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#SayHerName Loudly: How Black Girls Are Leading #BlackLivesMatter

by Ileana Jiménez

THE LITTLE RED SCHOOL HOUSE AND ELISABETH IRWIN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS CHANT IN WASHINGTON SQUARE PARK AS PART OF THEIR #BLACKLIVESMATTER WALKOUT IN DECEMBER 12, 2014 (IMAGE: ILEANA JIMéNEZ).

In the early winter of 2014, students at Elisabeth Irwin High School, the same school from which Angela Davis was graduated in 1961, walked out of the building holding #BlackLivesMatter signs.

They chanted in unison. They marched from Charlton Street in downtown Manhattan to Washington Square Park to a local police precinct in the West Village to Union Square, then up the concrete canyons in midtown, and continued their march back to the Little Red School House & Elisabeth Irwin High School (LREI). Nearly 200 students were led by boys of color, Black and Latino. The students who marched with them were Black, Latino, Asian and white; they were girls and boys, both transgender and cisgender, queer and straight. Their Black, brown, white, queer, and straight teachers walked along beside them, including their straight, white, male, Jewish principal.

I marched with them, too, their queer, feminist, Puerto Rican teacher from the Bronx whose father is a retired New York City police officer. When we placed our bodies in front of the precinct for our die-in, the silence resounded. I was doing exactly what my father had taught me to do: to stand up (or lie down) for justice. I was just doing it quite differently than he had ever imagined.

Black girls marched too.

Like their peers, they held signs and chanted and marched. Some signs read "Hands Up, Don't Shoot" and "Injustice Anywhere is a Threat to Justice Everywhere." As I marched alongside them, I noticed only one Black girl carrying a sign that read "Am I Next?" There weren't any other signs that directly called out violence against black girls and women. No signs signaled violence against Black queer and transgender communities. There certainly weren't any signs that read #SayHerName. That was because the African American Policy Forum (AAPF)—the New York-based racial justice think tank co-founded by Black feminist legal theorist, Kimberlé Crenshaw—had not yet coined the hashtag, #SayHerName, until a few months later in February 2015. Even so, Black feminist media had already been writing about violence against Black women and girls, including #BlackLivesMatter co-founder, Alicia Garza, in an October 2014 piece titled "A Herstory of the #BlackLivesMatter Movement," in which she wrote:

> *It is an acknowledgment that Black women continue to bear the burden of a relentless assault on our children and our families and that assault is an act of state violence. Black queer and trans folks bearing a unique burden in a hetero-patriarchal society that disposes of us like garbage and simultaneously fetishizes us and profits off of us is state violence . . . the fact that Black girls are used as negotiating chips during times of conflict and war is state violence. (Garza 2014)*

In the same way that Black women have always been erased from the historical record of the Civil Rights Movement as well as from women's and gay rights movements, the queer Black women who founded #BlackLivesMatter—PatrisseCullors, Garza, and Opal Tometi—have also found themselves erased in multiple ways. As Garza points out, "being Black queer women in this society (and apparently within these movements) tends to equal invisibility and non-relevancy."

While I don't believe my students intended to repeat the same toxic cycles of racialized sexism and homophobia that Garza points out in her article, I definitely saw this erasure in our students' walkout signs as an opportunity to revise my curriculum, not only in my feminism elective designed for juniors and seniors, where I started to include the African American Policy Forum's report, *Say Her Name: Resisting Police Brutality Against Black Women*[1], and other #SayHerNamearticles, but also in my American literature course for sophomores, where my team teaching colleague and I included more connections to #BlackLivesMatter. These conversations are for all young people, not only those who have access to special topics electives. Garza reminds us that "Black Lives Matter affirms the lives of Black queer and trans folks, disabled folks, Black-undocumented folks, folks with records, women and all Black lives along the gender spectrum." If we truly intend to create liberatory spaces for liberatory thinking and action, then all of our K-12 classes must heed Garza's call to affirm and include all Black lives.

Garza reminds us that "Black Lives Matter affirms the lives of Black queer and trans folks, disabled folks, Black-undocumented folks, folks with records, women and all Black lives along the gender spectrum."

