of anti-racist activism and resistance by connecting local instances of anti-Black racism to global instances of resistance. Just as the BPMs of the twentieth century mobilized and organized for liberation movements in African countries including Angola and Mozambique, BLM UK is mobilizing in support of the

[48] "About Us." BLACKLIVESMATTER.UK. Accessed April 3, 2024. https://blacklivesmatter.uk/about-us/.
[49] Ibid.
[50] "Blacklivesmatter.Uk." BLACKLIVESMATTER.UK. Accessed April 3, 2024. https://blacklivesmatter.uk/.
[51] "Free Palestine." BLACKLIVESMATTER.UK. Accessed April 3, 2024. https://blacklivesmatter.uk/free-palestine.
[52] "Justice: Justice for Chris Kaba." JusticeForChrisKaba. Accessed April 3, 2024. https://www.justiceforchriskaba.org/.

humanitarian crisis occurring in places including Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, furthering a tradition of transnational activism.[53]

BLM UK's solidarity with global acts of resistance was prominently evident during the summer 2020 protests that took place across the world, and notably within England, following the state sanctioned murder of George Floyd in the U.S. The state of the world during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic cannot be understated as tens of thousands of protestors all over the world overlooked social distancing and lockdown orders and mobilized in protest of not only the local context of anti-Black racism in the U.S. but also the global. It created an opportunity to galvanize support for racial inequities in a local context through this global framework.[54] Protesters put their health at risk during the pandemic to protest the terror and oppression Black people in the U.S. and other parts of the world experience at the hands of policing. Diana Richardson, a member of the New York State Assembly is on record saying "if coronavirus doesn't kill us, the cops will" during the summer of 2020 protests in New York City, further illustrating the graveness protesters felt about the state of the world through their willingness to ignore health 'protection orders' for the sake of racial retrieval. [55]

While the protests in the UK during the summer of 2020 were first ignited by two young Black girls, Aima and Tash, in May of 2020, the protests eventually garnered the attention of more established organizations like BLM UK in the following month.[56] While initially inspired

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[53] Adi, Hakim. *Pan-Africanism: A History*. London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021.
[54] "Global Protest Tracker" Carnegie Endowment For International Peace. Accessed April 3, 2024. https://carnegieendowment.org/publications/interactive/protest-tracker.
[55] Chaffin, Joshua. "Policing in the US: 'If Coronavirus Doesn't Kill Us, the Cops Will': Free to Read." Financial Times, June 5, 2020. https://www.ft.com/content/ff5245f0-375d-44b8-b9ab-3ded852c341e.
[56] Baah, Nana. "'This Is the Turning Point Now' – Meet the Young Black Women Behind London's George Floyd Protest." Who Organises the Black Lives Matter London Protests?, June 2, 2020. https://www.vice.com/en/article/bv8z95/george-floyd-protests-black-lives-matter-london.

by the murder of George Floyd in the U.S., activists in Britain also used this moment in history to capitalize on the familiar experiences of anti-Black racism Britain. This was evidenced as protesters shared the names of abuse and murder victims of British policing alongside the names of those in the U.S. British activists used the mobilization for Black lives in the U.S. to advance their mobilization for Black lives in the UK. This tactic of illustrating the oppression occurring in the U.S. is one the British media has historically condemned, garnering massive support from Britons who were compelled to protest the anti-Blackness in their own local communities. [57] What emerged out of these early protests was an agenda put forth that, not only situated the problems of anti-Blackness in Britain alongside the U.S., but also situated these injustices alongside a vast history of racial oppression and domination dating back to the TST. There were three primary goals set forth by organizers: British police reform, defunding and in some instances abolition; the end of slaveholder and racists glorification; and the reversal of structural racism.[58] Protests continued to erupt across Britain as protesters brandished signs including "Racist UK birthed Racist America," another ode to the connectedness in anti-racist struggles Black Britons perceive with their Black counterparts in the U.S.

Black British activists believe in a global anti-Blackness that is predicated on the oppression of Black people all over the world. For these activists, the roots of this phenomenon can be traced back to the TST. Current invocations of anti-Blackness including the glorification of prominent figures of the slave trade, directly stem from Britain's unequivocal leadership in the TST, colonialism, and imperialism. The activists themselves link current oppressions to that of

[57] Abrams, Benjamin. "Mobilisation without Opportunity: The UK's 2020 Black Lives Matter Protests." *European Journal of Cultural and Political Sociology* 10, no. 4 (September 29, 2023): 603–31. https://doi.org/10.1080/23254823.2023.2239328.

[58] McIntosh, Kimberly. "Everything You Need to Know About Black Lives Matter UK." Gal-dem. September 25, 2020. https://archive.ph/4FKwx.

Britain's history of anti-Blackness. A notable protest in June of 2020 in the city of Bristol resulted in the unsanctioned removal of a statue of prominent slave owner, Edward Colston, by protesters, who dumped the statue into the nearby harbor, further linking Britain's history of racial oppression with modern day activism in support of racial redress in the U.S. and beyond.[59] Protesters tied a rope to the bronze memorial statue of Colston, which stood at a whopping eighteen feet tall, which had been erected on Colson street since 1895 before throwing it into the harbor. Edward Colston was born in Bristol in 1636 and was a renowned merchant throughout Britain. This prominence came by reason of Colston's active and popular participation in Britain's principal slave company at the time, the Royal African Company (RAC). Colston took on esteemed roles in the RAC as an investor, manager, and deputy governor during his twelve-year tenure with the company from 1680 to 1692.[60] The RAC transported tens of thousands of enslaved Africans to Britain's newest colonies in the Americas.[61] During Colston's tenure with the RAC, it is estimated that over 84,000 enslaved Africans were transported to the Americas through the RAC, with 23%, over 19,000, dying before arrival to the Americas due to the unhygienic and unlivable conditions of the slave ships.[62] Later in his life, Colston became a Member of Parliament and advocated for the expansion of the slave trade while becoming an investor in the South Seas Company, another slave trading company at the time. The South Seas

[59] Mohdin, Aamna. "How the Fall of Edward Colston's Statue Revolutionised the Way British History Is Told." The Guardian, May 5, 2023. https://www.theguardian.com/news/2023/may/05/how-the-fall-of-edward-colstons-statue-revolutionised-the-way-british-history-is-told#:~:text=After%20the%20statue%20of,ripples%20spread%20across%20the%20UK.

[60] "Who Was Colston?" Countering Colston - Campaign to Decolonise Bristol, February 27, 2018. https://counteringcolston.wordpress.com/who-was-edward-colston-2/.

[61] "Who Was Edward Colston, Why Was His Statue Toppled?" Al Jazeera, June 8, 2020. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/6/8/who-was-edward-colston-why-was-his-statue-toppled#:~:text=Demonstrators%20on%20Sunday%20attached%20ropes,works%20before%20pulling%20it%20down.

[62] Ball, Roger. "Edward Colston Research Paper #1." Bristol Radical History Group, April 11, 2023. https://www.brh.org.uk/site/articles/edward-colston-research-paper-1/.

Company transported an estimated 15,900 enslaved Africans in the six years of Colston's investment from 1714 to 1720.[63] As an act of symbolism, protesters then laid a knee on the neck of Colston for eight minutes, reenacting the death of George Floyd who died after U.S. police officers asphyxiated Floyd by placing their knee forcibly on his neck for eight life ending minutes.[64] Following this symbolic act, protesters invoked additional symbolism as they proudly cheered and chanted while they threw Colston's statue into the Bristol harbor, which overlooks a bridge named after enslaved African Pero Jones who lived and died in Bristol after being enslaved at the age of twelve.[65] The actions by these protesters sparked further conversation about the ways in which the British media and education system has aimed to silently remove their culpability in the history of racial oppression and global anti-Blackness. Furthermore, British activists are situating their local contexts of anti-Black racial oppression within this global narrative of activism dating back to the slave trade, to further make visible their oppressions to Britain.

Conclusion

Black people in Britain have a long history of resisting oppression, despite a collective lack of media attention and education. In 2021, when asked if he knew of the BBPP or other notable Black British activists, a young Black British man, Kevin, responded that he did not. He expressed disbelief in the idea of racism in Britain, which he associated with the U.S. He

[63] "Who Was Colston?" Countering Colston - Campaign to Decolonise Bristol, February 27, 2018. https://counteringcolston.wordpress.com/who-was-edward-colston-2/.

[64] Pereira, Ivan. "Independent Autopsy Finds George Floyd Died of Homicide by Asphyxia." ABC News. Accessed April 3, 2024. https://abcnews.go.com/US/independent-autopsy-george-floyd-findings-announced/story?id=70994827.

[65] "Who Was Edward Colston, Why Was His Statue Toppled?" Al Jazeera, June 8, 2020. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/6/8/who-was-edward-colston-why-was-his-statue-toppled#:~:text=Demonstrators%20on%20Sunday%20attached%20ropes,works%20before%20pulling%20it%20down.

appeared to disconnect Britain from global anti-Black racism that many Black British activists understand as a framework for their activism. Despite family problems with migration to Britain from the Ivory Coast; his upbringing in the estates, England's low-income government housing; and his own legal troubles, which resulted in his multiple imprisonments in his earlier adolescence, at the time Kevin saw no connection between his and his families' conditions in Britain as Black people and Britain's history of anti-Black racism. Over time, he expanded his understanding of racial violence and oppression. He founded a non-profit organization geared toward sharing narratives of his life in prison to dissuade Black youth from entering the carceral system. He now connects the carceral state to racial oppression and connects current disproportionate incarceration rates among Black youth to a history of racial violence inflicted upon Black people in Britain and around the world. What he once saw as an issue confined to the U.S., as portrayed in British media and schooling, he now attaches to Britain and the world, as he advocates for the local conditions of everyday Black British youth.

Kevin and other activists are combatting the lack of visibility of Black British discrimination in the press and educational curricula through local activism with a global foundation. They are connecting the oppression and resistance of Black people around the world through their local activism. To combat the lack of visibility of racial oppression and resistance from the British press, education curricula, and government offices, Black activists have unearthed a tradition of Pan-Africanism through transnational activism as part of bolstering acts of resistance abroad and to make visible the conditions of anti-Blackness existing within Britain. While Britain has supported a narrative of the U.S. existing as the primary enforcers of racial violence, they have obscured the racial violence occurring within its own borders. However, despite Britain's assertions of innocence, compared to the U.S., Black activists have remained at

the forefront of holding Britain accountable for the many atrocities it has committed by localizing configurations of Black oppression and resistance within a global anti-Blackness and anti-racist resistance.

Chapter Two: Class, Gender, & Blackness

> One of the major bones of contention… was further illustrated in the "Race v Class struggle" controversary…the section on Black women and women's liberation was condemned and discredited from the start[66] – Ali Bey Hassan

Introduction

Black British activists connect their experiences of being Black in Britain to configurations of class and gender. Race, class, and gender are categories that are socially constructed. The injustices structured by these categories have influenced the ways in which Black Britons interpret their meanings and connections. For Black Britons, there exists a relationship among race, class, and gender that highlights the ways they have understood Blackness to include class and gender categories. While perspectives on Blackness vary, there has been widespread discussion and mobilization concerning configuring Blackness with the inclusion of class and gender. Contemporary activists are having conversations activists of the past had about the role of these categories in Black activist spaces. The opening quote in the pamphlet "Revolutionary Black Nationalism: Unity and Struggle Against Domination," by Ali Bey Hassan, features these conversations in 1971. Little is known about Hassan's affiliation with Britain, however what is known is that he was a member of the USBPP and the Black Liberation Army. Originally discussed and written in 1971 by members of the Black Liberation Front (BLF\, during their weekly Sunday meetings in London, Hassan later developed as an extension to the original discussion and in 1977. The excerpt highlights the inclusion of both class and gender in the goals and purposes of the group's Black-centered activism. It illustrates that Black activists have not been able to contend with the oppression of Black people independent of

[66] Hassan, Ali Bey. Pamphlet of "Revolutionary Black Nationalism: Unity and Struggle Against Domination", n.d., Black Cultural Archives, London, England.

considering the role of class and gender, thus showing intersectionality among Blackness, class, and gender.

