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RADICAL TEACHER

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

The Inevitable Threnique

by Mercedes Threnique[1]

GRAPHIC COURTESY OF AUTHOR. "SILENCED BUT NOT SILENT".

Imagine coming from a Caribbean background, which emphasizes education, manners, and a strong work ethic, and learning to walk a straight American line. My Mom immigrated from Haiti and taught me the three Haitian Ls—legliz, lekòl, and lakay—which means church, school, and home, with no room for friends or getting in any trouble. As my Dad would say, no time for idles; my Dad is from Trinidad and he taught me to always be honest, keep my hands clean, and read my Bible. Even if I tried to be rebellious like my brother (he was a ti gason decode, doing pranks on everyone and talking back), there was always a corner waiting for me to ajenou (to kneel in the corner like a time out). Basically, my childhood taught me to avoid bad consequences and always follow the rules. So I always tried to be the best person I could and never got into any trouble at home or anywhere else. Now imagine growing up and realizing all of your efforts mean nothing: being a decent law-abiding person doesn't matter and you'll always be a target because of the melanin in your skin. You can't escape it —it's literally your body… so what do I do? I had chosen to believe in this thing called the US Constitution— to give America the benefit of the doubt and believe in freedom and equal rights. But the Constitution doesn't hold as much weight as it used to; before it was like a diamond plate, there for protection, but now it's like paper in the wind, there for decoration.

One day during the spring semester, I went to school and attended my first class. But my other classes were cancelled. Excitedly, I called my boyfriend to pick me up so we could get Korean Corn Dogs. He picked me up in a U-Haul truck because I was moving and my Mom asked us to pick up the rest of the stuff since I was out of classes early. Coming back from the old house turned into the worst day of my life. We made a left turn and we heard sirens behind us. My boyfriend pulled over and two cops came to the car, looked at us, and told us to get out. They didn't ask for license and registration, and they didn't tell us why we were being pulled over– just a look and then "Get out!" I'm clearly black and my boyfriend is Puerto Rican and as history indicates, that combination really bothers some blonde hair, blue-eyed officers. There were about eight male officers surrounding our truck, the majority of them white. At this point I didn't know we would actually get arrested, so I took off my seat belt, stepped out and IMMEDIATELY I was handcuffed. They put the handcuffs on so tight I got a bruise. But now I'm trying to understand what was happening. I'm asking "Why am I being arrested?" but I am just ignored. No one read me my Miranda rights.

Officer K, the one that arrested me, radioed for a female officer to search me, but she didn't arrive quickly. That meant I was on a busy street in handcuffs with cars and people staring and recording. I felt so embarrassed. At that moment, if you opened up a dictionary and looked for the word "embarrassment" you would have found my picture--like there was a 10-ton weight on my back and everyone was just watching my struggle to keep it up. No help and surrounded by 6-8 officers with hate in their eyes. I just started to look at everyone's badge and name so I could remember them. While we waited for officer A (the female officer), Officer K was very antagonistic. I asked a question about my belongings in the uhaul and he kept saying "what you think, I'm your boyfriend" and to the other officers he said, laughing and pointing, "she thinks I'm her boyfriend." I didn't react angrily, I just looked at him in disgust. I was calm and composed which didn't make sense to him because of course I'm an "angry black woman." Eventually one of the other officers said they would get my belongings.

The more I ignored Officer K, the more he continued to try to find a way to get under my skin, but failed miserably. Finally Officer A showed up, searched me, and put me in a car to go to the Precinct. On the way there, Officer A sat next to me in the back while another officer drove. I asked them, "Do you know why I'm being arrested?" Officer A said she didn't know and the one in the front said "probably a summons."

I said, "No one asked for my name so how is it a summons?" They looked at each other, then me, and we sat there like the three stooges. Before we get to the precinct, let's speak facts. Black women are substantially overrepresented in police stops. Legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw states that in 2013 in New York City, of the women stopped by the police, 13.4% were white and 53.4% were black women--even though Black people represent only about 25% of the NYC population (5). This indicates that four times as many Black women as white women get stopped by the police; this doesn't account for the Black women that are actually arrested, harassed, or killed, or those who went missing.

In my own case, I found out later that Officer K had 86 cases of misconduct levelled against him: 20 complaints and 55 allegations (complaints have documentation of proof whereas allegations have no evidence) for physical force, abuse of authority, failure to show his badge number, and wrongful stops. Eleven of these charges were substantiated yet he is still active on the force. Officer Z, whom I met later in the precinct, had 3 complaints, 8 allegations, and 0 substantiated.