My concern about the student protest signs was short-lived. Black girls at LREI came back to school with an urgency and a sustained energy around #BlackLivesMatter that surpassed that of the boys who led the march. Three Black girls in particular, Kalli Jackson, Ellana Lawrence, and LabeebahSubair, took the helm. Like Black women during the Civil Rights Movement and now in #BlackLivesMatter, these three girls made no excuses for their leadership. Politicized as ninth graders by the walkout in 2014, they returned as sophomores during the 2015-16 school year ready to get their peers in formation. They wrote poetry, made films, choreographed dance pieces, and organized assemblies, all in the name of #BlackLivesMatter and #SayHerName.

Founded in 1921 by white lesbian educator Elisabeth Irwin, the Little Red School House and Elisabeth Irwin High School started as a public school experiment within New York City's then Board of Education. Since its founding, LREI has survived the slings and arrows of Tammany Hall, the Red Scare, and beyond. During the Depression, LREI became an independent school in 1932 when the Board of Education shut down experimental education in its public schools. Today, LREI remains an activist school committed to its experimental past when students proudly wore blue overalls with proverbial red diapers (O'Han 2016). The school continues to attract both students and teachers who want to make an impact on a world still broken by

institutionalized oppression and structural violence. Elisabeth Irwin herself was close to Eleanor Roosevelt and worked with the First Lady to highlight the school's focus on social change. As Ellana notes, "Before coming to LREI in ninth grade, I attended a public school in Queens. I decided to come to LREI because I admired how EI encourages students to fight for social justice as well as to always be socially aware."

I came to LREI for exactly that same reason. A closeted Latina in girls' schools for the first seven years of my career, I sought out LREI at 29 and I am now 41. It was one of the most liberating decisions of my life. After years of trying to bring intersectional feminism to girls' schools between 1997 and 2004, I was ready to be in a school that had social justice in its DNA. In fact, once I learned that Irwin was a fellow Smith alum, I knew that LREI would become a home and not just a job. And it is my home. In the 13 years that I have been at LREI, it has allowed my teacher-activism to flourish. It was at LREI where my former Black feminist principal, Ruth Geyer Jurgensen, supported me when I started my blog, Feminist Teacher, in 2009, and it was she who wholeheartedly approved of the intersectional feminism and activism

ONE BLACK GIRL HOLDS AN "AM I NEXT?" SIGN DURING LREI STUDENT WALKOUT FOR #BLACKLIVESMATTER (CREDIT: ILEANA JIMÉNEZ).

course I still teach to juniors and seniors that led me to build a movement with other feminist teachers across the country and around the world.

At the end of their electrifying sophomore year of activism and art, I gathered Kalli, Ellana, and Labeebah during the spring of 2016to discuss how they see the role of Black girls in #BlackLivesMatter and #SayHerName both at school and beyond. Inspired by feminists in conversation with each other in collections such as Audre Lorde's *Sister Outsider*, I wanted to gather Black girl feminist activists in conversation as well. During our time together after school, Kalli, Ellana, and Labeebah talked about their education at LREI and their entrance into #BlackLivesMatter and #SayHerName activism. Throughout our conversation, they frequently used the term "master narrative," which they learned during their sophomore year study of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. Kalli and Labeebah studied this novel with me, and Ellana with a colleague. Morrison once told journalist Bill Moyers in a now famous 1990 interview that the master narrative is the "white male life" we have all internalized as the universal norm (Moyers 1990). This term provides the girls with a touchstone for naming white privilege and supremacy. Naming how the master narrative functions in their everyday lives fuels their feminist call to action in #BlackLivesMatter.

During our conversation, they were mindful of the shift they had made from being either one of a few Black girls in a predominantly white private middle school or being a Black girl in a predominantly Black public middle school with white faculty to later being a part of the 32% that are students of color at LREI. Kalli identifies as Black and Chinese; Ellana identifies as West Indian and Asian; and Labeebah identifies as Nigerian and Muslim. Although they are now at a predominantly white school, all three noted that LREI has provided them with the academic and artistic platform to be activists today. As Kalli notes, it is because she can see herself in the curriculum at LREI, that she is able to claim her Black feminist identity: "I think because I am now at LREI where we talk about Black feminism, I had to get involved because it would be stupid not to be on my own side . . . I'm not getting an education that is teaching me to leave myself out or dislike myself or not care about my own history. I go to a school that allows me to have the resources to look for my own history and find myself in what I'm learning."