The intersectionality of race, class, and gender is one both adopted and complicated by activists in Britain. Kimberle Crenshaw first coined the theory of intersectionality in 1989 that explores connections among discriminated and privileged social identities, including race, class, and gender and its relation to systemic power structures.[67] Intersectionality rejects the treating of social identity oppressions as separate from one another and complicates a one-size-fits-all solution to oppression. It rejects the belief that identities and the systemic oppression that discriminates against them can be parsed out or siloed. The theory features overlapping identities and oppression to illustrate this connectedness. Thus, a solution to oppression can only be conceptualized and developed in a way that intertwines social identities. Black activists in Britain grapple with the concept of intersectionality and contend with the role of class and gender in Black centered activist spaces. This contention is not a new one and can be seen in historical examples of how a configuration of Blackness that considers intersectionality affects the activism of its members. However, rather than simply accept intersectionality as Crenshaw coined it, activists are also complicating the idea that these socially constructed categories are fixed or somehow assumed. Instead, they represent how these categories are configured, while intersectionality, as coined by Crenshaw, does not articulate the complication of configurations of these social categories.

This chapter refers to race, class, and gender as categories, rather than identities, as Crenshaw assumes, to illustrate the ways in which social categories are one of configuration and

[67] Crenshaw, Kimberle. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics." *Feminism And Politics*, March 12, 1998, 314–43. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198782063.003.0016.

of social construction that contend with varying definitions and configurations. It discusses organizations that may accept class categories as coherent but may adopt concepts, including political Blackness based in racial oppression rather than an African heritage. For activists in Britain who use intersectionality to conceptualize membership and belonging in organizing spaces, the fixed identities Crenshaw suggests is not always applicable. Thus, in addition to grappling with the theory of intersectionality, they complicate the fixed nature assumed in social categories to better suit the specific conditions and experiences in Britain that have shaped their configuration of Blackness. Black activists in Britain are forcing a rethinking of these three major social categories as self-evident or assumed, which have affected their organizing work.

To showcase how activists are engaging with both class and gender categories in relation to Blackness, the first section of this chapter engages class and the second, gender. Although separate, all three categories overlap in the chapter. In the class section, there is a brief historical examination of how class functions in Britain and its colonies and of the tradition of intertwining the categories of race and class. The chapter then goes on to explore two modern cases of the intersectionality of class and race through Marxism 2023: A Festival of Socialist Ideas in London, England, and the manifesto of the organizing group, the LBR. The second section of this chapter engages with gender in Black activist spaces. It explains how Blackness is often gendered and illustrates how Black women have understood how their chosen category as woman relates to Blackness. It begins with the BBPP and how the social categories adopted by the women within the BBPP challenge the beliefs in Blackness existing through manhood and asserting the importance of considering women. These contentions lead to the development of women centered groups including the Brixton Black Women's Group (BBWG). These concerns echo that of Claudia Jones and her insistence in the inclusion of Black women in working class

organizing spaces through her theory on triple oppression. Finally, the section explores the varying styles of resistance employed by Black British women to further illustrate the gender politics of activism and how these women complicate the frameworks of activism. The chapter primarily engages contemporary examples of class and gender intersectionality, but also uses historical examples to illustrate throughline in both the configuration of Blackness and its effect on activism. While the contemporary is important, it is also informed by historical configurations and acts of resistance.

While not claiming that all activism incorporates class and gender to the same degree as racial oppression and while not insinuating that all activists have similar views and opinions about the role of class and gender in their Black activism, this chapter illustrates how these activists are contending with the real implications of intersectionality to include race, class, and gender in their activism. This chapter draws on participant observation of events occurring contemporarily in Britain and the stories of Black women, both those narrated by others and myself. It highlights the role of intersectionality in configuring Blackness amongst activists and the ways activists are complicating the narrative of intersectionality and the idea of fixed socially constructed categories.

Blackness and Class

While Britain has historically privileged working class relations, Black Britons sharpen the intersectionality of race and class to underscore the conditions of working class Black Britons. Britain has been the site of great theory and action regarding class-based oppression as the development and power of the working class has continued to be a subject of questioning class relations and oppression. EP Thompson echoes the British's historical privileging of class oppression through his writings of the working class and their agency. He articulates how the

English working class advanced both a distinction in identity and class consciousness.[68] Thompson's analysis of the working class in Britain is one of both condition and agency to explain its emergence. He speaks of a growing consciousness of the working class as a response to the conditions of capitalism developed through the industrial revolution. He articulates the dreadful conditions the English working class experienced during the industrial revolution in the eighteenth century and the exploitation experienced, including low wages, child labor, extended working hours, and even an alteration of working-class people's characterization.[69] These historical moments illustrate the landscape of class oppression in Britain and illuminate the ongoing implications of this oppression on activism in Britain. While Britain itself has been the site of engaging with class-based oppression, this was also developed in the colonies of the West Indies and followed West Indian migrants to Britain in the twentieth century, articulating Black Britons understanding of the intersection of race and class.

British colonies in places including the West Indies experienced their own understanding of class oppression, which they have also connected to their racial oppression, outside the confines of the English working class during the industrial revolution that Thompson discusses. Their positionality as British subjects under both an economic and racial subjugation linked the shared oppressions of class and racial constructs.[70] This interconnectedness of class and race configured by Black people in Britain's colonies is evident through notable West Indian figures including Guyanese activist Walter Rodney. Rodney articulates the impact of race and class on the West Indies when he states:

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[68] Thompson, E. P. *The Making of the English Working Class*. London, UK: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1963.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Weeks, Deborah. "Movement of the People: The Relationship Between Black Consciousness Movements, Race, and Class in the Caribbean." (2008).

> Conscious blacks cannot possibly fail to realize that in our own homelands we have no power, abroad we are discriminated against, and everywhere the black masses suffer in poverty.[71]

In addition to articulating the racial oppression enacted upon the West Indian colonies from the British Empire, Rodney is also articulating a class oppression. He eloquently connects the issues of racial and class oppression to systems of slavery and colonialism, unearthing a belief in a shared intersection of race and class that existed in the West Indies and born out of slavery and colonial conditions. Rather than rely on European experiences of class oppression and resistance, there have been examples of Black people whose understanding of the intersection of class and race is based in their own experiences with violence and resistance. C.L.R. James, a Trinidadian born socialist scholar, who later lived his life in Britain, wrote of the unique interconnectedness of race and class that was developed through the TST in Haiti. The conditions of slavery, colonialism, and imperialism developed the intersection of class and race as interconnected social categories. The injustices experienced by Black people in the colonies because of these categories helped to configure Blackness and the inclusion of class in activist spaces. This tradition of intersectional resistance existed in the former colonies and was unearthed amongst West Indian migrants in Britain. Black people in Britain, many of whom are West Indians, continue to articulate the social categories of race and class and the oppressions of race and class as interconnected. They believe the conditions of violence experienced by Black people in Britain are not attributed solely to one social category and thus must incorporate an intersectional approach, as unveiled in the oppressions and resistance of Black people in the colonies.

[71] Gosine, Mahin. East Indians and Black Power in the Caribbean: The Case of Trinidad. New York: Harlem Graphic Arts Center, 1986.

Black activists in Britain have articulated how their configuration of Blackness is intersectional with class and how this configuration has informed their motivation for resistance. Scholar Evan Smith attempts to find the root cause of youth rebellion attacks that occurred throughout Britain in the 1970s and 80s and suggests the youth have an indistinguishable race and class consciousness that motivated the resistance of the youth. While the British left claimed the rebellions to be rooted in a working-class struggle that could exacerbate tensions with the British law enforcement and government, radical Black activists attributed the rebellions to a strive for racial solidarity amongst Black Britons in the creation of a new identity in post-colonial Britain. Smith argues however that while both interpretations engage the rebellions with political agency and not as "spontaneous and without precedent," the motivations behind the rebellions were a hybridity of both race and class consciousness.[72] Smith references Homi Bhabha's scholarship which discusses how political positions seek to claim ownership over various rebellions that may have more than one political position. Thus, while the radical left and Black activists sought ownership over the youth rebellions in places including Notting Hill Carnival, Bristol, Brixton, Mansfield Hosiery Mills and Grunwick, Smith and other scholars alike have adopted a more intersectional approach to understanding political activism and the complex motivations behind the rebellions. For youth who faced both racial and class based oppression in Britain's capitalist and anti-Black power structures, a complex adoption of intersectionality as the motivating factor is more thorough than simple claims of motivations being rooted in either class or race or a suggestion that these social categories are not intersectional to Black people in Britain.

[72] Smith, Evan. "Conflicting Narratives of Black Youth Rebellion in Modern Britain." *Ethnicity and Race in a Changing World* 2, no. 1 (2010): 16–31. https://doi.org/10.7227/erct.2.1.2.

The connection between class and race in activist spaces continues to be a much contested yet important topic amongst Black activists in Europe. At Marxism 2023: A Festival of Socialist Ideas in London, England, there were varying workshops that included the topic of race at the class centered event including: 'Frantz Fanon: Decolonization and Revolution; Claudia Jones, Race and Class; and Marxism vs. Black Nationalism.' While not a Black centered activist space, there again exists the relationship between race and class, so much so, that the festival dedicated numerous sessions to discussing the connected relationship. While attending the session entitled 'Cedric Robinson and Racial Capitalism' led by speaker and author Ken Olende, there again existed this conversation about the connectedness of race and class. In the presentation, Olende critiqued the book *Black Marxism* by scholar Cedric Robinson. While Olende acknowledged Robinson's contribution to class consciousness with his analysis of the role of Black people in Marxism, Olende critiqued Robinson's claims of a Black Radical Tradition (BRT), which theorizes acts of resistance amongst African people and their descendants that disrupt the cultural, social, political, and economic norms that emerged through slavery and colonialism.[73] One of Robinson's main points throughout the book is that African people and the African diaspora have resisted for centuries through a "specifically African character of those struggles."[74] Robinson attributes specific oppressions of African people, namely the TST, colonialism, and imperialism and the resistance of these institutions as the 'specific African characteristic' he describes. These BRTs include the intersection of class and race and one that rejects ideals of capitalism and class based hierarchies. Olende disagreed with the idea of a BRT of class based hierarchal rejection existing specific to Black people and

[73] Robinson, Cedric J., and Kelley Robin D G. *Black Marxism the Making of the Black Radical Tradition*. S.l.: Penguin Books, 2021.
[74] Ibid., 5

utilized the presentation to counter Robinson's point of their existing a specific uniqueness to Black people that showcase a BRT to include the intersection of class and race.[75]

Robinson uses *Black Marxism* to also illustrate the feelings some Black activists have spoken of surrounding their disappointment in the way Marxism and other class based resistance fails to inherently address the idea of race. Olende has spoken on this topic on a few occasions and has again rejected the claims of these Black activists. In one video, Olende speaks on the representation of Marxism being Eurocentric. He refutes a belief that Marx or Engels were "old white men looking backwards" and argues rather that Marx and Engels were insisting "things should be completely different, and that Marxism is not in and of itself Eurocentric."[76] Black activists however have questioned the lack of engagement on racial oppression amongst Marx and Engels and others who adhere to Marxism as a primary school of thought to address oppression. They have often questioned their analysis of race in the conversation of class, sometimes refuting that Marxism and class alone can be analyzed to describe and resolve the oppression of Black people. Ali Bey Hassan touches on this through the Revolutionary Black Nationalism pamphlet regarding Marxism:

> In many countries, the progressive forces have identified with Marxism/Leninism as a means of over throwing their local rulers. Revolutionary Black Nationalism argues that Marxism/Leninism is an inappropriate and outdated ideology to cope with our troubles today. Marxism/Leninism was drawn exclusively from the western proletarian experience. It totally ignores racism and as it came about before the full economic exploitation of Third World colonies in the latter half of the last century and the last half of the 20th century, it does not give sufficient attention to the role of colonialism, neocolonialism and imperialism.[77]

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[75] Olende, Ken. "Cedric Robinson and Racial Capitalism." Marxism 2023: A Festival of Socialist Ideas. London, June 30, 2023.

