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# **White Rage:**

**Investigating the implicit nature of state sanctioned White  
violence**

Kerry Sonia  
Swarthmore College  
Peace and Conflict Studies  
Fall 2018

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## Introduction

In November of 2016, I was sitting in the Black Cultural Center (BCC) at Swarthmore College when I realized that Donald Trump was going to be the 45th President of the United States. I was sitting with a group of my friends, feeling despondent and hopeless as I grappled with what a Trump presidency actually meant. Just as the reality set in, CNN commentator Van Jones began speaking to what the 2016 presidential election revealed to liberal Americans. He emotionally expressed, “This was a Whitelash. This was a Whitelash against a changing country. It was a Whitelash against a Black president in part. And that is the part where the pain comes” (CNN 2016).

“Whitelash.” What did this word mean? What did Whitelash look like outside of this one election? Was Whitelash something that had occurred in the past or was this a modern phenomenon? Who was most affected by these instances of Whitelash? Months after watching Jones first use this word live, I could not stop thinking about these questions and the notion of Whitelash. I searched online for resources or readings or even more videos using the word Whitelash, coming up short every time. I wanted to know more but it seemed that the only source I had at this point was Jones himself.

This all changed in the Fall of 2017 in Boston, during a semester off from school. Early on in the semester, I was wandering around a bookstore in an effort to find something that sparked my interest. There, I fell upon the book *White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of our Racial Divide* by Carol Anderson, an African American studies professor at Emory University. The cover art looked interesting enough and the title included the words “White rage,” so I bought

the book. The term Whitelash had left me with so many questions, so many unanswered ideas, that I was hoping this book would help me continue to grapple with those inquiries. I read the whole book within a week and still had so many more questions, but Anderson is able to name what White rage actually looks like in the past and present. For me, Anderson was able to give me more tangible information and case studies- something that I struggled to find when attempting to research the term Whitelash.

Anderson essentially gave me a framework to understand and engage with the ideas of White rage. Within the text itself, she works through periods of American history and identifies the specific instance of White rage. She looks at the period of Reconstruction, the time of the Great Migration, the Civil Rights Movement, and the election of former President Barack Obama. She explains how White institutions and people utilize legal and physical acts of violence as a means to deter Black resistance. Working through this text and further researching historical examples of White rage, I was still left with this question of: why is the term White rage useful? Why is it important to make a distinction between White rage and terms such as White privilege, White supremacy, or racism? Within this thesis, I work to grapple with these questions and assert that White rage is an important term to define. Within this thesis, I focus on how White rage directly affects Black resistance movements. This is not to say that White rage is not detrimental to other groups of color within the United States, for White rage does impact immigrant, Latinx, Asian, Middle Eastern, and non-Christian communities living in the country. Within the scope of my thesis, however, I have decided to focus on Black social movements because research about White rage has been predominantly concerned with how that rage works to dismantle Black advancement.

Throughout history itself, people have often tied the term rage to Black people. News stories often cycle in reports of Black people starting riots and looting stores whenever there is any hint of discontent amongst the Black community. When Michael Brown was murdered by a White police officer, the people of Ferguson were depicted as violent and rage-driven beings that were uncivilized. What was less talked about, however, was the nonviolent action taking place throughout the country in response to the unjust police shooting. Even further, the violent depictions of the Black community seem to overshadow the cause of protest: a White police officer murdered a Black man with his gun.

Time and time again, nonviolent Black resistance is ignored by the media and the general population. Just two years ago, Ieshia Evans

stood face to face with three armed police men at a Black Lives Matter protest in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Unarmed and calm, the juxtaposition of Evan's disposition and the police military gear reveals the reality of the state's monopoly on the legit use of force. These thoughts are



similar to that of Angela Davis, famed political activist. In an interview seen in *The Black Power Mixtape 1967-1975*, the interviewer asks Davis what she thinks of violence (Olsson 2011). Davis speaks to how Black people are constantly surrounded by police and pure violence everyday (Olsson 2011). She remembers feeling her house shake because of bombs, being stopped by police and questioned, and finding out that the four little girls she knew were killed in the Birmingham church bombing in 1963 (Olsson 2011). Davis goes on to say that, “When someone

asks me about violence, I just find it incredible because what it means is that the person that is asking that question has absolutely no idea what Black people have gone through, what Black people have experienced in this country” (Olsson 2011). To ask Davis about violence and Black people’s use of violence is to completely ignore the reality that Black people live in America- a reality that is defined by state sanctioned White violence.

To this day, many people continue to inspect Black resistance and measure how violent or nonviolent the movement is in their actions. When this happens, the violence that White institutions or people committed in the first place is forgotten or concealed. White institutions, especially the police force, have more access to state sanctioned violence. When Americans force the Black community to answer for acts of violence, they ignore the power dynamics that allow White citizens to use violence against Black people and often face fewer or no consequences. This allows those same institutions or people to continue committing acts of White rage that are detrimental to the Black community.

This is part of why I think the term White rage is so vital to modern conversations surrounding Black resistance and White repression of that resistance. In using this word, it is my hope that I can begin holding White institutions and people accountable for their violent actions. We, as American citizens, need to work to alter the narrative surrounding violence in this country, for it must become more clear that White institutions have a monopoly on violence that is used to maintain the racial hierarchy that continues to exist. Using the word White rage and identifying acts of White rage, emphasizes the violence that many White institutions and people use against Black people. Throughout this thesis I will utilize the term “White institutions” to refer to specific organizations and establishments in America that, in spite of Black resistance



efforts, have remained predominantly White. Such institutions include, but are not limited to, predominantly White colleges and universities, the police force, and government offices.

Within the first chapter, I will put the existing literature in conversation with each other and explicitly define White rage. As mentioned earlier, the term White rage itself is rather new even though people and institutions have been enacting White rage for decades. I will primarily depend on Anderson's (2014, 2016) pieces to do this work, but will also rely on other authors to further magnify the meaning of White rage. In doing this, I will also define other terms connected to White rage, specifically Whiteness, White supremacy, and White privilege. It is important to define those words within this work because they are intrinsically connected to White rage, but also so we do not conflate all of these terms. I will also use this chapter to explore nonviolent action theory, working to define nonviolent direct action and the role White rage can play in the repression of Black movements.

In the second chapter, I will look at two specific case studies in order to provide concrete examples of White rage. In looking at the Reconstruction era, the period of time following the end of the Civil war, I will focus on the 13th amendment and responses to that amendment. Most of my analysis will be concerned with how the 13th amendment promised Black people complete American citizenship, but White rage emerged once those individuals began attempting to enjoy those rights. During this time, the American legal system and law enforcement began criminalizing Black people and working to maintain a race hierarchy that kept White citizens in power. I will then transition to discussing the Civil Rights Movement that took place in the 1950s and 1960s. I will specifically study how White rage manifested itself to repress Black resistance, whether in response to *Brown vs Board of Education*, sit-ins, or voter registrations.

Moreover, I will examine how Civil Rights Movement leaders and participants more generally utilized the presence of White rage to their advantage and challenged White rage by transforming notions of criminality during this time.

Within my third chapter, I will grapple with what the presence of White rage means for specific nonviolent movements. More specifically, I will look to see how participants in the Civil Rights Movement were aware of, and maybe even counting on, the presence of White rage. This is apparent when leaders held trainings for how to remain nonviolent in the face of violence and encouraged participants to get arrested for a political purpose. I will also take time to acknowledge how White rage is detrimental to the mental health of Black individuals, especially Black resistors. In creating space for this discussion, it will become clear that it is one that is important to acknowledge. The mental well being of participants is important with relation to burnout and sustaining a movement in the long term. Finally, I will look to the modern Black Lives Matter movement and examine what they have learned from the Civil Rights Movement, specifically concerning White rage.

I will conclude by looking to current events and identifying White rage in the United States today. More specifically, I will look at the Charlottesville Nazi protests that took place in the summer of 2017 and the White rage that emerged in response to NFL player Colin Kaepernick's national anthem protests. In turning to these more modern examples, I will make it clear that White rage continues to exist and emerge in response to Black resistance. In doing this, I will also reassert why it is necessary to use the term White rage and what the knowledge of White rage means for Black resistance movements today.

I would also like to acknowledge my positionality as I continue to research and write about the issue of White rage. I am a White woman living in America and that provides me with a level of privileges to which Black people in this country do not have access. Historically speaking, White women in the United States have utilized the presence of White rage as a means to criminalize Black men, creating a myth of the Black male rapist. These women would claim that a Black man or teenager had sexually harassed or raped them. The surrounding White community, usually White men would immediately use violence against the accused Black man, severely injuring or murdering them. In 2017, Carolyn Bryant Donham admitted that Emmett Till did not sexually harass her in 1955 (Mack and McCann, 329). Till, a Black 14 year old, was brutally murdered because of Donham's accusations. The White men that murdered him were outraged at the idea of Till violating the segregated gender norms regarding Black men and White women (Mack and McCann, 329). Looking at this historical context, it is clear that as a White woman I often need to be aware of these dynamics that continue to exist in American society. Many women in this country have been socialized to fear Black men and Black sexuality, which leads some to make assumptions and accusations that have detrimental consequences for Black individuals. This is not to say that Black men are excused of accountability when they do sexually assault or rape women, but more of an assertion that there are also certain power dynamics present in interracial assault cases that are related to the issue of White rage.