As their conversation progresses, Kalli, Ellana, and Labeebah trace how their Black consciousness has shifted into a Black *feminist* consciousness via the books they have read at school, such as their study of *The Bluest Eye* with their tenth grade peers and their independent reading projects on works such as James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*, Davis's autobiography, and Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Labeebah points out that reading Davis's autobiography was that much more powerful because Davis is both an LREI alum and a Black feminist: "This school community, her peers and her teachers, encouraged her to be an activist, or at least planted the

seed. Knowing that she went to this school and knowing that she is such a major figure in Black women's activism is important, it just resonates."

Ultimately, Kalli, Ellana, and Labeebah recognize that they too are a part of a larger genealogy of Black queer and feminist voices. We see this in Kalli's prose poem, "#IfIDieinPoliceCustody," and Ellana and Labeebah's film, *Unfound Justice*, both of which had their debut at LREI during their sophomore year. Kalli first read her poem at a school coffeehouse event and Ellana and Labeebah screened their film during a school assembly on #BlackLivesMatter; it later won the Runner Up Documentary award in the 2016 New York Alliance Film Festival. These readings and screenings catapulted the girls into their current position as the leading #BlackLivesMatter activists in the school.

ELLANA LAWRENCE, KALLI JACKSON, AND LABEEBAH SUBAIR ARE LEADING THE #BLACKLIVESMATTER AND #SAYHERNAME ACTIVISM AT LREI (CREDIT: ILEANA JIMÉNEZ).

As feminists of color in a predominantly white school, Kalli, Ellana, Labeebah, and I know that we are not in a utopia at LREI. Nor did Irwin intend it to be. She wanted LREI to be a messy place where both students and teachers worked together to make that moral arc bend towards justice. The entrance to our high school is framed by Irwin's vision: "The school will not always be just what it is now but we hope it will always be a place where ideas can grow, where heresy will be looked upon as possible truth, and where prejudice will dwindle from lack of room to grow. We hope it will be a place where freedom will lead to judgment—where ideals, year after year, are outgrown like last season's coat for larger ones to take their places."

My students and I know that there is more work to be done both at and beyond our school, so that we can reach those larger ideals Irwin envisoned. Ever mindful that they too are not immune to the racialized sexism of the past and present, Ellana observed, "I've only known of Black girls who have stepped up," followed by Labeebah agreeing, "boys seem to follow after it has been initiated."

Here's what else they had to say.

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In what ways are you #BlackLivesMatter activists? And why should we address #BlackLivesMatter in school?

Labeebah: We need to do this work as girls of color because no one else will. Not doing this work is succumbing to white supremacy. Not recognizing that the trend of killing Black people is enforced by the master narrative can only make the situation worse.

Doing the work of seeking justice is not only the work of school, not just at LREI, but everywhere. We are the upcoming generation, and if students aren't learning about #BlackLivesMatter, we are simply perpetuating the negative feedback cycle of oppression. It's also not just a Black people issue, as not only Black children should have to know about #BlackLivesMatter; it should be something that everyone has to learn. Everyone is part of the system; Black people are being oppressed, minorities are being oppressed, but if only the people—how do I explain it? (looks at Ellana)

Ellana: If only the people who are being oppressed are the only ones learning about it, how can we change the system?

Labeebah: Yeah.

Ellana: I feel that it is my responsibility knowing that at any given moment, one of my relatives or friends could be a victim of police harassment or police brutality, and that makes me uncomfortable. Because I have the ability to stand up and say something, I should use that to its full advantage.

Kalli: I think the #BlackLivesMatter movement needs to be addressed in schools for the same reason that we need to read *The Bluest Eye* in your English class and take your feminism class as juniors and seniors, to include people who got ignored and pushed away and excluded from their own education for so long.

I went to another private school [before LREI] that was predominantly white—well, this school, LREI, is predominantly white too—and I was one of two Black girls at that school in New Jersey. We never talked about race ever, unless it was Black History Month. I really didn't like the fact that I was Black when I was in middle school because it was so different from everyone else. I used to hate talking about Black history in school because as the only Black girl, it was uncomfortable since I got singled out with questions like, "Didn't Malcolm X want to kill all white people?" I think because I am now at LREI where we talk about Black feminism, I had to get involved because it would be stupid not to be on my own side.

Labeebah: Yeah, I don't know, I went to a public school that was majority Black and it was sad because we didn't talk about #BlackLivesMatter either. Although we knew that things were happening and the Trayvon Martin thing got really famous, we never really talked about race. It was *white* history that we were studying. Also, most of our teachers were white but the student population was predominantly Black, and we still never really learned about it. You would assume that being in a school that was predominantly Black, you would expect us to know more about it or be willing to learn more about it. After I came here to LREI, I started realizing the importance of #BlackLivesMatter. But before that, I didn't know about it that much.

