

# RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

## Hashtag Activism and Why #BlackLivesMatter In (and To) the Classroom

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PROTEST MARCH IN RESPONSE TO THE SHOOTING OF PHILANDO CASTILE, ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA ON JULY 7, 2016  
(IMAGE: FIBONACCI BLUE)

In the wake of the murder of Trayvon Martin and the acquittal of George Zimmerman, the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter was started by Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors and Opal Tometi.<sup>1</sup> The case led to multiracial protests across the country and Twitter became a way of organizing and discussing these experiences. The subsequent media attention to the murders of unarmed black and brown people encouraged further protest using not only the streets, classrooms, and campuses, but also social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Tumbler, Snapchat, YouTube). Of these, Twitter is the world's largest microblogging service and gained singular political importance among Black audiences (Freeson, et al. 2016). Albeit limited to 140 written characters and 6 seconds of video, people across the world nonetheless engaged in hashtag activism and developed a rich discourse bridging social, economic, and political boundaries. Since the popularization of #blacklivesmatter, other hashtags have also emerged to challenge prevailing narratives denigrating Blacks and Latinos, cisgender people of color, transgender and gender nonconforming victims. Hashtags like #Ferguson, #SayHerName, #DangerousBlackKids, #StayMadAbby, #NotMyAbuela, #Ferguson, and #BringBackOurGirls provide evidence of how dialogue occurs almost instantaneously across place and space. More than just symbols and letters, #blacklivesmatter, other hashtags, and the social movement that followed fostered a new global space for conversations about race and the meaning of social justice in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Protests that rely on social media are not limited to those demanding racial justice. Instead, Twitter is also a resource for conservative communities. Perhaps now more than ever before, civil society finds its greatest expression online. It has changed the conversation on race following the election of Barack Obama in 2008. While many celebrated the election of the first Black President, others claimed to be "average" citizens and banded together in order to "take back" their country. Now in 2016, these conservative communities use Twitter hashtags to foster political support for groups like the alternative right and #MakeAmericaGreatAgain. Founded in 2006, Twitter proved to be the perfect outlet for these "average" citizens to express themselves. They have amplified the coded (ostensibly "colorblind") language characterizing the post-Civil Rights Era discourse on race in order to criticize the investigation of voter suppression and police violence (Bonilla-Silva 2013). In this way, these communities seek to protect the status quo and justify police actions. The targets of violence may still be people of color, but the weapons have moved beyond the physical to include virtual and discursive spaces.

"Hashtag activism" amplifies voices that are often ignored by media, but terms like "slacktivism," "hashtivism," and "clicktivism" attest to debate about its legitimacy as a social movement.<sup>2</sup> Some argue Twitter does not necessarily promote political engagement with established institutions. This debate may be a product of how Americans understand social movements. In contrast, European scholars consider new social movements "less as organizations of common interest and more as new forms of *collective identity* engaged in *discursive struggles* that

not only transform people's self-understandings but also contest the legitimacy of received cultural codes and points of view" (Carroll and Hackett 2006, 87). A critical part of this discursive struggle involves social media, which creates a virtual space to challenge, reframe, and reinscribe representations of who is victimized. Communities like Black Lives Matter (BLM) challenge the legitimacy of an ostensibly "colorblind" judicial system. These communities also redefine social justice and give voice to those who identify as LGBTQ and/or are gender nonconforming and those who have been historically marginalized in traditional civil rights movements.

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More than building awareness around specific social issues or even fostering public discussions on race and social justice, #blacklivesmatter has been used to facilitate the organization and planning of protests against racial profiling and police brutality in the United States and to build solidarities in different parts of the world. Youth have asserted the power of their physical voice by using "the politics of interruption." For example, protesters have literally grabbed the microphone from scheduled speakers in order to challenge apathetic college administrators, unresponsive politicians, and law enforcement (Sanders 2015; Gutierrez, 2015). In the contemporary moment, young people have the ability to seize upon a globally-connected voice that is more participatory and unmediated by traditional institutions. Organizationally, this unrefereed access to one another distinguishes the youth of today from their Civil Rights era predecessors who relied on public spaces, newspapers, and television to transmit their practice of non-violent civil disobedience and disruption of commerce to a global audience. People use social media to "write back" to a situation. This expanded protest arsenal includes images as "voice." Twitter users challenge the way mainstream media stages images. They express solidarity by posting selfies of themselves wearing hoodies to indicate they could be Trayvon. Bonilla and Rosa argue, "Whereas, in face-to-face interactions, racialized young people...might not be able to contest the meanings ascribed to their bodies (or impede the deadly violence exerted on them by the police), through their creative reinterpretations on social media, they are able to rematerialize their bodies in alternative ways...[They assert]...the fundamental value and particularity of their embodiment both on- and off-line" (Bonilla and Rosa 2015, 9). Through both text and image, users constitute themselves as political actors.

