The roots and influences of radical Black women in the 21st century

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The Roots and Influences of Radical Black Women in the 21st Century

by

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Thesis

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Abstract

Gender, race, and class are concepts that define the lived experiences of Black women in the United States. Black women’s experiences of police violence at the intersections of gender, race, and class, particularly, have helped to create radical critiques of the system of white supremacy and police brutality. My thesis explores these experiences from the Civil Rights Movement to the Black Lives Matter era to argue that the oppression, resistance, and the emergence of radical Black women organizers have made transformational contributions to the ongoing fight for Black liberation.
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Introduction

My thesis examines radical Black women's roles and contributions in the fight for Black liberation between the Civil Rights, Black Power, and Black Lives Matter movements, with a particular focus on the theories and praxis of activist-intellectuals. Black women were often marginalized by patriarchal leadership structures which pushed them to background roles. This, in turn, pushed them to organize their own organizing spaces. In decades since, scholars have also marginalized Black women in history books. Along with understanding how the relationship between the Black community and Black women have been less than ideal in terms of equality, the concept of “triple oppression” plays a role in the evolution of Black feminist thought. Triple oppression is a concept used to explain the connections between gender-, race-, and class-based forms of exploitation and oppression. Black women who have contributed to the scholarly formation on triple oppression are Claudia Jones, Louise Thompson Patterson, Angela Davis, and Audre Lorde to name a few whose lived experiences informed the emergence of these concepts. Black women, however, did not just accept oppression within systems and organizations; they created their own spaces to theorize about what it means to be a Black woman within the Black community and in white America, while developing transformative organizations to put their theories into practice.

While making important contributions to Black freedom struggles through their intersectional theories and praxis, Black women also experienced oppression from the government and their most visible enforcement arm, the police. Through such experiences, radical Black women, like Angela Davis, Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor and Mae Mallory, further developed their analyses of–and resistance to–white supremacy, racial capitalism, patriarchy, and the carceral state. These theories and praxis have, in turn, shaped the
evolution of Black freedom struggles since the 1970s and laid the groundwork for the emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement in the 2010s. Tracing that evolution from the 1960s to present day provides a better understanding of the social problems that the Black Lives Matter Movement have inherited due to suppression of the police.

As a study of the radical theories and praxis of Black women intellectuals, my work draws heavily from Black women scholars and activists such as Keisha N. Blan, Ashley Farmer, Angela Davis, Ruth Wilson Gilmore, and Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor. These women historians, organizers, and artists have helped mold and shape our understandings of Black liberation. My intention is to also shift the work of Black queer women from the margins towards the center of attention. Black queer women have contributed to the evolution of the Black Freedom Movement and continue to do so with the emergence of Black Lives Matter.

The theories and praxis of Black feminist movements over the past 50 years also offers vital insights into organizational structures and leadership models that have influenced recent struggles for Black liberation. The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement at different time periods have had leaders put forth. Dr. King was the face of the Civil Rights Movement; however, there is nobody per se who is the face of the BLM movement. Some people have been put forth by the media, but organizations have operated on less hierarchical structures, leading to frequent critiques from pundits and the public about BLM being “leaderless.” In this way BLM is different than the Civil Rights Movement as Taylor alludes to: “The students showed willingness to be met on the basis of equality, but were intolerant of anything that smacked of manipulation or domination. This inclination toward group-centered leadership, rather than toward a leader-centered group pattern of organization, was refreshing indeed to those of the older group who bears the scars of the battle, the frustrations and disillusionment that come when
the prophetic leader turns out to have heavy feet of clay.”¹ One issue within the concept of leadership is the sexism/patriarchy within the structure of society as a whole, which traditionally defines leadership in relation to centralized structures and charismatic male figureheads. In order for a social movement to be different from white society, it cannot mirror the oppressor’s system. As Audre Lorde famously wrote, “The master’s tools can’t be used to dismantle the master’s house.”² Dating back to the 1960’s-1970’s, Black feminists rejected the notion of patriarchal hierarchies, which gave men the power over women in regard to social structures affecting politics, economics, and culture. These challenges to hierarchal leadership models within Civil Rights organizations offer important context for understanding the structures and forms of leadership that current organizations have adopted in their struggles for Black liberation guided by Black feminist traditions.

As the Black Lives Matter movement has emerged in response to unchecked police and vigilante violence over the past decade and in turn drawn immense retaliation, my thesis will trace the evolution of state repression of Black freedom struggles through the lens of radical Black women. Seeing how different tactics of suppression have left some social problems in the Civil Rights Movement unresolved, we can trace these social problems to BLM and how they have experienced and resisted a massively expanded law enforcement system. When the system of white supremacy is being threatened and people are protesting, the state calls on the militarized police force to quell the threats to democracy as they see it. Studying histories of state repression from the perspective of radical Black women offers clearer insights and more expansive understandings of the functions of policing in the United States—and important

lessons from Black women organizers on how to effectively challenge state violence in service of achieving liberation for all Black people.

My research makes important contributions to the discipline of African American studies, as well as current activists, by offering an analysis of the history of suppression of Black freedom struggles to understand how this current generation of organizers have inherited these social issues. My research will inform readers about how Black women challenged patriarchal leadership structures within the Civil Rights and Black Power movements. I hope with my research I can explain how vital and important Black women’s contributions in social movements have pushed us to where we are today in the fight for equality. I hope activists and scholars will read my research and go forward knowing that in order for us to be a collective that is all-inclusive, we can’t look past the Black women who have paved the way for our grassroots movement from the Civil Rights Movement to Black Lives Matter.

I believe that it is imperative that our Black men who are activists no longer shun our Black women away as third-rate citizens in our own communities—we should be uplifting our women, not belittling them. Malcolm X said, “There’s no such thing as a second-class citizen.” I also hope to prove that the Black Lives Matter movement is what is needed for today's day and age of fighting social issues and oppression towards the Black community. Seeing where the successes and failures are within the organizing era of BLM gives a deeper insight into different organizations that came forth from the movement as well. The main area of concentration on this research deals heavily with oppression, resistance, and emergence of radical Black women. As

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Audre Lorde explained, if Black women can achieve liberation, this would advance the agenda of other political movements substantially.
Literature Review

My research builds upon the work of Black feminist scholarship. As Black women are the foundation on which my research is being conducted, I have selected some well-known women authors who studied the political lives, thought, and activism of radical Black women. Some key topics that appear in this research are the vital roles of Black women from the Civil Rights to the Black Lives Matter movements and the Black community as a whole. It is important to note the roles of the youth in the Black Lives Matter movement today along with what organizations have come from the movement’s social justice cause. It would be difficult to do this research without touching on the topics of white supremacy, racism, and policing. At the center of the social issues in this country, racism and white supremacy have a role to play. I will be bringing in analytical tools of Black feminism while seeking to center the voices of Black women and study through the lens of Black feminism.

Historian Barbara Ransby writes on the topic of Black Lives Matter in her book titled *Making All Black Lives Matter: Reimagining Freedom in the Twenty-First Century*. In her book, she writes about how the movement of Black Lives Matter is a complicated topic of discussion, how it has penetrated our society, and why a lot of Americans have heard the term but never understood it. Black Lives Matter relies heavily on the Black feminist topics as she puts it. She writes about Black women’s roles in this organization's leadership and being on the front lines of Black liberation. One major theme that can be seen throughout her book is Black women-centered discussion in relation to social issues within the Black community, and society. She traces important recent issues of police brutality and how each killing of Black men and women shifted the Black political landscape of understanding our realities. The Black Lives Matter Movement’s protests have been targets of state responses; however, this is nothing new, as police and state governments have historically oppressed social protests that rise against white supremacy. A strength of Ransby’s in her book shows Obama’s election did not rid the country of racism, poor, Black, working-class men and particularly women have suffered from police brutality and oppressive state responses to these social movements. I will use this analysis within my thesis by challenging the popular notion that we were in a post-racial society, due to Obama being elected president, by presenting facts that contradict societal ignorance of oppression towards the Black community.
Carrying forth the tradition of Black LGBTQ+ organizers like Audre Lorde, Charlene Carruthers has written a viewpoint of queer Black women, which has made important contributions to the field. In her book *Unapologetic: A Black, Queer, and Feminist Mandate for Radical Movements*, Carruthers centers Black feminist and anti-capitalist theories drawn from the lived experiences of Black women. This book provides a vision for how social justice movements can become sharper and more effective through principled struggle, healing justice, and leadership development. One of the things we as scholars have to do is be inclusive when we talk about struggles from a Black woman's perspective, and Carruthers discusses this angle rather well. Her book is not a history; it is more of a discussion within the framework of an activist, organizer, and community-based leadership from a radical Black woman’s perspective. She captures the importance of thinking of Black liberation as more inclusive and expansive. In doing this, you can see her understanding of marginalized Black women and the Black community’s struggles.

Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor takes a different approach when discussing today's issue of Black Lives Matter. In her book *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation*, her key topics of discussion bring to light the new movement that has followed in the path of the Civil Rights Movement. She uses history of the social movement within a historical context that has led to the emergence of the Black Lives Matter Movement. In doing so, she explains that there's a reason the new movement is called Black Lives Matter, and one of those reasons is that the police have been given a license to kill Black people in this country. She examines the intense policing of the Black community and the systemic issues that are still prevalent in today's society. She really attacks the aspect that the criminal justice system in the United States is historically corrupt and still is today. The system has locked up over half a million Black people, particularly men. She
attacks the police and the system that enforces them to maintain control over the Black community through killings and over-policing that oftentimes leads to confrontation between the police and Black citizens. She goes into vivid detail about different murders that have happened within the last 10 years and provides an analysis of the roles police played in the Ferguson uprising and state responses to the protest.

When comparing Ransby’s and Taylor’s books, we see that there are differences, and similarities between both scholarly texts. Ransby’s book focuses on social issues that the Black community has historically been dealing with, but she focuses on these issues from a Black feminist perspective. Taylor's book focuses on the Black collective issues that Black Lives Matter is addressing; she does not forget Black women in her writing, but she writes from a collective viewpoint of a Black feminist. However, both authors are grounded in Black liberation. One of the key concepts throughout Taylor's book, From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation is the myth of a post-racial United States just because Obama became the first Black president. However, the statistics she presents show that hate crimes and police killings are not only still prevalent in our society, but they have led to the Black Lives Matter Movement. This happened during the Obama Administration, the birth of BLM. One area that was not touched on enough was the importance of the LGBTQ orginazers and activits involved with the BLM Movement. In today’s movement, that is a major difference between the Civil Rights Movement and the BLM movement of today. While LGBTQ+ involvement has been constant, in today’s society it is more socially acceptable to be open about genders and sexual orientation compared to the repression of the Civil Rights era. LGBTQ people have a battle to fight themselves when it comes to rights as well.
Ashley Farmer is another Black woman scholar who has written about the experiences and contributions of Black women during the Black Power Movement. In her book, *Remaking Black Power: How Black Women Transformed an Era*, Farmer gives an inside perspective into the life of everyday poor and working-class Black women who became organizers. It showed the struggles that they endured being an activist while also often being at home with the family. Her book also shows the heavy involvement on how Black women truly stepped up in leading and, as the book title states, changed an era. Farmer also depicts how the struggles of Black women led to many different arts in the form of literature that came forth from lived experiences. In regard to organizing work, this literature gives an in-depth analysis about systemic issues within society. Young organizers that want to organize around certain social issues have guides in the form of books and lived experiences when it comes to understanding how to address issues and execute the vision to organize around important social issues.

Farmer does a good job when focusing on the social issues of Black women in America, but she also looks across the world too when discussing the Black liberation of Black women everywhere. The Third World Women's Alliance was a product of Black women coming together to address their social needs from a global perspective while also theorizing about their struggles at home in America. A strength of her book is that when she writes, she manages to capture the pain, resistance, and victories that Black women achieved within a repressive patriarchal society, and issues from within social movements such as the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements. Many lived experiences of these Black women mentioned in her book led many to theorize about police and society, which led to implementing those theories into action by radical Black women.

