

Reorientations: An Examination of Black Lives Matter and the Neoliberal Spectacle

A Thesis submitted to the faculty of  
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by

Felicia Rose Asbury

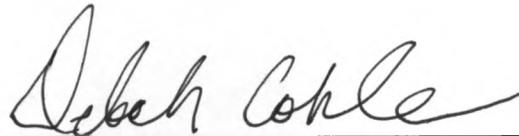
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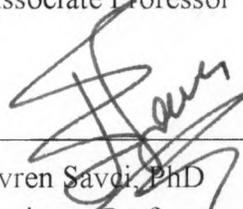
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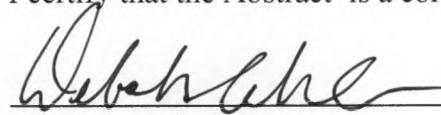
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Reorientations: An Examination of Black Lives Matter and the Neoliberal Spectacle

Felicia Rose Asbury  
San Francisco, California  
2017

#BlackLivesMatter was born as a movement that sought to call attention to how black lives, and in turn life itself, are situated within an economy of value. My project explores the ways in which the Black Lives Matter network functions as both a byproduct and site of resistance to the rise of neoliberalism and its reliance upon the masking of histories, like the Black Panther Party. As Grace Hong advocates, this historical silencing erases how neoliberalism's operations situate life within hierarchies of valuation. As such, I seek to highlight, and in turn re-orient, our understanding of neoliberalism's history by illustrating how neoliberal projects also operate along bio-political and affective lines of valuation. Such an examination allows us to re-imagine the workings of neoliberalism and the possibilities for life both within and beyond the neoliberal paradigm.

I certify that the Abstract is a correct representation of the content of this thesis



Chair, Thesis Committee

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## **Introduction**

In my thesis I am interested in exploring the Black Lives Matter movement as a site that can help re-orient our understanding of the affective and biopolitical nature of neoliberalism. Although neoliberalism is typically viewed as solely operating within economic realms, as Lisa Duggan points out, its underlying ideologies and policy prescriptions also work along the lines of culture. However, as highlighted by Duggan and scholars like Roderick Ferguson and Grace Hong, these neoliberal cultural projects are both foregrounded in racialized, gendered, and sexualized hierarchies of difference. As such, throughout the course of my project I will be examining the development of the Black Lives Matter movement as what I will later be defining as a “neoliberal formation”. Although I recognize that the Black Lives Matter network, and coinciding movement, operates as a part of the broader Movement for Black Lives, for the purpose of my project I will solely be focusing on of Black Lives Matter and how the development of such a movement operates as both a byproduct and site of resistance to the material and ideological manifestations of neoliberal projects. It is my hope that such an examination will serve as a way to further our understanding of how neoliberal cultural projects, like social welfare policies or the rise of the prison industrial complex, are situated upon affective and biopolitical economies that allow for the structuralized valuation (and disposal) of life in itself. In this way, Black Lives Matter as a sociopolitical site holds the propensity to serve for what Jasbir Puar refers to as an ‘unfolding archive’, for entertaining such a form of antedated temporality allows for us to historicize the contemporary moment. In this regard, it is my intention to explore what it would look to analyze Black Lives Matter, as a social movement and its location within

dominant discursive and political imaginaries, as a way to historicize neoliberalism within this particular moment of history

### **#BlackLivesMatter**

Despite common narratives of living within a post-racial and colorblind society, racism and its structural manifestations are anything but a thing of the past. After the acquittal of George Zimmerman in 2013 for the murder of Trayvon Martin, #BlackLivesMatter was born as both an affirmation of love for Black people and a means to put forth a larger conversation on the ways in which black lives are both materially and ideologically rendered as inherently invaluable. In response to the verdict, the hashtag was created by Black Lives Matter founders; Alicia Garza, Opal Tometi, and Patrisse Collurs as a way to put words to their feelings and in turn foreground what was happening in that particular, although not exceptional, moment of violence. In a Facebook post Alicia Garza wrote a love letter to Black people in response to the verdict stating, “Black people, I love us. We Matter. Our lives matter. Black lives matter”, which in turn prompted Patrisse Collurs to put a hashtag in front of the phrase, and #BlackLivesMatter was born (#EmergingUS, “How a Hashtag Defined a Movement”).