Inspired by these social media grassroots movements and their innovative praxis, radical teachers have adapted their teaching to help students participate self-consciously in these communities. They have created syllabi and edited volumes that historicize and contextualize phenomena

surrounding specific events, such as the Charleston Massacre in 2014 (Williams, Williams, Blain 2016). Others draw from a longer tradition that recognizes the critical role of discussion in learning. Some have incorporated Twitter into their classrooms by calling on students to post reactions on discussion topics. Others have used quantitative analysis to study hashtags as a new form of political engagement (Freelon, McIlwain, and Clark 2016; Denby 2016). While many academics have developed their own social media following, with colleagues highlighting trending topics, offering social commentary and/or crowd-sourcing information, the use of social media in the classroom links students to broader communities engaged in discussions of current events.<sup>3</sup> The incorporation of #blacklivesmatter and other similar hashtags into the classroom also reveals a dialectic that is a memorial space and a roll call of martyred bodies with an affirmation of multiple lives and an increasingly diverse black body politic.

Like their political antecedents, #blacklivesmatter and the hashtags (and photos) that followed point to the brutality wreaked upon black/brown bodies and the continuation of institutionalized racism, which fosters a unique opportunity for radical teachers and students to use testimony in order to move beyond the classroom to the streets in order to participate in the creation of knowledge. According to Professor Jeffrey Stewart, "Black Lives Matter has shifted the focus of Black Studies Programs, from focusing on the positive contributions to integrating the real problems of black people into what has been historically an empowerment narrative."<sup>4</sup> Undergraduate students too often come to the classroom without a basic knowledge of African American history. For example, while they are familiar with figures like Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rosa Parks, the narratives they know suppress the strategies, sacrifices, and dangers political activists face in the struggle to accomplish a political end. A radical tradition uses social media to integrate education and the student into a contemporary movement, moving students from a lack of racial consciousness to self-efficacy, e.g., a belief in their ability to influence the events that affect their lives (Bandura 2010).

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As students develop awareness of issues involving racial injustice, racial violence, economic injustice, and police brutality, teachers who choose to use their classrooms as spaces for teaching about social justice increasingly find themselves under scrutiny and attack. For example, in New Jersey, an elementary school teacher was fired for "letting students write get well cards to imprisoned journalist and former Black Panther Mumia Abu-Jamal"

(Holloway 2015). At the same time, social media allows us to know about these cases in ways that afford teachers some modicum of support from a community that is broader than their own institution. For instance, when a law professor received a complaint for wearing a BLM t-shirt on campus, her response to the aggrieved student generated attention from the academic world as well as social media (Jasick 2016). Fear of negative teaching evaluations and critiques from colleagues have also served to stifle classroom conversations about race, gender, and sexuality. This political context bolsters Twitter's ability to serve several purposes. It meets radical teachers' practical interest in teaching about a new civil rights movement and its praxis, while simultaneously protecting their jobs. It also allows radical teachers, like Zelli Imani, to become participants in #blacklivesmatter by drawing on the "power of the story" in order to "make Twitter matter" (*New York Times*, 11 August 2015).

This paper now turns to a discussion of other forms of activism that are more closely aligned with the labor of teaching. In particular, we consider two emerging trends in teaching: using social media to historicize the "new" civil rights movement and emphasizing discussion and testimony as a new praxis.

