

# GLOBAL CONVERSATIONS

A COLLABORATION  
WITH THE  
**MSBSA**

OUR BLACK LIVES:  
ACT. REFLECT. RESTORE.

SUMMER 2020 SPECIAL ISSUE



*“When you see something that is not right, not fair, not just, you have to speak up. You have to say something; you have to do something.”*

*- John Lewis*

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# Letter from the Editors in Chief

*Global Conversations is a unique platform. It combines a wealth of perspectives, experiences, and mediums to provide meaningful engagement with the pressing issues facing our world. But one thing that it is not—and should never be—is silent.*

*Following the global upheaval of COVID-19, the world was forced to acknowledge a truth older than many countries: anti-Black racism is alive and well—in our communities, in our institutions, around the world, and it continues to result in the senseless loss of Black lives. It should not have taken the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Adama Traoré and far too many more to make us confront this long-standing reality; but now that it has, we cannot let this moment go to waste. Sustained and meaningful change is needed.*

*We all have a role in this. For Global Conversations, our role starts with amplifying Black voices, and stimulating conversation on and expanding understanding of anti-Black racism. At the Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy, the recent establishment of the Munk School Black Students Association (MSBSA) has served as a powerful, student-led response to the call for greater discussion, mobilization, and action surrounding issues of anti-Black racism and the need for profound change. It also presented us with an invaluable opportunity for collaboration. Over the summer, members of Global Conversations and the MSBSA have worked together to produce a collection of pieces on topics including Black identity, racism, intersectionality, allyship, and more.*

*The following Summer Feature Issue is a special edition of Global Conversations written entirely by members of the MSBSA, with editing and design work provided by our team. We are sincerely grateful to our MSBSA contributors for sharing their personal experiences, insightful analyses, and exceptional writing, as well as to our newly appointed executive team for their assistance. This issue represents the beginning of an ongoing collaboration between Global Conversations and the MSBSA, to be carried forward and sustained through podcasts and a series of op-ed pieces. Through this collaboration, Global Conversations hopes to contribute to meaningful and lasting change, and we can think of no better use of our platform.*

*As we begin our time as Editors-in-Chief, we are honoured to present what we believe to be a meaningful and impactful first issue. In the spirit of Global Conversations and its values, we look forward to continuing a legacy of engaging discussion, exceptional analysis, and promotion of diverse perspectives and ideas in global affairs.*

*By choosing to share their experiences and perspectives with you, our writers are affirming their commitment to the power of the written word as an avenue for change. By listening to their voices, you can do the same.*

*Editors-in-Chief,  
Isabel Jones & David Watson*

# Introducing the Munk School Black Students Association (MSBSA)

*During the 2019-2020 academic year, two students at the Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy identified an issue: the discourse surrounding racism in Canada, and across the globe, was a limited topic of discussion within the Munk School. As a result of this realization, a seed was planted, and a passionate group of Black students requested funding for the Munk School Black Students Association (MSBSA) student-led initiative, the first of its kind. Amidst the 2020 global uprisings against anti-Black racism, the MSBSA was established.*

*Systemic racism is a deeply entrenched issue and, unfortunately, one to which many individuals in power have chosen to turn a blind eye. It is clear that being silent is no longer acceptable, nor is it appropriate.*

*While this was an important moment for the Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy, the MSBSA team is keenly aware of the tremendous responsibility and weight that will go into facilitating change through their work. For the 2020-2021 academic year, the primary goal of the MSBSA will be to focus on the challenges that Black communities face in today's society. The MSBSA will amplify Black voices by organizing and hosting events that provide insight into what must be done to dismantle the systems that have worked to oppress Black people.*

*Black people represent a vast diaspora of individuals. However, despite our diverse experiences, we are unified in the fact that our heritage and the colour of our skin has been weaponized internationally.*

*An important step forward in tackling anti-Black racism is creating spaces in which important—and in some instances uncomfortable—conversations can be had. We are grateful that Global Conversations is providing us with a platform where we can discuss the intersectional factors associated with Blackness. We are hopeful that our insights will act as a catalyst for change at the Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy, and beyond!*

Jennifer Oduro  
Director of External Affairs  
MSBSA

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# “My” is Not “Our” But It Is Part: Making Space for the Individual to Understand the Collective

BY CLAUDE GALETTE

HOW can someone be an ally? How can non-Black people understand the Black community?

What is the Black community? What is Blackness? These questions don't have singular answers. The Black American and Black Canadian communities are a group of people with a shared history based on slavery and state-sanctioned human trafficking. Black Europeans and Afro-Latinos share a different history, or a different context with poignant similarities. In modern times, this group shares the experience of exploitation, physical and psychological torture, and erasure. That is the shared experience that so tightly glues together the Black Community and the African Diaspora. To begin the processes of understanding the Black experience, this is a fundamental step.

In understanding race, prejudice, and injustice, nuance is often disregarded. In this context, I speak as an Immigrant, Black Caribbean, and Black American. These qualifiers are distinct but not rival. They serve to add context and points of reference. I understand my experience and stay mindful of my own bias by reflecting inward, staying conscious of these lenses. To understand a culture or a people, it is paramount to stay mindful of individual experiences, disavowing the presumption of a representative whole or a standard individual. Giving in to simple heuristics destroys the possibility of true understanding and humanity.