The #BlackLivesMatter slogan was later used in 2014 for the movement in Ferguson, Missouri. This uprising developed in response to the murder of black teenager Mike Brown, and became a centerpiece for a rising national discussion on police brutality and systemic racism (Rickford 2). These protests sparked the larger BLM movement, and the creation of the network’s national chapter based organization, which seeks to (re)build the Black Liberation movement and fight for the validity of black life. It does

so by fighting to affirm the lives of all black folks, and centering those who have historically been marginalized within Black liberation movements, such as women and queer, trans, and disabled bodies (Black Lives Matter). In this regard, both the movement and slogan, #BlackLivesMatter, function to broaden the conversation around state violence and institutionalized forms of racism that have intentionally rendered black people as powerless to the hands of the state and other intersecting structural articulations of power.

Despite the ways that police brutality tends to be represented as operating in isolation from the state, its material and ideological manifestations function as a part of a larger state based apparatus of power. For example, in a statement on the role of law enforcement in the prison-industrial complex, INCITE! puts forth a critical analysis on the interconnections between the police, prisons, and systemic forms of oppression:

...[law enforcement] represent the front lines of the criminal injustice system, and are often primarily responsible for determining who will be targeted for heightened surveillance and policing, enforcing systemic oppressions based on race, gender, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, immigration status, class and ability, and feeding people into the prison-industrial complex. (INCITE!)

In this way, by situating how law enforcement functions as a primary facet of the criminal justice system, and in turn as a part of a larger structure of state based operations of power, INCITE!'s definition allows for us to understand how these overlapping material and ideological conditions shape the everyday makings of police brutality and other forms of state based violence. Additionally, such a definition also highlights the complexities of what it means for many people of color to be living in a national security

state and yet exist under the gaze of heightened surveillance (#EmergingUS, “How a Hashtag Defined a Movement”). Consequently, as Asha Rosa, Monica Trinidad, and Page May argue in “ We Charge Genocide: The emergence of a Movement”, police violence is and must always be understood as state sanctioned violence, for its very structure is “...rooted in historical and systemic anti-Blackness that seeks to control, contain and repress Black bodies through acts of repeated violence” (Rosa et al. 122). Such an analysis not only highlights how police violence is racialized, but lends towards investigating how violence against black bodies, or even occurrences of black death, are tied to a historical social fabric that positions black life as being something that is expendable.

However, despite the ways that BLM both seeks to call attention to and end police brutality, Alicia Garza argues that, “Black Lives Matter is about so much more than policing(#EmergingUS, “How a Hashtag Defined a Movement”). She articulates that the movement is fighting to create a level of recognition that violence against black bodies cannot be separated from the ways in which these forms of oppression are constituted both by and through structural articulations of power, which the police are deeply a part of (#EmergingUS, “How a Hashtag Defined a Movement”). Black Lives Matter is arguing to call attention to the inaccurate and deceptive discourses of a colorblind society, but more importantly how such ideologies take shape in structural forms and have very real material consequences. Angela Davis also reflects upon these incongruities and the guise of living in a post-racial era. Davis argues that despite the U.S. having had a black presidential administration for the past eight years, there has been a drastic increase

in racial violence and countless numbers of black people who have been killed by both police and vigilantes under the Obama administration (Davis, “From Michael Brown to Assata Shakur, the Racist State of America Persists”).

Such analyses remind us that the structural marginalization and devaluation of the Black community has a history that can be traced back to colonial legacies of slavery, and the ways in which these forms of discrimination became institutionalized throughout the twentieth century. In *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation*, Keeanga-Yamhata Taylor argues, “racial discrimination, sanctioned by law in the south and custom and public policy in the north over much of the twentieth century, caused disparities between blacks and whites in employment, poverty, housing quality, and access to education” (Taylor 4). Social movements throughout the 1960s, such as the Black Power and Civil Rights movement put forth powerful critiques on the structural formations of Black poverty and discrimination, and the ways in which these conditions were blamed on Black people themselves. In their renowned book, *Black Power*, Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton coined the phrase “institutional racism” as a means of countering these narratives. The phrase also served to call attention to how the ideological and material conditions of racism take shape in structural forms, which in turn provided an explanation for Black poverty and inequality (Taylor 8). “But in the aftermath of the Black Freedom struggles of the 1960s, removing race from the law and shifting attitudes regarding race were supposed to usher in a new period of unfettered black success and achievement” (Taylor 4). These discourses culminated into what has come to be known as the state of existing within a post-racial or colorblind society. However, with the rise in neoliberal

policies that led to an increase in the privatization of state services and an increasingly shrunken welfare state, narratives on the “culture of poverty” and “personal responsibility” resurfaced as dominant discourses to both justify and explain the existence of black poverty and discrimination. Thus, despite claims of how race was situated as being a non-existent factor, and black individuals were and continue to be blamed for the structural conditions of their lives, this is anything but the case.