## Historicizing the "New" Civil Rights Movement

Some say BLM is "Not Your Momma's Movement" (Crowder 2015; Stockman 2015). Others believe the resurrection of what many refer to as the "New Civil Rights Movement of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century" began with #BlackLivesMatter on Twitter. The emblematic debate echoes the dialogue between historians who see the Civil Rights Movement as a phenomenon of the 1950s and 1960s and those who emphasize its historical antecedents, e.g., "the long Civil Rights Movement" (Hall 2005). The significance of differences, and the relative utility of comparison, is a common concern in historiography. On the one hand, every new historical moment undoubtedly has new features that limit its comparison to earlier ones. On the other hand, the current moment only gains meaning in and through its relationship with a historical legacy. The struggle continues and, as Crowder ultimately suggests, there is always historical continuity. In this way, the debate about current police brutality can be seen as temporally specific and limited to a "few bad apples" who lack appropriate training or, alternately, as part of a much longer historical pattern of racial domination and injustice. The fact that the connection between past and present was a crucial one in #blacklivesmatter is evidenced by the single most tweeted split image of confrontation between police and protestors: a picture from the 1960s is on the left and one from Ferguson in 2014 is on the right (Freelon, McIlwain, and Clark 2016). Clearly, #blacklivesmatter has been a reality for at least 150 years.

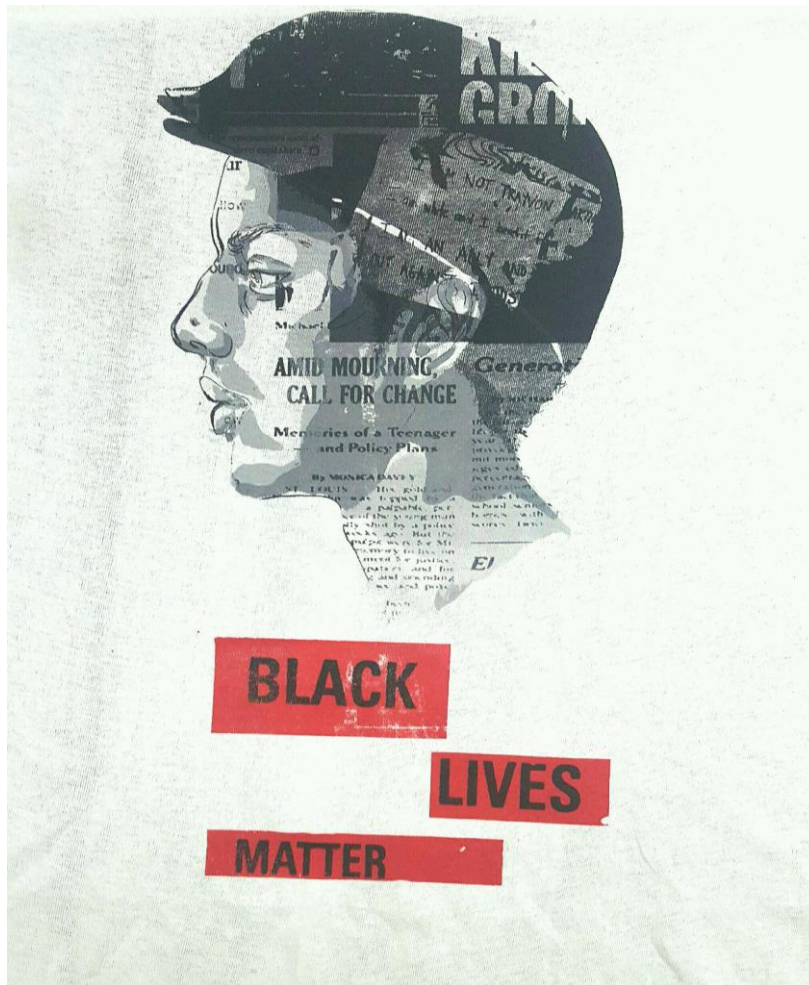
Understanding the relationship of past and present is a challenge for Americans, who are often accused of lacking historical memory. This historical amnesia is only compounded for Millennials who have been influenced by