Turning to Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor again, her book *How We Get Free: Black Feminism and the Combahee River Collective* is important to include because of the personal narratives of
Black feminists like Barbara Smith, Beverly Smith, and Alicia Garza who have contributed to the Black liberation movement. Their contributions to political organizations have been instrumental in understanding Black women’s struggles while providing leadership; the collection of stories compiled in this literature review is something that criticizes American politics and how historically Black feminists have disagreed with the American political system. The system serves white men and women, but more importantly, the system serves the white elite. These radical Black women’s lived experiences in this collection show that, and it influenced many of their scholarly and activist work. The discussions that are had within a Black feminist framework shows that there have been an evolution of Black feminist politics, and this evolution became known during the 1960s with the Third World Woman Alliance that is mentioned in this collection, along with the Combahee River Collective. The stories found within this collection are important to understand the grounded Black feminist perspective when dealing with Black politics, and lived experiences of Black women. The strength of this collection is the different perspectives and stories that are given; which are grounded in interviews and intergenerational Black feminsit activist-intellectuals lived experiences.
Methodology

When conducting research in the field of African American studies, Africology, Black studies, you have to research from a critical point of view. In Africology and African American studies, we have to look at history in a different light from what we have been taught in the Eurocentric way of researching. One of the primary objectives researchers in this field have to do is look for what is not there, what is not talked about, and critically attack Eurocentric perspectives of history with accurate facts grounded on evidence. Molefi Kete Asante writes on the three most important values we must understand when we are doing research with methodologies which I employed in my own research; these principles are as follows:

1.) Hold yourself accountable for hidden, subtle, and racist theories that may be in current methodologies.
2.) Work to legitimize centrality of their own ideals and values as a valid frame of reference for gathering data.
3.) Maintain inquiry rooted in a strict interpretation of a place. (In terms of the place that is rooted, it will be rooted in the United States, however in some regards of my research I will be discussing particular cities when making points and connections.)

These three principles from Dr. Asante were important when researching and writing my thesis. In my studies, I learned that when you write your paper, you give credit to those whose credit is due. Something that is important as well is the interdisciplinary aspect of African and African American studies research. When writing in this aspect, another methodology of the canons of Africology research that I employed is giving myself over to the research in terms of not letting my personal opinions get in the way of scholarly work. In doing that I'm not only hurting myself, but I'm hurting the process of writing and research. When conducting Afrocentric research, one
must understand that in order for your research to be valid, it must be verified through the community, by centering the viewpoints of those in the community that you are doing research about. Primary sources are important when doing research; in this case, I drew from Mae Mallory’s interview and her radical critiques about the system of racism, and white supremacy towards Black women. Ruth Wilson Gilmore's analysis on suppression, COINTELPRO, and lived experience in her interview on *Intercepted* was instrumental in understanding her critiques of policing, mass incarceration, and the protests that happened in 2020 following George Floyd's death.

In regards to how I framed this section of my thesis, I drew from Black feminist thought; Black Feminist thought is important to how I conducted my research. A Black feminist approach to scholarship is true to lived experience within the concepts of gender, race, and class: “Contemporary Black feminism is the outgrowth of countless generations of personal sacrifice, militancy, and work by our mothers and sisters.”

4 Audre Lorde has essays and poems that speak from her point of view as an activist, poet, Lesbian, and Black women. Drawing upon inspiration from her viewpoints helped me shape how to present this information regarding Black feminist thoughts. Scholarly tools that I have found from my readings of her essays is that the truth can be presented in many ways, from a personal standpoint, from a historical standpoint, or even from a first-person point of view. Black feminist writing comes from a place of each story is not the same but is connected by the common struggle of political and systematic oppression of black women. Black feminist thought usually includes inclusion. Drawing upon Audre Lord’s literature, and the example she left for the readers in her writing, my thesis on this section consisted of inclusion of all people, and properly documenting people’s perspectives from an

honest standpoint. While looking at other topics of discussion that are related to my field of research, I debated, critiqued, and tried bridging the gap where some authors may have either touched on the subject briefly or missed a point altogether.
Chapter 1: Policing

The United States of America is known to the world as the country of freedom, the country that welcomes all no matter your religion, sex, or national origin. Refugees come to the US because they seek to have a better life because of that notion of freedom. Freedom can be an interesting concept because restrictions, such as laws, can restrict one’s freedom. However, the freedom that is restricted due to the color of your skin is another matter entirely. People of color experience firsthand restricted freedom in the United States when the government of the United States enables agents of violence in the form of the police into urban communities to subvert cries for racial equality. By focusing on policing practices, one can analyze how crimes committed by police against Black women have traditionally been ignored. However, this analysis goes deeper into the social component of Black women within social movements, such as the Civil Rights Movement. Male hierarchy ignored Black women's agenda, and that agenda was grounded in gender, race, and class. Not addressing Black women's agenda, ultimately hurt the progress of Black liberation. Many of the social issues that Black women endured, if resolved, would have greatly advanced Black liberation. Gender, race, and class played a part in Black women's collective struggles; these three social issues were how Black women experienced policing during the 1950s-1960s. The goal of this chapter is to show a deeper analysis of policing through surveillance and how police actions showed how freedom, systematically speaking, was not meant for people of color. It has to be understood that policing was and is the problem today in a social setting. This chapter will also show how Black women were truly oppressed through how they were policed during the 1950s-1960s. The history of oppression is largely linear; there have been different evolutions to oppression, but one force has
remained the same in the form of racism manifested through police, along with the subversion of a marginalized group of people in the form of policing.

**The Role of Police in Society**

There has been a long history between the Black community and police; many times, the relationship between the two sides has been one of mistrust and oppression. The Black community have always had to worry about overpolicing of neighborhoods; however, that is one of the roles of policing within the functions of society. After all, the main goal and focus of police is systematically protecting white wealth, white supremacy, and capital, which has been inherit to the growth of institutionalized racism.

White supremacy gives white politicians and wealthy elites the power to ensure that they do not lose power to the minorities in America. This tradition of using police to protect wealth and power on behalf of white politicians plays into the notion of Black Americans not being free: “It is a constant reminder of the space between freedom, and unfreedom. Where the contested citizenship of African Americans are held.”

The Civil Rights Movement during the 1960s showed how far police went to maintain the structure of white supremacy. The police are an extension of the state and federal government and are empowered to protect white supremacy.

Policing of the Black community is another function of the police to maintain white elites’ power. Through lack of opportunity and systemic advantages that are given to whites, Black Americans have been unable to advance into higher positions in jobs. This causes lower class Black families to live within certain areas of a city, which makes policing Black communities that much easier when the targeted demographic is in one area. The police are a direct reflection of the state, and it shows in the ideologies of police departments. Police are

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trained to be racists towards the Black community, and it shows within the structure of police tactics. The role of police in society is to help maintain white wealth and power through policing and violence. Social movements, such as the Civil Rights Movement during the 1960s, was a challenge to the system of white supremacy, and police were empowered by the state to use violence to protect white elites’ power over the minority.

**Control of Black Americans**

Our democracy is embedded with systemic issues that are in place to keep the white elite in power. Laws are created to ensure the safety of white supremacy, which is protected and enforced by police. *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation* scholar Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor examines systematic issues in our society and how Black liberation requires fundamental changes within the government. Taylor’s in-depth analysis of the concept of the double standard of justice is enlightening. Activists in the Civil Rights Movement viewed police as the enemy of progress; when a militarized force will do anything to subvert social movements that call for equality, that is opposition to progress. The police were used as agents of the state, and when there was a disturbance, the state would call upon the police to use force to deter Black men and women from protesting. Taylor states, “The racism of the police is not the product of vitriol, it flows from their roles as the agent of the state. The police function to enforce the rule of the politically powerful and economic elite. This is why poor and working middle-class communities are so overpoliced. African Americans are overrepresented among the ranks of the poor and the working class, so the police overwhelmingly focus on those neighborhoods, even as they direct their violence more generally against all working-class people.” Politicians would say that the policing of urban neighborhoods is for the protection of the people within those communities. If

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one could look at this from a hypothetical perspective, one could gain a deeper understanding of how flawed the use of police is in urban neighborhoods. If police are paid by the state and get directives from the state, their agendas can be seen; many times, these agendas are surrounded by ways of controlling the Black community. What is not seen, however, is the strategies and tactics police use that are kept from the public eye. This could lead to setups by the police, confrontations with urban residents, shootings of those residents, and ultimately, control of entire urban neighborhoods.

It has always been the goal of the police to protect interests within white communities, and over policing made that objective that much easier. Policing eventually crept into jobs in the form of labor forces. If there were whispers of workers organizing or discussions of strikes, an undercover officer would report information back to the police, and the police would then proceed to intervene to arrest and suppress the workers. This form of suppression in the workforce was commonly used, and in doing so, Black workers were continually being exploited for their labor; this cycle maintained the interests of white capital.

**Police Surveillance**

Historically speaking, maintaining society’s structure of white supremacy has been important to maintain capital and wealth. In the eyes of the government, urban rebellions were a threat to white supremacy, and there had to be guarantees that white supremacist ideals would be protected. These guarantees came in the form of surveillance by police departments working with federal and state governments. During the 1960s, surveillance operations to monitor Black activists who participated in protests increased. Congressional members proposed a question: is there a way to stop urban protests from happening before they even begin?8 This question gave

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rise to *The Challenge of Crime in a Free Society*, the sole purpose of which was to create intelligence units to fight crime. The Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA) was also created to assist financially in supporting police departments around the country to monitor, suppress, disrupt, and stop so-called violence and disobedience to the law. In American society, everything is racialized, which systematically controls the Black community.

Police surveillance squads were involved in intimidation as well, holding Black Americans at gunpoint and stopping cars with Blacks in them to intimidate and inspire fear. These were fear tactics in which many police departments engaged because they had the power to do so. Most of the police departments during the 1960s consisted of white men, and they had no sympathy for Black Americans. Oftentimes, if a white mob started attacking Black protestors, the cops would not interfere or help due to the contempt they had for Blacks.\(^9\) The inaction of police was a crime; when the law is broken, repercussions should be expected. However, there were two separate rules for two different groups of people. White Americans had the pleasure of not living with surveillance, secure that they are not always being watched and monitored. On the other side of this coin, Black Americans were targeted and labeled enemies of democracy due to their protesting that illuminates the many injustices of the police and law makers: “While the police will go through the motions of crime control though not always, it is through the lens of class and race skepticism if not outright animus.”\(^10\)

State governments were involved in monitoring civil rights groups as well. Detroit, Michigan, was one of many urban cities where civil rights protests were happening. State and local governments set up teams in which they planted informers, and different personnel

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\(^10\) Vitale, “The Police Are Not Here to Protect You,” 53.
performed different covert operations to gauge the activity of the Detroit Civil Rights movements. The scope of targeting of different activists did not just stop at protestors; the surveillance also included student groups, environmentalists, feminist, and gay groups. This reinforces the notion that any ideology of equality and anyone who stood against the system of a white-dominated society itself became a target. All of these social struggles that people of color fought for were threats to the economic and political interests of white elites. White elites knew that if these social groups succeeded in their efforts for equality, their interests in this country of maintaining control would be in danger.

**Growing Tensions in Detroit**

This next section analyzes Detroit, Michigan, which was one of the urban cities that experienced intense policing aggression and surveillance. Detroit is famously known for the urban rebellion that took place in 1967. What led to the rebellion in 1967 was growing racial tensions between the police and people of color. Such tensions were not addressed systemically. For situations such as these, the LEAA was created to give funds to police departments, such as Detroit’s, in order to disperse rebellions. The Black community in Detroit had been hounded repeatedly by police, and the violent actions police had taken against the Black community were rooted in the training they had received. The Black community had complained about the overwhelming violence they faced every day. Some of these complaints ranged from police not responding to calls for help in emergencies to a lack of accountability on the part of police departments when crimes were committed against people of color. In this regard, people of color knew that the chances of help they would receive from law enforcement were minimal to no help at all, so there needed to be a response about how to fight back. The Detroit NAACP, Detroit Urban League, and the American Civil Liberties Organization (Detroit Branch) made efforts to
make the misconduct of the Detroit Police Department more visible to the people via photographs. Protests happened on the streets to demonstrate and bring awareness to the ongoing struggle that was happening within the City of Detroit.