After Zimmerman’s acquittal, Jet magazine conducted an interview with bell hooks where she warned her readers about the dangers of situating Trayvon Martin’s death within an ahistorical context. hooks asserted that “...we have to be careful not to act like this is some kind of new world that’s been created but that this is the world we already existed in.” (Castro, “Made of Shade: Dr. bell hooks on the George Zimmerman Effect”). While it may appear that these forms of violence are occurring within a vacuum, its contours, like the occurrence of Martin’s murder, are both connected to an informed by the ongoing history and institutionalization of white supremacy within the U.S. hooks states:

white supremacy has not only not changed its direction, it’s intensified as black people and other people of color have gained rights and have proved ourselves to be equal. In many ways the Zimmerman case is really a modern day lynching, it’s about racist white people reinforcing racialized power. The outcome sends a message to the world that global white supremacy is alive and well (Castro, “Made of Shade: Dr. bell hooks on the George Zimmerman Effect”).

In this way, BLM functions as both a response to these historical legacies and as a manifestation of the ways in which these conditions and sites of resistance have transformed over time. In an interview with fellow BLM co-founders, Alicia Garza and

Opal Tometti, and filmmaker Sabrina Schmidt Gordon on the origins and vision of #BlackLivesMatter, Patrisse Collurs highlighted that there have been several comparisons between BLM and the Civil Rights Movement. Collurs advocated that while the movement is not ahistorical and builds off of a long legacy of black liberation, BLM functions in a very different way from previous movements.

While in some ways the Civil Rights Movement upheld the narrative of respectability, BLM seeks to move beyond these traditional politics, which is made evident in the organization's leadership structures, transformative vision, and in the everyday acts of resistance to state based forms of oppression. For example, Black Lives Matter is a network-based organization that both seeks to center the most marginalized members, such as black women, and queer and trans folks, and the organization utilizes a de-centralized leadership model. Collurs argues that the protests in Ferguson serve as a perfect example of how these ideologies of respectability are disavowed,

Folks in Ferguson said no, we are not a respectable negro. We are going to sag our pants. We are going to be ratchet. And we're ok with that. We believe that we have to show up in our full selves, without closeting parts of ourselves, marginalizing parts of ourselves, and build together" (#EmergingUS, "How a Hashtag Defined a Movement").

In this way, the protests in Ferguson served as the genesis of the movement, because as in the case of Michael Brown whose innocence was never a question (Hill 2016), the uprisings in response to his death highlighted that one should not need to be "respectable"

to live. As such, similar to the Black Lives Matter vision, the protests illustrated that even the lives that the dominant political imaginary relegates as being expendable, should indeed “matter”.

Although these legacies of violence are often overlooked or even erased, white supremacy and its structural manifestations continue to both haunt and inform the everyday fabrics of our lives. In her book *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, Avery Gordon calls our attention to the ways that haunting functions as both a material and ideological practice “...where organized forces and systemic structures that appear removed from us make their impact felt in everyday life in a way that confounds our analytic separations, and confounds the social separations themselves” (Gordon 19) In this way, engaging with haunting or ghosts still requires us to both face and work with the structures of power that have come to shape our understanding of the world around us (Gordon 11). When we face these symptomatic presences and absences of history, we can truly begin to acknowledge the ways that ghosts are both alive and present. In this respect, ghosts serve as a way of acknowledging how history and events are passed on, and highlight its use as an unfulfilled possibility, which is demonstrated by the ways there is something to be done that the present is demanding. Gordon sees this notion of “something to be done” not as a need to return to the past, but rather a reckoning with the manifestations of the present. Such a level of engagement allows for us to hold the complexity of events, such as Martin’s death, within a historical context that makes evident how such events are not rare or even exceptional, but rather function within a sociopolitical web that has both a shape and history.