"post-racial" discourse that insists racism is "a thing of the past" and who fail to connect current race-based social justice movements with their historical antecedents. They were raised on a K-12 curriculum that focused on multiculturalism and an empowerment narrative, e.g. "we shall overcome," rather than the sacrifices, struggles, and failures of the traditional civil rights movement. One example of this is the narrative of Trayvon Martin. In as much as George Zimmerman felt he had the right to kill an unarmed black teenager, so too did lynch mobs believe that they had the right to take the law into their own hands. Black newspapers and intellectuals, like journalist and antilynching activist Ida B. Wells, produced a counternarrative to these acts of violence by arguing that lynching was a manifestation of the desire of white men to retain supremacy rather than in response to black criminality or for the protection of white womanhood. Similarly, social media offers an opportunity to provide information immediately and present an immediate pushback against negative characterizations put forth by law enforcement officials. By drawing upon students' familiarity with social media forums, instructors can use their [students'] tools to facilitate conversations, encourage students to engage more critically with the material, and bridge the knowledge gap.

One example of how instructors can do this is by thinking about social media as a new type of archive that has memorialized an ever-growing list of names of unarmed young black men and women, who were murdered simply because they were perceived to be a threat by an armed, adult white male. The deaths of Trayvon Martin, Sandra Bland, Eric Garner, Oscar Grant, Freddie Gray, and Renisha McBride are just a few of the most high-profile cases. These young black men and women have joined a roll call of African American martyred bodies, well known and unknown, a list that historically includes Emmett Till, James Cheney, Medgar Evers as well as Martin Luther King, Jr., and countless others whom we will never know but who weigh upon our collective racial consciousness and shape our understanding of what it means to be a person of African descent in the United States.

Through social media we readily have access to a rich variety of representations of victims and sometimes perpetrators created by themselves. Virtual communities as well as traditional media have access to the various Facebook pages of victims and members of their families. Presenting the images of a murdered Emmett Till in black media of that time in dialogue with the contrasting photos of Trayvon Martin wearing a hooded sweatshirt and those of him riding a horse and looking like the teenager he was offers a new opportunity for a discussion of the historical representations of young black men as dangerous. The murders of young black men such as Jordan Davis (whose

killer was eventually re-tried and sentenced to "life in prison without the possibility of parole" Pantazi 2014) and the general failures of the judicial system to secure convictions inspired users to post photographs of black boys using the hashtag #DangerousBlackKids (Jeltson 2014), which demonstrated a tragic reality: black children, infants and toddlers included, are disciplined more frequently and with greater severity than other



"BLACK LIVES MATTER," SONIA DE NICOLO, 2015

racial/ethnic groups. By juxtaposing the images and placing them in personal, familial, and domestic contexts, social media becomes more than just a site for conversation. For students and teachers, seeing a young black man or woman in their graduation cap and gown can be a particularly resonant representation of what has been lost. Social media (and #blacklivesmatter) become a place for analysis where students can not only engage a broader political community, but also see contemporary moments as part of larger historical debates.

In many ways, social media is the newest manifestation of a longer tradition of bearing witness that has been a crucial part of the struggle for racial justice. When Sojourner Truth asked her famous question "Ain't I A Woman?" she challenged her mostly-white abolitionist audience to see her as a mother and a woman as well as a political activist, more than just a former slave whose life was worth only the value that her labor produced, and

therefore, as equal to those who heard her testimony. From slave narratives like Frederick Douglass's and political statements by black abolitionists like Maria Stewart in the antebellum era, through Mamie Till's public display of the body of her murdered 15-year-old son, Emmett, to the broadcasting of videotapes of police brutality in the contemporary moment, testimonies in pursuit of civil rights have relied on writing, public discussion, and technology (for their distribution). In the African American historical tradition, truth telling serves multiple purposes to highlight and demonstrate the humanity of the speaker and to bear witness to the cruelty of disparities of status. In the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the Civil Rights movement used these images, such as those of Freedom Riders brutalized as they challenged segregated waiting rooms in bus stations and fire hoses and police dogs attacking peaceful protesters, in order to shock the nation out of its complacency and give a new understanding of the injustices experienced by African Americans.