Shared trauma is what binds Black people living in white worlds. Like prisoners, we unite through a collective pain which is impossible to escape. There is a time in our adolescence before we gain a consciousness of race; not to say it did not previously exist or affect our existence, but there is an innocence and a lack of lexicon. Then, there is a day when you are forced to understand your context—it is against your will—and come to an uncomfortable realization. The impact is startling—for me it started as a feeling of hopelessness and depression. I realized that there is no sanctuary for Blackness. I was 17. I returned from a year in Denmark. I was back in my hometown,



where I was the only Black student in my graduating class of 50 in a private, wealthy, Christian, K-12 private school. As I considered where I wanted to exist as an adult, including prospective colleges, I realized there was no place I could go where I would not be abruptly reminded of my skin. There was no place I could think of where I would not be different, overlooked, or erased. Only just returning from a year abroad, I was desperate to leave again.

For those of us in the diaspora who aspire to venture abroad, there comes a host of new considerations. We know the trauma that comes with living in our dysfunctional hell. There is a comfort in the trauma you know, but the possibility and opportunity for peace of mind is tempting. We are all searching for psychological homeo-

stasis, regardless of social distinction; some find it easier than others. The shared experience of traveling for Black people requires researching how racist your destination is and hoping someone else has documented their experience for your benefit. How racist is Shanghai? How racist is Venice? How racist is Rio? How racist is Tokyo? “Single Black woman in Chiang Mai.” “Black couple in Brazil.” “Black girl spat on in Korea.” It means spending hours reading, watching, and listening to strangers whose only similarity to you is the percentage of melanin in their skin recount their varied experiences. The research is an earnest attempt to protect ourselves from encounters that remind us that the world doesn't care for us. Then, if you book the flight, you take a gamble. For those of us who wish to escape the West and live elsewhere, we are choosing the lesser of two evils. Japan is racist, but not like America—it's more tolerable. Europe is racist but... Columbia is racist but... This is part of the shared Black experience.

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*Shared trauma is what binds Black people living in white worlds.*

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The individual Black experience is something totally different. Blackness is not a singularity. It is an irritating fact that it must be repeated that a race of people, continents of people, do not share a single story. It is an irritating fact that I have to explain my human and individualistic experience to prove my humanity to strangers. It is demeaning. When anyone of any race, from any place, thinks of a Black person, the image they conjure is a false singularity, a stereotype. It is strict and rigid. As Black individuals, we have a choice. We can feed ourselves the lie of an image of Blackness we had no part in creating—a lie that has been exported around the world. We can distance ourselves from the image as much as possible, ingest the teachings of respectability politics for protection, and in the process futilely aspire to whiteness. Or we do the painstaking work of dismantling the construct first in ourselves, then in others, that this image is indeed a fallacy that could never encompass or describe the diversity which exists within Blackness. No one is above

this work or choice. It is a process for all of us who have been exposed to the toxic fallacies of race and its derivatives.

To comfort my sister a few months ago, as she struggled with not aligning with the false stereotypes that white and many Black people hold of the correct or normative Black experience, I posed this question: “Is whiteness a monolith? If not, why would you assume Blackness is?” Is there one kind of white person, white experience, white mindset, white agenda, Eurocentric ideal? Why then would anyone assume there is but one Black experience, one Black person? My experience in Blackness is one I only share with my sister. I moved to the United States and had to learn English and I lost part of my cultural identity in the process. I was not raised listening to popular Black American music, or music in English. I did not watch cable TV; we watched documentaries. My family integrated into the Latin community because my mom is pseudo-Columbian, and we were surrounded by Spanish media, food, and culture. My family was never fully Haitian, Latin, or American. I was not raised with an understanding of race or the language for describing it. I did the slow work to understand how I, as a Black Haitian-American Immigrant, exist in the world by myself. I battled internal and external stereotypes. I found comfort in being a token because I knew nothing else, and later made the choice to reject it. I learned my cultural history, my contextual history, and reconciled with past experiences to end up in a physical and mental place of radical acceptance. I am not an outlier but a confirmation of the ignored norm.

There is a collective trauma that Black people in white societies experience. It is near impossible to shield oneself from it. To understand the Black experience, everyone should understand that minority groups are traumatized. All we seek is the fulfillment of the basic human and psychological need for understanding, empathy, space, and the ability to be the individuals we assumed we were as children.



*Claude is a Master of Global Affairs student at the Munk School, with a specialization in Environmental Studies. Claude has worked and lived in Canada, the US, Haiti, Denmark, and South Africa.*

PHOTO SOURCE: CLAUDE GALETTE

# A Black Woman's Plea for Intersectional Feminism

BY JENNIFER ODURO



*Content Warning: Discussion of misogyny and sexual violence in the sections “The Jezebel: The Hyper-Sexualization of Black Female Bodies” and the “The Dangerous Implications of the Hyper-Sexualization of Black Female Bodies.”*

As a Black female, I have often felt excluded from contemporary feminist movements. Although feminism strives to ensure equal rights between genders, it has often failed to acknowledge the ways in which gender interacts with race and ethnicity.

In her 1851 speech titled “Ain’t I a Woman?” Sojourner Truth speaks to her experience as a Black female stating: “That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me

into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain’t I a woman?” Truth’s words juxtapose the experiences of Black women against those of white women. While white women have traditionally been treated as delicate beings, Black women have been brutalized as a result of racial prejudice.