Even further, as a White person in America I have never been the object of White rage and probably never will. As a result, I need to recognize that parts of my analysis might be clouded by that lack of understanding and experience. I do not have the personal insights that are

extremely relevant to the discussion of White rage. I still want to do this work, however, because I believe that with those privileges, I must work to challenge the institutions that continue to give me that privilege at the expense of people of color. With this work, I hope to hold White Americans and institutions accountable for White rage and repression they have inflicted upon Black resistance. Within this, I am mostly focusing on mechanisms of White rage and hope to expose why White rage has continued to exist within this country. Hopefully, as I continue to grapple with the issue of White rage beyond the scope of this thesis, I will expand upon my understanding of how to effectively combat the terror that is White rage.

# Chapter 1: Defining White Rage

## **Introduction:**

This chapter primarily seeks to provide a concrete definition of the term “White Rage” by taking a closer look at the research and work that has already been done on the topic. While the term itself is rather new, popularized as “Whitelash” by CNN commentator Van Jones in 2016, White rage itself has been present throughout much of American history. In the next chapter, I will take a historical look at social movements that were led by or advocated for Black people living in the United States in order to identify ways in which White people responded to such movements.

I will begin by delving into the research and material about White rage that already exists. Within this section I will define other key terms related to but distinct from White rage, specifically ideas of White privilege and Whiteness itself. As I lay out the existing literature, I will make clear distinctions between racism against Black people and the presence of White rage. I will explain what this rage is not and what it looks like in response to Black resistance.

Within this paper I am trying to examine how White rage influences Black nonviolent movements in America and then identify why White rage is an important term to utilize in conversations about Black resistance. To do this work, I must first lay out what that nonviolent Black resistance actually looks like in action. As a result, the second half of this chapter will delve into revolutionary nonviolent ideology. To do this work I will engage with Gene Sharp and many other nonviolent theorists in order to define specific terms related to revolutionary nonviolent action. I will then reveal the relationship between revolutionary nonviolence and White rage.

## **Defining White Rage:**

Carol Anderson and her work in revealing the existence and nature of White rage inspired this thesis. In an article for the Washington Post, she wrote, “Ferguson isn’t about black rage against cops. It’s white rage against progress” (Anderson 2014). In her book, *White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of our Racial Divide*, Anderson grapples with the history of America’s institutional racism. Often, the media will focus on instances of looting and riots that create and reinforce an image of Black rage. Anderson asserts that then White rage becomes overlooked (2014). She argues that White rage is not just the violence White people used against Black bodies, it is also the courts, legislature, government, and state-sanctioned violence. She goes on to assert that White rage is triggered by any kind of Black advancement, such as their demand for full citizenship (Anderson 2016, 4).

White rage expressed through courts, police, legislatures, and government officials, creates an aura of respectability (Anderson 2014). It is, put most simply, “cloaked in the niceties of the law and order, but it is rage nonetheless” (Anderson, 2014). Institutions, whether that be the legislature or the government policies, are part of White rage and the repression of Black advancement. For every demand or push for Black advancement, there is a reaction, a backlash that is rooted in rage (Anderson 2016, 4). White rage is the systematic oppression and brutal repression of Black advancement, especially when they organize themselves into movements (Anderson 2016, 6). White rage is the repression of Black resistance, both the immediate and long term repression, that works to directly challenge and degrade that resistance. It is the disregard for Black bodies, it is the narratives that follow a police shooting and question the integrity of the victim but defend the police officer, it is the beatings of protestors, and it is the

destruction of property. And above all else, White rage is embedded in the legal system that allows White institutions and people to use violence against Black people in the ways listed above- allowing these instances to continue (Anderson 2016, 3).

For many White Americans, there is a lack of awareness or denial of the privileges they receive because of their *Whiteness*. White privilege is the advantages enjoyed by White people and denied to other racial groups. These privileges, which are statistically proven to exist, include better access to education, health insurance, and employment (Johnson 2012, 115). Whiteness in itself is a means of lived experience, a representation of a hierarchical structure that is maintained by White people and White institutions (118). Throughout American history, Whiteness has also become defined by the continual struggle to uphold that hierarchy, to maintain the status quo and uphold their own power (128). White rage is rooted in this desire to maintain power and ensure that the system in itself does not change, it is rooted in America's institutional racism but they cannot be conflated either. White rage is not the White privilege or the system of Whiteness in itself. Instead, it is the actual institutional and state-sanctioned violence that is taken against Black existence and resistance.

White rage is often directed at Blackness, tied to stereotypes and myths of Black individuals as criminals or too concerned with issues of racism. Writer bell hooks (1995) argues that Black people have been socialized to repress their own rage because expressing that rage in the "wrong way" is essentially "suicidal" (14). White people, on the other hand, are better able to routinely assault and harass Black people without facing consequences because their violence is assessed differently by the state (hooks 1995, 15). White rage is then privileged and allowed greater freedom to be expressed in many spaces (15).

White rage is rooted in the White supremacy that has saturated institutions within America. White supremacy is the notion that White people are the superior race and, therefore, should maintain more power than other races (Ferber 1999, 146). Today, many White supremacists work to utilize the vocabulary of historically marginalized minorities in order to create an “oppressed majority” narrative (146). “White supremacy promotes, encourages, and condones all manners of violence against Black people. Institutionalized racism allows this violence to remain unseen and/ or renders it insignificant by suggesting it is justifiable punishment for some offense” (hooks 1995, 22). Part of the danger of White rage lies in the fact that it is deemed acceptable and allowed to continue and endanger the mental and physical health of Black people, with diminished or minimal consequences, if any, for White people. Whites are then able to maintain racial differences by exercising their rage and reinforce their power over Black bodies.

One can see how White rage manifests itself by looking at responses and reactions to Malcolm X, the leader of the Nation of Islam. Throughout the Civil Rights Movement, Malcolm X spoke out charismatically against the subjugation of Black people in America. Malcolm X spoke to tens of thousands of his followers about his anger and his convictions that the White man was the devil for the evil that he committed against Black people (Painter 2010, 376). As the Civil Rights Movement and Malcolm X gave birth to the Black Power Movement, Whites claimed that this Black pride was a “source of alienation” (Painter 2010, 382). White institutions worked to degrade Black bodies and their communities. In redefining Black identity and centering that identity around pride, Malcolm X actively challenged White power. According to Painter (2010), Whites felt that “If Black people could proclaim themselves black and proud,



white people could trumpet their whiteness” (377). White people felt alienated by this Black pride they could never access, and Malcolm X argued that White guilt lead them to identify with a “White ethnic” identity. The idea of being “Irish American” or “German American” replaced this “White American” identity. In working to remove themselves from their Whiteness, White people were rejecting the guilt that Malcolm X had accused them of (Painter 2010, 382).

Whiteness then became hinged on escaping White racist history.

Durham (2007) examines how White Rage is central to understanding the racist extreme right. "We cannot understand the extreme right if we do not appreciate the centrality of its belief that the white race is under attack, and it's only salvation is to fight against those who would destroy it. It is mobilized around deep anger, at the heart of which is race” (Durham 2007, 1). White Americans experience this “deep anger” surrounding issues of race because they believe that their Whiteness, and the privileges that come with that Whiteness, are threatened. For Durham, this White anger is central to understanding the far right, but these emotions are not only applicable to the far right. Anderson (2016) asserts that government officials, police officers, and everyday White people are all guilty of White rage. Their anger leads them to fight back against Black equality and advancement (Durham 2007, 130). These actions and emotions are the White Rage.

White Rage can take many different forms. White Rage is the immediate violence and expression of disdain for a movement, usually rooted in fear that a freedom movement will be successful and alter the current power dynamics. At the same time, however, it is also the long term collaboration between White citizens and the government to hinder Black self-advancement, whether informally or through formal legislation and policy (Anderson 2016,

4). It is an aspect and product of the institutional racism on which America was built, but it is also the ways in which White America has been able to dismantle Black resistance and demands for citizenship.

#### Racial Control and Social Dominance Theory:

Social dominance theory (SDT) is most concerned with understanding that all human societies tend to be structured as systems of group-based hierarchies (Sidanius and Pratto 1999, 31). These group based social hierarchies are sustained by the power, privilege, and prestige that an individual receives because of an identity they possess (32). Group based social hierarchies often include one dominant social group and many subordinate groups, with these distinctions depending on the social value of each group (31). More specifically, the dominant group has a positive social value, meaning that members often possess political authority and power, plentiful and healthy food options, health care, wealth, and high social status (31). A subordinate group, on the other hand, has a negative social value that is defined by their low power and social status, high risk and low status occupations, poor health care, and severe negative sanctions (such as prison or the death sentence) (32).

Within America, it is clear that White Americans are most often the dominant social group, and the Black community is a subordinate group. White Americans consistently have better access to health care, educational opportunities, political positions, and jobs in general (Johnson 2012, 115). White people are granted these privileges as a virtue of their racial identity and Black people are denied them. The goal of this section is not to erase conversations surrounding intersectionality or negate individuals with a multitude of complex identities. It is

more an acknowledgement that when an individual is identified as White, they possess a set of privileges and a level of power that is hinged on the subjugation of Black and Brown bodies.