[76] "Ken Olende Leads off a Discussion on 'Is Marxism Eurocentric?'" Facebook, March 28, 2022. https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=645258819916598.

[77] Hassan, Ali Bey. Pamphlet of "Revolutionary Black Nationalism: Unity and Struggle Against Domination", n.d., Black Cultural Archives, London, England.

Hassan articulates his belief of a gap that Marxism and other class based theories hold which is the lack of understanding and credence it gives to racial oppression. Rather than parse out class oppression from other oppressions or using class based oppression to make sense of racial oppression, Hassan and others are searching for a more complex understanding and solution. While he understands a benefit of a grounding in class awareness, which he adopts through scientific socialism, he believes Marxism and other approaches can only offer a basic level of analysis and will ultimately not lead Black people to liberation through its sole inclusion of class. He articulates an opinion that Marxism and others do not clearly engage the impact of colonization and imperialism in conversations of class and ultimately would agree with a perspective that the struggle against domination cannot be organized solely under Marxism or a class based theory. These examples aid in the argument of this chapter that Black activists in Britain are contending with this issue of race and class through their configurations of Blackness. Whether the resistance has the same approach, there seems to be an overall adoption of both class and race as being imperative to the movement. One cannot articulate racial oppression without class oppression and vice versa, and Black activists are contending with this inextricable link. Regardless of the varying organizational theories and outcomes, activists are tasked with addressing and contending with the role of class configuring Blackness and its effect on their activism.

In addition to adopting an intersectional framework to their activism, Black activists in Britain have also complicated the belief in assumed social categories and are conceptualizing membership and belonging in activist spaces. These configurations of Blackness, that both adopt and complicate intersectionality, have had major effects on the activists and their organizations. This is evident amongst the LBR, a militant socialist group established in London. In a 2015

manifesto published to the groups' Facebook page and written by founder Arnie Joahill in response to a statement made by former members of the LBR who departed the group, he complicates this belief in fixed social categories and is parsing out his belief in membership and belonging to the group. Despite being called the LBR, they adopt a definition of political Blackness, which encompasses the inclusion of South Asian people in the group. Joahill is configuring Blackness through a common racial struggle rather than one rooted in African ancestry. This is clear in his statement when he writes the goal of the organization has always been to mobilize and defend the Black and Asian communities.[78] In this statement, Joahill is complicating the idea that Blackness is assumed through phenotype or origin and rather incorporates the South Asian community in the category of Black, placing them in the nexus of belonging to and membership in the organization. However, regarding class Joahill has other beliefs for who can be included and who the organization serves, again complicating this idea of fixed categories and the concept of belonging and membership. Later in the manifesto, Joahill wrote the following on the organizations position on class:

> Black Revs is a strictly working class, military and politically black organization…While London Black Revs welcome support of all sections of society, we screen members on the criteria of class and activist background, in order to potentially stop middle class activists and members of prior or existing left groups.[79]

While the LBR adopt political Blackness, complicating the definition and qualifications necessary to be identified as Black, Joahill argues that the LBR is purely an organization that serves the working class. When other members wanted to extend and collaborate with other groups who did not fit the and grounding in the working class, it was immediately rejected.

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[78] London Black Revs. "Response to a Statement Made by the Cultural Collective Split from London Black Revolutionaries." Facebook, July 16, 2015. https://www.facebook.com/LondonBlackRevs/posts/691303184335589.

[79] Ibid.

There exists an intersection to Blackness that includes both racial and working class criteria for the LBR. These intersections are the way they have configured Blackness, those who face racial oppression, political Blackness, and those of the working class, thus concocting their own configuration of Blackness through these specific intersectional categories. The adoption of political Blackness and the rejection of classes outside the working class is an example of how the LBR are configuring Blackness through an intersectional framework while complicating the boundaries of social categories, membership, and belonging. These configurations of Blackness have had momentous effects on the organization and just as Joahill writes, these conflicting configurations of Blackness, membership, and belonging between him and other members of the group led to a faction breaking off and forming their own group. Regardless of how activists are choosing to define membership, and belonging, these configurations of Blackness that include class and that incorporate and complicate intersectionality in their work, continues to have major effects on activism in Britain.

Blackness and Gender

Gender has also been an important social category that has influenced configurations of Blackness and subsequent activism within the Black community in Britain. Black women have primarily existed at the forefront of Black centered movements in Britain, yet conflicts still arose regarding their incorporation and oppressions. There exist configurations of Blackness that suggest that Blackness is gendered to mean manhood. Hakim Adi touches on this presumption when he writes:

> Gender sensitivity became one of the most important questions for the Black Power movement in Britain, which was often presented in terms of masculinity, and several Black women's groups eventually emerged from this movement.[80]

[80] Adi, Hakim. *Pan-Africanism: A History*. London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021.

As Hakim illustrates, to challenge this assumption, Black British women have used their social categories to challenge this existing belief in activist spaces, sometimes through the creation of women centered activism. This connection of Blackness with manhood is illustrated in the opening quote of this chapter through Ali Bey Hassan. While he could not theorize a world without oppression for Black people without the mention of gender, there is a clear disregard for the issues of women, further illustrating a belief in Blackness existing through manhood that does not require specific attention and credence to the experiences of women, further neglecting Black women's issues and separating gendered oppressions from racial oppression. Nowhere else in the pamphlet did Hassan bring up Black women or the incorporation of gendered oppression within the movement to eliminate racial oppression. Black women activists have utilized various methods of resistance including militancy, healing, nurturing, and education that have stemmed from their configuration of their identity and how they understand their womanhood. Thus, the social categories they adopted challenged a belief in Blackness existing through manhood, eliminating the limitations of gender politics in Blackness, and have worked to illustrate the intersections of race and gender within Black activist spaces. Black women activists in Britain have themselves factored in womanhood and have encouraged the incorporation of womanhood and the experiences of Black women in their work and the movement in support of the Black community.

Black women activists have complicated intersections of race, class, and gender through exposing how manhood gendered Blackness in Black organizations and the lack of gender and racial configurations of class oppression in leftist organizations. This is evidenced through the BBPP and the organizing of Black women's rights through the BBWG and Claudia Jones' critique of the communist party through her theory on triple oppression. Defacto leader of the

BBPP, Althea Jones-LeCointe herself discussed the issues surrounding the inclusion of gender within the BBPP. In an oral history interview, LeCointe addressed these issues and their impact on the longevity of the BBPP when she said the following:

> The issue was should black women organize on their own. Many women in the Black Panther Movement began to want a black woman's movement, which became a more pivotal issue to coalesce around. People need to identify central issues which will be true to self.[81]

LeCointe highlights how the BBPP did not meaningfully engage gender and the necessity of including women's concerns and voices in identifying its central issues. Black women argued that their chosen categorization as woman cannot be parsed out from Blackness., and to do so would be a disservice to themselves and to the movement that aims at overthrowing racial oppression because of how intersectional racial and gendered oppression is to one another. They echo a tradition of intersectionality that linked Black British activism with the freedom struggles of Black people all over the world. For LeCointe and other women, they insisted that Black freedom required freedom for Black women and men. These intersectional categories and oppressions cannot be siloed and for some women in the BBPP, there was an overall lack of meaningful incorporation of the oppressions of Black women into the movement's agenda, which ultimately led to some individuals to start competing movements that centered the intersection of race and gender.

For these women, the centering of Black women in Black organizations was the tactic necessary to achieving Black liberation for all Black people. Former BBPP members including Olive Morris, Liz Obi, and Beverley Bryan were some of the founding members of the BBWG. Despite the BBPP's leadership primarily falling under a woman, Althea Jones LeCointe, women

[81]Althea LeCointe-Jones, 2014, ORAL/6/1. Oral Histories, ORAL. Archives Collection.

in the BBPP, including LeCointe and those who went on to form Black women centered organizations including the BBWG experienced gendered oppression. LeCointe recalled the numerous debates and conversations amongst Black men and women of the times which left a lasting impact on her. Under LeCointe's leadership, sexism was regarded as a major offense to the movement. The members of the BBPP were obliged to treat sexism as equivalent with the issues of racism and were expected to not engage in sexist behavior in and out of the organization. Rather, they were expected to live out the morals and ideals of the BBPP, which included the end of racism and sexism in their everyday lives and embody these principles.[82] While these were motivating principles of the movement, these ideals were not always accomplished or meaningfully adopted by members. Black feminist activist Melba Wilson detailed the positionality of Black women within the BPM. She recalled that Black women were often relegated to 'backroom jobs' including paperwork filing, cooking, and cleaning. She expressed that Black women were also "on the pickets for sure but they were expected to follow, not lead."[83] While in Black organizations, British Black women were subjected to gendered oppression that did not prioritize their experiences reinforced oppressive attitudes and actions these Black women were fighting to abolish. When asked about how the BBPP dealt with issues of sexism, LeCointe highlighted the following:

> Within the Black Panther Party, how to deal with the men who are chauvinistic but should be done in house. How to deal with the violence out of slavery and helplessness was taken out on black women.[84]

[82] Wild, Rosalind Eleanor. "Black Was the Colour of Our Fight: Black Power in Britain, 1955-1976." *Black Was the Colour of Our Fight: Black Power in Britain, 1955-1976*. Thesis, University of Sheffield, 2008.
[83] Miller, Milo, and Jade Bentil. *Speak Out!: A Brixton Black Women's Group* . London: Verso, 2023.
[84] Althea LeCointe-Jones, 2014, ORAL/6/1. Oral Histories, ORAL. Archives Collection.

This elucidates how Black women have chosen to organize for the overall Black community but have had to deal with issues of a sole belief in Black manhood, a continued silence of Black women in Black organizing spaces. While LeCointe believed these issues of sexism should be changed amongst Black people, there were other Black women who left the BBPP and other male centered Black organizing spaces to organize for Black women, incorporating the intersection of race and gender in their Black politic. A sisters' forum was developed in 1971 to further connect the issues of racial and gendered oppression in the BBPP, however after the demise of the BBPP, many women went on to organize specifically under the premise of feminism, including the BBWG.[85] The BBWG, just one example of race and gender centered activism, sought to explicitly name the oppression of Black women and declared itself to be a Black socialist feminist organization with a clear understanding of the intersection of race, gender, and class, which was at the nexus of the social order in which they were oppressed.[86] The BBWG utilized their newsletter, *Speak Out,* as means to address issues pertaining to Black women and the Black community including reproductive rights, class oppression, and immigration and situated themselves within a network of women's centered activism.[87]

Black women in Britain continue the historic tradition of unearthing intersectionality in their activism, pressing the issue of the role of women in activist spaces. Their existence and actions not only reflect a complexity of intersectionality for Black activist spaces but continue to complicate narratives of gender categorization and concepts of womanhood.

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[85] Angelo, Anne-Marie. "Black Oppressed People All over the World Are One': The British Blacks' Grassroots Internationalism, 1969–73." *Journal of Civil and Human Rights* 4, no. 1 (2018): 64–97. https://doi.org/10.5406/jcivihumarigh.4.1.0064.

[86] Miller, Milo, and Jade Bentil. *Speak Out!: A Brixton Black Women's Group* . London: Verso, 2023.

[87] Ibid., 1-13

Black women across the world have also advocated for the intersection of gender and race and that configuration to be integrated within leftist movements. Prominent Marxist and feminist Claudia Jones, whose work in Britain transformed the Black community, used the term "triple oppression" to describe injustices structured by race, class, and gender categories.[88] Jones was born in Trinidad and Tobago on February 21, 1915, and moved with her family to New York City at age eight. While in Harlem, Jones experienced a whirlwind of racism, sexism, and classism, which inspired the radical politics she would later use to mobilize other Black people. She first vocalized her radical intersectional politics when she was involved with the Young Communist League as an editor for its newspaper. This role and the racial violence of the time, namely the Scottsboro case, which involved the imprisonment of nine young Black boys accused of raping White women, further ignited Jones' passion for activism. Her activism encompassed the intersection of classism, racism, and sexism as systems of oppression embedded in the foundation of the U.S. This theory of triple oppression, which Jones coined to describe the oppression Black women face to include race, gender, and class predates the work of Crenshaw who leaned on activists including Jones to articulate what she would later coin as intersectionality. Jones' activism caught the attention of U.S. politicians during the Cold War, which eventually led to her imprisonment for violating the Smith Act, legislation that prohibited the advocacy of overthrowing the government through violence or force.[89] Following her imprisonment, Jones was deported from the U.S. and found herself in Britain by 1956. There Jones discovered that the very anti-Black racism that existed in the U.S. was also prevalent in

[88] Lynn, Denise. "Socialist Feminism and Triple Oppression: Claudia Jones and African American Women in American Communism." *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 8, no. 2 (2014): 1–20. https://doi.org/10.14321/jstudradi.8.2.0001.