**Economic Repercussions**

An important aspect of surveillance and control was the concept of Black exploitation in the job industry. Many white elites in America benefited from capitalism while Black Americans continued to suffer at the hands of a corrupt system. With surveillance units in place to ensure the protection of white wealth and the elite, the oppressive cycle of oppression continued. People of color at their jobs had to be careful about what was spoken about during their shift, seeing as individuals at their jobs would also give information to police departments on people’s potential political activities. Chrysler, who was a part of the big three of the Detroit automotive companies, gave information about their workers and their political affiliations to the Detroit Red Squad and the FBI. With this information, the Detroit Red Squad used this information to assign undercover workers to follow these suspected activists connected to a social movement group. This went as far as the FBI recommending to different companies to fire some of the employees who were suspected of being involved with any social-political group. In the firing of these Black men and women, their income was crippled, and their movements continued to be monitored to get them in the criminal system. This is nothing new when it comes to surveillance of this magnitude. Since people of color have entered this country, there has been a system of monitoring their actions. All it has done is evolve over time into more technological

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advancements in order to monitor and track people of color in 2022.\textsuperscript{13} Black Americans continue to be exploited and underpaid for their labor and underrepresented in positions of power within the work environment.

Everything was done with a systematic purpose to control and maintain the white elites’ power. Crime is defined by the law, and law enforcement were the ones who deemed if you committed a crime had been committed due to the power they have. Accountability was a foreign concept to police officers during the 1960s due to being enabled by police officers and the state to protect white elites’ interest in maintaining power. This concept of justice, where surveillance squads could monitor organizations illegally and not face repercussions, is something that America enabled and continues to enable today; without accountability for overstepping boundaries in regards to monitoring and surveillance, we as a country will continue to be in a cynical cycle of racist and targeted injustices towards Black Americans.

In 2022, the ever-expanding capitalist society is known as America, and in this society, Black Americans continue to be crushed by the weight of capitalism. “How then can we transcend capitalism and challenge the structure of surveillance?”\textsuperscript{14} This question is raised in Brandi Thompson Summers’ article “Black Lives Under Surveillance” which critiques the surveillance of Black communities. With each governmental expansion of programs, all this does is open more opportunity for more surveillance of Black communities, which leads to more overpolicing of neighborhoods and active aggression from the police in our Black communities. The idea of defunding the police has been discussed in academic and political settings, but would

\textsuperscript{13} “Angela Davis (January 26, 1944),” National Archives and Records Administration, accessed February 6, 2022, https://www.archives.gov/research/african-americans/individuals/angela-davis.

that really solve the issue at hand? A more radical analysis is needed that attacks systemic issues with surveillance of the Black community, police brutality, and capitalism. Without conversations surrounding these key concepts, Black Americans will continue to be oppressed and exploited for their labor.

**Policing of the Black Woman**

Black women were policed around their gender, and this practice was overlooked during the 50s, and, 60s. Men believed that women should know their place; in this regard, police ensured that Black women knew their place as subhuman because of the way they were policed around gender, race, and class. Historians continued to teach oppression history from a male-dominated perspective because of society’s constant obsession with a male-dominated lens of history. Black men were indeed oppressed during the 1950s to early 1960s. However, when learning about systemic oppression, no group has been marginalized and oppressed more than Black women. This practice does a disservice to the academic world of learning and continues the traditional ignorance of how Black women were policed and oppressed. This section seeks to show how Black women were oppressed by police during the 1950s to 1960s. This period of time could be seen as oppression, but this was the beginning of resistance against policing of Black women and gave birth to radical stances and critiques against police and the government.

**Poor, Working-Class Black Women**

Policing comes in many different forms when discussing the relationship between Black women and law enforcement. Poor, working-class Black women were often discriminated against in the jobs they were able to get. This discrimination affected the class aspect of gender,

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race, and class. During the 1950s, Black women started to gain employment; however, with society's ways at the time, Black women were unable to get good quality jobs. There were, however, disadvantages that Black women had compared to those of white women. White women had the better, more comfortable jobs, such as desk jobs. Black women, on the other hand, did the dirty working jobs, such as being a caregiver for white families. Society believed that these jobs were the only type of employment Black women could do. Black women did not have much money to begin with, but they worked the job that needed to be done in order to provide for their families. The stereotype of Black women as mammies continued to be reinforced by the job market, which only gave Black women value as oppressed mammies in the eyes of society.

The concept of these status quos plays a major role in how Black women lived during this time period and also how they were policed. Historian LaShawn Harris describes how navigating life during the 1950s was dangerous for Black women because they did not have citizenship rights. Without citizenship rights, Black women and girls were vulnerable to attacks from the police. Additionally, many crimes, such as sexual assault, rapes, and violence, that happened to Black women were unreported due to not being able to turn to the legal system for help because of a lack of citizenship rights and money for a lawyer’s legal fees. Perhaps the most sickening of these crimes were the rapes that happened by white police officers. As detailed by Dr. Harris, many Black women who were arrested were sometimes sexually assaulted by the arresting police officer. Dr. Harris’s analysis about the predicament of Black women's struggle in

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regard to legal protection and harassment by police shows the system’s lack of care towards Black women and the protection of white supremacy.

**Media Attacks on Black Women**

Politicians labeled Black women as anti-citizen, pathological, and hypersexual; the media through newspapers demoralized Black women just because they were women; and lawmakers went as far as to state that Black women could not even be victims and enforced the idea that Black women would prey on white men. Dr. Harris provides in depth analysis at the root of why these stereotypes were applied to Black women. States had believed racist stereotypes concerning Black women and crimes they committed; without citizenship rights, they were left to the mercy of the system itself. Statements from public newspapers even stated that Black women carried guns and razors. Artist illustrations in newspapers also played a role in dehumanizing Black women, which reinforced the “just” cause of police brutality towards Black women in the eyes of the public. These images played into the hands of white citizens being in danger and needing protecting from Black women. With the media having a war on Black women, the enforcement of rigid Jim Crow policing made it easier for crimes to be committed against them.

**Surveillance of Black Women of the 1950s**

Black women were also on the surveillance list many times as potential threats to democracy. With the public on the side of the law, there was no protection of Black women. Many officers seized the opportunity to torture and sexually harass Black women on the street, in their homes, in police stations, and in jails. One constant throughout the oppression and

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17 Harris, “#SayHerName.”
harassment of Black women was the belief that white policing gave the police the right to have control over a Black woman's body. The system itself favored violence towards Black women, and many times, survivors of these violent attacks were persecuted for trying to speak about their experiences. This helped to shape the reality and future scholarship that emerged from Black women. After all, who could believe that Black women were victims in a society that enabled these horrendous activities? It was shameful that society and law enforcement gave white police officers so much power. If the ones who are supposed to serve and protect are the ones who rape and murder Black women, it shows the worth society gives to Black women. These women were misused, beaten, and broken mentally, physically, and emotionally.

The Beginnings of Resistance

Black women have been considered the backbone of the Black community. The fight of the Black women, if captured by one word, would be perseverance. With Jim Crow policing in the North, Black women did not take this abusive behavior from the police without fighting in many ways. Anti-police brutality campaigns were a major movement in which Black women started to eradicate police violence against Black women. One of the main concerns and concentrations of these movements was for public safety for Black women and accountability for the police action. Black women garnered enough support from other Black women in different communities that together they were able to get officials elected who would speak on behalf of the anti-police campaign. Eliminating Jim Crow policing was at the forefront of the campaign's goals, and fraternal police and police departments were who they were challenging in terms of systemic change. LaShawn Harris highlights that Black women “demanded protection from unreasonable search and seizure, an end to coerced confessions and police immunity from criminal prosecution, equitable distribution of city resources, and independent civilian complaint
review boards.”¹⁸ Black women’s resistance against police was not just campaigns of words, they also engaged in hand to hand self-defense to protect themselves from police brutality, whether in the form of physical or sexual violence.

**Black Women's Analysis**

Black women’s resistance against the police was multi-layered. There were congressional hearings, civil lawsuits, and working with the Civil Rights Movement. One organization that was a major player in the protection of Black women was the Black Women Communist party. One of the beauties of the resistance and collaboration of Black women was the generational impact it had on new activist leaders and intellectual thinkers that arose during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. There would be new intellectual thinkers, such as Mae Mallory, Angela Davis, Septima Clark, Ruth Wilson Gilmore, and Ida B. Wells, who were inspired by the groundwork that previous radical Black women pioneers had laid forth.

**Looking Forward**

With the ongoing lack of accountability throughout the years, there has been a pattern of police departments continually harassing Black women. Andrea Ritchie details these harassments and policing of Black women in her book *Invisible No More*, in which the analysis and critiques of police department policies and lack of protection from police officers’ abuse of Black women and mothers continue to be a glaring theme for Black women. Police are not a Black citizens, friend, and they are in place to ensure the safety and interests of white elites by any means necessary. The excessive force that police officers have used against Black mothers has resulted in miscarriages.¹⁹ In these instances, police were not held accountable for the loss of

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¹⁸ Harris, “#SayHerName.”

life. In this regard, Black women's lives have not been viewed as precious by the continued police harassment and abuse.

**Conclusion**

Black liberation cannot be spoken of without discussing the role of Black women and the police. Black women have been the engine that has driven and constantly fought for change whereas the police have been there every step of the way to continue to fight against the evolution of Black freedom. Black women have been through tremendous pain, hardship, and oppression in the Black community, and many times, they have felt powerless. However, they have not taken this pain lightly. Black women have used this pain to become intellectual thinkers, gave birth to theories, and influence our next generation of thinkers.
Chapter 2: The Resistance of the Radical Black Woman

Towards the end of the late 1950s, Black women were oppressed through expanded policing and systemic issues surrounding gender, race, and class. Oftentimes, these issues were not being addressed due to the public's conception of Black women and seeing them as less than human. Black women, however, did not want to be the victim of their own situation; they wanted to fight back by organizing and theorizing based on their lived experience. This chapter aims to do two things. First, it will show how radical Black women organized to resist police brutality and systemic oppression and exploitation. Secondly, it will show the evolutionary growth of police alongside the progression of radical Black women and the corresponding evolution of state repression of Black women's freedom struggles through expanded policing. It is important to show that police evolution was in line with the evolution of radical Black women’s resistance. After all, police were the deterrent force called on by state governments towards Black women and social movements that rebelled against white supremacy. The story of the resistance of radical Black women cannot be told without the evolution of police brutality and repression through state responses, which were key when discussing informed analyses. Black women's lived experiences have certainly helped shape Black intellectual thought that helped the growth of social movements, such as the Civil Rights Movement, the Black Power Movement, and the Black Lives Matter Movement. These interactions with police showed Black women the reality in which they lived. To improve upon that reality, Black women decided to take control of their own destinies by creating spaces for themselves in which they could come together to theorize their oppression and put these theories into practice. For this reason, Black women fought to center their experiences within the Civil Rights Movement, but while they were doing so, they created their own Black feminist organizations that came from these social movements.
The theorizing spaces Black women created inspired women of color across the country and resonated primarily with working-class, poor Black women. The concepts of gender, race, and class were topics that the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements addressed, but male leadership often subsumed them through a broader focus on race at the expense of gender. These theorizing spaces were important to have; therefore, Black women were marginalized within the broader aims of the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements due to the historical traditional patriarchy that was practiced within the movement itself by male leadership. These spaces they created were driven and led by Black women as they organized and educated themselves on what it means to be a Black woman in the United States and the world.

While Black women were progressing in addressing their political needs, such as equality and self-determination, policing was also evolving. The police are an extension of the state, and the police reflect the state’s intent to control and subvert the Black community through any means necessary. This came in the form of expanded surveillance and militarized policing, seen specifically through the Law Enforcement Act of 1965, which was signed by president Lyndon B. Johnson. Signing this law enforcement act upped the scale of aggression the police used, enabling them to essentially declare war on urban communities without any accountability.

**Mae Mallory and Black Militancy**

A major important theme with radical Black women activists came from the intersectionality of race, class, and gender. It is hard to discuss the resistance of radical Black women without addressing these fundamental issues. Black feminist have theorized and fought, and continue to fight, triple oppression; triple oppression is a theory that there is a correlation between sexism, racism, and classism in connection with Black women’s struggles. Mae Mallory is an example of a poor working-class Black woman who theorized about and organized against
white supremacy based on her lived experience with the triple oppression of race, class, and gender. Her experiences show how her lived experiences influenced her theory and praxis about achieving liberation for working-class Black women.

In order to get a glimpse at the life of a radical Black woman who experienced this triple oppression, Mallory is an important guide to gain a deeper analysis of the lived experiences of working-class Black women. Mae Mallory was born in Macon, Georgia, on June 9, 1927. At a young age, Mallory did not necessarily understand the way of the world pertaining to white kids and Black kids: “I found that they weren't at all superior, particularly intelligence, a great deal of them if you want to consider people being inferior, you know, a great deal of them were of inferior intelligence.” In her youth, her experience with white kids was positive in terms of playing together; however, that relationship took a turn when an altercation happened where she tested the limits of Jim Crow Laws.