Moving forward, theorists of SDT assert that different phenomena, such as racism, discrimination, prejudice, and stereotypes, must be understood within this framework of group based social hierarchies, especially in the context of social systems of economic surplus (Sidanius and Pratto 1999, 38). SDT is most concerned with how these hierarchies are able to reproduce themselves and remain in place. SDT looks to analyze specific mechanisms that produce and maintain group based social hierarchies (38). White rage is one of the mechanisms that continue to reinforce the racial hierarchy that exists in America. As mentioned earlier, Black Americans are a subordinate group, and they often mobilize in an effort to demand full citizenship. When they do this, they are challenging the status quo and jeopardizing the racial hierarchy in which White people are the dominant social group. White rage is the repressive force that works to maintain that racial hierarchy and keep Black people subordinate to White Americans.

Racial hierarchy requires that members of a racially dominant group and their allies actively work to keep individuals of racially oppressed groups in a socially subordinate position (Cazenave 2018, 80). Mechanisms of racial control, such as lynchings or mass incarceration, work to sustain White racial superiority and Black racial inferiority (126). Prejudice and discrimination increase significantly in response to any challenges to the racial status quo (124). These instances are White rage against any level of Black resistance. What is most alarming, however, is that this repression is often excused or condoned because the American legal system has racialized Black people as criminals- creating a dynamic in which Black lives do not matter

(124). As a result, there are diminished consequences for acting out of White rage and that allows for the racial hierarchy to remain the same.

### **Nonviolent Action and White Rage:**

Within this discussion of White rage, it is necessary to examine dynamics of nonviolent direct actions because White rage plays a specific role in nonviolent Black resistance. It is clear that White rage is a mechanism of repression that emerges when there is any level of significantly widespread Black advancement and works to dismantle Black resistance. Most Black people in America are aware that White rage exists even if they do not necessarily explicitly name it “White rage,” so Black resistance movements are aware of its presence as well. What I want to then explore is how resistance movements are able to use White rage as a means of leverage and, to a certain extent, how Black people are affected by White rage as well. To do this work, I must first define nonviolent action, the paradox of repression, and leverage.

Nonviolence is often conflated with passivity, seen as an unrealistic form of action that is too concerned with remaining more moral than one’s opponent. When many people, myself included, are first introduced to nonviolent theory, we cannot help but wonder how abstaining from violence could successfully challenge or destroy an oppressive system of power. Scholars, however, have argued that nonviolent action is not passive but instead a very active way to challenge an oppressive system. Moreover, it is often more effective than violent resistance. Deming (1968) challenges misperceptions about nonviolence, arguing that nonviolent action is about “waging battle” and identifying herself as a “revolutionary” (2). Nonviolent revolutionaries are not concerned with staying pure or the morality of their tactics, but are instead focused on creating change within an oppressive system (18). This action is not passive

or about accepting the conditions of the society, but a set of actions that are strategic and aggressive attacks on specific power dynamics.

Nonviolent action is not necessarily rooted in a moral code, but grounded in how effective nonviolent tactics are in dismantling oppressive systems of power. Many of Gene Sharp's (1990) theories hinge on the fact that the power of rulers and hierarchical systems rely on the obedience and cooperation of the general population (39). Sharp (1990) defines nonviolent struggle as "a technique of action by which the population can restrict and sever the sources of power of their rulers or other oppressors and mobilize their own power potential into effective power" (39). The general population commands a level of power because rulers are so dependent on their acquiescence; nonviolent struggle works to mobilize that people power against the opponent. Nonviolent techniques facilitate disobedience and interrupt the maintenance of an unjust hierarchy, challenging the rulers and influential institutions.

As mentioned earlier, many critics of nonviolence often argue that the methods are too concerned with morality, are passive, and unrealistic. A lot of Sharp's works grapple with these accusations and he works to prove that nonviolent action is the most effective *technique* movements could use in battle against a ruling opponent. Challenging systems of power and taking action against that power is central to nonviolent action. Nonviolent action itself is made up of over 198 methods and techniques that can be sorted into three classifications (Sharp 1990, 50). Nonviolent protest and persuasion involves using symbolic action in order to showcase disapproval, make compelling arguments, and mobilize people around shared identities. Examples include mock funerals and marches (41). Noncooperation is often seen as more disruptive than other forms of nonviolent action and involves refusing to cooperate with specific

systems; examples include boycotts and strikes (42). Nonviolent intervention is concerned with disrupting the normal operations of a society, usually through deliberate interference or interruption, and examples include marches and sit-ins (43).

For many nonviolent movements, leverage is central to effectively challenging those in power. Much as with armed struggle, leverage or power generated nonviolently depends on “the ability of the campaign to impose costs on the adversary for maintaining the status quo, or for retaliating against the resistance” (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011, 41). There are many ways in which a movement can generate leverage and maximize the damage it does to the opponent’s legitimacy and ability to act. For example, when the opponent attempts to violently repress the resistance, it often generates sympathy and moves more passive populations to side with the resisters (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011, 50; Sharp 1990, 268). This shift in loyalty is a backfire and the actions of the opponent can be used as leverage to generate more support (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011, 50).

Similarly, flexible strategy and diversity in nonviolent tactics often work to further throw the opponent off balance and create more opportunity to destabilize their power (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011, 56). A movement may need to be able to shift between methods of concentration and dispersion, switching between tactics that include larger concentrations of people in a public space and acts that are more spread out (56). In being able to adapt and innovate, the movement can reduce the effectiveness of the repression they are facing and work to maintain the initiative.

Sharp (1990) argues that nonviolent action is strategic, active, and takes an immense amount of organization and planning. In all strategic nonviolent action, the methods are rooted in a disobedience and disruption of a power hierarchy and its legitimacy that is dependent on

citizen cooperation (40). One is able to see that, as Deming (1968) pointed out, nonviolent participants make active choices to challenge the oppressor and change the systems that are oppressing marginalized groups (18). For Sharp (1990), the resisters must spend a great deal of plan planning and organizing the actions that they will take in order to maximize impact and chances of success (50). For nonviolent theorists, nonviolence is not necessarily rooted in a moral code but strategy and a specific set of tactics that can be revolutionary and successful. These tactics, when employed strategically, have been shown to decrease the amount of casualties in the long term and have been proven successful in case studies and quantitative analyses.

Many nonviolent scholars and activists argue that nonviolence is more effective than violence and there are more benefits in the long term as well. Chenoweth and Stephan (2011) researched over 300 specific case studies of movements that they defined as either predominantly violent or nonviolent (6). In looking at these cases, the authors attempt to determine whether or not a movement was successful and how their methodology influenced that outcome. Chenoweth and Stephan (2011) define success as “the full achievement of [the movement’s] stated goals within a year of the peak of activities and a discernible effect on the outcome, such that the outcome was a direct result of the campaign’s activities” (14). In the end, the research proves that the success rates of a campaign increases when the movement remains nonviolent (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011, 6; Sharp 1990, 390). Chenoweth and Stephan (2011) find that between 1900 and 2006, nonviolent campaigns were almost twice as likely to achieve full or partial success as their violent counterparts (7).

Part of this success is tied to the fact that there are no physical barriers to participating in nonviolent action and more individuals are able to participate in the actions themselves (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011, 35). The regime can better handle small scale resistance because it does not need to utilize or exploit more of their resources and is less likely to jeopardize whatever popular legitimacy they hold (Shultziner 2018, 58). The more participation in a movement, the more difficult it becomes for the opponent to successfully repress the resistance. Even further, nonviolent action often transforms the participants themselves, empowering the public with the knowledge that they can organize themselves to defend their own rights (Sharp 1990, 424). When a nonviolent movement is successful, the transitioning society has a foundation that is organized and has institutions that the resistance has built to challenge the oppressors (Sharp 1990, 424). Here we are able to see that nonviolent action works to effectively attack the systems of oppression within a society, but also works to ensure that the future of that society is not in chaos if they are successful.

Sharp (1990) outlines who can constitute the opposition, revealing what role these groups or institutions play in the context of a social movement. He uses the word opponent in his work to refer to the, “adversary, whether a group, institution, regime, invader, or, rarely, an individual, against whom nonviolent struggle is being waged” (Sharp 1990, 40). This opponent is most difficult when they are backed by the State or are rulers of the State itself, but nonviolent resistance is also effective against other opponents as well. Sharp goes on to assert that when individuals renounce their opponents’ authority or refuse to cooperate, they challenge the government or hierarchical system itself and the legitimacy of which it depends (406). Authorities, likewise, will take action to protect their interests and institutions.



As a movement or group challenges the system they are resisting, the opponent must find a way to stop that defiance from continuing or even spreading (378). This repression can take many forms, including a control of communication or information, psychological pressures, confiscations, bans, arrests and imprisonments, and direct physical violence (380). Sharp argues that repression from opponents “is an acknowledgment by the opponent of the seriousness of the challenge posed by the resistance” (378). This means that these acts reveal that the opponents are taking the nonviolent movement seriously, implying that the movement is, on some level, effective.

#### The Paradox of Repression:

Sharp (1990) also outlines the nonviolent dynamic of political jiu-jitsu that occurs when resisters respond to violent repression with nonviolent action instead of violently lashing out and thus undermine the authority of the opponent. This strategy strengthens group morale, turning third parties against the opponent and instigating internal discontent with the opponent’s support base (406). Sharp argues that when the resisters continue to use nonviolence in the face of brutal violent repression and injustice, power is shifted to them, and the opponent is left off balance because supporters begin to question their legitimacy as benevolent rulers (406). Political jiu-jitsu works to expose the unequal power dynamics between the resistance and the oppressor, contrasting the violent actions with nonviolent response in order to alter support. Sharp also notes, however, that political jiu-jitsu cannot guarantee success because the outcome is dependent on a wide range of factors. Instead, this is more of a claim that political jiu-jitsu can be used to reveal systematic violence and repression from opponents.