[89] Lynn, Denise. "Black Radicalism and the Trial of Claudia Jones." AAIHS, October 8, 2018. https://www.aaihs.org/black-radicalism-and-the-trial-of-claudia-jones/.

Britain. While it sometimes manifested itself differently in Britain, Jones made the connection that anti-Black racism was global and affected Black people all over the world. As in the U.S., she immersed herself in activist and community spaces to combat racism, sexism, and classism.[90] Some of her most notable activism in Britain includes the *West Indian Gazette,* revered as one of Britain's first major Black newspapers; her establishment of the Notting Hill Carnival, a direct response to the Notting Hill race riots in 1958; and her transnational advocacy support of the civil rights movement March on Washington in 1963 through her leadership of the CAACO. Jones made it a point to intersect the social categories of race, gender, and class throughout her activism, which is evident in her writings and the organizations she aligned herself with.

Throughout her years of activism, Jones highlighted the necessity in involving women in the pursuit of liberation. During her time with the U.S. Communist Party, Jones published her esteemed article, "An End to the Neglect of the Problems of the Negro Woman" which altered the Party's perspective on the oppression and resistance of Black women.[91] Through her article, Jones articulated the Party's lack of recognition of the intersection of race and gender. She articulated the various methods of resistance Black women have adopted as further illustration into the gender politics of activism and the varying frameworks of activism Black women adopt, including militancy. She highlighted the numerous sites in which Black women resisted oppression, including in the trade unions, mass organizations, and the home.[92] While Jones is specifically commenting on the life and role of Black women in the U.S., the tradition of resistance and militancy that she emphasized can also be extended to Black women in Britain.

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[90] Bryan, Beverley, Stella Dadzie, Suzanne Scafe, and Lola Okolosie. *The Heart of the Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain*. London: Verso, 2018.

[91] Lynn, Denise. "Claudia Jones and Ending the Neglect of Black Women." AAIHS, April 2, 2018. https://www.aaihs.org/claudia-jones-and-ending-the-neglect-of-black-women/.

[92] Jones, Claudia. 1949. *An End to the Neglect of the Problems of the Negro Woman!* [New York]: [National Women's Commission, C.P.U.S.A.].

The book *Heart of the Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain*, details the tradition of militancy amongst Black British women.

> Our stubborn refusal to accept a state of bondage has often been hidden behind stereotypes of passivity and acquiescence. Such images of Black women as downtrodden victims may well disclose one dimension of the realities we have lived through, but they fail to reveal the fact that our very survival has depended on our militant response to tyranny.[93]

Just as Jones wrote in 1949, the authors of *Heart of the Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain* reject notions of docility and stagnation amongst Black women. Instead, they reveal the tradition of taking up agency and sometimes the choice of a militant approach that Black women have adopted and spearheaded. They both rebuff the simplistic understanding of class or racial politics as existing in a vacuum and complicate the narrative further. They are configuring Blackness through an incorporation of gender and have advocated for Black activist spaces to include an intersection with gender beyond Black manhood.

In addition to methods of militancy, Black women activists have also chosen to illustrate nurture and healing as both a tactic and conception of resistance and justice that have been critical to movements in support of the Black community. While acts of militancy existed as resistance to enslavement, colonialism, and imperial rule, Black women have also existed at the forefront of healing practices and tasked with raising the Black community. Jones articulated this concept as the responsibility taken up by Black women and mothers during slavery to both defend and nurture the family.[94] This embodiment of methods of resistance including militancy, nurture, and healing has challenged the ways in which they have not been rendered women as

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[93] Bryan, Beverley, Stella Dadzie, Suzanne Scafe, and Lola Okolosie. *The Heart of the Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain*. London: Verso, 2018.

[94] Jones, Claudia. 1949. *An End to the Neglect of the Problems of the Negro Woman!* [New York]: [National Women's Commission, C.P.U.S.A.].

part of a trajectory that has carried over with Black men acknowledging their womanhood. This is articulated by decolonial feminist scholar Françoise Vergès in the following excerpt.

> Slavery transformed Black women's and men's bodies into sexual objects, into bodies to be trafficked and massacred, raped, humiliated, and exploited until death… Black women were constructed as hard-working, as incapable of maternal feelings, love, and affection.[95]

Vergès articulates how Black women were not rendered women through their racialization as Black and positionality as slave. However, Black women's prioritization of healing and nurture further complicates the narrative Vergès illuminates. Black women have challenged beliefs in womanhood as existing in specific contexts and have connected their chosen categorization as woman with their configuration of Blackness. As illustrated by Vergès, Black women were not believed to hold characteristics of healing and nurture, thus, the existence of Black women who have continued a tradition of both militancy, nurture and healing, complicates the perceived fixedness of gender that intersectionality suggests,

The social categorization as woman has both social and biological complexities. For some categorized as women, this includes childbirth. Althea Jones LeCointe articulates this through her story with motherhood. While temporarily incarcerated and awaiting the results of her trial with the other members of the Mangrove Nine who were facing rioting charges, Althea Jones LeCointe discovered she was pregnant with her first child. In the oral history interview, LeCointe reflected on her fear and depression of possibly being imprisoned whilst pregnant and bringing a Black child into a world to face racial oppression. While she was ultimately acquitted of the charges brought against her and able to give birth to her child freely, she discussed the realities of caring for a child. While at a difficult time, LeCointe associated her newfound

[95] Vergès, Françoise, and Melissa Thackway. *A Feminist Theory of Violence: A Decolonial Perspective*. London: Pluto Press, 2022.

motherhood with her womanhood. She also did not find contradictions between her choice to be an activist with her motherhood and womanhood. The factors coexisted and painted a larger picture of the complexities some Black women experience in navigating intersectionality. In the interview, LeCointe discussed the importance of family and community as she vocalized how the concept of family is often thought of in theory and it wasn't until the birth of her child that she began to understand the realities of family. She believed there to be a general underestimate of the impact of slavery and the breaking of Black families and current family organization. She recounts having all these thoughts and feelings as a Black woman during her prominent activism with the BBPP.[96] LeCointe saw her autonomy in having her daughter as an act of resistance. While different than her militant activism displayed during her time with the BBPP, her refusal to let conditions of the world prevent her from being true to herself and her role as an activist and mother or the history of natal alienation, which severed kinship amongst Black people as a condition of enslavement, illustrate another form of resistance.[97] Other practices associated with motherhood and birthing have also been sites of resistance to enslavement, including breastfeeding. An African tradition, breastfeeding not only allowed a disruption in the exploitation of enslaved Black women's labor, due to its frequency and timeliness, but it sometimes reduced the time they worked throughout the day, affecting the labor supply of slave owners.[98] These examples further illustrate varying methods of resistance employed by Black women.

[96] Althea LeCointe-Jones, 2014, ORAL/6/1. Oral Histories, ORAL. Archives Collection.
[97] Patterson, Orlando. *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982.
[98] Bryan, Beverley, Stella Dadzie, Suzanne Scafe, and Lola Okolosie. *The Heart of the Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain*. London: Verso, 2018.

Black women have spearheaded movements in the name of and with the inclusion of healing for the Black community. Some have adopted a belief in the mental and physical health of the Black community to be an act of resistance and form of activism. For Aliyah Hasinah, founder of Black Curatorial, healing within the Black community is a necessity for the end of racial oppression. Aliyah believes healing includes fostering; Black led spaces exclusively for other Black people. She believes siloed spaces to center communal healing and reckoning of past atrocities are imperative to the liberation of the Black community from anti-Blackness. Thus, Black Curatorial exists as a space for the healing of Black people through artistic expression. Much of her grounding comes from the women in her family, whose activism has shaped her work. The following is an excerpt from her oral history interview, detailing the role the women in her life played:

> My parents have always been a part of Saturday school. They were both part of that tradition because my elder aunt's on both sides had ran Black community spaces in Reading when they first moved there and had been running Saturday and Sunday schools and other community events… Mom didn't want us going to the public schools so she said I am going to start my own toddler group and that has always been her attitude, there's something missing, let me set it up.[99]

This emphasis on community displayed by the work of her mother, aunts, and other women family members, has spearheaded Aliyah's belief about the necessity of healing amongst the Black community. She views healing as a necessary step in activism, a tradition echoed by many of her elders. Siana Bangura, another activist I interviewed, also reflects Aliyah's sentiments about the power of community and healing. Siana's organization, No Fly on the WALL, has a key belief in creating safe spaces that are essential in the path toward healing. The following is

[99] Aliyah Hasinah, (Founder of Black Curatorial), Oral History Interview, London, England, June 2023.

an excerpt from the No Fly on the WALL website, detailing the importance of communal safe spaces for the organization:

> We unapologetically advocate creating safe spaces and sista circles, free from the very voices that often drown us out. We do not subscribe to the shambolic and shallow misrepresentation of what a safe space is. Everybody, especially Black and Brown bodies, needs spaces in which to heal.[100]

Aliyah and Siana are just two examples of the ways in which Black women have carried on a tradition of healing and community into activist spaces, disrupting gender norms that would suggest Black women's inability to do so. Both women find healing to be a critical attainment to justice and employ notions of healing throughout their work. No Fly on the WALL was a space cultivated by Bangura in 2013 as a Black British feminist platform, originally online via zine publications that later morphed into an in-person academy.[101] No Fly on the WALL had the goals of nurturing a space of Black feminism, emphasizing the connectedness of race to gender politics. While Aliyah's Black Curatorial and Siana's No Fly on the WALL are different, they both emphasize the importance of healing and community as a necessity in the fight for racial redress and reckoning. They both take inspiration from their Black women elders who have historically utilized healing, community, and nurture to resist the violence and oppression they and the Black community have experienced. They embrace a sense of intersectionality in their activism and complicate concepts of womanhood and gender by incorporating this intersection of race and gender within their configuration of Blackness.

In addition to methods of resistance in the form of militancy, nurture, and healing, Black women have had the responsibility of resistance through the education of Black youth. Education has been one of the primary ways the state has oppressed Black people in Britain. This violence

[100] Bangura, Siana. "Humanifesto." No Fly on the WALL., January 9, 2017. https://noflyonthewall.com/nfotw-humanifesto/.
[101] "Work." Siana Bangura., December 21, 2023. https://sianabangura.com/work/.

not only altered youth while in school but has also affected their future employability, another venue in which Black Britons faced major discrimination. In her interview, Aliyah shared a bit of her father's story and hardships with the education system growing up in Britain. She recalled that her father left school at the tender age of sixteen. having not yet graduated from secondary school, due to the racism he experienced from the White students in his class. She added the experience tarnished her father's relationship with Britain's education system.[102] In addition to racial terror experienced at the hands of White youth, Black school children were also systematically targeted and deemed inferior to their White classmates. In an oral history interview conducted with Gladstone Virgo, a Jamaican activist who moved to England in 1961 in his late teens, he detailed the effects of Britain's education system. He was sent to Britain from Jamaica to help further his studies and education and got involved in education activism in the latter part of his life through his job as a youth worker. He became a manager for multiple youth centers and began to see the racial violence Black children experienced in school. He recounted hearing and experiencing numerous exclusions of Black youth from school, after many White parents complained about the number of Black children in school with their children. He remembered a strong rhetoric of Black youth 'taking over' the schools and a fear of Black children's deviance at the time. These issues prompted him and other Black teachers, youth workers, and community leaders to mobilize in support of Black children's education. This oppression of Black school children was alarmingly evident through the classification of Black youth as 'educationally subnormal' (ESN) and the systematic effects that had on their educational trajectory and psyche.[103]

[102] Aliyah Hasinah, (Founder of Black Curatorial), Oral History Interview, London, England, June 2023.
[103] Virgo Gladstone (activist), Oral History Interview, London, England June 2023.