LREI STUDENTS CARRY A #BLACKLIVESMATTER SIGN INTO UNION SQUARE (IMAGE: ILEANA JIMÉNEZ).

Given that you are all #BlackLivesMatter activists in high school, how do you want your teachers to do this work?

Kalli: This year [with you] was the first time in an English class where I got to read a Black author and I've been going to school for over a decade, so I feel like that's kind of ridiculous that this is the first time out of so many years that I've gotten to read a book by a Black author as homework, as something that I get to analyze and have discussions about. The only thing that we get to discuss over and over every year at any other school is white male history. That just goes back to what we were talking about in English about window and mirror experiences, where only one group of people gets to see themselves in literature and gets to see themselves depicted as heroes, or gets to see themselves depicted as having depth and layers, and as people who can triumph and succeed, while Black people or people of color are side characters who don't have a lot of dimension or who don't get a story or who don't get a story told.

I think that if we did have that in other schools and we got to talk about it, then we would be able to open up discussions about institutionalized racism. It really doesn't matter whether you are a person of color or not; it needs to be a discussion that you have because unless everyone knows about racism, then it's never going to go away.

Exactly. You recently performed a poem you wrote titled "#IfIDieInPoliceCustody" at our school's coffeehouse. How do you see this poem as part of your #SayHerName activism?

Kalli: One nightI was thinking about how frustrating it is to be talking about how angry we are that Black lives don't really seem to matter in America but we also still do not really care about Black women's lives either. I was just really upset about it in that moment and I wrote about what I was thinking and how I felt.

I saw on Instagram and Facebook that people were using the hashtag, #IfIDieInPoliceCustody, and Black women were posting videos saying what they wanted people to know if they died in police custody, and it felt sad. I felt that the purpose of the hashtag was really important but I also felt that the hashtag didn't get that much attention. Since those videos were really impactful and since police brutality is a reality for Black women in America, that was why I wrote the poem and performed it at the coffeehouse. I wrote things that I've heard people say or that I've heard family members talk about or heard talked about at the dinner table. Even the fact that for Black families that's a dinner table conversation is already a reason that it needs to be a discussion that we are having with everyone.

#IfIDieInPoliceCustody

byKalli Jackson

If I die in police custody . . . do not let them say it was a suicide. Do not let them choke the air out of my throat, tase the life out of my body, beat my bones to shattered glass, put bullet holes in my being, and then have the nerve to say I took my own life. Do not let them say the dog ate their homework.Because they are the dogs. And they ripped through me because I was a piece of dark meat, nothing but flesh to sink teeth into. But the only teeth that do the sinking come out the mouth of a gun barrel. Do not let them murder me and then let me take the blame.

If I die in police custody. . . please know the first thing I checked for was the police officer's hands. I wanted to know what color they were. I wanted to know if my life was in them. I wanted to see if their palm lines took the form of a noose. I wanted to see how their knuckles looked wrapped around a trigger. I wanted to see what marks their fingers around my neck would leave. Please know that I also checked my own hands, to know what they would see when I put them up. I went to a palm reader once. She told me my lifeline was deep, I was meant to live long enough to tell many great stories. I wondered if they thought their bullet would make a great punctuation mark.

If I die in police custody . . . do not let them forget my name. Refuse to let them swallow the syllables as soon as they finish pronouncing me dead. When they encase my body below a patch of dirt, do not let my name become letters lost on tombstone. Don't plaster a hashtag in front of it as if likes on a post might make up for the days lost. But don't stop saying the names of the girls who never got a hashtag. The dead girls whose names were never said loud enough to be noticed. Ask them what happened to Sandra Bland, Kendra James, Kathryn Johnston, Natasha McKenna. Ask them what happened to Tanisha Anderson, Aiyana Stanley-Jones, Tarika Wilson. Ask them why Dylann Roof got Burger King for shooting up a Black church, but Rekia Boyd was killed for holding her cellphone. Ask them why only one of those two names is recognizable. Say my name over and over until the inside of your mouth resembles a graveyard.