After Truth delivered her “Ain’t I a Woman?” speech, white women sought to silence her as they feared she would divert attention from the women’s suffrage movement to the emancipation of Black people in the Unit-

ed States. This act exemplifies the historical exclusion of Black women from feminist movements.

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## WHITE FEMINISM

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The 2017 Women’s March proved to be another incident in which the concerns of Black women were disregarded. Alicia Garza, co-founder of the Black Lives Matter movement, implored: “Where were all these white people while our people [were] being killed in the streets, jobless, homeless, over-incarcerated, under-educated? Are you committed to freedom for everyone, or just yourself?” Although white women were overwhelmingly visible in the 2017 Women’s March, they were significantly less involved in protests surrounding police brutality, and the murders of innocent Black and Brown bodies. The 2017 Women’s March had the underlying intention of protesting the sexist comments made by Donald Trump, yet it is ironic to note that 53 per cent of white women voted for Donald Trump while 94 per cent of Black women voted for Hillary Clinton. Thus, a poster held by a Black woman during the march which read, “Don’t forget: White Women Voted for Trump” became a widely circulated reminder of the apathy that many white women had for Trump’s threat to marginalized and racialized groups.

Evidently, even within present day feminist movements, Black women are still being left behind. This is also an issue in the employment sector. For example, white women have made strides in obtaining senior level positions in the workplace due to their advocacy for gender diversity. However, many of these women have been less involved in acknowledging the racial pay disparities that exist between Black and white women, and the employment barriers that many women of colour face. Evidence from the Ontario government indicates that “Black women are more likely than white women to be unemployed or underemployed, despite having higher levels of education: 8.8 per cent of Black women with university degrees are unemployed, compared to 5.7 per cent of white women with high school diplomas.”

White feminism promotes the advancement of white middle-class women, and ignores the experiences of Black women and other women of colour. Intersectionality, a concept introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw in her 1989 essay “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrim-

ination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” was constructed to challenge white feminism and demonstrate how intersecting identities can exacerbate social inequality. Crenshaw notes that the oppression of Black women is multifaceted because our oppression comes from both our race and gender.

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## THE JEZEBEL: THE HYPER-SEXUALIZATION OF BLACK FEMALE BODIES

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As a Black female, I am well aware of the harmful stereotypes pertaining to Black females that continue to permeate our society. Black women have been labelled as the ‘Jezebel,’ ‘Sassy Black Woman,’ ‘Angry Black Woman,’ and ‘Strong Black Woman.’ Such perceptions have exacerbated the hardship that comes with being a female who is Black, and have stifled my ability to equally enjoy the privileges provided to white women. While this argument is apparent when analyzing each of the aforementioned stereotypes, I will focus my analysis on the Jezebel stereotype.

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*Evidently, even within present day feminist movements, Black women are still being left behind.*

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According to Eveline Versluys, “the Jezebel stereotype represents [Black] women as promiscuous man-eaters whose sexual appetites are ‘at best inappropriate and, at worst, insatiable.’” It is an extremely alarming stereotype that has been used to dehumanize the Black female body—a modern day issue with traumatic historical roots.

Before the transatlantic slave trade, European colonizers were fascinated by African women wearing minimal clothing—a necessity given the warmer climate—and the tribal dances that African females partook in, which they

PHOTO SOURCE: JENNIFER ODURO

saw as suggestive. For example, despite his anti-slavery stance, James Redpath believed that African females were “gratified by the criminal advances of Saxons.” These perceptions caused many to view African women as lewd beings, and this would later be used to justify the enslavement and rape of African women.

A number of factors associated with the institution of slavery further reinforced this false narrative. When Black women were being auctioned, they were stripped of their clothing, and when they were provided clothing it was often ripped and ragged, which would reveal parts of the body that were typically covered. In contrast, white women had the luxury of being fully clothed, and thus—though it was no fault of their own—Black women were seen as immodest, animalistic, and less sexually pure than their white counterparts.

The media has played a role in perpetuating the depiction of Black women as ‘Jezebels.’ Hollywood films continue to cast Black women as ‘baby mamas’ or ‘promiscuous man eaters.’ Even the former First Lady, Michelle Obama, was referred to as “Obama’s baby mama” in mainstream media. This depiction is rooted in the Jezebel stereotype.

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#### THE DANGEROUS IMPLICATIONS OF THE HYPER-SEXUALIZATION OF BLACK FEMALE BODIES

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In a recent study entitled “Revisiting the Jezebel Stereotype: The Impact of Target Race on Sexual Objectification” researchers found that “Black women are implicitly associated with both animals and objects to a greater degree than white women.” The implication here is that the objectification of Black females increases our risk of assault, and we are also vulnerable to assault that is more aggressive.

The hyper-sexual stereotype suggests that Black women are not desirable, but rather, we are sexually available objects to men. This deeply ingrained belief could help explain why, during my undergraduate studies, I was once told by a male colleague that while he would never marry a Black woman, he would gladly date one, but only briefly.