While it has now been revered as a scandal, it was quite common for Black children to be sent to schools for the ESN in the 1960s and 1970s.[104] The term subnormal was used to describe children with intellectual inadequacies and disabilities, oftentimes separating them from the general population into different schools. The program was under the guise of providing targeted education to children with lower intelligence, but instead was an opportunity to institutionalize anti-Black racism and reinforce racial subjugation. Black children were believed to have high rates of hyperactivity and low IQ scores and speak broken English, which made them primary targets of ESN classification.[105] Representations of Black people as inherently inferior or genetically less intelligent than White people were corroborated by industry experts, further developing a narrative of inferiority of Black children and support for the existence of ESN schools.[106] In addition to the institutional violence faced by students classified as ESN, they faced daily racial trauma and were made to feel inadequate and subpar by their teachers and classmates that have had lasting effects on them in their adult life, including not continuing their education to college or university.[107] A 1967 report from the Inner London Education Authority revealed that while Black immigrant schoolchildren only made up 15% of the population in the general schools, they made up 28% of the population at ESN schools, disproportionately affecting Black children. [108] Through the spirit and tradition of self-determination and agency, the Black community mobilized in what later became the BSSM to combat these oppressive and violent practices by the state on Black school children.

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[104] Team, Editorial. "Subnormal: A British Scandal." Black History Month 2024, May 21, 2021. https://www.blackhistorymonth.org.uk/article/section/film/subnormal-a-british-scandal/.
[105] Bryan, Beverley, Stella Dadzie, Suzanne Scafe, and Lola Okolosie. *The Heart of the Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain*. London: Verso, 2018.
[106] John-Baptiste, Ashley. "The Black Children Wrongly Sent to 'special' Schools in the 1970s." BBC News, May 20, 2021. https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-57099654.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Ibid.

With the prevalence of racial oppression in Britain's education system, many Black women mobilized to combat this oppression to better the Black community. Education is a passion amongst West Indian and African people and for some women, their migration to Britain was to offer better opportunities for education for their children.[109] The BSSM first emerged in the 1970s and have continued to exist in Britain as means to redress racial inequalities in the British education system. Aliyah's parents are direct beneficiaries of the BSSM, developed and maintained by Black women in Britain who saw the oppression faced by Black school children in the education system and who wanted to directly alter the way education was taught in Britain. While Black women were not the only people to advocate and create space for the education of Black youth, they spearheaded a movement that later generations have adopted and recognized. The following is an excerpt from *The Heart of the Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain* which encapsulates the unique role of Black women regarding education:

> Caring for children has always been seen as 'women's work', and since we bear and rear the children, overseeing the institutionalized care provided by the schools – an extension of child-rearing – has also been seen as our responsibility.

The creation of the BSSM is distinct from other supplementary schools in that rather being an additional schooling to educate about language or religion, the BSSM was created to mind the gap in education received from the general education system in Britain. It countered the inequalities faced in the general education system and offered a space to educate on Black history and culture.[110] These schools were created because the education system that did exist was laced with racial oppression and violence that was a disservice to Black youth in Britain.

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[109] Foner, Nancy. *Jamaica Farewell: Jamaican Migrants in London*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979.

[110] Kehinde Andrews. "Toward a Black Radical Independent Education: Black Radicalism, Independence and the Supplementary School Movement." *The Journal of Negro Education* 83, no. 1 (2014): 5–14. https://doi.org/10.7709/jnegroeducation.83.1.0005.

Within the BSSM curriculum, there was some focus on a fundamental education of common subjects including math and English. However, the BSSM also a site of resistance through the education on Pan-Africanism, experientially learning through excursions, and self-esteem for Black youth.[111] These programs were run by teachers and community leaders, oftentimes Black women, in the community who labored through their official employment but also in the BSSM as means to support, aid, nurture, and educate the Black community and future generations.[112] Despite Black women's low visibility in their impact on the BSSM, their work has been invaluable to the molding of a generation and the continued tradition of educating the youth. Black women exist within the nexus of resistance and continue to use the intersection of race and gender as both a beacon of support for intersectional theories and pathways for activism but also as an avenue for advocating the complex ways they resist racial and gendered oppression.

Conclusion

Black British activists have a tradition of advocating for the inclusion of class and gender in activist spaces and configurations of Blackness. While not all activists have the same beliefs of the role of class and gender in Black act visit arenas, they are nevertheless tasked with contending with the role of class and gender. This incorporation of class and gender into configurations of Blackness develop an intersectional configuration of Blackness that connects race, gender, and class. As evidenced in this chapter, Black Britons have historically and continue to develop configurations of Blackness that both incorporate and challenge

[111] "Black Education Movement." George Padmore Institute. Accessed May 7, 2024. https://www.georgepadmoreinstitute.org/collections/the-black-education-movement-1965-1988#:~:text=The%20early%20Black%20Education%20Movement,the%20needs%20of%20black%20children.

[112] Mirza, Heidi Safia, and Diane Reay. "Spaces and Places of Black Educational Desire: Rethinking Black Supplementary Schools as a New Social Movement." *Sociology* 34, no. 3 (August 2000): 521–44. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0038038500000328.

intersectionality. These configurations have substantial impacts to activism and the idea of membership and belonging within activist spaces.

Chapter Three: 'No Political Blackness'

> This is a Black only space. For those of African-Caribbean heritage or of Mixed Black heritage who identify as Black. No Political Blackness inna dis... you will be kicked out[113] – Black Curatorial

Introduction

This caveat was written at the end of the description for the Black Curatorial: Curatorial Collaboration with Languid Hands Lab hosted in June 2023. The creator of this event, Black Curatorial, is a "virtual and physical space for Black curators and creatives to experiment, build, and play in the UK and Caribbean."[114] The curatorial collaboration with Languid Hands occurred at 198 Contemporary Arts and Learning (198) in the heart of Brixton, London. The significance of this location is vast because it is the site of activism undertaken amongst Black people in Britain since the early twentieth century. The 198 space is a "historically Black led gallery in London focused on supporting emerging artists of color and exploring political and topical narratives."[115] As I walked to the exhibition, I couldn't help but be reminded of the rich history of Black activism in Brixton on Railton Road. The gallery is located on Railton Road which is a notorious site of Black resistance and activism in London. Notable activists such as C.L.R. James, and Darcus and Leila Howe had strong ties to this community and the activism that ensued. C.L.R. James, a notable Trinidadian Marxist, lived and died in his home on Railton Road. This home was intentionally located in Brixton, which featured a vibrant West Indian community, 'above the offices of the journal *Race Today,*' which functioned as a place of refuge for young people interested in political resistance. C.L.R. James' commitment to the global

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[113] Black Curatorial. "198 Lab: Curatorial Collaboration with Languid Hands." Eventbrite. Accessed December 1, 2023. https://www.eventbrite.com/e/198-lab-curatorial-collaboration-with-languid-hands-tickets-652673482957.
[114] "Black Curatorial." Black Curatorial. Accessed November 29, 2023. https://www.blackcuratorial.co/.
[115] "Home." 198 Contemporary Arts & Learning. Accessed December 1, 2023. https://www.198.org.uk/.

Black community is still physically represented by a plaque at 165 Railton Road Brixton, London, which reads "C.L.R. James 1901-1989 West Indian Writer and Political Activist lived and died here."[116] This historical landmark laid the foundation for subsequent generations of activists. Black Curatorial expressed their intentional decision to highlight this space in their collaboration with Languid Hands, a London-based collaborative duo who explore Black studies through artistic and curatorial mediums, as they continue the legacy of advocacy for the liberation of Black people as CLR and other historical figures once did.

As I stepped into 198, I was greeted by a Black woman who was assisting with the event. As she walked another participant and me up the stairs to the forum, she had a candid conversation with the other woman about her presence in the space. A seemingly South Asian woman, the Black woman asked her if she identified as Black. When the woman responded no, the Black woman explained to her that the event was a Black only space. She told the South-Asian woman that she would not kick her out of the event, despite the event description, but she made it clear the woman was intruding on a space and event designated for Black people. This was one of the first instances in which it became clear the role political Blackness and its legacy shapes the identity and activism of British people. The founder of Black Curatorial, a Black woman of Afro-Caribbean heritage, also understood the historical implications of political Blackness on identity and activism. Defining Black is so intrinsic to her activism, indicative of her clear declaration that the event was for Black people, those of or mixed with African-Caribbean heritage. She developed a definition of Blackness that she employs in her activist work. During her oral history interview, Aliyah recalled this experience being one of frustration. This was her first event in which a non-Black participant showed up, despite her declaration of

[116] "C. L. R. James: Writer: Blue Plaques." English Heritage. Accessed November 27, 2023. https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/blue-plaques/c-l-r-james/.

the event being solely for Black people and her definition of Black existing as African-Caribbean. Aliyah believes certain spaces, and Black Curatorial specifically should be siloed and confined to the Black community. She expressed the importance of healing and he needing to do that separate from other communities.[117] Her own definition of Blackness, which she employs throughout her activism with Black Curatorial, is one rooted in an African heritage and ancestry. It is one that critiques the present deployment of political Blackness as means for personal racial identification and for political agendas.

The message from Black Curatorial reveals how critical political Blackness was and continues to be in configurating Blackness among British activists. Political Blackness has historically existed within the realm of activism and resistance in Britain, with influence from Britain's American colonies. With Britain having colonial rule over a significant portion of Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean, they often utilized the forced and coerced movement of people to support the British empire economically. A large portion of this migration was South Asian indentured servants to Britain's American colonies. This movement of people developed racial stratification in the Americas. There began a configuration of oppression that linked the racial and economic oppression of enslaved Africans with that of indentured South Asians servants. This developed a sense of shared struggle and resistance to oppressive powers. Walter Rodney engages with this ideal as writes of the shared oppressions of Africans and Indians in the Caribbean. Rodney articulates a connected racialized oppression that particularly affects the working-class Africans and Indians in the Caribbean. He writes the following:

> Africans and Indians marked out the same "tasks" between the dams and the drains and they faced the same vexation from overseers…residential separation

[117] Aliyah Hasinah, (Founder of Black Curatorial), Oral History Interview, London, England, June 2023.

> must not obscure the fact that each group at different times came to understand what it meant to be at the total mercy of the planters in the plantation.[118]

In this quote, Rodney articulates the shared economic oppression Africans and Indians faced from European colonies. These sentiments as illustrated by Rodney developed the consciousness of the shared oppression of Africans and Asians that continued outside the colonies to Britain.

This consciousness followed the Windrush generation and South Asian migrants to Britain where again there existed a common struggle of racial and class inferiority. This is where the birth of political Blackness developed in Britain. Political Blackness denotes Blackness as a large umbrella term to describe all those who face racial oppression based on their complexion. It has been utilized to unite minority groups originating out of labor movements in Britain, against racial oppression inflicted by the British state and its citizens. In conjunction with the migration of Black and Asian peoples to Britain, there erupted a long history of activism to combat the oppression faced by these racialized migrants. Within this activism, political Blackness truly took shape. Its ideals spread with the hope of ending the racialized oppression of Black and Asian migrants. The early adoption of political Blackness would have a legacy that configures Blackness within activist spaces in the present day. This chapter illuminates the impact political Blackness has on contemporary configurations of Blackness and its impact on the activism of Black people in Britain. While political Blackness emerged primarily in the twentieth century, it continues to have a legacy that current Black activists contend with in their work. This chapter briefly explores the history of Black people in Britain and the solidarity of Black and Asian people within Britain and around the world to provide a broader context into how political Blackness has remained significant to configurations of Blackness. This chapter relies on

[118] Rodney, Walter. *A History of the Guyanese Working People, 1881-1905*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982.

activists and organizations of the twentieth century to illustrate the history of political Blackness in Black activist spaces and uses contemporary conversations surrounding political Blackness to illustrate its legacy in Britain.