What Kurtz and Smithey (2018) call “the paradox of repression” corresponds with Sharp’s idea of political jiu-jitsu. Repression takes place when those in power work to demobilize dissent and social movements (Kurtz and Smithey 2018, 2). The goal is to intimidate or even crush the powerless and eradicate their resistance (4). The paradox of repression contends that these instances of repression can be harnessed to work in favor of the resisters and delegitimize those in power. Repression can backfire against governmental regimes because bystanders and external parties are repulsed by their actions (Kurtz and Smithey 2018, 55). In fact, “Every time regime leaders issue an order to their subordinates to repress unarmed civilians, they risk insubordination, loss of domestic legitimacy, and the possibility of renewed mobilization” (Chenoweth 2018, 33). In violently repressing the resistance, the opponent is running the risk that the resisters will then be able to use these actions as *leverage* to further work towards their demands. The movement can exploit any level of repression in order to gain more supporters, cultivate deflections, draw international audiences, and further reveal the oppression that they are facing. Resisters are essentially able to utilize the repression they are facing in order to put more pressure on those in power and demand structural changes.

Understanding the power dynamics of nonviolent resistance is important in grasping the relationship between White rage and Black resistance, especially nonviolent resistance. As we will see through several case studies in United States history, this dynamic has existed for decades and continues to influence current events.

## Chapter 2: Introducing Case Studies

Within this chapter, I will look to answer these central questions and further explore how White rage actually manifests itself in response to Black resistance. I will focus on the period of reconstruction following the North winning the Civil War and the introduction of the 13th Amendment that legally abolished slavery. More specifically, I will investigate the ways in which White people and institutions in America opposed Black citizenship. The second half of this chapter will turn to the Civil Rights Movement and how Whiteness shaped repression of nonviolent movements striving for human rights and the end of Jim Crow. In looking at these two historical examples, I will highlight how White rage has characterized U.S. history and the progression of Black resistance in the United States. Finally, I will explore the criminalization of Black individuals as a result of White rage. These case studies illuminate forms White rage can take.

### **The Reconstruction Period:**

After the end of the Civil War, the Emancipation Proclamation, in theory, freed the slaves, defined citizenship, and protected Black people's right to vote. The 13th Amendment legally abolished slavery, making the practice itself unconstitutional, except for purposes of incarceration. These legal decisions freed Black people from slave plantations, conferred Americans human rights, and challenged hierarchal conventions, making many Whites within the country anxious that Blacks would have access to the same rights and treatment that they enjoyed. Their anxiety is manifested through repression and White Rage. More specifically, I will examine the official and governmental responses to the Emancipation Proclamation and the 13th Amendment, along with the visceral violence White people used against Black bodies.

Looking at these instances of White Rage will reveal how this rage manifests itself to formally and legally oppose Black advancement.

### Legal White Rage

Legal responses to Black social movements, such as the Black Codes, are a form of White rage. Mississippi first introduced the Black Codes, which required that Blacks sign annual labor contracts with plantation, mill, and mine owners. If Black people refused to or could not provide proof of employment, they were often charged with vagrancy and sold to the highest bidder (Anderson 2016, 13). Once these Black citizens were labeled as criminals, the freedom promised to them by the 13th amendment was revoked. The codes forbade Black people from seeking new employment, trapping them in a system where it was essentially illegal to be self-sufficient without written consent from the Mayor or a judge (14). Penalties for defiance, outside of jail, included whippings. These Black codes, crafted by respected judges, attorneys, and planters, spread to nine other Southern states (14). Then President Ulysses S. Grant made it clear that he did not oppose these codes, asserting that he thought the South was properly adjusting after losing the Civil War. Although the Emancipation Proclamation and 13th amendment promised Black Americans freedom from slavery and American citizenship, the White government of the South worked directly against this progress in order to further subjugate Black people. These officials could identify that freeing the slaves and allowing them access to basic human rights could challenge the hierarchical systems that they, and all of White America, depended on. The Black Codes were a new coded reiteration of slavery with a different label that kept Black people from accessing basic human rights because White people were concerned about how they would become affected.

Even Presidential figures were guilty of White Rage, influencing the words and policies that they endorsed during their time in the White House. President Andrew Johnson explained that Black people needed to build their own schools and buy their own land instead of receiving “government handouts” after slavery ended (Anderson 2016, 25) He “raged” against any government initiatives that worked to aid Black people in becoming full citizens with access to institutions, citing that they ignored the “needs of our own race” (24) Johnson actively worked to guarantee that the United States had a “white man's government” and ignored the history of slavery, demanding that Black Americans create new institutions for themselves without any assistance (24). Johnson was sympathetic to the Southern cause and, as evidenced by his defense of a “white man’s government,” aligned himself with White superiority. His denial and avoidance of what Black people needed from the government was intentional and worked to debilitate this group of people. It was also White Rage rooted in his anger that Black Americans could be looking for governmental support to change a system from which he was benefiting and that they were demanding civil rights. His systematic refusal to create systems that would help Black citizens prosper in the wake of over a century of slavery was in itself an example of White rage, but it also legitimized White rage. The person in the highest position of power in the country practicing and allowing White rage, made repressing Black resistance with any means necessary legal.

### Violent White Rage

The end of the Civil War and the idea of free Black Americans also led to a considerable amount of violence. In New Orleans, for example, 50 Black people were murdered and over 100 injured for meeting to discuss the right to vote (Anderson 2016, 27). In one case, a White man

bludgeoned a Black man to death during a meeting about voting rights. Someone else asked the White man if he was worried about legal repercussions, and he only laughed, saying that he had no worries because the President was “with him” (30). These acts of violence that immediately follow slave emancipation are clear examples of White Rage manifested in physical injury to Black bodies. In the case of the White man with no remorse, he was outraged that Black people were organizing to practice their right to vote and took that anger out on a participant. He wanted to release and show that anger, but presumably he also wanted to discourage other Black people from demanding their human rights as well. Even more noteworthy, he knew that the President essentially sanctioned his actions as acceptable and shared his White Rage.

During the period of Reconstruction, millions of newly freed Black individuals attempted to insert themselves into American society and enjoy the rights promised to them by the Constitution. In response, White rage erupted in numerous ways. With the Black codes and President Johnson, we are able to see how White rage is first created in legal and political contexts. More informal instances of White rage, such as the violent beatings and murders of Black individuals with no remorse, are then empowered and seen as legitimate. There are often less severe and punishments for this White rage at any level because it is so embedded into American society and its legal system. Even when there are consequences, they serve to blunt any accusations that the legal system is unjust or racist.

### **The Civil Rights Movement:**

The images of Civil Rights Movement actions are present in almost every American’s mind by the time they graduate high school. These might include pictures of police officers violently repressing nonviolent marches, police dogs attacking those attending marches, and

White customers throwing food at teenagers sitting at a counter labeled “Whites Only.” These popularized images, used by Civil Rights Leaders as leverage, speak to how White Rage can produce violence and how it can backfire. The Civil Rights Movement has a rich history of nonviolent direct actions that were met with repression and White Rage.

Three specific examples of Black resistance during the Civil Rights era reveal how White people often responded to these actions. In the *Brown vs. Board of Education* Supreme Court ruling, which was a result of Black activism demanding equal access to education and desegregation, White Rage took the form of both short term violent outrage and long term official racist educational systems. Even further, during sit-ins throughout the country, student activists, who demanded the desegregation of eating spaces, faced blatant degradation and imprisonment. Finally, campaigns to register Black voters resulted in humiliation and long term efforts to create networks and policies that actively hindered Black progress. In choosing these examples, I am working to reveal how White Rage takes many forms. White Rage is the immediate violence and expression of disdain for a movement, usually rooted in fear that a movement will be successful and alter the current power dynamics. At the same time, however, it is also the long term collaboration between White citizens and the government to hinder Black self-advancement, whether that be informally or through formal policies and practices.

In 1954, the Supreme Court, in the *Brown v. Board of Education* case, ruled that Jim Crow schools violated the 14th amendment (Anderson 2016, 74). This ruling required that, after 1954, American schools be desegregated, but the White resistance and responses to desegregation meant that, a decade later, school demographics remained essentially the same. *Brown vs. Board* spurred the reemergence of the KKK, mass protests outside of desegregated

schools, and encouraged many White nationalists to continue to resist desegregation (Durham 2007, 115). Besides the initial violent reaction to *Brown vs. Board*, the government put policies in place to further subjugate Black Americans and implement obstacles that blocked their access to basic human rights. For example, in Little Rock Arkansas, the governor closed the public schools in the area. With over \$300,000 in donations, state funding, and tax-subsidized busing, White students could maintain access to education and attend private schools (Anderson 2016, 82). This, by and large, left Black children without access to schools and formal education. Here, a court ruling that was meant to increase accessibility and equal access to education was met with immediate resistance from White parents. After stalling and defying the Supreme Court ruling, the officials within regions were able to essentially avoid desegregation and continue to deny Black children the right to an education. These efforts and resistance to change are rooted in the anxiety that Black Americans will progress and begin to achieve in the same schools as their children.