The abuse I suffered at the hands of the police was not an isolated incident, but part of a broader pattern of police violence against Black women. We all know the names Breonna Taylor, a black woman who was shot and killed by the police who had a no-knock warrant but raided the wrong house, and Sandra Bland, who was stopped and brutalized during a "routine traffic stop" and was later was found dead in her cell, and whose death was labeled a "suicide." In 2014, nearly 250 black women were killed by the police and many went unreported like Tanisha Anderson[2], a mother who died after being slammed on the concrete by a police officer, and Aura Rosser, who died after being tased and shot when the police entered her home. In response to the number of black women dying at the hands of the police, #Sayhername was created. This hashtag turned the names of victims into a page *https://www.aapf.org/sayhername*, so people can learn about their stories and see how cops can escalate a situation and take the lives of Black women, as well as Black men. So we cling on #sayhername to point out all the lives impacted and ruined: Mothers who left behind children, families that will forever grieve a person taken before their time, and fear for the rest of the Black community wondering when it will be them. The hashtag was made in hope that society will see all these cases and

question the police system and the ways women as well as men are impacted, eventually bringing justice back to the families and the wider Black community.

However, what about the women that #sayhername doesn't cover? Women who don't die at the hand of police, but go through physical, mental, and sexual abuse are still often left with lasting forms of physiological damage. My case was one of these.

Under Trump, police brutality, especially against women, continues. Trump's famous quote, "Grab em' by the pussy," exposes his openly misogynistic morals. Trump's dismissive, demeaning attitude reflects not just ignorance, but a fundamental lack of care for women as people. His disregard for women is matched by his support for the police. In late 2025, when Kathy Hochul decreased funding for counterterrorism, Trump reversed the cut (Ashford and Pager). In addition, Trump enables police violence. He believes that officers have the right to handle people they have arrested without any care; he thinks it's justified for police officers to handle people roughly. Trump said to police officers on July 28, 2017: "at the end when you see these thugs being thrown into the back of a paddy wagon--you just see them thrown in, rough--I said, please don't be too nice. (Laughter.) Like when you guys put somebody in the car and you're protecting their head, you know, the way you put their hand over? Like, don't hit their head and they've just killed somebody--don't hit their head. I said, you can take the hand away, okay" (Robinson, 1).

When dominant voices in society express unqualified support for police and downplay police violence, it creates a context for abuse. When there is no real executive power pushing for oversight, the police can close investigations into officer violence without any answer for the communities or families of the victims. This is what happened to Eleanor Bumpurs, a 66-year old grandmother who was shot twice and killed in her own apartment by NYPD officer Stephen Sullivan on October 29, 1984. Bumpurs was known for being quiet and kind, and minding her business. However, she had a mental illness that made her talk to herself and carry around a knife. This detail was used to acquit the officers who killed her. Despite her family, neighbors, and even prisoners fighting for her, the police never gave details about how they handled the investigation. During the trial, Judge Eggert ruled that Sullivan's legal team was able to prove beyond reasonable doubt that his second shot was legally justified. The effects of this were devastating, as LaShawn Harris has explained: "The lack of legal accountability gave the [Bumpurs] family the impression that Eleanor's life and death did not matter and that her murder did not warrant institutional retribution" (Harris 231). The government, primarily the executive branch, enables police officers by allowing their brutal actions to continue without serious consequences.

Knowing that they won't get in real trouble, police officers use their authority to commit violence and also sexual brutality against Black women. If there is any uproar towards them at the time they will say we are working towards getting answers or working on the case, but without pressure from the government there is little incentive to start an investigation. The NYPD needs to be held accountable, and the consequences need to be as heavy as the loss for the victims' family. According to Kimberlé Crenshaw, there were "548 cases of arrests of police officers for sex related crimes between 2005 and 2007" (2). However, many cases of black women getting abused by the police go unreported because the police often aren't held accountable. Crenshaw states: "According to a study of 548 cases of police officers arrested for sex related crimes between 2005-2007, 51.3% were for sexual misconduct on duty, 32.2% involved forcible/ statutory rape, 19.5% involved forcible fondling, and 10.8% involved statutory rape" (2). Police sexual abuse was made clear in September 2024 in a case filed by a Black teen against the NYPD. Two plainclothes officers raped her while she was handcuffed in a police van, but claimed that it was consensual sex. When questioned about the article in the penal code that details sex offenses, a police spokesperson said "it is against department policy to have sex on duty [but] the law does not preclude consensual sex between an arresting officer and a person in custody" (Neely, xi). The cop claimed the teen consented even though he threatened her by showing her a gun. She was also handcuffed so she wasn't in the right state to resist the officer or to even properly consent. The lack of consequences normalizes police violence, and gives police officers loopholes to hide their illegal actions. With only their word against police officers--and with little public attention–Black women suffer due to racism and sexism and are often later silenced or made invisible. "Invisibility is not to be taken in the literal sense," sociologist Cheryl Neely writes, "but to connote society's attempt to render black women as inconspicuous and obscure, to marginalize the importance of their life experience in a white society. In a patriarchal society, the lives of women have less value than those of men. Black women not only face sexism as females, but they also are discriminated against on the basis of race and class" (Neely xi).