Black People in Britain

Black people have existed in Europe and Britain for centuries. Hakim Adi details this early account of Black people in Britain in the introduction *Black British History: New Perspectives*. In this, Adi discusses Cheddar Man, a skeletal remain found at Gough's Cave in 1903 in Somerset.[119] Cheddar Man represents one of the oldest humans in Britain and was described as darker skinned, implying his and others' migration from Africa to Europe.[120] Adi explores the origins of Cheddar Man as means to counter popular belief that Europeanness is synonymous with Whiteness, a belief that has continued to exist to justify the oppression of non-White people in Britain.

While Black people have always existed and lived in Britain, this research is particularly concerned with the large migration of Afro-Caribbeans from the twentieth century to the present. This mass migration in the 1940s to London, England is of particular importance to the current conditions of Blackness and activism seen today. One of the most notable migrations occurred following the passing of the Marshall Plan and the British Nationalist Act of 1948. [121] The Marshall Plan was signed in 1948 by then U.S. President Harry S. Truman as means for the U.S. to assist in the economic infrastructure of Europe following the two World Wars.[122] The World

[119] Lotzof, Kerry. "Cheddar Man: Mesolithic Britain's Blue-Eyed Boy." Natural History Museum. Accessed November 28, 2023. https://www.nhm.ac.uk/discover/cheddar-man-mesolithic-britain-blue-eyed-boy.html.
[120] Adi, Hakim. *Black British History: New Perspectives*. London, UK: Zed Books, 2019.
[121] Hunter, Virgillo A. "Postwar Jamaican Immigrants in Brixton, England 1948-1962: Citizenship, Transnationalism and Communalism." Master's Thesis, Syracuse University, 2013.
[122] "Marshall Plan (1948)." National Archives and Records Administration. Accessed November 28, 2023. https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/marshall-

Wars left many European nations, including Britain, in economic turmoil, igniting the need for economic recovery through increased labor. In addition to the Marshall Plan, the British government drafted and passed the British Nationality Act of 1948 to further support their efforts of postwar economic development via labor from their British colonies. The British Nationality Act of 1948, which created the identity of citizen of the UK and colonies, was enacted to further influence migration of those in the British colonies and commonwealth to Britain, whilst still maintaining the legal identification as British subjects.[123] These two legislations were instrumental in transforming the racial landscape of Britain, and specifically London. These legislative acts generated mass migration of West-Indians from British colonies such as Jamaica, Trinidad, and Barbados to Britain. The *Empire Windrush* was merely one of the boats that brought Afro-Caribbeans to Britain along with the *Orbita* in the fall of 1948 and the *Georgic* in the summer of 1949. [124] By 1958, ten years after the initial voyage of the *Empire Windrush,* there were around 125,000 West Indians in Britain. [125] Despite the mass migration of Afro-Caribbeans to Britain occurring a few short years after the initial voyage of the *Empire Windrush*, this migration of peoples has been referred to as the Windrush generation. These migrants and the generations following, unearthed the use of political Blackness in activism as a response to the violent racial oppression they experienced in Britain.

Racial Imperial Violence and Resistance

plan#:~:text=On%20April%203%2C%201948%2C%20President,economic%20infrastructure%20of%20postwar%20Europe.

[123] "Historical Background Information on Nationality (Accessible)." GOV.UK. Accessed November 28, 2023. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/historical-background-information-on-nationality/historical-background-information-on-nationality-accessible.

[124] Fryer, Peter, Paul Gilroy, and Gary Younge. *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain*. London, UK: Pluto Press, 2018.

[125] Ibid., 372-373

This chapter is concerned with the nexus in which racial and imperial violence overlap to form the specific experiences of Black and Asian migrants and future generations, from British colonies to Britain. political Blackness' emergence amongst Black and Asian British subjects must be analyzed through a lens activists have promoted of both racial violence and imperial violence. The experiences of being both non-White and imperial subjects to the Empire made the violence experienced unique and informative of the way Blackness is configured in Britain. The connectedness of race to the empire is further examined in this chapter as activists' resistance to violence was understood through the lens of an anti-racist and anti-imperial framework. Thus, this understanding of a racial imperial violence and its influence on configuring Blackness is explored throughout this chapter. Scholar Jon Burnett discusses the role of racial violence in Britain. He proposes that the racial violence experienced in Britain by non-White people have connections to the Empire. He writes the following:

> Increasingly among academics and intellectuals, there is a propensity to talk of the UK as entering an age of hyper-, supra-, or super-diversity… reflect[ing] the demographic changes which have taken place over the last few decades... These changes, a swirling consequence of the UK's former and ongoing imperial adventures are here to stay.[126]

This connection of racial violence to imperial violence is foundational to the role of political Blackness. Alongside scholarly connections of racial violence to imperial violence in Britain are the experiences of Black British activists who themselves have connected their oppression to both race and their history with the British empire.

The British Empire was one of the largest and most powerful Empires to exist, with colonies expanding across the world. In the seventieth century, its Empire expanded to the West Indies in countries including Jamaica and Barbados and expanded to Asia in countries including

[126] Burnett, Jon. "Britain: Racial Violence and the Politics of Hate." *Race & Class* 54, no. 4 (2013): 5–21. https://doi.org/10.1177/0306396813475981.

India through the East India Company.[127] These settlements occurred simultaneously with the Empire's participation in the TST on the African continent. The British Empire reinforced White rule over Black and Brown people as the foundation of these colonies in the Americas were primarily built by enslaved Africans. The subjugation of Black and Brown people in the British colonies established and reinforced the racial imperial violence committed by Britain on Black and Brown people. Following the abolishment of slavery after numerous uprisings from enslaved Africans, the British Empire needed cheap labor to produce in the colonies. This led to indentured servitude of many Asian peoples in other parts of the Empire. This introduction of Asian indentured laborers in former slave economies built a foundation for Black and Asian interaction and potential alliances to challenge the racial imperial violence they experienced as subjects of the Empire. Many indentured laborers were coerced into migrating and staying in the West-Indies and Africa by the British, with nearly a third of Trinidad and Tobago's populating being of South Asian descent.[128] This migration of Asian peoples to the West-Indies and Africa is significant to the ways racial imperial violence led to configurations of Blackness under a Black and Asian single identity.

The mass migration of Black and Asian persons to Britain resulted in much racial violence and terror from British citizens. It prompted tensions that culminated in 1958, just ten years after the mass migration of Black persons to Britain, during the Notting Hill Riots. Newly migrated Afro-Caribbeans took up community all over Britain, with one of the most well-known areas being Notting Hill in London. While living in Notting Hill, Afro-Caribbean migrants faced

[127] "British Empire." Encyclopaedia Britannica, December 5, 2023. https://www.britannica.com/place/British-Empire.

[128] Dow, Lucy. "Indentured Workers and Anti-Colonial Resistance in the British ... - Gale." The Gale Review , 2021. https://review.gale.com/2021/05/25/indentured-workers-and-anti-colonial-resistance-in-the-british-empire/.

extreme racial terror and violence from white Britons, namely the Teddy Boys, who harassed the new migrants and their property.[129] These vigilantes received support and backing from right-wing conservative organizations and parties to continue the harassment of Black and Asian people to ensure Britain remained a hostile and violent environment that dissuaded migration to Britain. White vigilantes assaulted Black residents and on the evening of August 30, 1958, around 400 White youth erupted violence across the Black community by throwing petrol bombs at Black homes attempting to chase the Black community out. These riots lasted nearly a week with riot participants traveling from all parts of England to mobilize for racial terror against the Black community in Notting Hill. The racial sentiments to keep Britain White and expel anyone who did not fit into that category, namely affected new migrants, continued well beyond the Notting Hill riots, reinforcing a racial imperial violence upon the Black community in Britain.

Despite Britain's plea and coercion for members of its colonies to migrate to Britain to redevelop its economic infrastructure in the 1940s, there continued an existence of racial imperial violence amongst the new migrants. Violence on the part of the British state and its citizens created a landscape of racial terror in Britain. On the part of the law, the Immigration Act of 1971 significantly affected new migrants and their families. Scholar J.M. Evans best describes the Immigration Act of 1971 and its origin as the following.

> For the broad purpose of the Act is to assimilate…the legal position of aliens and Commonwealth citizens for the purposes of immigration and deportation…the Act recognizes that Britain is no longer the metropolitan centre of the commonwealth.

[129] "Notting Hill Riots 1958." Notting Hill Riots 1958 - Exploring 20th Century London. Accessed December 16, 2023. https://web.archive.org/web/20120327094258/http://www.20thcenturylondon.org.uk/server.php?show=conInformationRecord.161.

While once encouraging the migration of its commonwealth citizens to Britain, The Immigration Act of 1971 was passed to halt migration. The government's halt of migration illustrated attitudes of xenophobia and created hostile environments for Black people in Briton who were not protected by the law against White citizens who echoes the Immigration Act of 1971's xenophobic sentiments. The Immigration Act of 1971 was an intentional legislation that sought to reprimand the migrants from the Windrush generation and curtail their rights. It is not lost that this legislation existed as calls to keep Britain White and as racial tensions rose amongst White and non-White residents in Britain. This legislation is important in highlighting the ways in which racial imperial violence was reinforced by White vigilantes and by the state itself. Both entities reinforced beliefs in racial superiority and continued to enact violence against Black and Asian communities as means to continue the racial imperial violence that the British Empire had perfected.

Scholar Kennetta Hammond-Perry articulates the conditions of Black life in twentieth century Britain as she highlights the significance of the migration of Black people through the Windrush journey, beginning in 1948, to Britain from the Caribbean and its impact on the "emergence of race as a domestic political issue."[130] Britain's unique relationship with migrants from its now former colonies placed questions of identity and citizenship at the precipice of the Windrush generation's mind. The reinforcement of anti-Black racism by the state led to a transformation of race "by a diversity of movements for citizenship, national self- determination, independence, equality, and the freedom to belong."[131] Black migrants' claims to Britishness disrupted traditional beliefs on what it meant to be British. Calls for anti-colonial and anti-racist

[130] Hammond Perry, Kennetta. "Black Britain and the Politics of Race in the 20th Century." *History Compass* 12, no. 8 (2014): 651–63. https://doi.org/10.1111/hic3.12178.
[131] Ibid., 654

action cultivated a specific identity for Black migrants in Britain, that "people of African descent saw themselves as rights-bearing citizens rather than "immigrants" who stood outside of the boundaries of Britishness because of their skin color, ethnicity, colonial nationality, or newcomer status."[132] Perry's article articulates the experiences of the Windrush generation in Britain and highlights the political navigation of race, ethnicity, and nationality. Perry eloquently articulates an analysis of the connectedness Black migration from the Caribbean to Britain had on global activism to racism, colonization, and the British Empire. She further highlights how oppressions, and the activism which ensued as a result, were both localized to a British context and embodied motivations for a global liberation of Black people.

These instances of racial terror led to much resistance amongst the newfound immigrants in Britain. One of the most notable of these activist groups was the BBPP, whose legacy of radical resistance has shaped the history of resistance to racial violence in Britain. Paul Field and R.E.R. Bunce take a historical look at the creation of the BPM in Britain through Stokely Carmichael's 1967 speech at the Dialectics of Liberation conference in London, England. This speech birthed the British BPM. The BPM had varying ideology and tactics, with Black Power figures Obi Egbuna and C.L.R. James on opposing sides of the movement.[133] Field and Bunce delineate the differences between Egbuna's and James' definition of Black Power as well as the motivations and organizing of a BPM in Britain. On opposing ends of the meaning and implications of Black Power, Egbuna and James did not collaborate, and it was not until Egbuna's arrest that James and his nephew Darcus Howe, collaborated, and joined the BBPP, which Egbuna founded in1967. Egbuna's initial belief in excluding radical white supporters,

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[132] Ibid., 658

[133] Bunce, R. E., and P. Field. "Obi B. Egbuna, C. L. R. James and the Birth of Black Power in Britain: Black Radicalism in Britain 1967-72." *Twentieth Century British History* 22, no. 3 (2010): 391–414. https://doi.org/10.1093/tcbh/hwq047.

excluding the majority of Black peoples who were considered to be intellectually inferior and the delineation of the BBPP as a vanguard and militant organization, radically changed following Egbuna's incarceration. Student Althea Jones-LeCointe's de facto leadership of the party changed its direction to a more Marxist, inclusive, and grass roots organizing space, like that of the USBPP, that lasted until the end of the Party in 1972.