Moreover, in 1960, Black students in Birmingham began sitting at White-only counters in cafeterias and diners, staging sit-ins that evolved into massive disruption campaigns against Jim Crow segregation (Morris 1984, 195). The organizers of these sit-ins emphasized organization and preparation, with students holding trainings to practice handling confrontations with racist Whites and police (201). While Morris (1984) does not directly mention the presence of White Rage in these sit-ins, he does explore the ways in which White people within the diners and police officers responded to these mass acts of defiance. White people in the dining halls threw food and slurs at the students, often seen in large groups surrounding the students as they antagonized them for sitting at the counter (197). Students were also arrested and imprisoned by



police officers, who were called to the scene (197). White customers and the police officers who punished protestors were attempting to repress this resistance effort, hoping to put an end to the defiance, and to express their complete disapproval of the efforts however they could.

Even further, the Supreme Court also ruled that denying citizens the right to vote based on their racial identity was unconstitutional, but racism in the South created obstacles that prevented many Black Americans from casting their votes. During the Civil Rights Movement, there were many efforts to register Black Americans and get them voting. In Tennessee, one of the few states without literacy tests or poll taxes, Black people began to line up outside of the Courthouse in order to register to vote (Aronoff 2011) Courthouse employees would spill or throw their coffee on the people waiting in line and there was even a case in which an armed White gang shot at an organizer's family tent outside of the building (Aronoff 2011). The White Citizens Council, controlled by a handful of politically and economically influential White families, distributed a list of Black voters to the local businesses so they could begin denying these individuals service and goods (Aronoff 2011). Those on the list were unable to buy groceries, gas, or take out bank loans, and some were even fired from their jobs. As Black Americans attempted to exercise their constitutional right to vote, Whites immediately worked to undermine their efforts and make it clear that they did not support their actions. In the long term, the White Citizen Council was able to essentially punish Black people to make them regret their actions and discourage others from demanding their basic human rights.

Again, as Anderson (2014) asserts, each time there is action or promise of Black advancement, there is a backlash. This reaction is White rage. When the Supreme court ruled that segregated schools were unconstitutional, White people and the legal system worked to

counteract that ruling. Even further, each time Black people dissented and took action, whether through the right of voting or tactical sit-ins of protest, White law enforcement or groups of White people worked to degrade those efforts and people. All of these efforts were direct attempts to stifle Black advancement and maintain power structures that continued to privilege White Americans.

### **The Criminalization of Black People:**

Within conflict theory, there is an assumption that a society's legal system actually only serves individuals and groups in power by criminalizing or punishing those that "threaten their interests" (Cazenave 2018, 124). The American legal system and society not only tolerates violence against Black people, but actually encourages it (129). This is seen in both the period of Reconstruction and the Civil Rights Movement, in which White governmental officials and law enforcement were able to criminalize Black people and institutions while protecting White institutions and people. This criminalization worked to seemingly stigmatize the image of Blackness, creating and reinforcing stereotypes that Black people are criminals who break the law, are lazy, and uncivilized. In many instances, the media is able to suggest that the subjugation of Black people is necessary for maintaining law and order for the greater population (hooks 1995, 112). In the cases I am grappling with, it is clear that these White institutions are enraged by the idea that Black people could begin to enjoy the rights promised to citizens by the Constitution. In large part, this criminalization of Blackness essentially normalizes and legalizes levels of White rage and violence that threatens the lives or liberties of Black citizens.

As I noted earlier, the 13th amendment made it unconstitutional to force anyone into slavery or involuntary servitude unless they were punished for a crime. In the documentary

entitled *13th*, director Ava DuVernay explores the nature of the 13th Amendment with numerous politicians, writers, professors, and activists speaking to the history and effects of the amendment. Historian Kevin Gannon explains that the amendment granted *freedom* to all Americans, but there was also a loophole: criminals still had to provide free labor (DuVernay 2016; Gilmore 2000, 196). This loophole was embedded in the structure and language of the constitution, there to be exploited by a system devastated by the end of slavery (DuVernay 2016; Gilmore 2000, 197). As writer Jelani Cobb points out, slavery was central to the South's economic system and the abolishment of the practice after the war left the region “in tatters” (DuVernay 2016; Alexander 2010, 27). As a result, Black people were arrested enmasse for minor crimes such as loitering and vagrancy, forced back into a system in which they had to provide free labor in an effort to rebuild the economy (DuVernay 2016; Alexander 2010, 28).

The 13th amendment itself is not a social movement or an example of Black resistance, it is instead the product of a civil war and a need to unite a country divided, in part through a new form of slavery. This amendment, however, serves to reveal how Whiteness and White rage are embedded in America's legal system. Language within the Constitution gives the American government and law enforcement the ability to reinstate a new coded form of slavery (Gilmore 2000, 197). Here, we are able to see what Anderson (2014) was speaking about when she asserted that White rage is essentially “cloaked” in law and order. After the demise of slavery, the country began scrambling to somehow begin to rebuild and they grounded those efforts in denying Black Americans the rights they had just recently been granted. These institutions sought to deny Black people their citizenship because they were full of rage that slavery had ended and that Black people were full citizens, implying that they deserved to be treated as

human and thus could compete with Whites for status and resources (Anderson 2016, 39). The American government was expressing their own White rage, but they were also setting a precedent that created space and essentially legalized White rage more generally.

Similarly, within the Civil Rights Movement, Black leaders were consistently labeled as criminals and were forced to deal with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) on numerous occasions. In the *13th* documentary, interviewee Van Jones talks about Martin Luther King Jr. and how the director of the FBI, J. Edgar Hoover, labeled King “one of the most dangerous people in the country” (DuVernay 2016; Alridge 2006, 679). Malcolm X had undercover cops in his entourage, individuals infiltrating his circles in order to gain intel and monitor him (DuVernay 2016). In a Desert Sun article, a journalist reports that Hoover labeled the Black Panther Party “the greatest threat to American democracy” (“Black Panther Greatest Threat to U.S. Security, 1969). The Black Panther Party, at this time, was in no way powerful enough to stand against the strongest military in the world. This is not to understate the power of these figures and parties, for they were all effective and dangerous leaders during this time. In all of these cases, however, the law was responsible for attempting to criminalize Blackness, attempting to strip them and their movement of the power and authority that they were beginning to hold. In doing this, they expressed rage that these people and parties challenged the hierarchy from which White bodies benefit. They worked to stifle Black dissent.

This criminalization does not only manifest in public perceptions and media, it also leads to a considerable amount of violence. As mentioned previously, individuals and law enforcement violently attacked Black resisters throughout the Civil Rights Movement. White rage led to the murders of numerous Black leaders during this time as well. Fred Hampton was the chairman of

the Black Power Party, known for being able to unite people of all races with his speeches (Haas 2011, 227). In the winter of 1969, Hampton was murdered in a police raid at 4:30 in the morning. He was shot numerous times in his bed with his pregnant wife, who also died in the raid, and the murder was later ruled a justifiable homicide (DuVernay 2016; Haas 2011, ix). In response to a figure that was known for his ability to unite people in resistance, law enforcement was able to murder Hampton and not face any consequences. This rage was immensely violent and worked to silence Hampton in particular, but it also worked to eliminate the progress he made by unexpectedly stripping the Black community of an important leader.

Black people were never allowed to control their own narratives and stories in the public sphere, leading them to resist oppression and the injustices they faced everyday. This resistance consistently leads to a response rooted in White rage, in which White legal institutions utilize their privilege to control public perceptions of Black people. They are, in essence, creating a story in which Black people are constantly demarcated as evil criminals, thus regaining power over the population. Criminalization is rooted in the history of the 13th amendment and continues to influence the present, with a disproportionate percent of Black men in prison. This legal form of White rage is, arguably, one of the most dangerous because it contributes to White privilege, in which Whites can continue to express this rage and know that law will be on their side. Black individuals, on the other hand, are denied these privileges and continue to face brutal law enforcement.

## Chapter 3: Identifying White rage as Inherent to Black Advancement

Within this chapter I will explore further the impact that White rage has on Black social movements. I will examine the Civil Rights Movement in the United States and investigate how the movement was able to use the presence of White rage as a means of leverage. I will specifically look at how movement leaders and participants, exploited White rage to create a level of backfire. White rage, within this chapter, refers specifically to attempts to suppress nonviolent action or calls for Black liberation.

In much social movement theory, and activism more generally, individuals often overlook the importance of mental health in sustaining an effective nonviolent action or movement. This is especially true of movements that are rooted in the Black community because of the long history of institutional racism and efforts to appear strong in the face of that oppression. As a result, I think it is important to create space within this chapter to grappling with how White rage is detrimental to the mental health of Black resisters. If activists burn out because their mental health is deteriorating, the movement has a smaller chance of sustaining itself and forcing a backlash. To do this work, I will look to the works of Black feminist bell hooks and psychologist Frantz Fanon who worked with Algerians who fought against French colonialism.