If I die in police custody . . . don't say I was "a good person." It doesn't matter what kind of person I was. My hands were up and empty. If I die in police custody. . . please know that it didn't hurt. After so much pain, you start to go numb. The pain of being hated for your skin, being hated for its color, being hated for no reason. Remember that it hurts ten times more to live in a body that was never meant to survive in the first place. A body that was whipped and lashed so much that its back looked like a sheet of music, crying out for relief. A body that was hosed down by the fire department at a pressure that could dampen bones and drown out screams. A body that turns on the TV and sees its brothers and its sisters and its children's corpses on display. When Trayvon was murdered, I took a bullet too. It ripped through my heart and my hope when spilling out the hole it left.

If I die in police custody . . . promise not to learn to forgive them. Do not let anyone tell you that I am "in a better place" or that "everything happens for a reason." We know the reason. It's the white man behind the silver badge that promises, "to serve and protect." It's the same man who promised us forty acres and a mule. The same man who smiled pretty as he deemed us three-fifths a person and called it a compromise. Do not let them tell you any different. Do not stand at the podium during my funeral, and cry softly as you whimper through my eulogy. Stand tall with the spine only a black woman can carry, fill your lungs with all the air I'll never breathe again and get mad. Get enraged. When they call you an Angry Black Woman, show them an earthquake. When they tell you not to make everything about race, show them a thunderstorm. When they are found not guilty with the charges of my murder, show them a natural disaster. Raise hell. Make noise. Be heard.

If I die in police custody . . . I did not kill myself.

Ellana and Labeebah, you both made a film titled "Unfound Justice" featuring the #BlackLivesMatter walkout we did as a school in December 2014. It was selected as a semi-finalist and later won an award at the 2016 New York Alliance Film Festival. Can you talk about the process of making your film?

Ellana: We started it in ninth grade as an honors project with our art, media, and life skills teachers. We were inspired by the walkout. Definitely that was the first protest or any kind of activist work that I've ever done and I was overwhelmed with so many different emotions that I couldn't forget about it, even thinking back on the cheers and chants that we did that day gives me chills. So after experiencing that, we wanted to further our understanding

LREI STUDENTS CONDUCT A DIE-IN IN FRONT OF A NEW YORK CITY POLICE PRECINT IN THE WEST VILLAGE, DECEMBER 12, 2014 (IMAGE: ILEANA JIMÉNEZ).

of the work by interviewing our peers and family members. This is something that is very close to us. It's not something that we are out of touch with.

Labeebah: I think it was also knowing that you have a voice. Before, I felt that it was taboo to talk about. But after the walk-out, it was like ok, this might be something that people in our surroundings are interested in, but not everyone, because you can't make that generalization. I guess that knowing we had the right to do that, and that we could assert our own voice was really our inspiration.

At first we started interviewing anyone in the school. We believe that it wasn't just like a Black people issue. (Ellana: Yeah). Then we made it only Black people because we felt that—and this goes back to the single story idea that ChimamandaNgoziAdichie talks about—we felt that people telling different stories about being Black and their police brutality experiences was a form of advocacy for Black people.

In the end, we realized that most of the people we interviewed were young men, so it was just Lutfah, my sister, and she was the only female. Everybody else was male. We realized we were focusing on only young men and I think that that's something we should've changed. We can go back to do that.

What was it like for you to be marching in a #BlackLivesMatter walkout protest with your teachers and your peers? What was coursing through your body as you were marching?

Ellana: It was very, very empowering. I think knowing that we had the institution behind us drove us as well. Knowing that we had that support behind us made everything better.

I know that it was emotional for me, especially when we did the die-in at the precinct. My father was a New York City police officer and he's retired now. First my father was an officer in the Bronx and then he got moved to Brooklyn to be in Internal Affairs, which means he was busting cops who were—

Ellana: Abusing power.

Yes. It was moving for me to be lying down on the street, and feel my father there. I was both resisting him and also supporting him in some ways. Since he was a Puerto Rican cop in New York, I wondered what kind of racism he went through as a Latino man to uphold the master narrative. How much did he buy into? Because that happens. How much did he resist? I don't know; I've never asked him. That was what was going on for me. So, I have wondered through all of this, is it important to see that your teachers are activists too?

Kalli: Yeah, because your teachers are the ones who are part of the education system in America. We talked in English about how the master narrative is responsible for feeding children messages to dislike themselves. I'm not getting an education that is teaching me to leave myself out or dislike myself or not care about my own history. I go to a school that allows me to have the resources to look for my own history and find myself in what I'm learning. I think that you need your teachers to show that they are active in this movement or show that they are active in caring about your history and your education and not just go the easy way with whatever textbooks they are making in Texas or places where people of color are left out of the conversation.