PHOTO SOURCE: UNSPLASH, GAYATRI MALHOTRA

Furthermore, research shows that the hyper-sexualization of Black women has caused their reports of sexual assault to be either ignored or dismissed. When the assaulter is charged, men convicted for sexually assaulting Black women receive shorter sentences in comparison to men who have sexually assaulted white women. This contributes, in part, to the mistrust Black women have with the current justice system. This system has also caused Black women to underreport sexual assault as they fear the repercussions it will have on Black assaulters and their community as a whole.

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*...I was once told by a male colleague that while he would never marry a Black woman, he would gladly date one, but only briefly.*

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On the other hand, a number of white women have and continue to oppress men of colour with their sexuality. Various situations include white women falsely accusing Black men of rape which has significant social costs for the men who have been accused. This can be seen through the tragedy that occurred in 1921 after a white woman falsely claimed that a Black man had attacked her, causing the successful Black community of Greenwood, Oklahoma to be massacred by white men. This racially motivated act resulted in the murder of nearly 300 Black people, and the elimination of what was then referred to as the ‘Black Wall Street.’ Clearly, “when white women cry rape, our society mobilizes to punish the targets, guilty or not, to protect white women’s virtue,” the same cannot be said for Black women.

This same dynamic was apparent in a more recent case where a white woman, Amy Cooper, attempted to weaponize her privilege by calling the police on an innocent Black man who had confronted her for breaking park rules in New York City. She was later charged with mak-

ing a false report.

This analysis is not intended to dismiss the experiences of survivors of sexual violence, but to emphasize the importance of recognizing how racial stereotypes maintain the inferiority of Black women, and further prove why intersectionality must be at the forefront of strategies to promote equality for all women.

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#### THE WAY FORWARD: BRINGING INTERSECTIONAL FEMINISM TO THE FOREFRONT

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In my opinion, feminism does not serve me or other Black women in the way that is required for our advancement and liberation. In order for all women to be seen, understood, and represented, white feminists must evaluate the ways in which their movement has failed to incorporate intersectionality, and acknowledge the experiences of Black women.



*Jennifer Oduro is a second year Master of Public Policy candidate at the Munk School. Prior to entering the program, she completed an undergraduate degree in Health Studies at York University. She is interested in addressing equity issues that exacerbate social, health, and racial inequalities through her extracurricular engagements and professional work.*

# Black, Queer, and Invisible: It All Started with a Black Trans Woman

BY ADAM LAKE



EVERY June, LGBTQIP2SAA Pride sweeps across the country, prompting many to reflect on the 1969 Stonewall Riots in Manhattan, New York. Although in recent years, Pride has become a celebration of equal rights, the civil unrest following George Floyd's murder has reminded the queer community that Pride began as a protest against police brutality. This has created a much needed conversation about the lack of discussion surrounding the intersection of Black and queer identities in society.

Race, gender, sexual orientation, and class represent multiple forms of marginalization that can lead to oppression. They act as an integrated pull and interweave to form various oppressions. Throughout history, Black LGBTQ+ individuals have tried to promote an understanding of the power and abuse projected onto them due to their ascribed status and how it furthers social inequality. The experiences of Stormé DeLarverie and Marsha P. Johnson are well documented yet continue to be forgotten, and modern-day Black LGBTQ+ individuals like Lady Phyll and Munroe Bergdort actively continue to pave the path to Black queer liberation.

In 2020, the coming together of the Black community and the LGBTQ+ community through anti-Black racism protests, Pride festivals, and social movements is critical to eradicate racial discrimination in the queer community, homophobia in the Black community, and the heteronormativity promoted throughout society. It is about time that the Black LGBTQ+ community experiences visibility and carves out a place for ourselves—within North America, within our local communities, and within our families. Our desires, fears, and dreams should not be tumultuous or precarious, but full of freedom. Black queer futures should no longer include a despairing, unimaginable life, full of unrealized opportunities; the goal in our current heteronormative and patriarchal society should be to end the deadly silence and create an inclusive and accepting environment based on action.

As an African-Canadian LGBTQ+ individual, I believe that it is essential to highlight the social and economic impacts of excluding the intersectional experiences of multiple marginalized individuals. Navigating white, heterosexual spaces while growing up was challenging for me because I was not in supportive or safe environments where my emotional and social needs were nurtured. This was problematic and confusing for me once I became an adult because the progressiveness of the LGBTQ+ community and the support from heterosexual culture meant that “gay became the new Black.”

This dangerous discourse made me realize that we should be inclusive as educators and leaders within communities that have faced and continue to face institutional discrimination and individual prejudice. When it comes to education, culture, and identity, when we stand up and continue to engage in conversation, we can create a critical role in the Black and LGBTQ+ community. Through teamwork and collaboration, we can strengthen the long-term commitment to combating social injustices. I realized that through my need for a sense of community and identity when it came to Blackness and queerness, I had to recognize my intra-group differences within both com-

munities. I learned that although I might not be accepted in Western society for who I am, I could work alongside both communities to eradicate Black queer bodies' criminalization and create a pathway towards equity.

People reveal the ways they interpret their identities and experiences through their stories. Using the narratives of my experience as a queer Black young adult led me to discover the inequities and inequalities rooted within the socially-constructed categories of sexuality and race. I understood the mobility and immobility of Black queer individuals—their stories and experiences were so similar, yet drastically different. Meeting individuals who were a part of my communities revealed to me how patterns of discrimination exist at the individual, systemic, and structural level, and are fundamentally embedded within power.