Race relations between whites and Blacks were still controlled by Jim Crow laws, and Mallory was not doing well in the South in adjusting to what she could and could not do under Jim Crow. Mallory had an altercation with a white mother and her daughter and was hurt when the mother hit her. She informed her cousin that the white child had hit her, and in response, her cousin “told her to go back and even if Mary Saloon had crawled up her mother's dress to hit her or Mallory wasn't going to come into that house.” Mallory did as she was told and punched the white child in the face. The mother responded by calling the police, and 15 police officers showed up looking for Mallory. After this altercation, her mother knew that Mallory would not be able to handle the Jim Crow South, so they moved north to Albee Square in New York in 1939.

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20 Mallory, interview with Malaika Lumumba, 3.
21 Mallory, interview with Malaika Lumumba, 2.
Mae Mallory saw the inexcusable conditions of the Black community of New York when she first arrived. The building that she moved into was shared with three other Black families. She was not allowed to play with the other children because many of the Black children within that neighborhood did not have access to bathtubs in their own homes. This led Mallory to have an isolated childhood from the rest of the children and influenced her to start reading books and strengthen her intelligence. At the age of 17, Mallory married and became a mother, but shortly after, she knew there was more for her than just being a mother. She eventually left her husband due to assigned roles she did not feel comfortable in. Mallory was an intellectual and believed that there is more to life than just being a mother: “Now I love babies but I think there is something else in life besides having a baby and rearing it.”

Mallory rejected society's roles for her and knew that she could be more than what any assigned gender role was given to her. 

**Activism**

Mallory was an activist, and the heart of her activism was created out of lived experience and wanting better for the next generation. Looking for an outlet for her anger, she briefly joined the communist party during the McCarthy era. The McCarthy era was a period in which people who identified as a communist would be blacklisted from opportunities and jobs due to their belief in communist ideals. In her findings about communism, Mallory knew that it sounded different from the capitalist society the United States upholds. Mallory decided to leave the communist party due to discrimination with jobs within the communist party: “Well, when the boss fired me, and the union let him, and the union didn't give me a job because only the Hungarians had to have jobs, I began to question the validity of the white communists.”

This incident gave Mallory insight to understand that even within the communist party, there would

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22 Mallory, interview with Malaika Lumumba, 8.
23 Mallory, interview with Malaika Lumumba, 10.
still be racism. What truly was the difference between the communist party and society? As far as Mallory could tell, there was none.

One day, Mae Mallory stumbled upon the lack of sanitation within her daughters’ school after she was informed of a death of a student in the back alley when a beer truck had run over a Black child. Initially, this death was seen as an accident, but a deeper analysis shows that the current state of society did not care if a Black child lost their life because society deemed the life of a Black child less important than beer being delivered. Mallory decided to go to the school to speak to the administration about this occurrence and saw why her children ran home after school so quickly. The bathrooms the young boys and girls used were less than sanitary; the waste in these bathrooms could not be flushed after being used. The smell penetrated the inside of the schools, and nothing was being done about this, so Mallory decided to challenge the school about these injustices and won. The bathrooms were replaced the next day. This victory gave Mallory the confidence to continue to challenge the system. After her victory, she was inspired to then fight for a new school because she believed that children should be able to learn in a decent environment: “If I could go to Albany and get a toilet, I should be able to go to city hall and get to school.”

Mae Mallory continued her pursuit of equality by challenging the system yet again. This time, she decided to challenge city hall. Her goal was to get a new school built for the children, which would be a major victory for the Black community, so she organized and gained supporters around the call for action for a new school to be built: “Well, I found out that you can challenge city hall. People say don't fight city hall but you can fight city hall, just fight.” She knew in her lived experience that society gave nothing to the Black community, and she grew up

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24 Mallory, interview with Malaika Lumumba, 3.
25 Mallory, interview with Malaika Lumumba, 6.
being told she was less than, but her lived experience influenced her to take action for the children to not have the same poor conditions in education and the building. This action produced a victory against city hall in 1957.

Black parents had many concerns over the quality of education that their children had received, and activism began around this concern. This gave birth to the Harlem Nine, which Mallory was apart of. In 1958, a group of Black mothers who were motivated to challenge the system by boycotting the schools in Harlem. This led to different discussions about how best to go about achieving their goals. The demands from these nine mothers were better educations and school buildings for their children to learn in. The Black mothers were ready to put it all on the line in their fight for better education for their children. Black Women, such as Viola Waddy, stated, “We will go to jail and rot there, if necessary, but our children will not go to Jr. High Schools 136, 139, or 120.”26 The Harlem Nine did in fact run into legal challenges in dealing with their fight for education. They were charged with crimes of violating compulsory education laws by holding their children out of school. However, Justice Justine Polier sided with the Harlem Nine by a ruling that stated that the mothers had a constitutional right to refuse less than quality education: “These parents have the constitutionally guaranteed right to elect no education for their children rather than to subject them to discriminatory, inferior education.”27 This ruling was a legal victory for Mallory and the Harlem Nine.28 However, though the Harlem Nine’s


28 Ashley D. Farmer, “Fighting School Segregation Didn’t Take Place Just in the South .” Life Letters Magazine, April 17, 2021,
efforts achieved victories, things within the organization were not always smooth. There were rifts between different members of the organization; these rifts revolved around class lines and how they looked down on Mallory for being a poor Black woman. It showed the mindset of some of the other Black mothers within the organization; classism does not just apply to white society, it even permeates the minds of the high middle class Black women who believed they were better than Mallory due to their living conditions. This would later on be vital to the creation of the Organization of Militant Black Women.

Mae Mallory refused to accept that nothing could be done to improve the wellbeing of the Black community’s struggle for equality. After Mallory’s different victories as a militant Black woman, she was persecuted for her actions against the system. The state government retaliated by finding something that would dissuade Mallory from continuing her activism. After Mallory protested conditions at her children’s school, the government looked into her financial situation with receiving welfare checks. Mallory received notice from the welfare department that she would be prosecuted for grand larceny. She was thrown into jail, and her children were taken from her during this time as well: “This whole furor around the schools stirred up such a thing until the power structure decided that they would try to find something that they could discredit me with.”  

Mallory understood that she was being made an example of what would happen if anybody were to rebel against the system; however, she did not stop her activism as she had only gotten 30 days in jail. This was a retaliation in direct response against Mallory for her actions against the school board and city hall. These experiences were key in that they served as a learning point for Mallory through which she developed more radical critiques of the system.


29 Mallory, interview with Malaika Lumumba, 15.
and how better to analyze the structure in which society operates pertaining to a Black woman.

**Prosecution**

During the 1960s, the question of nonviolence was a topic that was frequently discussed throughout the Civil Rights Movement. Some believed this was the best way to gain rights, while others believed that violence should be met with violence. Robert F. Williams was an advocate for self-defense and a former NAACP chapter leader, but he was removed from that position due to his position on armed self-defense. He strongly believed in defending oneself if met with violence. Perception is key also when understanding violence within protests; white Americans during this time period always saw violence by Black men and women as radical due to the threat to white supremacy. However, there has been a long history of Black protestors arming themselves to protect themselves from the Klan or at times law enforcement. Mae Mallory’s beliefs about defending oneself agreed with Williams’s political viewpoints, so she linked up with him and his chapter: “When Robert Williams …was brought up on charges by the national [NAACP] advocating armed self-defense. And I heard it and I said My God, you know, this is only right.”

Mallory believed in Williams’s teaching, and she decided to organize support for him. Eventually, she named the cause the crusader family for those who supported Williams.

A situation happened in 1961 where Williams was confronting Klan violence, and he encouraged others to use arms to protect themselves and their communities against Klan terrorism. However, on August 27, 1961, a white mob attacked the Freedom Riders who were there to support Williams and the NAACP. Violence erupted around the city. When Mr. and Mrs. G. Bruce Stegall turned down the street toward Williams’s house, it was crowded with Black residents who had gathered seeking shelter. Williams had a choice to turn away the couple looking for shelter or accept them in his home hopefully to ease tensions. He chose the latter, but

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30 Mallory, interview with Malaika Lumumba, 17.
sadly, his kindness was met with lies told by the elderly couple. The elderly couple informed authorities they had been kidnapped by Williams. Mallory was staying with Williams at the time; she was also an accomplice to this alleged kidnapping as told by the Stegalls. Williams fled to Cuba while Mallory fled to Cleveland, Ohio, where police later found her and arrested her on October 19, 1961.31

Mallory battled the legal system in particular when she was being held in Cleveland, and her situation was less than ideal in her battle for freedom. North Carolina Governor Terry Sanford attempted to get Mae extradited back to the state. However, the governor of Ohio would not sign the papers, and he tried to cut a deal with Mallory to get Williams in Cuba: “See, this is the game that they put black people in. So he was voted in. He said one of his top Negroes went to jail to make a deal with me, that if I could say that Fidel Castro gave Rob arms and encouraged him to start the trouble in Monroe that he would give me a good job, a state job, and I wouldn't have to worry about anything.”32 This informed Mallory that the system worked for itself and did not truly stand for justice for all. The system is not grounded in justice; it is merely an illusion of justice to the public while committing humanity crimes towards African Americans.

It is vital to understand that race controls many of the laws that are created and what the Black community does and does not have access to. Systemically, the United States has always persecuted Blacks through the use of police and legislation, which was on full display when Mallory was in prison. In news reports written about Mallory during her time in prison, the media attacked her character, deeming her to be dangerous and needing to be locked away. Justice Hugo Black, who was a United States Supreme Court Justice, denied Mallory bond after

31 Mallory, interview with Malaika Lumumba, 18.
32 Mallory, interview with Malaika Lumumba, 23.
the alleged kidnapping of the Stegalls. However, Robert Soblen was a spy within the United States and was able to post bond, but Mallory could not. The state and federal government had criminalized Blackness to the point where a spy within the borders of the United States was deemed less of a risk than a Black woman.

Mallory's lived experience with the system taught her that calling out white supremacy comes with consequences. The public persecution that she faced from government officials and police informed her that any protest will be persecuted: “They try to pile as much on you as they can pile on you to see if you will snap; to see if you will break.” Despite this, her upbringing had shown her that she should not think of herself as any less than white people. Mallory's lived experience after her legal troubles helped her form the Organization of the Black Militant Woman in 1965. Mallory stated that “Black working-class women, adopting a nationalist political agenda and militant persona was a viable path to liberation.” She felt compelled to create this organization because she knew from her lived experiences that other poor Black working-class women were important to Black liberation of women because they were fighting for women. The power that working-class Black women held in terms of being radical was something that made the Organization of the Black Militant Woman inspirational and radical. Mallory is resistance personified. She was persecuted, shamed, and looked down upon even by other Black women, but she remained true to her north star, which was resistance to the system and fighting for equality for poor working-class Black women.

**Third World Women's Alliance**

Black women have been integral to Black community leadership in many of the

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33 Mallory, interview with Malaika Lumumba, 16.
liberation spaces, like the Civil Rights Movement, Black Power Movements, and the current Black Lives Matter Movement. Despite their important contributions within these organizations, Black women were pushed to the back due to their gender. This made it difficult to speak about a Black feminist agenda within these organizing spaces, so women created their own spaces to organize and address their own issues without the male patriarchy, which was influenced by the oppressive society. Mallory’s Organization of the Militant Black Woman was created in response to gendered roles in social movements. Another organization that came to be surrounding the intersectionality of gender, race, and class was the Third World Women's Alliance (TWWA). This organization did not just focus on Black women's struggles in the United States, but it also collaborated with women of color around the world.

TWWA was founded in 1968 by Frances Beal and other Black women within the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Beal was a political activist who understood the need to address the Black women's agenda surrounding the issues of gender, race, and class in regard to how Black women should define who they are. Because of patriarchy within SNCC, she created SNCC Black Women’s Liberation Committee in 1968. Black women within SNCC supported Black manhood and empowerment; however, Black men continued to ignore Black women’s viewpoints of Black liberation due to their gender. Beal noted a puzzling aspect to the cause of Black liberation: if Black men were fighting to liberate Black people from the shackles of capitalism and racism, how could they leave intact the oppression of patriarchy within SNCC? Black men choosing aspects of liberation to fit their gendered needs was a contradiction to the fight of Black liberation, and continuing to keep patriarchy in place in SNCC


pushed Black women, such as Beal, to seek other avenues of organizing around issues facing Black women during the 1960s. At the core of TWWA’s message was to address the intersectionality of gender, race, and class; however, since Black women from SNCC were a part of TWWA, there had to be clear distinctions between both groups' political beliefs. TWWA wanted to also address issues pertaining to reproductive rights, abortions, and sterilizations.