Labeebah: But even though we go to a progressive school, teachers have power over the students, so there is still that hierarchy, so being that that's true, if teachers are not willing to be part of this movement, or willing to teach students about it, then there's no way that we are going to reach our age group. Teachers really do need to be a part of it.

Ellana: Even when I was in public schools in elementary and middle school, our teachers never spoke about race until about eighth grade. If I had been taught about race in middle school or elementary school, I would've been inspired from an even younger age instead of being inspired when I was in ninth grade [at LREI].

As part of your end-of-year tenth grade project, you were all asked to read an independent reading book, and each of you selected a major African-American

writer after our shared reading of *The Bluest Eye* with your classmates. Kalli, you are reading Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*; Labeebah, you are reading Angela Davis's autobiography; and Ellana, you are reading James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*. How do you see these selections as part of your education as young activists?

Kalli: Reading a book that is outside of the master narrative is activism in itself. You are giving yourself the opportunity to learn something about who you are and who your people are, written by someone who is like you. I think you are helping yourself by doing that, you are educating yourself by doing that, and giving yourself the tools you need to set yourself free from all of the systems that are trying to put you into this one box.

Labeebah: This goes back to windows and mirrors. You definitely see the mirror. As Kalli said, the master narrative puts forth the white male narrative in literature rather than the story of the Black female or Black people in general. I feel that reading literature that propels your own activism makes you knowledgeable. For me, it's more of a historical thing. It makes me more knowledgeable about how people in the past dealt with racism.

While I read Angela Davis's autobiography, I learned that she provides a solution. She seems to be saying, this is how you go about activism. This is how you should unite. Right now in the book, she's talking about how people of color see white people as the enemy. She's talking about how, if we don't step beyond that, how the master narrative kind of makes us feel this disassociation from white people, it makes us feel this disconnect that creates a barrier that doesn't allow us to have our own voices and to be the activists that we can be. Her solution is for us to unite more.

Does it make a difference to you that she went to this high school?

Labeebah: Oh, yeah (laughter). When she was talking about being in prison, like how it was so close to here, I was like, woah. I couldn't even imagine, it was hard for me to imagine even the geography of everything. I feel like LREI was the beginning of her Communist ideology and she went beyond that. Knowing that she went to this school, even though it might not be the same as when she went here, she talks about how most of the teachers---and this goes back to teachers being activists---she talks about how most of the teachers here were on the blacklist, so they couldn't even teach at regular public schools. She came from Birmingham, Alabama, so coming here was like the total flip side of the type of education she was receiving. This school community, her peers and her teachers, encouraged her to be an activist, or at least planted the seed. Knowing that she went to this school and knowing that she is such a major figure in Black women's activism is important; it just resonates.

Ellana: Yeah, *The Fire Next Time*, oh my God, the amount of stuff I highlighted and put in brackets, I'm pretty sure I highlighted the whole book. It starts off with him writing a letter to his nephew and one of the lines, I think, is that they [white people] don't expect you to strive for excellence. This is not something that I heard often as a child. I would speak to my father about race a lot and I still do, but to hear it in a piece of literature, it's something that I've never heard writers write about before. It gives me more of a reason that Baldwin should be put into the curriculum in schools. It can help inspire kids to think in a different light. I would say that *The Fire Next Time* is making me think about race in a different light than what I was thinking about previously and my experience of going here as well. In the book, he talks about a time a police officer comes up to him and calls him the 'n' word and beat him, and that definitely resonated with me. Baldwin talks

STUDENTS AT LREI GATHER BEFORE THEIR #BLACKLIVESMATTER WALKOUT ON DECEMBER 12, 2014 (CREDIT: ANA MAROTO).

about religion and how for him, religion was a distraction from race, and I don't think I've ever heard that statement before. My perspective of the world has changed by reading this book.

Labeebah: When we talk about race, or when we talk about systems of oppression, as a student, I feel like we are stuck in this bubble believing that it's just America.

Ellana: Yeah, yeah.

Labeebah: In her autobiography, Angela Davis talks about how she went to Germany and France, and it makes me realize that racism does not exist just here, it's all over the world.

Ellana: It's a huge system.

Labeebah: The master narrative. It's so slick. It's just like right there, I'm going to control your world and I'm going to put you at the bottom.