In this way, Grace Hong advocates in *Death Beyond Disavowal*, that “neoliberalism is foundationally an epistemological formation organized around erasure and disavowal” (37). Hong argues that this form of disavowal, as I will be highlighting later, is only made possible by the ways in which post-WWII liberation movements are both co-opted and “misremembered”. Thus, if we recognize that the emergence of Black Lives Matter is situated within a “sociopolitical web” that has a history, then we need to also call attention to its sites of inheritance. More specifically, if neoliberal cultural projects are able to claim that racialized, gendered and sexualized violence are things of the past, which in turn erases the structural legacies of these forms of violence, then we need to re-visit some of these historical sites of erasure to better understand the context of the present.

As a way to highlight neoliberalism’s reliance upon co-optation and misremembering, in chapter one I will be examining the history of Black Panther Party (BPP), as both a post- World War II liberation movement, and as a key tenet in the rise of the Black Power movement. Similar to the Black Lives Matter Movement, the Black Panther Party developed in response to the limitations of the civil rights movement and its coinciding respectability politics. As I will be highlighting in my first chapter, despite many of the gains that were made with the Civil Rights Movement, like the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts, these achievements did not come without the cost of police violence or eradicate the presence of state violence within many black communities (Abron 33). As a result, many black youth felt the urgency to create more substantial forms of structural support to ensure their overall viability and protection within their

communities. Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale recognized this need and responded by creating the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California in 1966. For example, after Matthew Johnson, a black bay area teen, was shot and killed by San Francisco police in 1966, Newton and Seale were prompted to develop their iconic “police patrols” (Bloom and Martin 28-69). These patrols allowed BPP members to monitor the activities of police, and in turn ensure the safety of black communities. This program functioned as one of many BPP efforts to challenge the ongoing legacies of structuralized violence, and in turn call attention to the “life/death” binary that functions as the foundation of capitalism and political modernity (Hong 11).

As such, throughout the course of my first chapter, I call attention to the Black Panther Party’s efforts to both highlight and challenge police brutality and economic and political disparities within black communities. I advocate that in doing so, the BPP, like the Black Lives Matter movement, sought to call attention to the ways in which state sanctioned economic, political, and even physical violence against black subjects, served as a broader cultural project that requires the expendability of black life. As such, like the Black Lives Matter Movement, the Black Panther Party also sought to call attention to how the state defined black life as unprotectable and devalued, and in turn put forth a new definition that captured the re-imagination of the black community and many of their hopes to move beyond the grasps of the state and its material and ideological manifestations of power. Thus, if we look back to Gordon’s analytic of ghosts as a manifestation of the presences and absences of history, we can in turn recognize the rise of the Black Lives Matter as an outcome of the ways in which these legacies of black

liberation, as in the case of the Black Panther Party, were “misremembered” or even erased. In doing so, I utilize Gordon’s discussion of historical sites of haunting, like the erasure of the Black Panther Party, as a way to call attention to neoliberalism as a structure of disavowal, and in turn situate the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement as a byproduct of those very structural conditions.

### **Neoliberalism**

In chapter two I will be examining BLM as a site of neoliberalism to help us contextualize Black Lives Matter within this particular moment of history. In an interview with Amy Goodman on *Democracy Now?*, Angela Davis reflected upon the activism that took place in Ferguson and stated “...oftentimes there are historical conjunctures that one cannot necessarily predict but there are moments when things come together in such a way that new possibilities arrive.” (Goodman, “Angela Davis on Not Endorsing Any Presidential Candidate”). The new possibilities that Davis is referring to are the ways in which Ferguson’s outcry against the blatant disposability and disregard for black life catalyzed the development and resurgence of black liberation efforts. Davis was also later quoted as stating “Black Lives Matter, this is what we have been waiting for. This is a historical conjuncture where all the ingredients came together in an amazing way and Opal, Patrisse and Alicia (the co-founders of the movement) were able to read the times and understand that this is what we need at this moment” (Workneh, “Angela Davis and Gloria Steinem on the Power of Revolutionary Movements”). Davis’ analysis helps situate BLM within the context of its historical, and what I will be defining as a neoliberal, formation. This “historical conjuncture” is what I argue to be the rise of

neoliberalism and the ways in which its material and ideological consequences have manifested in such a way, that life itself is situated within an economy of value. For, if neoliberalism functions as a structure of disavowal that as Grace Hong states, “both brutalizes and affirms” certain forms of life, then BLM can be seen as both a byproduct and site of resistance to these very conditions and modes of being.