Learning about the Stonewall Riots, which have turned into a whitewashed memory of liberation for the LGBTQ+ community, showed me how the eradication of queer people of colour is still ongoing. The erasure of Black queerness has always been viewed as a safety mechanism. It has been rooted in gentrification, over-policing in ethnic areas, limitation of Black LGBTQ+ support programs and resources, and economic policies that create stigma and minority stress towards Black queer individuals. Through society labeling and distinguishing human differences, negative stereotypes are created in dominant cultural beliefs that assign an individual like me undesirable characteristics. An ‘us versus them’ mentality has allowed discrimination to co-occur, as I am trapped within a reductive power dynamic.

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*I was too gay to be Black  
and too Black to be gay.*

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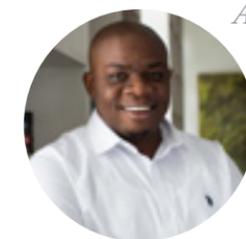
This power dynamic forces me and other Black queer people to face minority stress and negative stigmatization at the individual, systemic, and structural levels. I dealt with internalized transphobia and homophobia, concealment, and sensitivity around rejection. I used my personal experience when it came to my gender identity and sexual orientation to uplift other Black queer indi-

viduals. The goal as a Black queer male, navigating white heterosexual and queer spaces, and combatting negative stereotypes placed upon me, was to end the assumed correlation of Black queerness with risky behaviour, such as bulimia, hypersexualization, and drug and alcohol usage. The silencing of Black queer voices within LGBTQ+ activism and the continued refusal to acknowledge multiple aspects of identity at the intersectional level has allowed for Blackness and queerness to go unacknowledged—if even allowed a place at the table.

Sexuality, race, and masculinity continue to shape the expectations that are placed upon Black, queer individuals. Society has allowed heterosexuality to determine natural forms of sexual behaviors, and the sexual acts that are considered deviant. As a Black queer male, prejudice, discrimination, and stigma created a stressful and hostile social environment, while the intersection of sociocultural factors such as religion and masculinity with my sexuality created unique challenges for me compared to my peers. I was too gay to be Black and too Black to be gay.

We use race and sexual orientation to classify and categorize groups of people based on distinct social stereotypes. The interconnected identities of identifying as Black and queer have become blurred. Westernized culture needs to be accepting and welcoming of all individuals. Becoming an accepting society will encourage safe spaces and limit the amount of violence, harassment, and bullying occurring against marginalized and vulnerable populations. As citizens, we must continuously challenge ourselves. We have to deconstruct notions of homogeneity, heterosexism, and binaries on a global scale. We will continue to be resilient and educate others on our experiences, so that missing colours of the rainbow can finally become included.

And I will continue to tell my story and take up space.



*Adam graduated from York University in 2019 with a Specialized Honours BA in Sociology and Certificate in Anti-Racist Research and Practice (CARRP). He is a Toronto-born community activist and advocate who has decided to use his voice as power when it comes to voicing the various forms of discrimination that intersect.*

PHOTO SOURCE: KENNETH SERGIENKO

# Enforcing Racial Stereotypes: The Media and Black Criminality

BY KUUKU QUAGRINE



FROM protestors to policymakers, students to fearful and anxious Black parents, many are quick to point the finger at the justice system when discussing issues of systemic racism. Indeed, the criminal justice system in America sits at the centre of inequality and anti-Black racism. However, other institutions have similarly contributed to perpetuating inequality.

While it can also be used to educate and inform, the media has projected criminality onto Black communities as a means of racial control. How crime is reported in the news has a direct influence on perceptions of racial identity and criminal activity. Black people are the most depicted race in crime reporting, which encourages audiences to associate criminal activity with Black populations. Crime reporting in the press and media emphasizes the racial and ethnic identities of perpetrators and creates further disparities in the perception of criminal offending by race. This method of race control has succeeded in the background for decades and warrants a more immediate and global response. This conversation is not new. The media's direct role in enforcing the systemic racism prevalent in American culture is well captured in Michelle Alexander's book *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incar-*

*ceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, and is explored more graphically in the Netflix documentary *13th*.

In celebrating 75 years of television broadcasting, Verne Gay described how television and broadcast media were introduced during the period of rising racial segregation in America. These racist ideologies continue to play out in the way the media captures Black people. Early media representation of Black people in films such as *Birth of a Nation* (1915) and the *Tarzan* series showed people of colour in unflattering roles like thieves, rapists, and the devil. The success of such films segregated Black societies and strengthened institutional racism prior to the civil rights era. Media depictions of Black people involved in crime use this same racist rhetoric in reporting. Media coverage tends to emphasize racial identities of perpetrators, often people of colour, by showing images in police quarters accompanied by mugshots. This glimpse of life in Black communities is overproduced in the media and perpetuates unfounded stereotypes of Black folks as "criminal and dangerous."

Statistics from the FBI Criminal Justice Information Services Division recorded that in 2016, 69.6 per cent of

all individuals arrested in the United States were white, 26.9 per cent were Black or African-American, and 3.6 per cent were of other races. White individuals were arrested more often for violent crimes than individuals of any other race and accounted for 59.0 per cent of those arrests. Despite these equally alarming crime rates, recent media observations show that when a white man commits a crime, the act is personalized and often reported as relating to mental illness. However, when a Black man commits a crime it is perceived as a race problem which affects members of the entire racialized group.