Anne-Marie Angelo further examines the creation of the BBPP in its foundation and its existence in Britain. She begins by discussing the origins of the BBPP, like Bunce and Field, as it gained influence from the USBPP but had no official affiliation with that party. Angelo discusses the demographic makeup of the BBPP, namely West-Indians in Britain, and discusses the motivations behind its creation. She examines how a Marxist, Pan Africanist, and Black Power theology motivated BBPP Nigerian born founder Obi Egbuna and other followers. The BBPP focused on acts of resistance against the British State, namely the local police forces, through activism and violence when deemed necessary. They also focused on community organizing and involvement by creating spaces for Black youth in Britain to convene and learn.[134] Overall, Angelo delineates how the USBPP laid the groundwork for a transnational BPM in Britain in the form of the BBPP and its influence and motivations within Britain. Like other resistance movements of the time, the BBPP adopted political Blackness as a framework in which they resisted, incorporating South Asian membership and leadership. This acknowledged solidarity between Black and Asian people as evidenced through the BBPP was also prominent in other arenas.

Black and Asian Solidarity

[134] Angelo, Anne-Marie. "The Black Panthers in London, 1967-1972: A Diasporic Struggle Navigates the Black Atlantic." *Radical History Review* 2009, no. 103 (2009): 17–35. https://doi.org/10.1215/01636545-2008-030.

While political Blackness was sometimes adopted in activism within Britain, the concept of political Blackness have been underscored in other parts of the world, including South Africa and the Caribbean. This alliance amongst those of African and Asian descent as means to combat colonialism and imperialism appeared as the foundation of the Bandung Conference in 1955. The Bandung Conference echoed the spirit and action of self-determination of Asian and African countries who had been significantly affected from European colonial rule. The conference represented Afro-Asian solidarity in related struggles surrounding colonialism and self-determination. The opening speech of the conference by President Sukarno of Indonesia spoke of the collective resistance Asian and African countries had to imperialism.[135] Authors Luis Eskava, Michael Fakhri, and Vasuki Nesiah echo historian Odd Arne Westad when they write the following:

> We wish to reassess the impact on personal and global politics of an alternative form of identification, that of Afro-Asian solidarity, which was in large part a reaction to the perceived continuation of white dominance.[136]

Eskava, Fakhri, and Nesiah argue that this Afro-Asian solidarity was a newfound identity, one that counters the domination of White supremacy and European rule. While many Asian countries had gained independence at the time of the conference, many African countries had yet to attain this goal. The conference was a methodical attempt to strategize on how to prevent colonialism from occurring again and threatening the livelihoods of Asian and African people and nations. While this conference only occurred once, it represents an Afro-Asian solidarity on the part of a collective struggle against racism and colonialism. It was this collective oppression that had been foundational to the support and adoption of political Blackness. Hakim Adi

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[135] Eslava, Luis, Michael Fakhri, and Vasuki Nesiah. *Bandung, Global History, and International Law: Critical Pasts and Pending Futures*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018.
[136] Ibid.

routinely asserts the impact of the Bandung Conference and other instances of Afro-Asian solidarity in his discussion of the history of Pan-Africanism. He asserts the Bandung conference's importance in positioning leaders of African and Asian countries who were in opposition to old colonial powers.[137]The twenty-nine countries involved in the conference thought it important to mobilize those of the Global South as means to combat the oppressive conditions placed upon them by European powers. These concerns established at the conference were echoed in Britain amongst Africans, Afro-Caribbeans, and Asians, who used the Afro-Asian solidarity established in the Bandung Conference as a framework to understand collective struggles amongst Black and Asian people. This is evident in the "Revolutionary Black Nationalism" pamphlet found in the BCA. Within the pamphlet, they stated specifically that the alliance between Black and Asian peoples was means to combat imperialism and European domination. This alliance is central to why proponents of political Blackness have advocated for its use.

Defining Black

There has long been a need to define for oneself what constitutes Blackness. Black leaders from across the world expressed this desire outside the confines of western and White sentiment. Malcolm X spoke to this desire when he declared, "there is a new type of Negro on the scene. This type doesn't call himself a Negro. He calls himself a Black man. He doesn't make any apologies for his Black skin."[138] This same rhetoric of self-defining and its importance to identity and liberation was evidenced in the pamphlet "Revolutionary Black Nationalism:

[137] Adi, Hakim. *Pan-Africanism: A History*. London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021.
[138] X, Malcolm. n.d. *The End of White World Supremacy : Four Speeches*. Edited by Benjamin Karim. New York: Merlin House: distributed by Monthly Review Press.

Unity and Struggle Against Domination" by Ali Bey Hassan. The following is an excerpt from the pamphlet.

> One of the major bones of contention was the question of "Who are Black People." There was considerable confusion with the equation of Black with non-white or the alternative equating of Black with African. It showed that once again we were prepared to be trapped by the white man's definitions and our psychological reluctance to define for ourselves our own liberation.[139]

This pamphlet illuminates the necessity in naming and identifying oneself. While detailing ways to achieve liberation against domination, Hassan and others amongst the BLF felt inclined to specifically highlight the necessity in self naming and why these naming tactics are a form of resistance to European domination. The pamphlet then goes on to describe and define Black as the following:

> It is necessary at this stage to define Black people. We define Black people as all non-white persons of African and Asiatic origin who are visibly identifiable and recognizable as Black people and who have historically or presently been discriminated and oppressed for racial reasons.[140]

Not only did Hassan and others think it important to detail the reasons behind naming and self-identifying outside of a European context, they also specifically upheld a definition of Black that falls under the confines of political Blackness. While activism through Black Curatorial rejects the validity of political Blackness, the BBPP and this pamphlet adopt political Blackness through their activist work, extending Blackness to those beyond an African heritage. Two differing configurations of Blackness, but one that has still mobilized these groups to advocate and organize against racial oppression. The need to define Blackness is indicative of the contentiousness of the utility of political Blackness in Britain. These contentions not only existed

[139] Hassan, Ali Bey. "Revolutionary Black Nationalism: Unity and Struggle Against Domination", n.d., Black Cultural Archives, London, England.
[140] Ibid., 3

between groups but also within groups. Even amongst the members of the BLF, those who mobilized to create "Revolutionary Black Nationalism," there were differing opinions of what Black meant. Within the pamphlet there was a caveat in the footnote following its assertion of political Blackness that stated the following.

> In the course of our discussions on the original draft, we found that not everybody was prepared to accept this definition. Some felt that the term Black people should be restricted to persons of Black African origin, and that Asians should be excluded on the grounds that they are brown and not black and do not consider themselves Black. We cannot go into a detailed discussion of this issue in this text.[141]

The members of BLF could not all agree upon one definition of Black that would support everyone's configuration. The contention surrounding these differing definitions lay in the very reason BLF and Black Curatorial have clearly defined Black within their activism. Configurations of Blackness are just that, configurations, thus defining Black has been an essential aspect to Black activism in Britain. Some opponents of political Blackness, who adopt a definition of Blackness through African ancestry and heritage, have rejected its ideals because of the anti-Blackness embodied in other non-White persons who continue the discrimination of black people. Despite some activists' adoption of political Blackness, Britain still upheld a racial stratification in which those of African descent maintained the lowest layer of the strata. Scholar Anne-Marie Angelo details this when she notes that South Asians had differing experiences and treatments then their Afro-Caribbean counterparts. Often found within the middle class, South Asians would often try to separate themselves from Black Britons and their racial and economic struggles.[142] As a result of this racial stratification that while oppressed South Asians, also

[141] Ibid.

[142] Angelo, Anne-Marie. "Black Oppressed People All over the World Are One': The British Blacks' Grassroots Internationalism, 1969–73." *Journal of Civil and Human Rights* 4, no. 1 (2018): 64–97. https://doi.org/10.5406/jcivihumarigh.4.1.0064.

prescribed them in a higher racial stratification than Black people, some activists and scholars have rejected the inclusion of all non-White people into this definition of Black. They have not rejected the idea of solidarity amongst Black people and South Asians, but rather the rejection in Black not being extended to those not of African ancestry who also perpetuate anti-Blackness.

The academy has also been a site of contention in defining Black. The incorporation of the academy within this analysis of political Blackness' role in activist spaces highlights the vastness of political Blackness' impact across Britain. While this thesis is particularly concerned with the impact on activism, the varying configurations of Blackness within the academy have been used to analyze these activist movements. Thus, the incorporation of the debates amongst scholars is an important one in how they analyze the configurations of Blackness amongst activists. British scholar Kehinde Andrews advocates for Blackness to be defined through 'African Ancestry', which has been a definition adopted by the BSSM in Britain, in which much of his research has analyzed.[143] Contrastingly, others have argued for a configuration of Blackness outside of African ancestry, but rather one that looks to connect those that have been racialized in society. British scholar Kobena Mercer makes light of this differing configuration of Blackness as he defines Blackness as "reflective of 'a form of symbolic unity' which arose 'out of the signifiers of racial difference' and similarities in experiences of racial oppression and history."[144] These scholars not only elucidate the impact configurations of Blackness have had on the academy but also in how these scholars study the activism of Black Britons. The BSSM which may reject a configuration of Blackness through political Blackness differs from the

[143] Andrews, Kehinde. "The Problem of Political Blackness: Lessons from the Black Supplementary School Movement." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 39, no. 11 (2016): 2060–78. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2015.1131314.

[144] Maylor, Uvanney. "What is the Meaning of 'Black'? Researching 'Black' Respondents." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 32, no. 2 (2009): 369–87. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870802196773.

adoption of political Blackness in the BBPP. Both are sites of resistance and activism in Britain, but their varying configurations of Blackness have impacted their activism.

Political Blackness in Historical Activist Spaces

The oppressive conditions of Afro-Caribbean, African, and South Asian peoples historically through British imperialism and upon migration to Britain led to the development of political Blackness and its role in activist spaces. Mohan Ambikaipaker echoes Stuart Hall's historical analysis of political Blackness when he writes "[p]olitical blackness has been the form of race-based antiracist organizing that has consistently incorporated the joint realities of multiple ethnic, racial, and religious minority communities suffering racism in Britain."[145] At the time political Blackness emerged in Britain, many marginalized people, namely Caribbean, African, and South Asian communities were the target of racial, class, and immigrant retaliation from both the British state and its citizens. Peter Fryer describes the conditions of Black people in Britain during the 1970s in his chapter, "The New Generation". Within this chapter, Fryer details the brutality and oppression Black people in Britain were experiencing in the 1970s. He specifically highlights oppression in the realms of education, housing, and employment. He argues that Black people faced increasing discrimination in the workforce to include obtaining employment, the types of employment offered, low wages and dissatisfactory working conditions.[146] Scholar Tanisha Ford details these conditions as she writes "[t]hey lived in working-class communities, and though many of their parents had belonged to the educated, professional classes of the Caribbean and West Africa, they had been forced to give up that

[145] Ambikaipaker, Mohan. *Political Blackness in Multiracial Britain*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018.
[146] Fryer, Peter, Paul Gilroy, and Gary Younge. *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain*. London, UK: Pluto Press, 2018.

status in Britain."[147] Despite that education, many Afro-Caribbean parents were subject to lower paying jobs within Britain and overall racially oppressive conditions in life.