To end the chapter, I will look to the Black Lives Matter movement, a modern example of Black resistance with clear roots connecting back to the Civil Rights Movement. In this section, I will lay out what the Black Lives Matter movement has learned from the Civil Rights Movement, specifically what they seem to have learned about White rage and how they manage

this rage. I will also look at how the movement has started to actually begin dialogue and create awareness about the mental health of its participants. This reveals that a movement can plan to utilize the presence of White rage as a means of leverage, usually in hopes to inspire individuals or force the repression to backfire. Awareness of mental health is a necessary aspect of this outcome because White rage does cause trauma and that trauma can endanger the longevity of the movement. As a result, acknowledging and working to heal the damage White rage allows the movement to sustain itself and force opportunities in which they can benefit from the paradox of repression.

### **White Rage and Leverage in the CRM:**

Earlier in this thesis I examined how a loophole in the 13th amendment states that slavery is illegal, unless the individual is imprisoned. This led to massive amounts of Black people being arrested and criminalized in order to prevent them from gaining access to their full American citizenship. For decades, Black people were victimized by this incessant criminalization, but the Civil Rights Movement turned the idea of criminalization on its head as leaders defined their movement around getting arrested (DuVernay 2016). Civil Rights leaders were able to transform the notion of criminality, for getting arrested by a White police officer became a *noble* act of dissent (DuVernay 2016). Throughout history, Black resistance in the United States has been rooted in this desire to be understood as a full and complicated human, as something more than a criminal (DuVernay 2016). In cognitantly breaking the law to convey their dissent and demands for full citizenship, Black Americans attempted to control their own narrative and reveal their own complexity. Participants in the Civil Rights Movement were voluntarily getting publicly beaten and arrested, revealing to the public that they were wholly committed to the cause. This

example of political ju-jitsu challenged the perceptions that Black people were just naturally inclined to break the law; instead it became clear that they were breaking these laws *for* something. What this worked to do is get outraged White moderates at least interested or actively supporting the movement. It also worked more broadly to gain more supporters from all communities, mobilizing greater numbers of people in support of the movement.

Prominent Civil Rights Leader, Martin Luther King Jr. worked to transform the connotations associated with being labeled a criminal. In his letter from a Birmingham jail, King speaks to his willingness to break the law. He names that White people are anxious over how Civil Rights Movements participants have not been hesitant to break the law (King 1963). He goes on to state that he feels that he has a personal moral and legal responsibility to break unjust laws, laws that degrade human life (King 1963). Here, he makes breaking the law, going to prison for your beliefs, and disrupting civil society the *moral* choice. King is changing the meaning of breaking the law and ultimately getting arrested, arguing that it is tied to righteousness instead of just criminality. He says that anyone breaking these unjust laws must be ready to face the consequences, which will most likely be an arrest, and that it will hopefully raise an awareness about injustice (King 1963). He and other members of the movement know that breaking the law will get them arrested, and they are prepared for the legal response to their actions, but King is explicitly saying that getting arrested is necessary. King has problematized the criminal justice system in America and revealed that Black people are doing the morally right thing while a primarily White police force continues to uphold an unjust set of laws. This further complicates the stereotype that Black Americans deserve to be in jail and reveals that Black Americans are complex human beings who are more than just criminals.



Rosa Parks was another essential figure of the Civil Rights Movement who challenged this idea of the Black criminal. In 1955, Alabama had institutionalized segregation in public spaces, and Black people were arrested for sitting in the first few seats of a bus or for not giving up their seat to a White rider (Kohl 1991, 41). In the winter of that year, Parks sat in the “colored” section of the bus and refused to give up her seat when it became overcrowded (42). The bus driver immediately told Parks that he was planning on calling the police and having her arrested, to which Parks responded “You may do that” (44). Prior to this day, at least three other Black people had been arrested by police for refusing to adhere to segregationist laws on a bus so Parks was well aware that she was going to be arrested for refusing to move (45). Parks understood the consequences and had the pure resolve to remain steadfast in her belief that the segregation laws were unjust. Parks actions were a direct challenge to the White legal system that was in place, specifically the system that was in place in Alabama. In fact, bus boycotts emerged because Parks was arrested, because Parks experienced White rage when she sat down on the bus while a White person stood.

It is important to note that Parks was not acting in pure rage or “tired,” this was a tactical and intentional act of defiance. For months, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), leader E.D. Nixon, and the Women’s Political Council (WPC) had been planning the Montgomery Bus Boycotts and were looking for someone who could inspire and spark the boycott (Kohl 1991, 45). They needed someone who had the respect of the community, the resilience to deal with a racist police force, and the ability to handle the publicity that would come with being at the center of a bus boycott- Parks fit those needs (45). When Parks was arrested, the NAACP, Nixon, and WPC were able to mobilize around the injustice and

inspiring story of the woman who resolutely and intentionally broke segregationist law (45). All parties were waiting on, seemingly depending on, the presence of White rage that they wanted to exploit for the means of their movement. All Black people in Alabama at this time were aware that in breaking the bus segregation laws, law enforcement would arrest them for believing that they were deserving complete American citizenship. Instead of adhering to this system, Parks chose to break the law knowing that the White rage that ensued would reveal the injustice of racial discrimination in the United States.

For many participants of the Civil Rights Movement, “fill the jails” became a central theme for their direct action. Civil Rights leader James Bevel suggested in 1963 that children should organize because so many of their parents were anxious about losing their jobs if they participated in an act of civil disobedience (King 1999, 153). Bevel himself bellowed a rallying cry of “Gandhi said to fill the jails! We’re gonna fill the jails” (153). In what became known as the Children’s Crusade, thousands of Black children left their classrooms and of the thousand people arrested 319 were children (153). Five days after this, another 2,000 people were arrested in the area for nonviolent actions- the jails were packed (153). Here, one is able to see how Bevel and participants in the civil rights movement were aware that police officers were going to arrest them. They disrupted the regular day on a large scale, with kids leaving class and people taking to the streets. They were counting on police officers arresting people in large amounts in order to overwhelm the jails. Theoretically, once a prison system is overwhelmed and direct actions continues to take place, the government is hopefully then forced to begin listening to demands of the movement.

In the case of the Children's crusade, we are able to look back at how the jails juxtaposed nonviolent action with police brutality to pressure the American government to listen to their demands for desegregation. Now famous opponent to the Civil Rights Movement, Bull Connor, was outraged as the Children's Crusade led to so many people being arrested. He was furious with the participants, and as people were singing freedom songs, he sent out German shepherd dogs that snarled and attacked the protestors (King 1999, 153). Connor then went on to order the fire department to use their hoses against the people in hopes of dispersing the crowd, breaking some bones, lacerating their bodies, or inflicting painful eye injuries (154). What is most noteworthy about this altercation, however, is the television coverage of the events. Eventually, the Justice Department was obviously embarrassed, and Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy sent a top official to Birmingham to act as an intermediary (154). It was later announced that White business executives agreed to a desegregation plan, and within a month, then President John F. Kennedy publicly denounced segregation on live television (155).

In the case of the Children's crusade and subsequent nonviolent protests, participants of the movement were able to pressure the Justice Department to listen to their demands. As Black resistors continued to disrupt everyday life and survive the violent repression of the police force, the American government, specifically the Justice Department, lost legitimacy. As evidenced by cries of "fill the jails," leaders and participants during this time knew that they were going to be arrested for participating in the crusade. People fully understood that they would be arrested, which is an example of a movement being aware of the presence of White rage. Even further, the movement was depending on the presence of White rage because they were trying to overwhelm the jails and that could only happen if the police force attempted to dismantle their resistance by

arresting people. Participants within the Civil Rights Movement were clearly aware of the presence of White rage and knew how the government would respond to any level of resistance. With this knowledge, they were able to plan actions like the Children's Crusade and structure the action in order to use the presence of White rage as a means of leverage that worked to pressure the Justice Department to consider their demands.

### **Mental Health:**

Often when we talk about nonviolent action, we spend a lot of time working through how the resistance is going to face repression and what strategies are necessary to overcome that repression. What has been historically left untouched, however, is the mental health of participants within these movements and how acknowledging the mental health of individuals can be essential to the strength and longevity of the movement itself, especially under conditions of long term and structural oppression. Within many of the case studies that I have examined, it was clear that White rage posed a direct threat to Black resistance and the ability of Black individuals to enjoy the rights that their American citizenship was supposed to grant to them. White rage led to the destabilization of Black resistance movements and led to mass physical violence used against Black people. It has also had a huge impact on their mental health, which sometimes making it difficult to sustain and maintain a Black social movement.

Bell hooks (1995) asserts that the Black community often avoids talking about their mental health because there is a culture of shame surrounding it (134). This is not to say that White people do not face a similar shame in acknowledging their mental health, but for the Black community the issue is particularly layered. Black individuals, especially Black activists, feel the need to "prove" to White people that racism has not completely destroyed their communities

(134). Even further, Black people are forced to “live within a white supremacist capitalist patriarchal society that must attack and assault the psyches of black people (and other people of color) to perpetuate and maintain itself” (hooks 1996, 144). Black people live within a society in which the racial hierarchy is dependent on attacking the mental health of Black people. At the same time, however, the Black community has historically struggled with acknowledging and accepting issues regarding mental health. This just compounds and continues to contribute to the trauma that many Black Americans experience during their lifetime.