In *Twilight of Equality?*, Lisa Duggan explores the rise of neoliberalism and how its project has been predicated upon developing social relations and a compliant political culture that serves to mask the ways in which (neoliberal) policies are engineered to support an upward redistribution of wealth and increasing corporate profit rates. While these political and economic formations operate under the guise of both promoting and achieving neoliberal ideals of equality, Duggan asserts that these articulations only further enable a veiling of how such functions necessitate the structuring of inequities along lines of difference, especially race, and in turn the very nature of neoliberalism’s political, economic, and cultural forms.

Hong furthers Duggan’s exploration of the existence and nature of neoliberal cultural projects, by examining how neoliberalism operates as a “structure of disavowal”. Hong asserts that neoliberal projects function in this regard by erasing the very conditions of gendered and racial violence and making it appear as if they are things of the past. She states “it does so by affirming certain modes of racialized, gendered, and sexualized life, particularly through invitation into reproductive respectability, so as to disavow its exacerbated production of premature death” (Hong 7). For the sake of my project, I will be exploring the ways in which these power formations function both within and through

the project of neoliberalism, and in turn how the existence of BLM within this particular moment of history is no mistake, but rather the manifestation of the ways in which neoliberal projects require the simultaneous legibility and erasure of subjects of color.

Despite the ways in which neoliberalism is typically viewed as solely functioning within the realms of economic and trade policy, it does indeed have and operate through a larger form of cultural politics, which are situated upon hierarchies of difference. Duggan argues that these cultural formations are defined by neoliberalism's primary strategy of privatization. Privatization functions by creating a socioeconomic and political climate that conducts itself through the depletion of public services and a demand to transfer these services from public hands to the domain of private enterprises, which in turn increases corporate profit rates and further dilapidates the already limited welfare state. These cultural and economic politics mask the shift from what was formerly a governmental responsibility for providing social services and support for public resources, to the ways in which the neoliberal concept of "personal responsibility" places this burden upon the individual. These changes are supported by the development of public discourses that designate public entitlements and dependency on social services as social ills (Duggan 14).

In this way, just as Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton put forth the definition of "institutional racism" to articulate how the conditions of black life were shaped by structural forms of discrimination, rather than being an outcome of individual choices, neoliberal narratives of "personal responsibility" continue to mask the ways that these

relegations of life are institutionalized and function along sexualized, gendered, and racialized lines.

Such narratives illustrate how these state policies serve to both support and perpetuate identity politics and hierarchies of race, gender, class, sexuality, and nationality. For example, as in the case of the discursive anti-welfare campaigns, these narratives are racialized and positioned against black mothers. In doing, these tropes depict black mothers on welfare as ‘irresponsible’ and ‘lazy’ for abusing state resources and failing to take personal responsibility (Duggan 16). However, neoliberalism masks these cultural politics by dismissing them as “non- politics” or what Duggan highlights as “identity politics”, which in turn obscures the ways in which such efforts to legitimate upward redistribution both necessitate and are deeply embedded racialized, gendered, and sexualized hierarchies of difference (Duggan 15).

Despite the ways in which these sites of culture and identity operate in a manner that serves to relegate their existence and distinctions as relatively invisible, these politics take shape in highly visible forms. As in the case of welfare reform, Duggan advocates that neoliberalism’s structural implications and function create a visible conflict over cultural politics, which exhibits itself through what the author refers to as “cultural wars” or “equality politics”. Culture wars function as attacks against multiculturalism and efforts intended to shrink public funding bases, as well as sites for non-market politics. On the other hand, equality politics take the shape of supporting diversity and tolerance, but do so under narrow terms that are still defined within the neoliberal framework (Duggan 21). However, these conflicts only serve to distract from the larger structural

ramifications of the neoliberal project. We can better understand this navigation between hypervisibility and invisibility through Robert McRuer's discussion of the spectacle and the ways in which neoliberalism requires flexible subjects.