Scholar John Narayan explores the process of radicalization amongst Black Britons in his work on nativist socialism from the oppressive conditions they experienced, as Fryer and Ford indicate. He examines the unique role Black activists had in transforming the racial landscape of Britain in their revolutionary fight on a domestic front and on a global sphere for decolonization and against imperialism. He specifically discusses radicalization through the formation of the BBPP in the mid to late twentieth century. He articulates that while the BBPP was inspired by its American counterparts, the BBPP differed in its adoption of political Blackness. Narayan writes "political Blackness has a distinct link to anti-racism in the UK, having emerged in the late 1960s in reaction to the state racism endured by New Commonwealth communities."[148] Those of the new commonwealth communities, including many African, West-Indian, and South Asians, created community as means to organize for anti-racist and anti-imperialist policy and action in Britain and across the world. Narayan highlights the process of radicalization throughout the paper by illustrating how and why people organized. He argues the process of radicalization occurred through the organization of peoples through an identity of political Blackness coupled with demands and calls for socialism. Black power offered a transnational movement for the empowerment of Black people that transcended national boundaries and that organized for radical and revolutionary change for Black people across the world. The BBPP's configuration

[147] Ford, Tanisha C. "WE WERE PEOPLE OF SOUL: Gender, Violence, and Black Panther Style in 1970s London." In *Liberated Threads: Black Women, Style, and the Global Politics of Soul*, 123–58. University of North Carolina Press, 2015. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9781469625164_ford.9.

[148] Narayan, John. "British Black Power: The Anti-Imperialism of Political Blackness and the Problem of Nativist Socialism." *The Sociological Review* 67, no. 5 (2019): 945–67. https://doi.org/10.1177/0038026119845550.

of Blackness, through a utilization of political Blackness, radicalized and activated recent migrants and their children to participate in combatting racial oppression.

The utilization of political Blackness is also evidenced in women organizing spaces in Britain as scholar Nydia Swaby explores. Swaby leans on past scholarship to describe political Blackness as the following:

> Located in this framework, political blackness provides a sharp example of a negatively articulated diaspora consciousness, in that 'black' was an exclusionist term appropriated to form political alliances between migrants from Africa, Asia (specifically the Indian sub-continent) and the Caribbean who settled in Britain during the post war period.[149]

This collective framework allowed for new migrants to connect under the basis of discrimination, forming an alliance in which to resist. This collective experience established itself in the form of mobilization as many Black and Asian migrants looked to resist British oppression and tyranny. Swaby goes on to discuss how a gendered political Blackness framework is used as strategy to conjoin forces of numerous oppressed groups. She offers insightful analysis into the ways gendered specific organizing spaces adopt or reject political Blackness and the advantages and disadvantages of such adoptions. Throughout numerous venues of activism in Britain, configurations of Blackness were defined and utilized in activist spaces. As Ambikaipaker, Narayan, and Swaby illustrate, political Blackness has had a powerful influence on activism in Britain. It has been utilized to entice resistance and incorporate multiple oppressions into the conversation. The impact of political Blackness was and continues to be influential on activist spaces in Britain.

Conclusion

[149] Swaby, Nydia A. "'Disparate in Voice, Sympathetic in Direction': Gendered Political Blackness and the Politics of Solidarity." *Feminist Review* 108, no. 1 (2014): 11–25. https://doi.org/10.1057/fr.2014.30.

While some rallied around the concept of political Blackness, others found it to be of great controversy and dated following its decline in the 1990s. Scholar Yasmin Ali touches upon this concept when she writes:

> Black in its British usage was intended to convey a sense of a necessary common interest and solidarity between communities from the old empire (or the New Commonwealth); it was a usage predicated on the politics of anti-racism. As such 'black' became "hegemonic" over other ethnic/racial identities in the late seventies and early eighties. The moment was not to last.[150]

Ali recognizes the desire for an anti-racist epistemological reaction to the racial brutality faced by Black and Asian people in Britain, however, she questions its continued existence. The configuration of Blackness within a race and class struggle amongst British colonies and into Britain have historically been advantageous for those of African and Asian descent. This race-class alliance was imperative to resist oppressive conditions and racial stratification. While political Blackness has historically been a contested utility, it seems the role of political Blackness has lost some support amongst African and Afro-Caribbean activists in the modern day.

In the oral history interview conducted with the activist I call Kayla, a local radical activist from North London of African heritage, she expressed her opposition to political Blackness as an organizing tactic. She detailed her initial rejection of the concept altogether and described a conversation she had with her mentor, who was a proponent of political Blackness within her activism in the twentieth century. Kayla's mentor described to Kayla the conditions Black and Asian people collectively experienced when they arrived in Britain and that separately, neither group had significant populations in Britain to enact the necessary change needed to end racial oppression. Thus, it was believed a collective unity was necessary not only

[150] Nicolaïdis, Kalypso, Berny Sèbe, and Gabrielle Maas. *Echoes of Empire: Memory, Identity and the Legacy of Imperialism*. London, UK: I.B. Taurus, 2014.

for their fight against oppression in Britain, but for their fight against the British Empire, whom many originated from as subjects of the Empire. While Kayla recognized political Blackness as a tactic once of importance to Black liberation, like Yasmin Ali, she expressed her concern with broad definitions of Blackness when non-White people project anti-Blackness and operate higher within the racial strata of Britain and the world.

While Kayla and Aliyah, the founder of Black Curatorial, expressed their opposition to political Blackness, other groups and activists continue to be proponents of the concept. One proponent of political Blackness that was discussed in Kayla's interview, was the group the LBR. The LBR have been described as having "a predilection for dramatic, raucous, direct action."[151] Shortly after the documentary finished filming, the LBR had a public disbandment. On July 16, 2015, the Facebook page for the group wrote a 14-page manifesto detailing the rise and fall of the organization. Written in this manifesto, by the organizations founder, Arnie Joahill, was a description of the goals and ideals of the organization. The following is an excerpt from this statement.

> London Black Revs was formed in (October 2013). Since its foundation London Black Revs has been committed to militant and radical action. Black revolutionaries aims to mobilise, defend and fight within the Black and Asian community where-ever possible, in the fight against Austerity…We are a working class and militant politically Black and Asian revolutionary (and socialist) organization… espousing anti-asian rhetorical arguments about oppression…We are a working class and militant politically Black and Asian revolutionary (and socialist) organisation, something that the collective rejects, espousing anti-asian rhetorical arguments about oppression.[152]

[151] "About." Generation Revolution, February 3, 2017. https://genrevfilm.com/about-us/?v=7516fd43adaa.

[152] London Black Revs. "Response to a Statement Made by the Cultural Collective Split from London Black Revolutionaries." Facebook, July 16, 2015. https://www.facebook.com/LondonBlackRevs/posts/691303184335589.

The description of the group and their constituents specifically speak to the ways in which the group utilizes political Blackness in the twenty first century as an organizing tactic. Founder, Arnie Joahill, made it a point to group together Black and Asian experiences of oppression in the struggle against imperialism and racism. Despite the collective advocacy of Black people from individuals and groups including Kayla, Black Curatorial, BBPP, BLF, the LBR, and others, they operate under differing configurations of Blackness.

The legacy of political Blackness shapes conversations around race and resistance in Britain. In 2016, students at the University of Kent protested the Black History Month commemoration put together by the Kent student union which highlighted notable figures in British Black history. The contestation came after multiple notable figures were not of African descent and rather those of South Asian heritage, calling into question configurations of Blackness. The union vehemently apologized for its conflation of a single identity following the protests of the Kent University students.[153] In 2017, there was a campaign across the UK with the goal of raising voter turnout amongst marginalized communities in Britain entitled 'Operation Black Vote.' The campaign featured a video ad which showcased South Asian rapper, Riz Ahmed, stating "Blacks don't vote…and by Black people, I mean ethnic minorities of all backgrounds."[154] These two incidents illustrate the powerful legacy of political Blackness within cultural, activist, and academic discourse on race and resistance in Britain. For contemporary activists, they too must grapple with configuring Blackness and understanding how these specific configurations impact their activism. It is evident that not all Black centered activist spaces have the same configurations of Blackness, just like the organizations of the past. Britain's imperial

[153] Appiah, Kwame Anthony. "What We Can Learn from the Rise and Fall of 'Political Blackness.'" The New York Times, October 7, 2020. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/07/opinion/political-blackness-race.html.

[154] Ibid.

history and the history of black activism in Britain will continue to impact configurations of Blackness that may include political Blackness that contemporary activists must contend with in their work.

Conclusion

> Oral History, or the practice of recording and preserving memories and experiences, enables us to capture the wisdom of our living libraries before they pass away and "burn to the ground." Unlike other methods of record keeping, oral histories provide a personal account of pivotal events from individuals who experienced them firsthand… Having these recorded accounts provides an important perspective and context which enriches our understanding of African American history and culture.[155] – National Museum of African American History and Culture

This thesis complicates the meanings of Blackness by illustrating the varying ways British activists configure it in their endeavors. As evidenced throughout the project, Black British activists contend with visibility, the intersections of race, class, and gender, and political Blackness. They grapple with existing conditions and configurations of Blackness. They must determine how to make visible and situate their local instances of anti-Black oppression within a global framework in which to understand oppression. They confront other socially constructed categories including class and gender and the ways they frame Blackness and activism. They must engage conceptions of Blackness that have historically prioritized shared oppression to include those who are not of African heritage.

This research analyzes Black activists in Britain to understand their experiences. What became clear through this research is that, even within this specific region of the world, their exists many configurations of Blackness that activists have used to ground their resistance. There are numerous examples of Black activist organizations of the twentieth century that employ a strong belief and inclusion of political Blackness as the basis of their activism. Yet groups like Black Curatorial believe Blackness to be a sacred space of siloed healing, not incorporating

[155] "Capturing Your Family's Oral History." National Museum of African American History and Culture, April 26, 2023. https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/capturing-your-familys-oral-history#:~:text=Recently%2C%20oral%20historians%20have%20documented,African%20American%20history%20and%20culture.

beliefs in political Blackness and the extension to groups not of African heritage. The varying configurations that exist call for further research to understand Blackness as the basis for activism. They demonstrate the value of centering stories of activists to highlight the complexities of configuring Blackness in activism.

At the core of this thesis are the stories Black Britons shared with me through oral histories. While only parts of their story are highlighted in the thesis, their lives, and the lives of the generations before them are some of the most important aspects to understanding the experiences and resistance of Black Britons. I heard stories about migration, activism love, violence, family, and personal journeys that made writing about their narratives a beautiful experience. As the opening quote explains, this method allowed critical and pivotal moments and of individual lives to be the focal point exploring Blackness in British activism. This approach stands in contrast to efforts to interpret activism through federal acts or media reports, because it allowed individual activists to reflect and narrate their experiences and interpretations of Blackness on their own terms.

For concepts as complex as Blackness and activism, the stories and narratives of activists who have centered Blackness as their basis for resistance are important to understanding the racial and political landscape of Britain and beyond. These configurations, as illustrated throughout the thesis, force a rethinking of how we understand these global Black movements. I came into this thesis wanting specifically to illuminate the experiences and resistance of Black people of African heritage, however, the landscape of Britain's Black centered movements have oftentimes incorporated configurations of Blackness I was unfamiliar with. It complicated my idea of Black activism and has since reshaped my understanding of what it means to configure Blackness and have global Black resistance movements. British activists are contending with

complex issues including belonging, membership, intersectionality, and visibility all while trying to accomplish their organizational goals. They are complicating implications of Blackness within the nexus of activism. Within Britain, a site of resistance that incorporates those from Africa, West Indies, and Asia, Black British activists continue to illustrate the challenges of conceptualizing Blackness and how these configurations function as the framework for their activism.

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Biographic Narrative

Jala Ashani Grant was born in Bitburg, Germany and raised in Washington, DC. She obtained her B.S. in Business Administration from Bucknell University where she majored in Global Management with a minor in Africana Studies. She is a current graduate student through Syracuse University's M.A. in Pan African Studies degree program. She is also obtaining her Certificate of Advanced Study in Conflict and Collaboration from the Syracuse University Maxwell School of Citizenship & Public Affairs. Jala's research interests stem from her own family's West Indian heritage. These interests include politics of anti-Blackness; socialist and anti-capitalist movements spearheaded by Black activists; and the modern activism of Afro-Caribbeans in the U.S. and Britain. While at Syracuse University, Jala has served on the executive board of the Black Graduate Student Association, often dedicating her time spent outside of her studies to creating community amongst Black graduate students. Following her graduation from Syracuse University, Jala will continue her studies in a PhD program.