TWWA was not just a US-based organization; it served an international community because the organization members had conversations with different women of color around the world. At the core of the conversations where they all agreed on their own oppression was the intersectionality of gender, race, and class. The Cold War during the 1950s played a part in the growth of TWWA; the Black women within the organization did not like how Asian, African, and Latin American countries were being used as pawns within the anticommunist empires. TWWA believed that these third world nations should be free and not forced into an imperialist war between countries. Connections started to become clear to TWWA between the United States and colonial regimes that oppressed people of color around the world. This led to more informed analysis of shared oppression, which inspired understanding of other women of color's lived experiences in different countries and led to collaborations between different women of color in different countries.

This has been an ongoing collaboration between Black women in the US and other countries around the world. TWWA collaborated with women in Cuba, learning from them and establishing the Los Venceremites in 1969 to help the women in Cuba establish news surrounding the revolution that was taking place in Cuba and women’s roles in them. Black

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women in their combined lived experiences knew what core principles they needed to enact for the advancement of the Black women's agenda. These principles came in the form of Black liberation, self-determination, and self-sufficiency. The movement focused on these principles by educating Black women about questioning everything, especially within the functions of society, and anything that did not serve Black women’s needs. An area for growth was to be challenged with new ideological frameworks that at conferences would be discussed. It was important in this education to promote self-worth and mental growth for Black women and manifest their goals in an engaging way. With the movement gaining traction, it appealed to the everyday working-class Black women who were being economically exploited for their labor. The system of white supremacy had to be challenged and changed for the true liberation of Black women to happen. The movement connected many different women of color because there was a conditioning by society that continued its traditional racist attacks on Black women: “Black women’s liberation is not just the skin analysis. It’s not just the class analysis. It’s not just the racial analysis. It’s how those things operate in the real world in an integrated way, to both understand oppression and exploitation and to understand some methods by which we might kind of try to deal with them.” Beal stated this in an interview in 2005, and it still is relevant in today's society with how Black women are treated. How one sees themselves is important when talking about liberation; liberation of the mind is equally important to the liberation of one's lived experiences. TWWA empowered Black women to define who they are and not let society do that for them.

The TWWA women rejected in many ways the roles that they were given by society,

along with the assigned roles of the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power Movement during that time period. The Black Women Leadership Committee ideals were in conjunction with that of the TWWA. Both the BWLC and TWWA shared many of the same visions when it came to the advancement of self empowerment, and education concerning the intersectionality of gender, race, and class: “BWLC members saw ‘nothing wrong with cultural nationalism’ as a theory but rejected the conservative gender roles that advocates espoused.”41 Patton makes this remark about gendered roles that were traditionally assigned to Black women. It was important for Black women to escape the patriarchy they were under because they could only advance so far within these social movements. It should be noted, however, that even though many of the radical Black women who became a part of these organizing spaces still worked in the Civil Rights Movement and fought on behalf of the Black community while creating organizations such as TWWA. Black male leadership within the Civil Rights Movement and Black Power Movements had failed with their goal of total Black liberation; if Black liberation is the goal, then shouldn't liberation be as inclusive as possible? Refusing to push harder for a more focused attentiveness to Black women's lived experiences did not help the goal of being inclusive. Rather it created divides within the social movement organization.

Black men focused on keeping women in the back because of traditional specified gender roles created by white men to maintain male patriarchy. On the occasions that Black women came into power over men in social organizations, it was met with resistance and disdain from male members of organizations. One example is that of Elaine Brown, who became the new Black Panther Party leader in 1974 after Huey P. Newton fled to Cuba for murder and assault charges. Male panthers were not thrilled with this decision because they believed a woman

41 Farmer, Remaking Black 171.
should be behind a desk instead of leading. Oftentimes, Black Panther men within the organization wanted their women to be seen and not heard, even though they were leaders within the party: “Behind the scenes women ran almost every program and were involved in every level of the party.” In this regard, Black men had failed Black women by falling into the traditional societal male patriarchy, and it was another motivating factor for Black women to create their own spaces. The patriarchy of the Black Panther Party was a concern in instances within the party where men would not take orders from a woman regardless of their rank-and-file. Many times, it was the men's egos within the organization that caused friction between the women and the men. Black women panthers did just as much as the Black panther men to advance organizational causes. In this regard, an analysis could be made that the party seeking to liberate all Black people from the systemic and racist efforts of the government themselves had become oppressors.

Connections with different women around the world are what made TWWA so relatable in terms of different women of color’s lived experiences. These women learned from one another in terms of understanding each other’s different lived experiences with oppression from government and systemic issues they faced. They also supported one another, which was important because these women in their lived experiences with governments and male-dominated societies knew that they had to do for themselves because the governments and men of the world did not put importance on Black women's lives and other women of color as well.

TWWA was transformational in that it not only addressed gender, race, and class, but also

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the wrongdoings of governments all around the world, particularly those governments that were involved in wars and colonialism. These radical Black women brought their own analysis of different political issues that were going on in the world, and they were critical against the United States, particularly with their involvement in Vietnam. The TWWA stance on the war was publicly well known in January of 1966 when they acknowledged that the Vietnamese people were being oppressed, which led to an anti-war movement that had debates and discussions surrounding imperialism, globalization, and self-determination. Imperialism is an influence of sorts, and it goes beyond one country's borders. American imperialism is a prime example of this. TWWA discussed and theorized ways to end American imperialism in other countries. Removing U.S. foreign policy involvement from different countries that were being oppressed was an analysis that can be inferred from the TWWA’s discussion of the United States’ imperialism. The critique of imperialism came from the Civil Rights and Black Power movements, knowing that American imperialism continued even after slavery had ended and its influence was still felt around the world.

The fact that other women overseas experienced some of the same issues of imperialism and triple oppression helped TWWA members understand their collective goal of liberation from systemic issues within governments. Some of the women within the organization had the chance to live and work in post-revolution Cuba for a more diverse understanding of the struggles of women abroad. These interactions with women abroad helped Black women back at home reevaluate how they were being treated in regard to gender equality.

**State and Policing Evolution**

During the time period in which the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements were growing, the government needed ways to continue to subvert the message of equality from these
social movements. The cause of concern from whites was that the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements threatened the economic and political power that they had held onto historically for years. As state repression escalated through the expansion of policing in the 1960s, Black women organizers developed increasingly radical critiques of systemic racism and the US government.

Oftentimes, the government refused to acknowledge the source of the problem at hand, especially in regard to race relations. This willful ignorance is one of the root causes of racist ideologies and beliefs that have helped to maintain white power. These assumptions about the Black community were not grounded in facts. Instead, these fears were played into the white community to maintain public support of oppressive tactics used by the government to maintain control. White supremacy is controlled heavily by political and economic exploitation of marginalized Black Americans, and it goes hand in hand with the evolution of the police in the late 1960s, which came from the state’s enabling the use of expanded surveillance and systematic programs in the form of social reform programs that supposedly were for the benefit of urban Black men and women. Programs, such as the New Frontier social program, which was created by President John F. Kennedy in 1960, prevented government contractors from discriminating against employees or applicants based on race.

Other government programs that were created during the 1960s was The Great Society program. This program created important social programs like Medicaid and the Equal Opportunity Act; they were coupled with the expansion of surveillance programs, such as COINTELPRO, which was created in 1956 by the FBI to monitor political groups that were deemed dangerous to democracy. This was nothing more than a rouse for a hidden agenda for expanded surveillance and more control through these government programs. The threads can be

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traced back to President Kennedy when he knew something had to be done about the Negro problem in America. The Negro problem, according to the Kennedy administration, was multilayered when it came to understanding what pressures the administration was under. President Kennedy knew that he won the election by a narrow victory, so he was hesitant to do anything significant for the Black community due to fears of his reelection bid when the time came. Kennedy had received 70% of Black votes, which played a major role in his election to president. With growing pressure from the Black community for legislation action, the administration had to navigate this reality of aiding the Black community while focusing on political gains in Washington.

The war on crime was, at its core, an investment by the government to maintain white supremacy. The war on crime was declared by President Johnson to alarm Americans to the growing concerns of the rising crime rates that were happening across the nation: “No right is more elemental to our society than the right to personal security and no right needs more urgent protection.” The Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA) was created to aid local and state governments in their fight against crime, but it mainly targeted racial protests that were happening across the country. The LEAA and war on crime were direct responses to the urban rebellions that were taking place between 1964 and 1965. These are ways in which systematic


racism was used to target people of color; these agencies and organizations were used to attack people of color. White Americans were never seen as thugs or a threat to democracy, but Black men and women protesting racial injustice were. Money was given by the federal government to programs, such as LEAA, to continue to expand operations to subvert and quell protests across the country: “The LEAAs allocation grew thirteen-fold during the Nixon administration, from $63 million in fiscal year to 1969 to $871 million in 1974.”

The Law Enforcement Act of 1965 gave federal funding to states and local levels through state agencies and local crime programs as well. This was signed by President Johnson in his attempt to control “the Negro problem” in predominately Black populated cities. There is a direct correlation between the evolution of policing, the power police gained, and the legislation that was passed in the government spurred on by previous presidents. The government knew the cause of oppression but ignored it willfully and continued its systematic oppression to maintain white supremacy. President Johnson's interpretation of the rebellions was based on “poisonous propagandists who posed as spokesman for the underprivileged and capitalized on the real grievances of suffering people.”

Shifting blame has always been a tactic used by government officials who do not understand that systemic issues within the government continue to be the cause of urban protests. The final years of Johnson's administration included new strategies to seek out criminals in neighborhoods. Johnson wanted to crush these rebellions with increased and militarized policing in urban neighborhoods that would subvert urban protests.

Police, with the help of the Law Enforcement Act of 1965, had increased riot gear, and assault rifles were provided to them to maintain crowd control and urban protests. The militarization of police started during the 1960s in direct response to urban protests. Eventually,

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48 Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime*, 118.

49 Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime*, 136.
this led to the LEAA and the war on crime in order to criminalize the Black community. These were ways in which the government used laws to attack and subvert the Black community during the 1960s. When a Black individual is arrested for protesting, it sends a clear message to Black men and women that the institution of white supremacy, which America was founded on, will not change. Activists and organizers could only do so much in the face of constant attacks from militarized police. Some protestors lost their lives to police violence during urban rebellions and uprisings. Social issues that protestors were fighting for silently faded to the background due to the overwhelming force of police and politicians who used their power to subvert cries for equality. This is how Black Lives Matter inherited social problems from the Civil Rights era, which without accountability continues to be the fight youth protests fight for today.

**Informed Radical Resistance**

The evolved forms of oppression through policing, policies, and increased police surveillance produced more radical analysis and critiques of the system. One of the more prominent Black feminist figures that critiqued the system was Angela Davis. Davis had strong political beliefs that were rooted in communism. Communist beliefs are grounded in an economic sharing of wealth. The government of the United States is reliant upon capitalism, which is a form of oppression to the marginalized people who are unable to advance their lives due to the structure of society. This structure of society gives wealth to white men and women while the distribution of wealth for Black men and women is not on par with their counterparts. Davis, in an interview, states, “I am a communist because I am convinced that the reason we have been forcefully compelled to eke out an existence at the very lowest level of American society has to do with the very nature of capitalism. If we are going to rise out of our oppression,
and poverty we will have to destroy the American capitalist system.”