McRuer advocates that a key facet of neoliberalism is its political economy of visibility that requires able-bodied heterosexual "flexible" subjects who are tolerant of queer and disabled forms of existence. Within this context, McRuer defines these neoliberal "flexible" bodies as "...gay bodies that no longer mark absolute deviance, [and] heterosexual bodies that are newly on display" (12). As such, he asserts that neoliberalism is "the dominant economic and cultural system in which, and also against which, embodied and sexual identities have been imagined and composed over the past quarter century" (McRuer 1). As a cultural site that emerged from shifts in the liberal landscape following the New Deal era, the Civil Rights movement, and countercultures of the 60's and 70's, neoliberalism operates through both a masking and celebration of difference, rather than stigmatization (McRuer 2). This level of celebration requires the existence of gay /disabled bodies that no longer mark absolute deviance, but rather function to put heterosexual bodies on display by making available a sense of subjective wholeness, regardless of how illusory (McRuer 12). This construction of subjectivity functions through the use of the spectacle, by demanding visual and discursive repetitions of heterosexual or flexible epiphanies. However, this desired subjective wholeness is constituted through the ways in which minority groups no longer mark forms of absolute deviance, but rather operate within forms of visual and discursive subordination, which is enabled by flexibility.

McRuer argues that this form of flexible compulsory heterosexuality and able-bodiedness is necessitated by the ways in which neoliberalism functions through a landscape of tolerance that profits off of notions of diversity and multiculturalism (McRuer, 14). Thus, by demanding more forms of visibility through existence of flexible subjects, identity categories are working within a larger cultural project of neoliberalism that seeks to profit off their subordinated existence, while obscuring the ways in which such forms of work require the existence and perpetuation of structural forms of power.

While McRuer explores the neoliberal concepts of flexibility and spectacle through compulsory heterosexuality and able-bodiedness, I argue that these articulations also operate along lines of race. Chandan Reddy advocates “national culture constitutes itself against subjects of color” (Reddy qtd. in Ferguson 3). It does so by establishing social and political formations that are only able to exist because of the ways in which they are rooted in notions of normativity and, in turn positioned against racialized, gendered, and sexualized subjects. Thus, in having a cultural project, neoliberalism is only able to exist because of the ways in which its extraction of resources and need for low-wage labor is predicated upon the existence of surplus bodies. However, unlike liberalism, neoliberalism shifted by requiring a need for visibility of these cultural subjects—as in the case of welfare reform and the trope of the (black) welfare queen—in order to further its guise of non-politics.

Roderick A. Ferguson navigates this site of racialization through an examination of the use of the spectacle in industrial capitalism. Ferguson explores this concept as an exploration of the ways in which liberal forces have historically operated both within and

through racialized formations. Just as compulsory heterosexuality and able-bodiedness is both situated and dependent upon the existence of queer and disabled subjects, Ferguson advocates that the universalization of heteropatriarchy was also reliant upon an “other” that is simultaneously the effect of racial, gender, and class discourses. In this regard, the neoliberal project of compulsory heterosexuality also functions through and is maintained by the category of race.

The author examines the figure of the prostitute in nineteenth century Britain as an example of such workings of power. “The prostitute symbolized poor & working-class communities’ potential threat to gender stability and sexual normativity” (Ferguson 8). However, this understanding of gender and sexual chaos was also a racial phenomenon, for the establishment of ideals of (white) normative sexuality were dependent upon the situation of racial others as sexual deviant. As in the case of Sarah Bartmaan, her image was used to link the figure of the prostitute to the discursive and material positioning of the black woman as sexually deviant. (Ferguson 9). Thus, the universalization of heteropatriarchy (and compulsory heterosexuality and able-bodiedness) is dependent upon categories of race. Additionally, even within the liberal context, these operations were dependent upon the use of the spectacle, such as in the case of the public display of Bartman’s body. However, what differs within the context of neoliberalism is the ways in which this form of compulsory existence requires a hypervisibility and flexibility of the subject.

These notions of flexibility and spectacle under neoliberalism can also be explored through Grace Hong’s conceptualization of existential surplus. Like Ferguson,

who defines surplus as “in large part, the outcome of capitalism’s demand for labor” (Ferguson qtd. in Hong 67), Hong highlights “...in our contemporary moment in which the value of speculative capital far outweighs that of productive capital, race, gender, and sexuality are categories create by the process of turning existence itself into forms usable for speculative capital as sheer surplus” (Hong 68). Due to the state’s need for a homogenous heteronormative citizenry, the state works to regulate the gender and sexual non-normativity of non-racialized groups. This in turn renders the labor of these groups as more vulnerable to devaluation and more likely to be positioned within the category of surplus. Hong argues that these alienated subjects are both important to the racial state and racial capital but function beyond the state and capital’s capacity to explain them. The author asserts that these contradictions are managed within the site of culture (Hong 68).