Herein lies the problem: white people control mainstream media and choose what images of Blacks to portray. The origin of Blackface, for example, in entertainment media and minstrel shows is a blatant form of racism that remains a sensitive topic for Black people. White people used this opportunity to further discriminate against Black actors by painting themselves in darker complexions to play Black characters on screen. The categorization of Black people as second class and devalued in American culture is directly linked to blackface in the media. Black people were considered inferior and incapable of playing the same roles as white actors. As blackface reached wider audiences, two things became apparent: first, that white people were perceived as superior to Black people and thus received better treatment in society; second, white actors purposefully restricted Black actors' access to influential roles in mainstream media. However, if the topic of discussion was drugs, criminality, violence, or some other demeaning stereotype, Black people were overrepresented in media sources.

The war on drugs also played a huge role in enforcing racial inequality in America through the media. An audio clip from top Nixon aide John Ehrlichman captures the concerted efforts to criminalize Black people through increased drug law enforcement and the media's role in this:

"The Nixon campaign in 1968, and the Nixon White House after that, had two enemies: the antiwar left and [Black] people. We knew we couldn't make it illegal to be either against the war or black, but by getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and blacks with heroin, and then criminalizing both heavily, we could disrupt those communities. We could arrest their leaders, raid their homes, break up their meetings, and vilify them night after night on the evening news. Did we know we

were lying about the drugs? Of course, we did."

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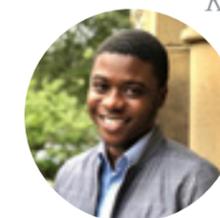
*Herein lies the problem:  
white people control  
mainstream media and  
choose what images of  
Blacks to portray.*

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The focal point here is the concluding statement on the vilification of Black people on the nightly news. Half a century later these attitudes have been amplified, and Black communities remain challenged by their representation in the media. Media outlets are still mainly owned and controlled by white people, but the real challenge here is accurately capturing the story of Black communities outside the grip of the criminal justice system. All Black lives matter, and Black people should be allowed to tell their stories. The media has deprived Black communities of this privilege for too long, and an undoing is necessary.

In pursuit of such an undoing, it is constructive to reflect on the words of Kofi Annan:

"Ignorance and prejudice are the handmaidens of propaganda. Our mission, therefore, is to confront ignorance with knowledge, bigotry with tolerance, and isolation with the outstretched hand of generosity. Racism can, will, and must be defeated."



*Kuuku Quagraine is a graduate student at the Munk School. His research focuses on including the perspective of marginalized communities especially in Sub Saharan Africa, on the global front. His research and work experience is in migration and global development. He is also the President of the Fast Forward Global Initiative (FFGI).*

PHOTO SOURCE: FLICKR, IVAN RADIC

# The Marathon Must Go On: The Importance of Social Justice Movements and Allyship During COVID-19

BY AN-NOÛRA COMPAORÉ



THE protests emerging across the United States denouncing police brutality have catalyzed a worldwide uprising against racial injustice directed toward minority groups, especially people of darker skin complexions. The protests have resulted in numerous riots across many parts of the United States, as well as several impassioned international movements in solidarity with those who call for an end to racial discrimination. In Bristol, England, protesters removed a statue of the infamous 17th century slave trader Edward Colston, rolled it through the streets, and threw it in the harbour. Across the English Channel, the streets of Paris were flooded with people protesting the death of Adama Traoré, a Black French man who died in police custody in 2016. The French marches were also carried out in protest against racism and the disproportionate effects of police violence on minorities. Many assume that the associated street violence and destruction of property is caused by Black and minority activists during

otherwise peaceful marches. However, attention has been called to the role of outside agitators in instigating violence and vandalism during protests and causing overall disruption. The riots stem from decades of neglect, racial injustice, the proliferation of institutional racism, the condoning of race-based violence, and the silencing of minority voices.

A majority of anti-Black racism marches have taken place and continue to take place amidst the realities of the COVID-19 pandemic. Parallels can be drawn between COVID-19 outbreaks and systemic racism. Much like COVID-19, we should assume systemic racism exists even if we cannot see it. Moreover, we need to acknowledge that we may be carriers capable of spreading the disease, whether intentionally or unintentionally. In both cases, we should listen to the experts and the testimonies of the people affected, in order to increase our awareness and assist in the fight to eradicate these

threats. Moreover, we should be willing to acknowledge that both COVID-19 and racism thrive when we ignore their effects and refuse to listen to individuals who are more knowledgeable on the subject than ourselves. To end racism and COVID-19 alike, we must be willing to change the status quo in order to limit their potential to spread and alter certain aspects of our lives to end them permanently.

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*Much like COVID-19, we should assume systemic racism exists even if we cannot see it.*

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Combating racism means acknowledging the countless statistics that highlight instances of racial discrimination, such as the disproportionate incarceration rate of various racial groups. This acknowledgement should also inform future policy decisions and implementation measures, especially those that directly impact the health and socioeconomic status of minority groups. Developing policies to dismantle racist institutions and environments is certainly a critical step; it is perhaps more important to enforce strict standards for government accountability. The simplest way this can be done is by voting. The same energy and emphasis that has characterized these recent marches should also be present in our electoral system when voting for mayors, council members, and local and federal representatives. When elected officials are not keeping their promises, that same energy and strength should be used to call them, write to them, show up at their offices, and hold them accountable to their constituents. Through this, we can end the belief that racist institutions, racial injustice, civil rights, and equal treatment of races and minorities can be an afterthought.