Police brutality victims are typically thought to be male yet thousands of women suffer because no one believes their stories or because people don't realize what a big problem police abuse is for women as well as men. The prevailing belief is that white cops protect society, and are forced to use their weapons because Black people are wild and dangerous. So if a Black woman tries to go against the norm, she is often portrayed as a liar because there are no prior reports, witnesses, or evidence for her plea.

Back at the precinct, what was the most traumatizing day of my life was just another day for Officer K. The police took my ID, my laces, my cute pink sweats, and my hair scrunchie because it was a "safety hazard." Police officers have tactics to humiliate Black women that stem from racism. Fannie Lou Hamer talked about how police officers in 1963 sought to humiliate her by lifting up her skirt to expose her undergarments. In the same way, the police officer cut the scrunchie out of my hair to dishevel my appearance and violated my hair to try to embarrass me.

Then they put me in a tiny cell with two other women. As ironic as this may sound, this was the best part of it all. I'm sure they put three Black women in one tiny cell to instigate a hostile environment (or maybe because they didn't care if we were crowded and uncomfortable). But to their surprise, the opposite happened. We literally had a

food party. It sounds nice but in reality we had pizza only because Officer M wrongfully arrested Ceecee, one of the black women in the cell with me, and we had Chick-fil-A because Officer E ALSO wrongfully arrested the third woman in the cell. I guess food was their bribe.

For about an hour, I demanded that Officer K give me my one phone call. Finally, Officer M came and asked who I wanted to call. But he completely ignored what I said and asked me and the other women in the cell, "you guys know each other?" Then another officer came along and was in awe that three Black women were not fighting but sharing food and making the most of the situation.

Time passes and still I am not allowed to make a phone call, but a new officer, Officer Z, says they are going to question me downstairs. I ask him for my phone call and he just plain walks away. When I'm downstairs, a man in a white shirt tells me, "There are no cameras down here, we didn't read you your rights, if you cooperate I'll let you go." I was cooperating the whole time, even when they were violating my rights, but I felt in that moment that if I didn't want to be #Mercedes, the best thing was for me to just stay quiet and comply. I was down there for a couple minutes getting threatened, mentally and emotionally harassed because, like he said, no cameras. The only thing that stopped him was the fact that I told him I was a student at Brooklyn College.

All I learned from this incident was that the precinct was crooked from the higher ranks and the lower ranks had to take the fall for the higher ups. When I went back to my cell a few minutes later, Officer Z came back and told me that I didn't need my call because I was going home, but he seemed really nervous. He handed me a ticket for not having my seatbelt on!! The same seat belt I took off when Officer K told me to get out of the car. Officer K was nowhere to be found, so Officer Z, a brown-skinned Asian man, had to take the fall if I reported anything, and he did. When I reported the ticket and received a court date, the officer that arrested me did not show up. Instead it was Officer Z who had to answer to the judge. He said "I did not recall the events that took place" and that's because he wasn't there at all; he was just in court to hide officer K's illegal actions.

There's an aftermath of being wrongfully arrested that not everyone thinks about--as long as they let you go and you get to go home, you should be fine. But that's never the case. After getting arrested, Black women deal with mental health issues and PTSD that change our personal views on law enforcement and impact our health. Harris and Cortes explain: "Available data show that African American and Black women are more likely to experience or witness police violence and worry about a family member becoming a victim. These experiences of police violence have been linked to psychological stress, sleep disturbances, and pregnancy loss. The expectation of negative encounters with the police leads Black women to live a life of hypervigilance, which may increase stress, inflammation, cardiovascular reactivity, and blood pressure" (Harris and Cortes 2).