In my (Prudence Cumberbatch's) Brooklyn College course entitled "#sayhername: African American Women's History," students were asked to consider how the idea of "sayhername" has historical antecedents, in which generations of black women struggled not only for freedom and equality for the race but also to create space for black women's voices. The texts ranged from classics like Darlene Clark Hine's "Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West" and Evelyn Higginbotham's "African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race," to recent books such as TalithaLeFlouria's *Chained in Silence: Black Women and Convict Labor in the New South* and articles including Brittany Cooper's "A'n't I A Lady?: On Race Women, Michelle Obama, and the Ever-Expanding Democratic Imagination." The course was designed to deepen students' knowledge of these critical interventions by generations of black women while at the same time sharpening their knowledge of the theoretical frames through which to study and advance that intervention. The underlying goal was to give students a framework to understand our current complex social environment through the lens of intersectionality, cultural studies, and the politics of interruption while at the same time learning the individual and social challenges black women face in the age of mass incarceration. By linking the call to "sayhername" to its historical antecedents, students could study the generations of African American women who worked to rewrite the Black American narrative to construct independent identities as "race women," and thereby claim a position they had as "race leaders." By linking the past to the present, and seeing both through new theoretical frames, my students had the opportunity to understand their role in positioning African American women as change agents.

As we covered both the contemporary moment and historical topics found traditionally in an African American Women's history course, it was clear that students were familiar with the political uses of social media and were quite comfortable in analyzing its messages. Sitting in a seminar room filled with laptops covered by stickers with political slogans including BLM, I was immediately made aware that my students were both aware of the current

political situation and, indeed, considered themselves political actors. However, surprisingly, many had never heard of the black clubwomen's movement or Shirley Chisholm or were even aware of the women behind the hashtag Black Lives Matter. In their facilitation of classroom discussions, students were encouraged to and did use a vast array of materials, from movie clips and YouTube to Blogs, Instagram, and Twitter posts to engage both the historical and the contemporary to bridge their knowledge gap. These students proved adept at reconceptualizing historical moments, analyzing images of black women within the context of a longer trajectory, and making connections between the historical and contemporary. For many, the course was revealing – not only in terms of how little they had learned about black women's activism prior to this seminar but about the possibilities of recentering black women in the larger narrative of African American history. For instance, in bringing together the past and the present, one student wrote:

*Under slavery, the robust health of the black female body increased the white man's profit. In the antebellum period, the attractiveness of the black female body also must have increased the chances of being raped; there is evidence for this in Solomon Northup's *Twelve Years a Slave* and Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. While it indicates a monumental shift in the state of civil rights in the United States, the white gaze of much of the media treats Obama when she is speaking from a podium in much the same way that the white gaze of the slave owner treated the slave on the auction block. The United States is struggling to navigate how to treat the African American woman who is the most powerful female representative of the nation when that same nation was built on the lack of power held by the African American woman. (Dummett 2016)*

By the end of the semester, for my students, #SayHerName had taken on a new meaning. This was evident, not only in their essays, but more so in their reading responses. It was here that they consciously admitted both their lack of knowledge but also the ways in which the course readings changed their perspectives on the place of black women in history. Their engagement in social media filtered through their insights as they made links between the past and the present. For example, our prior discussions of black feminism as it manifested in various generations informed our casual conversation at the beginning of class about Beyoncé's film *Lemonade* and they offered their own readings of the film as well as responses to commentaries they read on Twitter, Facebook, and blogs. By bringing social media into the classroom, students were made to feel the relevance of history while it also encouraged them to be politically honest. Instructors, who either actively use social media in their classes or follow the conversations in these forums, are afforded the opportunity to facilitate discussions that encourage pedagogical risks while also bridging a cultural

and political wall that often separates those in front of the classroom from their students.

## Testimony and Discussion as a New Praxis

While my students view social media as “raw,” meaning unfiltered discussions, those with access to Twitter and Facebook viewed the former as faster and more accessible as opposed to the latter, which they considered to be more of a closed community. Some asserted it was difficult to “get personal” on Twitter; therefore it was easier to express their opinions and engage in this new form of online activism. One student expressed an appreciation for the incorporation of social media in the classroom because it provided a way to broach difficult topics and have uncomfortable conversations while simultaneously raising issues that students wanted to learn more about. Others appreciated how Twitter could be used to bring a larger community to the classroom and to their college experience.