I acknowledge that there are many individuals that are not directly affected by racism, but wish to participate in ending racism. In such politically and socially tense climates, these individuals may want to engage in allyship, but may not know how to begin. This information gap renders many potential allies silent on the issue of racial

injustice. Silence can be interpreted by many as approval of or complacency in racism and racist institutions. Those in this position should start with anything but silence. Share your feelings and opinions, be willing to listen to others, and accept corrections or constructive criticism, as learning is the best way to grow and become a true ally.

Furthermore, a true ally listens to the voices of the Black and other minority communities, and the changes they are fighting for. If you decide to donate to activist groups, any amount is more than welcome and deeply appreciated. From my experience working for a non-profit, I know that movements have greater longevity when they receive recurring donations. Due to the nature of current events, communities and donors may forget to donate to social activist groups once the topic becomes eclipsed by another issue. Thus, many activist groups are asking for monthly donations in order to help sustain their operations on a long-term basis.

Lastly, do not forget to check in on your Black and other racialized friends. These troubling times can be detrimental to their mental, emotional, and physical health. Checking in on them and acknowledging the difficulties of these times can help alleviate the weight that they may be feeling. However, be careful not to further burden them when reaching out. Avoid encumbering them with personal emotions, guilt, and unwanted or insensitive opinions. Be cautious to not pressure them into sharing, explaining, or educating unless they are willing to do so. If someone decides to be actively engaged as an ally, they must not take over the movement or impose their own views upon it. An effective ally to the cause of racial justice must heed the words of the Black and minority groups who are already putting in the work.



*An-Noûra is currently pursuing her Master of Public Policy degree at the Munk School and is the MPP co-president of the MSBSA. She has a bachelor's degree in economics from the University of British Columbia. She is passionate about changes and movements focused on long-term development, women's equality, and the self-sufficiency of developing nations.*

PHOTO SOURCE: UNSPLASH, CHRIS HENRY

# Battling My Identity: My Continuous Evolution as an African Black Female

BY RUVIMBO CHIDZIVA



As an African Black female, I am challenged with understanding my identity and forming a narrative of my personal experiences with racism and discrimination in the different contexts I have lived in. Without this introspection, it is easy for my identity to be defined by social media, the news, my peers, my university, and my future place of employment. I want to be able to define myself.

My narrative is not just comprised of the negative—it is entangled with positive experiences of being Black and being associated with a community which is forced to be resilient, hardworking, and brave. Even outside the Black community, the colour of our skin historically comes attached with different connotations. As we work to define and understand our own identities, society is consistently defining, labelling, and shaping them too. There is a sudden ‘wokeness’ to anti-Black racism and systemic discrimination which on the one hand is an important conversation to continuously have, but conversely brings with it generalizations of the Black experience.

It is easier for people to get behind a cause and fight for it if the message is clear and simple—anti-Black racism is an issue, Black people face systemic discrimination; unfortunately, there is little attention paid to the nuances of being Black and the fact that it is not a homogenous identity or experience.

Erik Erikson, an award-winning developmental psychologist, defined identity as a “conscious sense of [self] [...] an unconscious striving for a continuity of personal character, [...] a maintenance of an inner solidarity with a

group’s ideals,” and more broadly, as the “inner synthesis of self-concept with social and cultural location.” I am a Zimbabwean Black female, born and raised in Harare, Zimbabwe until I was eighteen years old. I lived in Nottingham, England and Paris, France while pursuing my undergraduate degree; I have travelled extensively throughout the world and I now live in Toronto, Canada as a graduate student.

I am a person with myriad experiences gathered through the different contexts in which I have found myself. But living in these different places has tainted what Erikson calls my inner solidarity and my understanding of which group I belong to. When one looks at me now, I am a Black female in Toronto and therefore I must have the same narrative as other Black females in North America—I must fit and identify with this group. Up until I was eighteen, I had a constant sense of self—this has now been systematically challenged by a young adult life of living in countries with Black minority communities.

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Being raised and living in a Black majority country most of my life, I will never understand being so acutely aware of my race at a young age and the psychological trauma which ensues from being in the minority, unable to participate in society on an equal basis because of the colour



of my skin. In Zimbabwe, everyone around me looked like me—the doctors were Black, the teachers were Black, the lawyers, the politicians, the musicians were Black. I had ample role models and never felt I could not achieve something because of the way I looked.

Zimbabwe, however, has a colonial past which still heavily shapes the identities of the Black population in my country—even forty years after independence. The trauma of discrimination and racism imposed by a white ruling minority is acutely different from experiences of slavery and discrimination in North America. Although I was born into an independent Zimbabwe, the remnants of colonization persisted. The all-girls secondary school I attended in Harare had a long history of admitting mostly white students, but by the time I started my education there in 2005 most of the students were Black. The leadership of the school was, however, predominantly white, something that was apparent in regulations at the school which did not take into consideration its Black students.