Davis also was an advocate for the liberation of Black women; her critique and analysis of the system was from a Black feminist lived experience. Davis knew that gender plays a major role in politics and economic class; Black middle-class women and white middle-class women are different not just in race, but also in their activism around women's places in the economic structure of society. Working-class Black women face oppression in different complex ways that cross between gender and class within an economic oppressive system of white supremacy. Davis believed that Black feminism should be “an adversary stance to white male rule and have activity resisted its inroads upon them and their communities, both in dramatic and subtle ways.” Davis was an accomplished, educated Black feminist who also believed in the abolition of prison systems that were created to lock up Black men and women. Davis’s experiences with the state’s repression of and her work with incarcerated people influenced her to become an activist for prison abolition. Her activism and her connections to communism gained the attention of the FBI and governor Ronald Reagan. In 1969, Davis was hired as a professor of philosophy at the University of California-Los Angeles. She was still in connection with the communist party, and California Governor Ronald Reagan did not accept this. In 1969, Reagan wanted her dismissed due to her connection to the communist party to make Davis an example to those who challenged the capitalist system of the United States. However, the first attempt to fire


Davis failed due to it being blocked by a court ruling. The Board of Regents, however, took necessary steps to then proceed to fire her due to her use of “inflammatory language.”²⁵³ This persecution of Davis was due to her vocal critique of the system and her support of the Black Panther Party. This analysis shows that those in positions of power will use political power to suppress criticisms of white supremacy. Davis knew that her voice was important, and the causes she supported and fought for were worth the sacrifice of losing her job as a professor. She continued on her path of activism, which led her to an encounter with George Jackson.

Davis in her activism had come across Jackson in a court room for a pretrial of a murder of a prison guard in Soledad prison. Davis and Jackson started their involvement with each other through letters. Davis ran into trouble with the law on August 7, 1970, in a particular situation involving Jonathan Jackson, who was George Jackson's younger brother. Jonathan Jackson had tried to free George Jackson from prison. George Jackson had been charged with stealing $70 from a gas station in Los Angeles, California. While in prison, he had transformed himself into a leader, but in the eyes of the correctional officers, he was deemed a Black militant. While George was brought up on these charges, a message managed to get out about the situation that George was in, and his brother Johnathan took up arms to rescue his brother, which led to a shootout within the courtroom due to him taking hostages. Johnathan lost his life in this daring attempt for his form of justice.

Davis was accused of murder in connection to the failed rescue attempt due to her support of George. Davis was implicated on the belief that she had supplied the weapons to Johnathan, which put her on the FBI's top ten most wanted list.²⁵⁴ Putting Davis on the most

https://www.archives.gov/research/african-americans/individuals/angela-davis#davisintro
²⁵⁴ “Angela Davis.” (January 26, 1944).
wanted list did a few things. For one, it gave the media reason to change the narrative about her. The public knew she was a communist, but in facing criminal charges, the media played the race card in order to dehumanize her. This historically is not something new; in chapter one, it was seen that Black women were dehumanized all the time so that public opinion would not be sympathetic towards the oppression Black women faced. Meredith L. Roman in an analysis of Davis’s political persecution states, “The press racialized and consequently depoliticized her as a ‘Black militant.’ This discursive change worked to justify both the government’s ‘hunt’ for Davis and her subsequent incarceration.” The government and state wanted to use Davis as an example to all Black radicals who might challenge the system. They first used her politics to label her a communist and then they proceeded to criminalize her race by then calling her a Black militant, someone who is unruly and dangerous to democracy. Davis’s experience is representative of how the United States has always weaponized people of color’s skin against them to control the public narrative and protect the interests of the state and capital. Davis was captured by the FBI on October 13, 1970, and served 18 months in prison before her release. Davis’s arrest was a direct response to her support for Black liberation causes, thus making it easier for the government to target her due to her critiques of the system. Davis's lived experience caused her to criticize the system that oppressed Black Americans. The government’s message was: if you continue to resist, protest, and organize, there will be retaliation. George Jackson’s experience with the system informed Davis that America will always criminalize being Black, and that race influences the state’s response, such as locking away people of color. If you make enough noise in response to the systemic design of America, which is white supremacy, you will be targeted as she was as a political prisoner in 1970.

55 “Angela Davis (January 26, 1944).”
Lived experience is vital to making a critical analysis of white supremacy that is either being fought for or against. Ruth Wilson Gilmore was another Black feminist scholar-activist and prison abolitionist whose lived experiences with state violence influenced her political development. Her compelling argument was that society has evolved to being more controlled by police: “Policing has penetrated almost every foundation of our society, from educational schools to jobs.”\(^5\) While some may consider this to be a good thing due to how the media portrays police, in fact the police are the guards of white supremacy. The police are enabled by the state to use violence in order to maintain control, and the system works as designed to maintain control. The answer some may come up with is to abolish the police state because clearly this form of policing has not worked. What is needed is true reform and fundamental change that can work instead of the government’s repeated failed experiments. Gilmore’s lived experience that informed her politics was largely influenced by the death of her cousin who was like a brother to her. Her cousin had been involved with the Black Panther Party for self-defense. Her cousin, along with a man by the name of Bunchy Carter, had attempted to inspire the UCLA Black Studies department to speak out against anti-capitalism, anti-racism, and anti-war.\(^5\) These efforts by these panther activists came across J. Edgar Hoover’s desk, and they became targets of the FBI. COINTELPRO and the Los Angeles Police Department instigated the murder of these young men. This is nothing new, of course; the United States has organizations in place just like COINTELPRO to eliminate certain targets who are a threat against the system of white supremacy.

Mass incarceration was on Gilmore's political activism as well because she knew that mass incarceration serves one purpose. Gilmore states, “The purpose of locking people up today

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\(^5\) Kumanyika, *Interview with Ruth Wilson Gilmore*. 
has pretty much been incapacitation. If you’re locked up, you can’t do what you were doing.”

Gilmore's analysis provides a deeper understanding of the motives of why longer sentences are given. If the system's goal is to subvert and criminalize Blackness, wouldn't the goal be to systematically lock away Black men and women for long periods of time? However, systematically speaking, surveillance plays a key role in the criminalization of Black men and women. Gilmore's analysis on economic motives behind prisons can be understood from the numbers that prisons generate within the economy. Many jobs come from prisons being built, which Gilmore pointed out in a speech in 2016 in which she stated that “the prison system went from being a fairly small part of the entire state infrastructure to the major employer in the state government.”

Organizations, such as COINTELPRO, were created to attack political activist groups, such as the Civil Rights Movement, Black Power Movement, communist party, and any other political group that was deemed to be a danger to the United States’ democracy. The surveillance of these political groups was also another means to an end by the government, to use the justice system to attack activists within these social groups to prevent them from uprising. Jim Wall and Ward Churchill’s analysis about targeted surveillance states, “The FBI, by infiltrating and spying on selected groups in American society, arrogated to itself the role of a thought police. It decided which groups were legitimate, and which were a danger—by FBI standards—to the Republic.”

The lengths to which the federal government and the FBI went to monitor and control threats to

democracy showed that they did not believe in equality by any means.

Gilmore and Davis are both leaders and transformational educators. They both show that Black women are leaders, and the fight for Black liberation for Black women is still ongoing. Davis and Gilmore continue to fight white supremacy, and to do so, they created an organization by the name of Critical Resistance. The purpose of this organization is to come together to find ways to abolish the prison industrial complex. It is a belief within the organization that the sole purpose of the prisons is to ignore social, economic, and political issues that are wrong within the United States. Inherently, the organization was the spark that kept the flame alive for social justice, addressing social issues within the United States and also addressing the systemic issues in the world. Critical Resistance makes connections that are needed to address issues that affect people of color all over the world. The different work that the organization does focuses on prisoners in prisons and how they let their stories be heard in order for justice to be served. Zachary project is a project that is within the critical resistance, and it started with a man named Zachary who believed and was passionate about helping those within his community. He was instrumental in the *Abolitionist* newspaper as well.

**Conclusion**

Critical Resistance was very instrumental in terms of an organization keeping the flames alive. During the year of 2020 racial tensions have sparked after the death of George Floyd. However, it created conversations surrounding the topics of systematic racism, police, and abolishing the police. Resistance of radical Black women during the 1960s through the late 1970s paved the way for the next generation of Black women leaders to emergence and carry the flame of continued resistance against white supremacy in all forms of governmental oppression. Black Lives Matter emerged from the years of continued police violence, and systemic issues
that have not been addressed. Black women shaped Black liberation through lived experiences in the 1960s and 1970s, through different organizations from the TWWA to Critical resistance. Black women leadership in scholarship and organizing helped shape today's protest in the era of Black Lives Matter. The emergence of radical Black women leadership guides the Black community as the fight for liberation continued.
Chapter 3: Black Lives Matter

The fight for justice is ongoing and has spanned years; it has been an even longer fight for Black women activists in their fight against discrimination related to gender, race, and class. Spanning across the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power Movement have been different literature and theories that came from lived experiences. Black women have been persecuted due to their courage to hold the government accountable. Black women such as Mae Mallory and her lived experience as a poor, working-class Black woman to fight the systemic issues within her life and society. The government's attacks on Angela Davis because of her beliefs and activism around being a Black feminist who identified as a communist. These lived experiences were vital in their journeys to fight against the systemic oppression that is embedded within American democracy. Throughout the course of history, the fight for racial justice has been passed on from generation to generation, and that fight has tackled many issues, such as voting rights, racial equality, mass incarceration, and systematic racism. In today's society, Black women have emerged as key figures in the fight for social justice. Historically, however, Black women have been pushed to the back due to male patriarchal roles in movements in times past.

Despite that treatment, Black women have been on the front lines of protests and activism when bringing attention to issues pertaining to the Black community, specifically issues of policing and incarceration of Black women. Black women such as Angela Davis, Mae Mallory, Ruth Wilson Gilmore, and Claudia Jones have all contributed to Black women's emergence throughout history from being under the patriarchal leadership of males in society and social movements. The goal of this chapter is to highlight the emergence of Black women's role and leadership in the Black Lives Matter movement and understand what led up to this movement from police killings, to racial injustices, to the suppressed social issues that have been inherited
from the Civil Rights Movement. The roles Black women play cannot be taken for granted when
discussing the emergence of Black women organizers in shaping the Black Lives Matter
Movement. This chapter seeks to show how Black women continue to influence and guide the
next generation of organizers and activists. The other analysis of this chapter is to show how
systematically speaking, there are still problems revolving around mass incarceration and how,
Black elites in power does not translate to help for the Black community.

Where We Have Been

Black radical women activists have helped lead and shape social causes while also
creating their own theorizing spaces to fight against discrimination related to gender, race, and
class. In order to understand the racial climate of 2022, this section will highlight the aftermath
of the Black Power Movement, highlight major policing incidents, and look at the systemic
issues of mass incarceration pertaining to Black women leading up to the emergence of Black
Lives Matter. Black Lives Matter is a culmination of constant police brutality and systematic
persecution; law enforcement has continued to use their power as judge, juror, and executioner
against the Black community, Black women, and the LGBTQ community as well.

The Invisible Injustices

Systemic issues are flaws within the structure of our government, and many times, these
systemic issues are targeted and affect marginalized groups of people, such as African Americans
in the United States. Stokely Carmichael was instrumental in helping develop analysis of
systematic racism within America. Carmichael gives an example of how systematic racism is
prevalent within society in writing, “But when in that same city, Birmingham, Alabama, not five
but five hundred Negro babies die each year because of a lack of proper food, shelter and
medical facilities, and thousands more are destroyed and maimed physically, emotionally and
intellectually because of conditions of poverty and deprivation in the ghetto, that is a function of institutionalized racism." This is an important analysis when explaining how the government ignores these stunning statistics concerning the Black community. The analysis reinforces that the government knows of inequalities that run rampant in the Black community, but the government’s unwillingness to provide resources to the Black community is one of many ways they oppress the Black community.

It is important to acknowledge those who came before. It is also important to analyze and discuss such flaws within the structure of government because, if left unchecked and unchallenged, years of systemic oppression can continue. Systemic issues surrounding police brutality and mass incarceration are relevant today in our society, and government officials too long have ignored these growing issues within our country. Focusing on mass incarceration is important to address because mass incarceration is not random; it specifically and systematically targets African Americans. African American women especially have been targeted, and activists like Angela Davis and Ruth Gilmore refused to let these injustices fly unchallenged. Davis alludes to the gender issues within prisons: “When we combine the effects of race and gender, the nature of these shifts in the prison population is even clearer. The prison incarceration rate for Black women today exceeds that for white men as recently as 1980.” The ongoing discussions around mass incarceration are relevant and vital because it is a problem that the United States holds 20% of the world's prison population. However, when these systemic issues and

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problems, such as police brutality and mass incarceration, go unchecked, it can have a
generational effect on those who continue to live within the oppressive structure of the
government. This section seeks to analyze systemic issues related to policing and incarceration
leading up to the emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement. These particular issues that
will be discussed are one part of the problem of racial equality, particularly the persecution Black
women have suffered at the hands of police and the system.