In a very practical sense, Twitter use has had a significant effect on engaging students in discussions that go beyond the classroom, which in turn has been linked to improved grades (Junco et al. 2010; Prestridge 2014). The role of grades and assessment raises the seemingly mundane conundrum of the instructor’s role in the course. On the one hand, the instructor clearly has a central role in building active and participatory discussions vis-à-vis social media. On the other hand, the instructor ultimately retains their authority to establish learning outcomes and evaluate each student’s performance according to their own guidelines. In this relatively traditional scenario, the instructor’s authority necessarily competes with that of the student, who is central in the process of creating knowledge about how race matters. After all, it’s the power of the student’s story that is at issue. “Teaching” #blacklivesmatter therefore encourages radical teachers to consider a fundamental paradigm shift in which they should think beyond their role as an authoritative figure who holds knowledge as if it were property. Instead, #blacklivesmatter encourages radical teachers to see themselves as co-participants in the construction of knowledge. In this analysis, radical teachers are responsible for coordinating learning and assessment in innovative ways.

Studies indicate that students may not appreciate the importance of their Twitter discussions, particularly insofar as they make them participants in the creation of knowledge (Manca et al. 2014). This importance may be further diminished when learning is assessed in ways that are determined solely by the instructor. Instead, the radical potential of using Twitter in classes is that it offers radical instructors an opportunity to contribute towards students’ sense of self-efficacy. More specifically, students can influence their lives in very immediate ways when they not only bear witness to their experience vis-à-vis twitter, but also when their peers recognize their shared role in creating collective knowledge and when instructors concede their role in shaping the process of evaluation. For

instance, the frequency and/or nature of responses to tweets is indicative of a student’s engagement with a discussion and shifts in their awareness relative a particular issue. The very immediate affirmation of students’ collective contribution is a profoundly political act. Recognizing and validating students’ voices is particularly powerful in cases where students are youth of color who have been assumed to fall on the “wrong” side of the digital divide.

While lack of access to a tablet, desktop, or laptop computer has rendered African-American youth at a disadvantage relative to their White peers, the smartphone has somewhat mitigated access to the internet. A recent study found that 92% of teens report going online daily and 85% of Black teens have access to a smartphone (Lenhart 2015). Studies also found that while ownership of desktop and laptop computers has changed little in the past ten years, cellphone ownership and use is near saturation for most groups (including Blacks) and has shifted the communication and information landscape for youth (ibid; Anderson 2015). A 2013 study found there were no significant racial differences in the extent to which youth accessed the web. This access has contributed to the development of an online black culture that is often referred to as “Black Twitter,” which speaks to the high frequency of tweets that relate to race and that trend on Twitter. André Brock considers Black Twitter a community of users that is both social and cultural, and that transgresses “popular conceptions of Black capitulation to the digital divide” (2012, 546). In summary, the use of Twitter enables radical teachers to meet their students “where they’re at.”

### ***Under the umbrella of BLM, integrating social media into the curricula can facilitate integration of social justice into the classroom in a holistic way.***

Under the umbrella of BLM, integrating social media into the curricula can facilitate integration of social justice into the classroom in a holistic way. With the space to share their ideas both within and outside of the classroom, students can engage both the historical and the contemporary in a way that is useful and encourages critical thinking. Recognizing that the majority of tweets relate to current events, one exercise we use to teach about the changing meanings of race is for each to inventory 25 tweets related to #blacklivesmatter (or other hashtags related to race) at a specific day each month during a semester (Anderson and Hitlin 2016). Students write a 3- to 5-page summary of tweets related to race once a month over the course of a semester. Their final comparative analyses invariably reveal that how we are thinking about race, what we magnify and focus on, are specific to a time and a context. This becomes important evidence of how the meaning of race not only changes over time, but also is informed in very direct ways by students’ actions (through dialogue). They also work with their sample of tweets during the semester as data to discuss

political influence and refine their awareness of how social issues are not simple matters of right and wrong. By the third month in the semester, students use their analysis to discover how competing frames are developed and used by groups in order to advance a specific interpretation of events.

A final exercise that contributes to the goal of social justice begins with their first snapshot analysis at the beginning of the semester, where we encourage students' conscious awareness of their own relationship to a broader collectivity. We believe this exercise is not only about building solidarity with users advocating social justice, but also giving students the opportunity to reflect meaningfully on how they participate online. First we introduce C. Wright Mills's concept of the "sociological imagination" that insists on recognizing how personal troubles are tied to public issues and vice versa. We ask students two questions about the 25 tweets they choose to analyze: First, how are your experiences or opinions reflected (or not) in your sample? Second, how does social structure produce or impede the desired outcomes identified in your set of tweets?