For example, although the dominant languages in Zimbabwe are Shona, Ndebele, and English, in Harare most of the Black population speaks Shona. At thirteen years old I was told that my school was an English-speaking school and that Shona was banned on the premises even during break time. When we spoke Shona, we were seen

as being rebellious and ‘breaking the rules.’ I remember my friends and I questioning this amongst ourselves, but ultimately accepting that those were the rules of the institution. Although I still formed a positive Black female image and identity from being surrounded by wonderful Black girls and women, I already began to think my mother tongue was inferior.

For as long as I can remember, I have had a ‘British-like’ accent. I was teased about it in high school, as a “white girl trapped in a Black girl’s body”—although I was a Black Zimbabwean living in Zimbabwe, I did not sound Black enough. When I moved to Nottingham, I was immediately mistaken for a second-generation immigrant. Because of how I spoke, when I was asked where I was from and answered Zimbabwe, I was always met with a “Yes, but where in London are you from?” I was repeatedly questioned as to why I did not sound like I was ‘fresh off the boat.’

This line of questioning has followed me for the past decade: somehow those I interact with seem to need to understand and make sense of why I speak the way I do. In Nottingham and Paris, the people around me, including my circle of friends, became increasingly white and less Black. When you move to a new city and attend predominantly white academic institutions you are told of ‘safe’ neighbourhoods to live in, which are coincidentally

PHOTO SOURCE: FLICKR, STEVE CONOVER

PHOTO SOURCE: RUVIMBO CHIDZIVA



majority white. During my undergraduate years I never questioned this. I figured this is how it was out here in the ‘First World’—what did I know?

But increasingly I came to realize that those who looked like me were often pushed to the fringes of society, that the lack of people who looked like me did not stem from their non-existence but rather their lack of opportunity. I struggled to find people who looked like me and shared my experiences within those institutions. The unravelling of my identity began, and so did the categorizations of my Black femininity and associated identity. I was oblivious to this process as I pursued my undergraduate degree.

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*The unravelling of my identity began, and so did the categorizations of my Black femininity and associated identity.*

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But moving to Toronto last fall has reinforced this dynamic, as I am yet again facing the intersectionality of being an African Black female in a Black minority country. In addition to this, after George Floyd’s brutal murder

the society around me become acutely aware of the fact that I am a Black female and therefore I must be experiencing my Blackness in a certain way. I am challenged to define my identity every day as the media, my university, my peers, and my employer have also taken it upon themselves to define me.

The experiences I have shared of my battle to understand myself are just a snapshot of many years of unanswered questions. As one Cameroonian living in the United States so eloquently stated: “I never signed up for this colour. Where I come from, it means little. Now, in America, it fills me with questions and a host of new terms, sending me down YouTube rabbit holes: gentrification, racial prejudice, broken windows theory, Black Lives Matter.”

Discovering my place and identity in Toronto feels much like that. Where do I fit in? Which community is my own, which community will fully embrace me? How does society view me, but most importantly, how do I view myself?



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*Ruvimbo is the MGA co-President of the MSBSA and Director of Internal Affairs of the Master of Global Affairs Students Association.*

PHOTO SOURCE: RUVIMBO CHIDZIVA

# Where I’m From

BY RUVIMBO CHIDZIVA

Where I’m from is warm—  
the weather is perfect,  
the trees can grow unpolluted by the air  
which makes some countries first world  
while mine is in the third.

Where I’m from is diverse—  
in culture, people, language.  
The benefit of colonization  
is that my thirteen-year-old sister converses  
in English and learns her mother tongue  
as a second tongue.

Where I’m from is rich—  
rich in minerals, fertile land, and livestock,  
rich in potholes and inflated government official’s egos,  
rich in wealth for 10 per cent of the population  
while 90 per cent are formally ‘unemployed.’  
Rich in corruption, rich in diamonds, rich in education—  
home to the world’s most literate people—  
literate, but silenced; with guns, intimidation, starvation.

Where I’m from is free—  
free from our former masters,  
now our own masters, new slaves—  
slaves to our brothers  
who instead of loosening our shackles  
tie them tighter. Still tighter. Still tighter.

Where I’m from has suffered pain—  
the pain of war, discrimination, segregation—  
the pain of not being able to alleviate your pain  
due to the lack of democracy, bread, fuel, electricity.  
The lack of hope, prosperity, water... water.

Where I am now is confusing—  
the people are polite, there is electricity, and water,  
the roads are untarnished, the language is familiar,  
it is the first world;  
there is democracy, rights, opportunities, prosperity—  
unless you look like me.

Where I am now celebrates me—  
as an anomaly, as an inspiration, as a minority,  
they question why I speak so well,  
as if their ancestors didn’t mandate it;  
they are now aware of my struggle and my difficulties,  
they stand in solidarity... but for how long?

Where I am now seeks to correct my experience—  
without taking the time to understand  
what my perspective is...  
Seeking to alleviate their guilt by having me  
educate them on anti-Black racism and systemic  
discrimination,  
as if they do not realize they benefit from it.

Where I’m from is my home—  
it has potential beyond its limitations,  
hope beyond helplessness,  
wealth beyond poverty;  
where I am from is me.

Where I am now is also me—  
it has opportunity, hope, and freedom,  
the freedom to speak, to disagree and to build,  
to shape, to change, and to thrive.

BUT where I will be... remains to be seen.



PHOTO SOURCE: CREATIVE COMMONS, UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO



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