This avoidance is inherently dangerous, but this is especially true in the context of social movements and individuals participating in efforts for Black liberation. Hooks (1995) argues that this culture of shame makes it difficult for Black Americans to acknowledge for themselves how living in a White supremacist society and consistently being targeted by White rage and abuse is fundamentally psychological trauma (134). Even further, the Black Lives Matter healing toolkit acknowledges that, “Organizing against violence and for Black liberation can consciously or unconsciously trigger us to relive unhealed experiences in which we, our ancestors and our communities, have been oppressed and violated” (Healing in Action). In not acknowledging this trauma and working to actively heal that trauma, “we create the breeding ground for pervasive learned helplessness and powerlessness” (hooks 1995, 143). Even further, not addressing one’s own mental health jeopardizes the movement, for movements depend on participation, and activists often burn out if they are not conscious of their own health. The hope is to replace the culture of shame with a culture of ongoing resistance, a resistance that is grounded in healing the Black community and one that can endure from generation to generation (hooks 1995, 145). This section in particular will grapple with these dynamics, looking at how White rage is detrimental

to the mental health of Black liberation activists and how these activists persevere through the repression.

Frantz Fanon (1961) focuses on the mental health of Algerians who lived under French imperialism, specifically the mental health issues that have arisen within the Algerian fight for liberation. Fanon explores specific cases in which his patients during this time were visiting him and experiencing these mental health issues. “It seems to us that in the cases here chosen the events giving rise to the disorder are chiefly the bloodthirsty and pitiless atmosphere, the generalization of inhuman practices, and the firm impression that people have of being caught up in a variable Apocalypse” (Fanon 1961, 443). “But the war goes on; and we will have to bind up for years to come the many, sometimes ineffaceable, wounds that the colonist onslaught inflicted on our people” (Fanon, 443).

For example, there is the story of one man who was actively a part of the liberation movement in Algeria and only 26 years old. He often drove members of the National Liberation Front (FLN), a political nationalist party in Algeria that was very influential in the Algerian war, to places close to their attack and provided them with a means to escape after these attacks (Fanon, 443). During his time in the FLN, he was forced to find refuge in a friend’s home and remain in hiding from French authorities (Fanon, 443). While in hiding, he got word that his wife had been raped by French officials searching for him because she had refused to answer any questions about his whereabouts (444). During his time with Fanon, the man is in a deep depression, has a loss of appetite, and eventually becomes impotent (444). Beyond that he also struggles to grapple with what happened to his wife, questioning whether he will remain married to her, and also calls his own daughter “rotten,” even going on to tear up a picture of her (444).

With another patient, another Algerian man, one who was not directly part of the liberation movement, begins to visit Fanon. The man survived a massacre that killed the majority of his village, a village that was attacked because there was “too much talk about it” (445). After this traumatic event, he became extremely paranoid and steals a gun to assassinate sleeping soldiers (446). As he stays in a hospital to be treated, he also attempts to murder other patients in the hospital with makeshift weapons (446).

Even more disturbing, Fanon tells readers about two of his teenage patients. These two boys, 13 and 14, were charged with murdering their European classmate with a knife (448). The young kids say that they killed him even though he was a “good friend” because they know that Europeans want to kill all Arabs and cannot kill grown Europeans, but they could kill their friend before he grew up to oppress them (448). One of the boys points out that he has never seen a European in jail for killing an Algerian, but he had seen so many Algerians in prison and that he himself was not scared about going to prison for his actions (449).

As bell hooks articulated and these young boys lived, White people are given space to express their White rage and not face legal repercussions for it while people of color are not. What this conversation exposes, however, is how difficult this is to watch as a person of color and see how your own body is not respected or given the same respect as your White counterparts’. These children are able to display, in the simplest terms, that seeing these White supremacist dynamics are harmful and detrimental to their own mental health- with the two boys seeming immensely detached and indifferent about going to prison.

George Lakey (2018) discusses the role of fear within a movement and how overcoming that fear is essential to managing repression. While I am not conflating fear and mental health

care, a lot of Lakey's theories are applicable to this conversation of surviving White rage and utilizing it to create a backlash. Lakey (2018) emphasizes the importance of actively creating a culture that can aid individuals in overcoming repression as a collective and supporting members of their movement as they deal with their trauma (272). In fact, "A movement's long term response to repression is influenced by how those wounded early in the struggle cope and heal so as to bring their skills back to the struggle instead of being sidelined, perhaps embittered by their experience" (279). Thinking only in terms of logic, working to support these participants as they grapple with their trauma only increases the chances that they will return to the movement-keeping participant numbers high. Even further, having these members return to the movement means that members return with their own set of coping and self care skills that they can share with other members.

Lakey (2018) argues that trainings are a central mechanism that works to create a healthy movement culture. He gives an example of a training that took place in the summer of 1964 with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Students from all around the country gathered in order to train for a "summer of confrontation in Mississippi" and early on leaders told the students that three people had died during similar confrontations in rural Mississippi (278). The students were obviously scared, but very few students returned home and many stayed because leaders created space for "Group singing, permission for people to express their grief and fear, and exemplary stories..." (279). Trainings essentially tell participants what to expect during an action and build trainees' confidence that they will be able to handle the version of reality that they will eventually encounter in the field (279). Leaders must plan these trainings



and role plays before strategic action is taken so that the movement itself is organized and prepared for whatever repression reemerges.

For Lakey (2018), this organization piece is essential to managing and surviving repression. Activists within a movement must gain an accurate analysis of how the opponent will respond to feedback, correction, and a demand for change because that analysis informs the potential repression the movement will encounter (285). Resisters then need to build resilient organizations and institutions within the movement before they confront the oppressor in order to ensure that participants are ready to endure the repression that follows (289). As mentioned earlier, Lakey (2018) conceptualizes these organizations in the context of overcoming fear and “making meaning out of pain and suffering” (270). What I propose, however, is that this framework is applicable to my conversation surrounding mental health. White rage is the repressive force that each Black resistance movement must analyze in order to understand the severity of force they are likely to encounter. A Black social movement must then organize and build a culture that engages with productive conversations about mental health and trauma. In order to maximize the paradox of repression, Black movement organizations must be able to survive that repression and that only comes from actively working to heal and transform the trauma that White rage is causing.

### **Black Lives Matter:**

With conversations of the Civil Rights Movement and mental health in mind, it is clear that the Black Lives Matter movement is attempting to learn from the lessons of the past. This is clearly seen in the context of leadership. The Civil Rights Movement was defined by charismatic leaders such as Fred Hampton and Martin Luther King Jr., leaders who were eventually

assassinated. This left the Black community susceptible to political attacks, especially at a time when the American government began to increasingly incarcerate Black people as a means to replace Jim Crow laws (Alexander 2010, 3). President Ronald Reagan kick started the “war on drugs” that directly affected Black communities more than White communities (60). It has been proven numerous times that the public health approach to the issue of drugs is more cost effective than the punitive approach- an approach that obviously does not work (Duvernay 2016). President Bill Clinton later introduced the three strikes you’re out law that made prison sentences significantly longer, keeping Black individuals taken in for drugs in prison for longer sentences (sometimes life) (Alexander 2010, 56). These legalities devastated the Black community and continues to be a major hindrance to Black advancement and the mental health of Black people.

In large part, however, the Black Lives Matter is a current resistance movement that has learned from the outcomes that followed the end of the Civil Rights Movement. The Black Lives Matter movement is entirely decentralized, with no one or two leaders that are in charge of speeches or organizing. Instead, the leadership is spread throughout the movement, making it impossible for the government to eliminate it- for there is no one leader on which the movement is dependent. The Black Lives Matter movement is creating this dynamic in which White rage cannot demobilize the movement. Instead it is specifically working to organize the movement so it is able to withstand the effects of White rage and continue to work towards Black advancement.

Moreover, the Black Lives Matter Movement has worked to create resources and spaces for Black activists centered around healing. On the Black Lives Matter website, there is a

pamphlet entitled “Healing in Action: A Toolkit for Black Lives Matter Healing Justice and Direct Action.” The toolkit was created to condense some of the lessons that individuals within the movement have learned from history and from their own experience. The authors also acknowledge that the document will probably change throughout time, as people gain a more nuanced understanding of healing justice and mental health within direct action. They assert that while preparing for direct action, it is important for the group to make space for breathing exercises. There are specific breathing exercises and chanting that helps individuals ground themselves within the group space, but also allows each person to check in with themselves and evaluate their mental health. This section within the pamphlet also includes a list of community support and organizing resources that are often willing to offer support to resisters during or after direct action. During action itself, trauma can reemerge, and it compounds the stress of organizing. As a result, it is essential that participants remember to eat, sleep, and hydrate, while also utilize available resources. Finally, the toolkit suggests that, following an action, it is helpful for the group to process what happened and begin to address the trauma they have experienced. The author encourages individuals to engage with their own trauma and consult community members or healers to determine what practices help them remain healthy.

The toolkit itself acknowledges that within recent years large numbers of people have been in the streets engaging in direct action. Direct action can trigger individuals and be emotionally taxing. The toolkit goes on to emphasize that the movement needs to actually redouble their efforts in recent political climates, but that only increases the stakes and further jeopardizes the mental health of participants. Healing and self-care are then essential pieces to maintain and sustaining the mental health of each participant and the movement all together. The

toolkit outlined above really conveys that the Black Lives Matter is committed to these healing measures, with the toolkit and awareness of the importance of mental health being embedded in the movements language. White rage is going to be present in any level of Black resistance. It is also clear that the rage triggers many participants, which can lead to individuals burning out. The Black Lives Matter movement is choosing to consciously name the mental health dynamics at play, which reveals a commitment to sustaining the participation and overall movement over a long period of time.