We believe "teaching" #blacklivesmatter involves being explicit about our political goals, which are:

1. Fostering the education of youth on matters of social justice,
2. Disrupting the authoritative voice of schools and universities, e.g., traditional bastions of privilege and authority,
3. Appropriating institutional authority in order to lend legitimacy and give voice to the experiences of actual and potential victims of police brutality and state control,
4. Encouraging new, porous, and democratic forms of activism beyond and/or in collaboration with established organizations (Dewey 2014), and
5. Bearing witness and collecting testimony in a public form that challenges injustice and that demands social change.

These goals are particularly important to the political ideal of democratic participation in civil society. Freelon, McIlwain, and Clark's 2016 study of Twitter conversation on keywords related to BLM found only a small minority of tweets were original. They also found that youths' discussion of police brutality on Twitter differed from that of activists. These insights underscore the fundamental importance of democratizing #blacklivesmatter by encouraging the participation of users in forms that affirm unique contributions from youth and from students. Some users claim Twitter is all they have to build solidarity around threatening experiences. Radical teachers should celebrate the power of their students' stories and encourage their voices.

## Conclusion

In 2013, President Obama, who had been constrained with regards to making comments about race and racial bias, made the following statement: "Trayvon Martin could have been me 35 years ago" (Cohen, 2013). His words attested to the political influence of personal testimony, particularly when used to identify with victims of police brutality. By portraying himself as a potential victim, his well-circulated comment resonated with many people of color and "escalated a nationwide debate on the [Zimmerman] verdict that has prompted protests, including some that turned violent" (Cohen, 2013). His comments also attest to how the politics of race are reliant on personal testimony and the power of the personal story. The voices that speak through Black Twitter undoubtedly challenge mainstream media portrayals of a "post-racial" America and "colorblind" justice.

This paper indicated the ways both testimony and images give voice to diverse experiences of how #blacklivesmatter. Tellingly, the studies that have been conducted of social media related to #blacklivesmatter, Black Lives Matter, and BLM find retweets common and centralized around hubs. Ironically, social media offers the immediate potential of democratizing voice. Radical teachers therefore play a critical role in disrupting "business as usual" when it comes to discussions of authority, discipline, and related phenomena like the carceral state, state violence, police brutality, representation, and framing. Whether it be by juxtaposing past and present, rewriting the narrative on black lives, or challenging the ways they are represented, students must be reminded of their ability to influence their lives by seizing their story and their voice.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> In "Beyond The Hashtags," Freelon, McIlwain, and Clark point out the hashtag was relatively insignificant until it became a part of the Ferguson protests and developed into a chapter-based organization (Black Lives Matter). The organization incorporated more conventional forms of activism and "has more in common with traditional advocacy institutions like the NAACP than with porous,

digital-first activist networks like Anonymous" (2016:9). This article focuses on the hashtag and online activism.

<sup>2</sup> In his May 2016 commencement address at Howard University, President Obama applauded the efforts of the "new guard of civil rights leaders" and the "activism of young people....from Black Twitter to Black Lives Matter" who brought attention "to the real problems, for example, in our criminal justice system." However he followed this comment with the statement: "But to bring about structural change, lasting change, awareness is not enough." His strategy for confronting the problems of the nation reflected his personal history as an organizer, including a discussion on the importance of voting: "Change is the effort of committed citizens who hitch their wagons to something bigger than themselves and fight for it every single day." Politico Staff, "Obama's full remarks at Howard University's commencement ceremony," May 7, 2016 <http://www.politico.com/story/2016/05/obamas-howard-commencement-transcript-222931#ixzz4A4f91p4V>

<sup>3</sup> In addition to having their own social media accounts on sites such as Twitter and Facebook as well as blogging and having their own professional websites, academics are active participants in online conversations through the use of hashtags. "TwitterHistorians" is just one example, but those who attend conferences and talks are using hashtags to highlight those events.

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Jeffrey Stewart, Professor of Black Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara, April 2016.



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