Ellana: It's so hard to see sometimes.

Labeebah: Reading Angela Davis makes you realize that the majority of the human population doesn't realize this.

Ellana: Yeah, it's right in front of your eyes, but not there at the same time.

Kalli: I think the scariest part of it is how early it starts, from the minute you are born, from the moment they decide they are going to wrap you in a blue or pink blanket. When I was doing volunteer work with kids, there was a little black girl who said Beyoncé is racist; this was right after the Super Bowl. I asked her why she thought Beyoncé was racist. She said, "Because she put the Black Panthers in her choreography," and I said, "What's wrong with the Black Panthers?" and she said, "I don't know, but on the news, they said 'that's racist' and the news is never wrong."

ELLANA LAWRENCE HOLDING A #BLACKLIVESMATTER SIGN, DECEMBER 12, 2014 (IMAGE: KALLI JACKSON).

That's it; that's the master narrative right there. All of what you are reading is a part of movement building. In other words, you have to read what came before you, so that you can build on their work. How do you see yourselves moving forward as activists?

Kalli: The next step is to keep reading and writing and producing things that we are trying to illustrate. The best way to get other people to hear about it and listen to it and try to understand it is to keep writing, keep making films, and creating things so that others can view what our experience is like. You have to put it out there.

Ellana: Education.

Labeebah: Just as much as white literature and history is forced down everyone's throat, I feel that this is just as important, we need to make it something that is not a taboo, that everyone should learn about. Making people aware that the master narrative is so present.

Ellana: Bringing it up in school is a great way to get students involved from a young age. The master narrative is very real.

Labeebah: And not just in school.

In what ways do you hope other Black girls will become a part of Black feminism and #BlackLivesMatter? How do you hope that your activism will inspire them to be young Black feminists within the movement?

Ellana: I hope other Black girls will become part of Black feminism and #BlackLivesMatter by becoming informed about the movement. I hope my activism will encourage them to take action and bring awareness to issues such as police brutality.

Labeebah: I hope that other Black girls continue to involve themselves in Black feminism and the #BlackLivesMatter movement in any way possible, whether it be through the arts, research, etc. This is extremely important because, as Black girls and women, we are at the bottom of the social hierarchy. I hope that my activism inspires other girls to unite because without the unity of Black girls, we make ourselves even more subject to systemic oppression. I believe that we have a voice, and through my work and that of others, I hope that we assert ourselves effectively enough to make a change.

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As Kimberlé Crenshaw said at a women's studies conference in November 2015 and I documented in this tweet, the "deaths of black women are not seen in relation to [the] vulnerability of black people writ large." The AAPF further elucidates this point on their #SayHerName site: "Although Black women are routinely killed, raped, and beaten by the police, their experiences are rarely foregrounded in popular understandings of police brutality" (African American Policy Forum 2016). I see Crenshaw's words as not only a call-to-action to activists, politicians, and academics but also to teachers, counselors, and administrators. If the deaths of Black women are not seen in relation to the larger "vulnerability of black people writ large," then by extension, that means that the deaths of Black girls -- whether physical or emotional, developmental or spiritual -- are also invisibilized, including at school. While school is one of the first places where Black girls, both queer and straight, cisgender and transgender, are both erased and policed, school can also be a potential site of affirmation, healing, and transformation. It can be a site for visibility. It can be a site for Black girls to write themselves back into the narrative. Back into claiming their names, their stories, and their lives. As Kalli said in our conversation, "You have to put it out there."

Kalli, Ellana, and Labeebah are "putting it out there" by writing themselves into a Black feminist narrative that we all need to be accountable to as educators. Even as

sophomores, they remind us that intersectional feminism should permeate curriculum design and pedagogical practice, not only in high school but in all K-12 classroom spaces. As Ellana points out rightly, "If had been taught about race in middle school or elementary school, I would've been inspired from an even younger age instead of being inspired when I was in ninth grade." We cannot afford to continue the cycle of erasing Black girls' visions for racial and gender justice, as this is yet another form of violence against their minds and bodies, and yet another way that we refuse to #SayHerName. Black girls at LREI and across the country are planning their own feminist revolution in schools and we must listen to and get in line with them. Their work is a model for what we can all do to mobilize around #BlackLivesMatter to #SayHerName loudly.

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Notes

[1] http://www.aapf.org/sayhernamereport