The Black Lives Matter movement is essentially working to create the organizations and structures that Lakey (2018) encourages. They are creating a culture in which discussing fear and trauma is acceptable, normalizing mental health instead of further stigmatizing it. In giving space to healing trauma and institutionalizing conversations of mental health, the Black Lives Matter movement is working to endure repression and that creates opportunity for them to use White rage as leverage. Hopefully, this helps the movement sustain itself so that it can continue to push for Black advancement and work to dismantle systems of racial oppression.

## Conclusion

I have worked to define White rage and explore what the presence of White rage means for Black resistance movements in the United States. After the 2016 Presidential elections, I first heard the term Whitelash and began researching the concept. During my semester off from Swarthmore College, I happened to read Carol Anderson's work *White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide* and was introduced to the term White rage for the first time. Using the framework and definitions that Anderson provided, I was able to start doing my own research and identify other instances of White rage within American history. I think this term is so important because it directly works to challenge the stereotype that Black people are the ones acting out of rage. This only further exposes the monopoly White people have on violence within this country and how they use that violence to destabilize or attack Black advancement.

Most of the literature explicitly concerned with White rage is fairly modern. Anderson's work currently has the most comprehensive definition and analysis for the term White rage and utilizes historical examples to elucidate her points. White rage is a form of repression that works to obliterate Black dissent and impede Black advancement. It is easy to identify violent instances of White rage, instances in which racist White individuals have brutally beaten Black people in response to resistance. Throughout history and in current society, is not uncommon to see examples of police brutality on the news or online- instances in which a police officer has killed an armed Black man. What is less easy to identify, however, is the White rage that is rooted in legal frameworks. Specific policies and practices within America make it more difficult for Black Americans to prosper as citizens. These legal frameworks then make it easier for White

individuals and groups to act out in White rage, for there will be fewer consequences and punishments.

To determine how White rage affects Black nonviolent resistance, I had to explore nonviolent revolutionary theory. Within this theory, Gene Sharp's work is essential to understanding effective nonviolent action. Sharp works to define specific terms, such as the opponent and repression, while also making it clear that nonviolent action needs to be organized in order to be effective. Part of that organization is having a clear understanding on one's opponent and what level of repression they are willing to inflict on a movement. Once that is clear, activists have the ability to assess whether the movement can capitalize on the repression and force a backlash. When effective, this backlash, known as the paradox of repression, creates sympathy from onlookers or moderates, legitimizes democratic societies, and pressures those in power to listen to the demands of the resistance. White rage is a form of repression and, throughout history, Black social movements in America have been able to create a backlash when White rage emerges.

As mentioned earlier, White rage is fairly new term but has existed for decades. During the period of Reconstruction, White Americans were enraged when the 13th Amendment legally abolished slavery. Following the end of the Civil War, there were numerous outbreaks of violence in which many Black people were either injured or killed. White people were panicking at the notion that newly freed slaves were now full American citizens, just like them. The 13th Amendment, however, was not as liberating as Black citizens had hoped- there was a loophole. The Amendment stated that slavery was illegal, unless one was a prisoner. There in the Constitution, embedded in the legal framework of America, was a loophole waiting to be

exploited by a country struggling to reform an economy that was dependent on free slave labor. Police officers began arresting Black people en masse for minor petty crimes, such as loitering. The 13th Amendment was supposed to liberate Black people in the country, but it also worked to criminalize those same people and exploit them in order to rebuild a broken economy.

Shifting our focus to the Civil Rights Movement, it is easy to assess how this one loophole was still affecting Black people in America. During this movement, White rage was present in almost every nonviolent action. During sit-ins and marches, police and White individuals would utilize violence and hurl slurs at protestors. Leaders of the movement, such as Fred Hampton, Martin Luther King Jr., and Malcolm X, were being assassinated. Other leaders, such as Assata Shakur, were taken to court and were eventually forced to flee the country in order to avoid a life in prison. These leaders were all over the media, demarcated as criminals that the American government needed to protect citizens from. In response to major Supreme Court rulings, such as *Brown vs. Board of Education*, local governments worked to halt progress and desegregation. In all, White rage was turning up at every corner.

To a certain extent, the Civil Rights Movement was aware of and able to use White rage as a means of leverage. This is evidenced by the numerous trainings that the movement held, working to prepare participants to remain nonviolent in the face of violent repression. People would role play, with someone pretending to be a White repressor, throwing objects and insults at the participants. At these role plays, leaders of the movement would also remain honest with participants and give them complete information about what they were getting themselves into. These training were essential to the success of the movement and specific actions because it both mentally and physically prepared people who were about to join the movement. Even further,

leaders of this movement began turning the notion of criminalization on its head. Leaders, such as Martin Luther King Jr., began asserting that going to jail was noble when the law is unjust. In fact, he maintained that he had a moral obligation to break unjust laws and that encouraged other participants to feel the same way. In theory, if enough people are arrested then prisons themselves will get overwhelmed. The Civil Rights Movement worked to capitalize on that fact and began to overwhelm the jails so that governments would begin listening to their demands more seriously. At that point, participants were depending on the presence of White rage and police officers arresting them for protesting segregation.

At the same time, however, the legal attacks and murder of major leaders of the movement was still crippling for the Black community. Regulations and policies, such as the war on drugs and three strikes your out law, devastated communities and incarceration rates skyrocketed. The Black Lives Matter movement, however, has attempted to learn from this history in order to maintain their resistance. Instead of building a movement grounded in individual leaders, power is decentralized. This means that there is no one leader to target in order to dismantle the resistance, instead the movement is rooted in the collective power of the people and that cannot be killed. Even further, the Black Lives Matter movement has made concerted efforts to acknowledge and heal the mental health of participants. Experiencing White rage is traumatic and is detrimental to one's mental health as well. With pamphlets and intentional trainings, the movement attempts to give participants tools to heal and maintain healthy lifestyles. In all, the Black Lives Matter movement is working to sustain itself by acknowledging that White rage exists and works to create opportunities to use that repression to its advantage.



Finally, I find it necessary to reemphasize the importance of the discussion surrounding mental health. Acknowledging and healing an individual's mental health is not just a moral issue, but an issue of sustaining a resistance. When activists are experiencing trauma and do not make space to deal with it, the activist may burnout. Participation is essential to creating successful nonviolent action, but if people are burning out then the movement is unable to sustain that participation. When a movement creates a culture of healing and support, however, it is more likely that people can remain active participants. When a Black social movement is then able to sustain itself, it can begin to work towards using White rage as a means of leverage.

When I first started writing this paper, I wanted to write my entire essay on White rage in the context of more modern examples. I wanted to explore what White rage looked like in the Charlottesville Nazi protests that happened in the summer of 2017 and the Colin Kaepernick protests that led to national outrage. In Charlottesville, also known as the “Unite the Right Rally,” a few hundred White men took to the streets with tiki torches while screaming “White Lives Matter” and “You will not replace us” (Heim 2017). The protests emerged in response to the destruction of White supremacist statues and, as evidenced by the White Lives Matter sentiments, the Black Lives Matter movement (Heim 2017). In regards to the Colin Kaepernick case, Kaepernick is a former NFL quarterback that sat down during the national anthem in August of 2016 (CBC Sports, 2018). He then began kneeling instead in an attempt to show respect for American veterans but also protest the ways in which America actively oppresses Black people and people of color (CBC Sports). Many other players within the NFL also started kneeling during the anthem or would publically express their support for the protest. Kaepernick himself, however, was eventually pushed out of the league and left without a job, until Nike

recruited him for an ad with the slogan “Believe in Something. Even if it means sacrificing everything” (CBC Sports). When this Nike ad dropped, I remember seeing White American on Twitter burning their Nike gear in rage. Most alarming, however, is the responses that each of these events received from President Donald Trump. After Charlottesville, Trump did not immediately denounce the actions of the White supremacists or condemn those that participated in the action. During the NFL protests, however, Trump vocally condemned Kaepernick and anyone that participated in kneeling during the national anthem, saying that it was anti-American.

Unfortunately, both of these instances are incredibly modern so it was difficult to research some of the material when there is little analysis or personal accounts of those events available. These examples, however, prove that White rage is not a thing of the past but something that continues to influence current social movements. Trump’s responses reveal the hypocrisy that exists when White rage does emerge. Charlottesville protests were violent and the protests caused three deaths, while Kaepernick has remained nonviolent in his protest of America's race politics. Yet, the highest branch of the American government continues to heavily condemn Black resistance and gives space to White rage, allowing it to continue to exist.

In all, I have been most concerned with laying out what White rage means, but also examining why this term is relevant. At the same time, however, it was important to consider who was most affected by White rage and how it was harming them. For the scope of this thesis, I was able to investigate how White rage harmed Black resistance and participants within those movements in the United States. White rage emerges in the face of Black advancement and works to maintain racial hierarchies that guarantee White supremacy. Violence inflicted upon

Black people is sanctioned by the state, with many of perpetrators facing little to no consequences. That is what make White rage so dangerous, for the legal frameworks leave space for this White violence and disregard the lives and experience of Black Americans. As a result, combatting issues of White rage means dismantling the systematic and institutional racism that allows for this repression to continue.

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