Over the years, crimes committed against the Black LGBTQ community, particularly
transgender women, have been overlooked. Persecution of transgender people in the form of
being discriminated against in schools, places of employment, and even within the family
structure has long been a subject that has been overlooked. Police brutality within the Black
community is documented well, but crimes against transgender and queer women have often
times gone unanswered. The story of Ali He'shun Forney gives us a deeper insight to the world
of a transgender woman. Ali He’shun was a Black transgender woman who was murdered by
police on December 5, 1997, in Harlem, New York. Ali was an active activist for homeless gay,
lesbian, and bisexual rights, but Ali met her fate when she was her outside her place of
employment. Later, when the investigation was underway, it was found out that prior to her
death, Forney had been a sex worker. She was an activist for transgender youth, and her lived
experience inspired her to work for change for a cause that does not get addressed enough. A
pressing problem that does not get talked about is the policing around sex workers, and how
women are not protected from crimes committed against them due to a traditional societal
judgement. Many Americans have an elitist mindset when sex workers are involved and consider
them to be less than human. A homeless center was opened up in 2002 for LGBTQ youth to
honor the activist work of Ali He’shun. The leadership that Ali He’shun showed during her
lifetime was instrumental in the early 2000s and was monumental in that being anything different from male or female was not socially acceptable, but her taking a stand against bigotry was important for the work that would continue to be built upon years later. This particular case of brutality impacted the theory and praxis of organizers and how organizers address these issues of police brutality pertaining to the LGBTQ community.

Regardless of how a Black woman identifies herself in terms of her sexuality, she is in constant danger of being targeted by the police. News media reports more on Black male altercations with the police due to more gender bias. Gender, race, and class continue to be an issue within the media as well; rarely are police brutality and killings of Black women reported on. On October 3, 2013, Miriam Carey was murdered by the hands of capitol police in Washington, DC. Her death was caused by the police mindset of shoot first, ask questions later. Miriam had made a wrong turn and was quickly swarmed by United States capitol police with guns drawn towards her in her vehicle with her child. Fearing for her life, and her child’s life, she tried to escape from the checkpoint. Sadly, 26 bullets were put into the car, ending her life. The capitol police District Police Chief Cathy Lanier is on record saying that the police officers were “heroic.” It is unfortunate that violence against Black women is praised, even in Congress. Congress gave the police officers who killed Miriam Carey a standing ovation. In America, there has been a long history of praise given to those who murder, arrest, and punish Black men and women. In 2013, when Carey died, it sent a message to Black Americans that their life continues to hold no value, and that embedded in American democracy is racist ideologies that continue to


be prevalent today. Black men and women have been murdered by police in different instances in this country. However, far more people know Trayvon Martin’s name than they do Miriam Carey's name. In this instance, we see that police officers chose to shoot first, rather than assess the situation first. It is the same mindset that many police officers have towards the Black community. Being Black has been criminalized, and rather than help Miriam, they shot first and murdered her. The continued overaggressive police continue to murder Black women and men in their interactions with them. Society has a way of addressing the world solely through a male perspective, and it continues to show in the media how we live our day to day lives. Was Miriam Carey's life less than that of Trayvon Martin’s life? Both had families and friends, but the outcry for justice for Martin was not the same as for Carey. This is a reflection that society dismisses Black women's lives and continues to not care for or fight for Black women.

The media is a powerful tool because it allows control of what is shown to the public, and in some instances, news is what some Americans may deem to be the truth of what is happening around them. Historically, police violence against Black women has been largely ignored by the mainstream media, effectively rendering them invisible to the American public. One of the biggest crimes that continue to happen is sexual assault by police officers today. Chapter 1 showed us how police had control over Black women's bodies; the lack of accountability of police officers’ rape of Black women continues to be prevalent in today’s society. Officer Daniel Holtzclaw, a former Oklahoma police officer, raped 13 women in 2016. Holtzclaw used his authority as a police officer to assault these vulnerable women. This is the same abuse of

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67 Harris, “#SayHerName.”
policing that Black women back in the 1950s experienced. When a systemic issue, such as rape and sexual assault by police officers in this country, is not addressed, rapes continue to happen unchecked, and the system of white supremacy is left intact.

**Mass Incarceration**

One systematic way for the government to keep control is through the use of mass incarceration; this way there was a way to lock up Black men and women. In this section, an analysis will show the two driving forces behind mass incarceration: suppressing dissent and managing surplus labor. Mass incarceration was a direct result of urban rebellions that were happening during the 1960s Civil Rights Movement and the 1970s Black Power Movements. Former presidents, such as President Lyndon B. Johnson in his war on crime, gave additional money and resources to states in response to urban rebellions that were taking place. In turn, expanded surveillance under police happened in order to arrest and subvert urban rebellions and social movements between the 1960s to the late 1970s. These are key moments that gave birth to the rise and continued growth of mass incarcerations.

The statistics regarding mass incarceration pertaining to the Black community is telling: “DOJ statistics show that about 1.39 million people were incarcerated in the year 2000, as opposed to about 774,000 in 1990. By 2018 Black men over five times more likely to be imprisoned than white men, and Black women were imprisoned 1.8 more times than white women.” These statistics are the reality in which the Black community lives. Mass incarceration is spoken about usually from a male perspective, but Black women are targeted by police, and the system, if not more than males.

Gender, race, and class play a role in mass incarceration when talking about the

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inequalities Black women have faced and continue to face. When the average man or woman thinks about the prison systems, they think about the crime, not the system itself. Ultimately, when one person loses their value to society, they become a candidate for prisons themselves. Deindustrialization and automation have led to mass job loss and a surplus labor population. Policing and mass incarceration have been used to manage that surplus population, which the state and capital see as a threat: “Capital must be able to get rid of workers whose labor power is no longer desirable.”

Ruth Wilson Gilmore explores this idea in *The Golden Gulag* when analyzing the structure of prisons and society. With society’s white supremacist ideologies towards Black women, they have been a target for incarceration themselves. Angela Davis’s book *Prisons Are Obsolete* explores how gender structures the prison systems.

The structure of prisons is different for both men and women; Black men are labeled as criminals while Black women have been labeled as crazy: “Studies have shown that women have been even more likely to end up in mental facilities than men suggest that while jails and prisons have been dominant institutions for the control of men, mental institutions have served a similar purpose for women.”

Gender plays a role in the way that Black women have been treated within mass incarceration, and the cruelties they have gone through at the hands of society continue to happen. This is why Black Lives Matter addresses the prison issue pertaining to Black women. Black males’ fight against mass incarceration has historically gotten the attention, but Black women have largely been forgotten and overlooked, even though they have been locked up at higher rates than Black men.

Through the Black Lives Matter Movement, Black women have continued to bring attention and awareness to issues that pertain to Black women,

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71 Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete*? 63.

72 Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete*? 66.
such as sexual assault and murders by police officers and mass incarceration, which are all factors when describing the state of Black women in the United States.

**Keeping the Flame Alive**

The fight for equality never dies unless the oppressed have laid down the fight and have given up. After the Black Power Movement ended during the 1970s, there was a lack of political effort to create legislation that would aid the Black community. What happened to the fight for equality and justice for many Black men and women? White history would have us believe that racial problems ended with the Civil Rights Movement and Black Power Movements, and we have moved to a post racial society, when in fact police brutality and violence and mass incarceration continue to be on the rise: “It is no exaggeration to say that men and women in blue patrolling the streets of the United States have been given a license to kill-and have demonstrated a consistent propensity to use it.”

This section seeks to analyze how Black feminist organizers and activists continue to bring awareness to systematic issues from mass incarceration to police violence and how in their own ways have kept the flame of social justice movements alive.

One of the more prominent Black feminist figures and activists in the wake of the Black Power Movement was Angela Davis. Her analysis and work on prison abolition was something that during the 1970s led her to be one of the founding members of Critical Resistance. This organization was instrumental in that they addressed why prisons do not work: “Critical Resistance popularized radical analyses of the ways in which imprisonment, and policing, firmly linked to developments in global capitalism.”

Davis’s activism around prison abolition was notable in her book *Abolition. Feminism. Now*. Davis’s lived experience with the system of white supremacy helped her develop a critical analysis of prisons and the reason they are in place.

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Davis was a passionate activist about this, but she also addressed other issues that were important to Black women, such as the criminal justice system. Her analysis and critique of the system was inherently linked to mass incarceration. Davis knew that if you did not have white skin, and you were Black, indigenous, poor, trans, or a woman, you were perceived to be a criminal and belonged in the prison system. Davis was instrumental in the development of analysis pertaining to mass incarceration and the role that it played in our society, specifically how it affected Black women in particular. Davis was one of the driving figures of keeping the fight of equality going during the 1970s, once the Black Power Movement ended; without her resilience and persistence for justice, the push for equality would not have progressed.

In addition to Davis, Barbara Smith is a lesbian Black woman activist who has grounded her works in Black feminist thoughts and activism. Smith was instrumental in keeping the flame alive by her lived experience and contributions to the cause of Black feminist politics and literature in which she lays out her thought process on the concept of the Black feminist: “Feminism is something I claim because I claim it in the name of Black women.” Smith’s lived experience influenced her to be active in educating people about the importance of being a Black feminist. She was a major advocate for lesbians creating their own spaces and political agenda that would lay the groundwork for years to come in regards to understanding how gender and sex play a role in how Black gay women see themselves within the scope of society. Smith fought two battles, the battle of being a Black woman and the battle of her sexuality. In these instances, Smith had decided that she would not let these social labels, such as gay or lesbian, define her.

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75 Davis et al. 2022 46.
77 Smith, Jones, and Virginia Eubanks. *Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around: Forty Years of Movement Building with Barbara Smith*. 176.
Her lived experience with the Black community informed her that she would be accepted only if she stayed closeted about her sexuality. Audre Lorde and Barbara Smith both were lesbians who wanted to give a platform to Black women lesbians who wanted to share their lived experiences. In doing so the founding of the Kitchen Table: Women of Color press came to be in 1980.

**Critical Resistance**

Critical Resistance is one of the post Civil Rights and Black Power movements organizations that helped to keep the flame alive with their activism. The organization came to be in 1997. Angela Davis and Ruth Wilson Gilmore are pioneers who helped start Critical Resistance. Both Davis and Gilmore have had lived experience with policing and how policing has permeated almost every level of society from schools, to jobs, to subverting protests surrounding the issues of racial inequality. Critical Resistance came to be through a common understanding that imprisonment of individuals was not the solution to systemic issues within society. In 1998, Critical Resistance called a conference to discuss ways to educate and create a plan of action for addressing mass incarceration. Black feminist activists were at the forefront of these conferences, and one common denominator that was discussed was how capitalism is strongly linked to mass incarceration.

The foundation of Critical Resistance ideologies and beliefs came from Black feminist perspectives and led to a more informed analysis of policing and organizing. A Black feminist perspective towards organizing around policing and incarceration is based in lived experience. Black women know that bringing awareness to the social injustices of police on a national stage, such as Critical Resistance provides, gives them their space to theorize on how to best resist and organize on ways to create radical analysis grounded in lived experiences against incarceration and police violence towards Black women. Critical Resistance targets an international
community as well; the organization seeks to address mass incarceration on an international level. The Third World Women's Alliance (TWWA) played an influential role in the emergence of Critical Resistance in that it does not solely focus on the shared experiences of Black women and women of color in the United States, but women of color and their oppression around the world. At the core of TWWA and Critical Resistance are the concepts of gender, race, and class, which Black women's experiences are rooted in.

Critical Resistance bridges the gap of time between the Black Power Movement until the emergence of Black Lives Matter in 2013. While other organizations have sprung up to address racial inequalities, Critical Resistance had a particular focus on the abolition of prisons. Critical Resistance, particularly during 1998, organized efforts that targeted anti-prison activism from the cities of Oakland, New York, Chicago, New Orleans, Los Angeles, and Portland.  

Decarceration, the practice or policy of reducing the number of people subject to imprisonment was an important strategy to Critical Resistance. Through the efforts of the organization’s continued persistence, they became more of a national movement and organization in 2001. The beliefs behind Critical Resistance did not only target anti-prison construction but also local law enforcement. Critical Resistance advocated for changes in policing as well because the direct relationship between police and imprisonment are linked. The organization seeks to abolish prisons and defund the police because police do not prevent crime from happening. This is a deeper look into the purpose of police and why Critical Resistance believes that, in order for systemic changes to happen, these actions are needed to open up the conversation to address the issues. The importance of Critical Resistance was and is still important in today’s society, as the

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organization continues to address systemic issues, such as anti-prison change and addressing policing and systemic changes, on a transformational level that holds police and state officials responsible.