Even just hearing a story about police violence can make people feel vulnerable and fearful. Those who experience this first-hand will always be on edge. Now when I hear sirens, whether it is in person or on media, and when I see cops, I no longer wonder if they're the good or bad kind. I just pray they leave me alone. Police violence has deep and lasting mental health impacts on Black women. The emotional and psychological harm goes beyond the immediate moment of violence and can reshape their our sense of safety, self-worth, and mental well-being.

In order to bring attention to police violence against Black women, the Black community started a platform called "Missing," where Black female victims in predominantly white Southern cities in America share their experience of police brutality through video footage: "Virtual witnessing is a strategic response utilized by black women most often when they are alone with officers and do not have access to physical witnesses. … Specifically, Black women discuss how virtual witnessing helps preserve a record of police interactions, which they plan to use in the future to hold officers accountable. As such, Black women use their phones and social media platforms to counteract institutional power dynamics and prepare for justice-seeking processes within the carceral system" (Gonzalez and Deckard 905). The platform "Missing" gave black women a chance to share their personal stories and experiences with police officers. In the interviews they shared what happened and the way officers are able to escalate a situation because they had the power, while the victims were ignored and had their rights violated.

These testimonies have raised awareness and encouraged public dialogue about the mistreatment of Black women by police. As a result, communities have developed strategies to increase safety, such as ensuring there are always witnesses either in person or virtually during police encounters. Recording any interaction with the police can push them to behave within their regulations. In many cases, officers' behavior shifts from aggressive to cooperative once they realize they're being recorded, as they seek to avoid viral backlash or disciplinary consequences like termination.

Black women are disrespected, unprotected, and silenced in a country that uses freedom and equal human rights as a mascot. In this current political moment, many people are being accosted by law enforcement. In Minnesota, ICE agents rampaged through the streets and conducted sweeps to find illegal immigrants. However, they aren't doing it the right way; they are kidnapping people and not giving them due process, just sending them off to jails where they are brutally tortured before being deported; some of the people being kidnapped or killed by ICE are citizens or here rightfully on visas. On January 7, 2026 in Minneapolis an ICE agent shot a woman, Renee Good, a 37 year old citizen and mother. As ICE agents were trying to arrest |immigrants," a cop, Jonathan Ross, approached Good's car and tried to open the door. When Renee reversed a little, the cop sent three shots to her head and chest. He wasn't arrested and only placed on administrative leave. Once again the police force left children without a parent and got away scott-free. However, this isn't surprising because this was the same city where a cop Derek Chauvin killed George Floyd by kneeling on his neck for over nine minutes.

Raising awareness and sharing your story of police violence on the "Missing" platform or in other ways can

motivate and encourage other women to speak out, and then we can fight collectively to give Black women a life where they can let their guard down and live normally, without wondering how different life would be if they weren't Black. I chose to share my story to expose the twisted racism and also sexism that Black women face when interacting with law enforcement. Without sharing the experiences or reporting the cases, Black women will never get justice. We can't say Black lives matter and leave out Black women.

Notes:

1. Threnique is a quiet internalized grief.

2. "The family of 37-year-old Tanisha Anderson reached out for assistance to calm their daughter during a mental health crisis. Anderson grew increasingly agitated when the police separated her from her family and attempted to place her in the confined space of the police vehicle. During the struggle, a police officer performed a 'takedown' move on her, slamming her against the concrete sidewalk. He placed his knee on her back and handcuffed her as she lay face-down on the pavement. The officers refused to allow Anderson's family to comfort her as she lay dying and exposed on the snow-covered street. She was pronounced dead upon arrival at the hospital. The Cuyahoga County medical examiner ruled her death a homicide. Anderson's family has filed a wrongful death lawsuit against the City of Cleveland and two of its police officers. Anderson suffered from bipolar disorder, but her mother, Cassandra Johnson, explained that as long as she was on her medication, 'you wouldn't know anything was wrong with her.' Johnson indicated that despite media narratives, Anderson was not violent, and that it was the behavior of the police in isolating her from her family that made her panic" (Crenshaw, 16).

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Author's note: I'm a Political Science major at Brooklyn College. Doing this research showed me how important it is to tell your story. Research on this topic is hard to find; I discovered that many Black women experience police mistreatment, but stay silent because they fear they won't be believed. Carrying that trauma can have lasting effects on mental health. Sharing these stories helps other Black women feel less alone and encourages them to speak out, which raises awareness about this overlooked issue.

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