**The Youth Activist**

Legacies are important in different traditions, such as in sports and families. The area of protesting and organizing to address social injustice has been passed down to youth organizers and activists. Activists and organizers are different forms of social organizing. An organizer can educate somebody about a political cause or get the conversation going about change that needs to happen regarding a specific issue that needs to be addressed. An activist can be seen as a foot soldier for justice or change; being in the streets is a part of an activist’s passion for whatever social cause is near and dear to them. These are two different concepts, but both work towards a goal that is rooted in passion. Radical Black feminist leaders, such as Angela Davis, Ruth Wilson Gilmore, and Barbara Smith, in their own ways have influenced the organizing and activism of Black Lives Matter. In this sense, they are the elders of the movement who have guided the next generation of youth activists who are now in the streets organizing and fighting for a better world for their futures. The lessons that these radical Black women give to the youth today come in the forms of speeches, interviews, and appearances at protest gatherings. These Black women have given the blueprint on how to fight against police brutality, mass incarceration, and a government that does not protect queer men and women. Most importantly, these Black women have taught today’s youth to be unapologetically Black. In all of these lessons, the youth organizers and activists of today within the Black Lives Matter era have produced different organizations and leaders, but at the forefront of these movements, Black women have emerged as our leaders in the movement for change. Black women are unapologetic in their demonstration of their
leadership and continue to guide change towards fighting systematic issues that still plague the Black community.

Black women have transformed the way in which we protest and continue to fight the fight our elders fought, which is racism in different forms. Black Lives Matter originally started out as a hashtag on Twitter on July 13, 2013. This hashtag was used for the first time on the social media platform after the George Zimmerman verdict. This was the beginning of social activism that would happen on a social media platform. Since then, the hashtag has evolved and taken on a life of its own thanks to Patrisse Cullors, Alicia Garza, and Opal Tometi. The legacies of Black feminist activists protesting in the streets lives on in our Black women leadership, from Tamika Mallory, who is an activist who was instrumental in women’s marches and who has given impassioned speeches about Black Lives Matter.

Organizations Rising under BLM

There is always a spark that ignites revolution and cries from the people of the world. There were cries of no justice, no peace in the streets when George Floyd was murdered by Derrick Chauvin. The other officers who stood by were complicit in Chauvin’s actions. History has shown that police murder without sympathy for what families are destroyed, and those who have lost loved ones to police violence have simply had to move on. The tragic murder of George Floyd sparked movements around the world in which Black men and women and allies of Black Lives Matter protests joined together to say enough is enough.

Causes and effects are something that is in our everyday life; there is always an effect for something that was caused by an event or series of events. The Black Youth Project 100 (BYP100) was an effect of the verdict of the Trayvon Martin case. With chapters in places like Atlanta, Chicago, and Detroit, the organization consists of young Black activists between the
ages of 18 to 35 years who have come together to address injustices that have been done towards the Black community. Organizations like these in today's society are important because BYP100 trains the next generation of activists to organize and to network to spread awareness of social injustices that have been done to the Black community. A core component of the organization's goal deals in economic, social, political, and educational freedom. The organization has had different campaigns from restoring voting rights to incarcerated people, to honoring workers’ rights, which attacks capitalism at its core. Some of the agenda related to workers’ rights includes protections against discriminations and workers receiving better wages, along with proper time off for maternity and parental leave. These agenda points are a direct critique of capitalism. Other agendas include protecting women workers and supporting trans wealth and health, which addresses the lack of employment of and discrimination against trans gender women.

Connections can be made between the goals of BYP100 and the Civil Rights Movement. When it comes to addressing the needs of the Black community, the Civil Rights Movement sought economic freedom in the form of better opportunities for loans and not being exploited for labor within the job industry. Social freedom was also a major component of the Civil Rights Movement in that they sought social equality with white Americans. Despite having some similarities, BYP100 is also different in some approaches they take. For instance, they address issues concerning the inclusion of all people regardless of sex, gender, class, citizenship status, sexuality, and physical ability. An organization that is not inclusive of all people from different backgrounds does not serve the purpose of true liberation and just mirrors the tactics of the oppressor. BYP100 continues their activism and training of the next generation of protestors and
activists to carry on the fight from the elders that were before them.80 Some of the goals of the organization of BYP100 were influenced by Mae Mallory, in particular in her fight for poor working-class women. One of the agendas the organization wanted to accomplish is better working conditions for Black women. Mallory in her activism knew that Black women workers were not protected and were exploited for their labor. It is interesting, and disheartening, to see how, despite the time between Mallory and BYP100, issues still have not changed for Black women.

Today's organizations are focused on areas in which changes are needed, and The I Project based in Chicago brings attention to a serious investment issue within the city. The goal of this organization is state investments in Black urban communities. Amid rising gun violence within the city, more money is being given to the police departments than to school systems. Education emancipation is the goal of the organization because empowering the Black youth in the city of Chicago is vital. Education could be the way these children grow and have a better future for themselves.81

The fight for social justice never died. It was passed down from generation to generation, and we see this track in the different movements that popped up after Trayvon Martin's death in 2012. Dream Defenders marched in Florida where the murder of Martin took place. These young Black men and women, along with allies, occupied the Florida State capital for 30 nights and 31 days. The resolve that these young activists showed in their push for equality shows that this fight means something to these young men and women. The Dream Defenders are still active in Florida. These days, they are still pushing for racial change in Florida by also training the next

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generation of protestors as well. The focus of Dream Defenders is around racial equality and the need for safety and security. This includes addressing Florida's prison rates, deportations, and taking strong stances against wars. The methods with which young activists and protestors have rallied around the cause of social justice in the current political climate were transformational, and yet they still had a similar feel of fighting the same fight the elders before them fought.

Black feminists Angela Davis’s and Ruth Gilmore’s work can be seen as major influences in the work that Dream Defenders are doing. Both Davis and Gilmore in their work with Critical Resistance showed us the why of the prison system, and how it is tied to political corruption and capitalism. Dream Defenders can build upon their work, create a more radical analysis of the system, and organize around the evolved method of mass incarceration.

**Black Faces in High Places**

Barack Obama was elected president of the United States in 2008. It was an important time period in history in the United States; however, those in the political arena and media seemed to believe the United States had crossed the threshold of a post racial society due to Obama’s election and position as president. However, that is far from the truth. To the point that was addressed earlier, if America had achieved a post racial society, why did Black Lives Matter rise under Obama? Some Black leaders within the Black community, such as Cornel West, have criticized Obama’s leadership pertaining to the Black community problems: “His words reek of political calculation, rather than moral conviction.”

As West stated in an interview on Newsnight, Obama has always played the middle ground. It is simple, and plain to see, Obama served as a middleman. He did not truly address the issues of the Black community from a political leader point of view. This is nothing new in terms of Black elected officials not aiding

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the cause of Black liberation. Angela Davis and Ruth Gilmore were activists during the 1960s, amidst an era of Black elected officials. Yet in those circumstances, Black elected officials turned an eye towards America’s problems, not the Black community’s problems. This is a historical lesson that shows us that Black elites cannot be counted on to help the vast majority of oppressed African Americans. Those who have ascended into a higher status of power from the Black community have oftentimes fought for causes that are issues for Americans across the country, while forgetting about the oppression that many African Americans continue to face each and every day. The question has been debated on whether or not Black faces in high places do the Black community any good. This goes to show how important it is to elect men and women who will fight for causes that are affecting the Black community. When seeing how the Black elite live their lives and not address issues concerning the Black community, it shows how classism has affected the Black community and will continue to do so until systemic changes are made within American democracy and Black communities.

**Conclusion**

Black women are key for social justice for many reasons, but their emergence as key leadership figures within the Black community has helped shape protests and movements. Many issues still need to be addressed on a governmental level, but Black women continue to hold police, politicians, and local ordinances accountable for their continued support of white supremacy. Historically speaking, Black women have been the most oppressed and marginalized group of people. With the emergence of Black women leadership, the question should be asked: if not for patriarchal male traditions within organizing spaces, how much farther would the advancement of the Black community be? Looking at this from a bigger perspective, Black women have shown that Black liberation cannot be achieved without being inclusive of all
oppressed people of color, regardless of gender, race, and class. Black women, such as Davis, Gilmore, and Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, continue to offer leadership to today’s organizers in the form of speeches, appearances, and perspective on our present-day situation. Their continued activity with Black Lives Matter continues to shape how youth activists learn from those who have been in the struggle and on the ground since the 1960s and 1970s. As the movement continues to grow and organize with the leadership from Black women of the past and present, the closer we could get to total Black liberation.
Epilogue

Throughout these chapters, I have focused on the influences of Black women, and the contributions they have made towards different social movements from the 1950s to the Black Lives Matter era. Within this research the concepts of gender, race, and class have been a central focus of the work. The influences that Black women have given to the struggle for freedom and, at the same time, created their own theorizing spaces has shown how resilient Black women have been throughout the Black freedom movement. They created theorizing spaces to combat anti-police campaigns. What this history can teach youth organizers, and activists is that resistance to change can come from many different spaces. These spaces can influence you to take different paths, or actions to address certain issues within organizations. It can also influence others to take actions against the system of white supremacy that is ongoing.

Chapter 1 focused on the oppression of Black women. During the 1950s, Black women were not treated as human. Black women were more or less seen as less than, and society let them know through how they were treated. The policing of Black women led to crimes committed against Black women that went unanswered for. When a system allows such horrendous policing of a person, it influences and makes one understand the system in which they are a part of. Black women were not helpless, and during the early 1950s, this was a spark that ignited the beginnings of resistance against police brutality and white supremacy.

Chapter 2 focused on the resistance of radical Black women, and the rejection of patriarchy within the Civil Rights Movement. This era encapsulates the resistance of Black women against police brutality and systemic oppression, redefining who they are as Black women. Organizations from the TWWA and how Francis Beal and Gwendolon Patton came together to create an organization that would address police brutality, and gender, race, and class.
Growing from outside of the SNCC organization that ignored Black women's issues surrounding their gender and lived experiences. The TWWA influence was important in that it had made connections with other women of color around the world. Mae Mallory gave radical critiques of the system of white supremacy by her activism, and unrelenting pressure on racism. Her lived experience showed her that you should not allow others to oppress you due to the color of your skin, and your gender. Ultimately, Black women have fought, and organized around issues pertaining to their lived experience. This era of Civil Rights gave birth to intellectual thinkers that not only wanted to attack their issues surrounding gender, race, and class. But in their fight for Black liberation, they helped the cause of Civil Rights, and the Black community in their analysis and critiques of police and systemic racism.

In Chapter 3, the Black Lives Matter era burst onto the scene from over 40 years of oppression, and suppressed cries from the Civil Rights Movement. Black Women have emerged as leaders within social movement spaces. Black women have shaped generations of leaders, activists, and organizers. The youth look to the elders like Angela Davis, Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Keenga-Yamhatta Taylor and LeShawn Harris. These Black feminist scholars continue to cotnrubute to the fight of Black liberation by continuing to help the youth understand the connections of their lived experiences dealing with police and the system of white supremacy. The theory and praxis of radical Black women within the chapters have influenced the emergence of Black women as leaders within the Black community. Black women have helped the evolution of the Black Lives Matter Movement. The fight for progress is ongoing, but one thing remains the same: Black women are the heart and soul of our fight for Black freedom.

So What Now?

Where do we head now? This history has been an informative analysis about Black
women's roots and influences pertaining to social movements. As shown in each of these chapters, Black women have been influential in how their informed analysis of the system of white supremacy and police brutality have created theories and praxis about how to structurally dismantle the system. I believe that this history is a guide for the youth activists of today. Today's continued oppression of the Black community has stemmed from the oppression of organizers and activists from the Civil Rights and Black Power Movement. First, I see this history offering a guide to honoring what Black feminist have done for the Black community as a whole, even in the midst of their own oppression surrounding gender, race, and class. They continued to push for the protection of Black men and women everywhere despite their own oppression. Second, this history shows why we need Black women, because the Black community could not have advanced as it has without Black women’s refusal to allow police and governments to run over the Black community. As the fight for Black liberation continues today in 2022, Black women have taken center stage in keeping the flame alive, and continuing to show why Black women are critical to the success of our social movements.
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