These material and ideological articulations of labor function as a form of spectacle, in that they situate existence as a site of surplus, which is situated upon speculative modes of valuation. In this regard, surplus is not formed through labor, but through value-creation (Hong 70). “We can trace in histories of race and colonialism modes of value produced not through the material processes of production but through the immaterial processes of speculation...”(Hong 71) Through this level of speculation and production, populations are divided into those lives that are protectable and those who are not. Hong argues, “to be surplus in this moment is to be valueless, unprotectable, and vulnerable” (Hong 72). This relegation of life valuation highlights the ways in which this process of spectacle renders certain bodies not just as “surplus”, rather as both

existentially and inherently surplus. It functions in this way, because the process of positioning subjects as disposable, puts a level of value upon their existence as a whole. In this way, the cultural project of the neoliberalism also operates by creating material and ideological conditions for the development of social values and structural articulations that create an economy of value of life. However, within the realms of neoliberalism's speculative enterprise, these individuals become valued for the very nature of their "devalued status" (Hong 72), because as articulated by Duggan and McRuer, hierarchies of identity play a fundamental and profitable role within the neoliberal project.

Black Lives Matter serves as a site that calls into question this landscape of value and highlights the ways that black lives are structurally devalued and at times even erased. Thus, through the very creation of #BlackLivesMatter, the founders were attempting to develop a discourse that both highlighted and called into question the historical and structural legacies that have articulated black life as invaluable. Additionally, the development of this movement was predicated upon highlighting police brutality and the ways in which racism and structural forms of injustice have been institutionalized, as in the case of the prison industrial complex. As exemplified by Duggan, with the rise of neoliberalism, instead of using "social democratic programs as a primary mode of incorporating and diffusing the anger and alienation of poor populations, neoliberal policymakers turned instead to policing and imprisonment as central regulatory and disciplinary institutions" (Duggan 18). This example serves to highlight the ways in which neoliberal projects, and their material and ideological

manifestations, operate through hierarchical structures of difference, and the efforts of BLM serve as a response to these specific articulations of power.

### **Biopolitics**

*It is no longer a matter of bringing death into play in the field of sovereignty, but of distributing the living in the domain of value and utility. Such a power has to qualify, measure, appraise, and hierarchize, rather than display itself in its murderous splendor... (Foucault 144)*

To help situate our understanding of neoliberalism's hierarchies of difference, and the ways that its very structure functions to disavow minoritized existence as a whole, Hong examines biopolitics as a site of neoliberalism. The notion of "biopower" was originally put forth by Michel Foucault in his 1978-79 lecture series "The Birth of Biopolitics" and in the *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1: An Introduction*, which was also published in 1978. However, since Foucault's definition and intention for the term "biopolitics" is heavily contested (Kristensen, 11), for the purpose of my project I will be utilizing his reference from *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1*, which states:

During the classical period, there was a rapid development of various disciplines - universities, secondary schools, barracks, workshops; there was also the emergence, in the field of political practices and economic observation, of the problems of birthrate, longevity, public health, housing, and migration. Hence there was an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations, marking the beginning of an era of "biopower". (Foucault, 140)

Foucault's analysis of biopower, and in turn biopolitics, demonstrates how state-based policies and forms of management operate through technologies that seek to "control" the life of subjugated populations. Hong extends this analysis by articulating that biopower undergrids the very formation of neoliberal structures. Neoliberal "commodification and affirmation of minority difference alongside its repression" (Hong 8) works in tandem with a new form of "biopower that let's die", and outwardly deadly necropolitical regimes that make die (Hong 13). What she means by this, is that by operating as a structure that requires the simultaneous subjugation and celebration of certain forms of sexualized, gendered, and racialized bodies—as exhibited by the function of the neoliberal spectacle and need for flexible subjects—neoliberalism materially and ideologically fashions some lives as being protectable and others not. However, these forms of protection are only able to occur, because of the very ways that certain bodies are relegated to both bio/necropolitical sites of death (Hong 13)

...unrecognizable as protectable life is a new maneuver, such a maneuver simply reconfirms the modern political order that makes the protection of life its primary legitimation. That is, this particular relation between life and death is not new, but is utterly commensurate with the structuring binary of racial capitalist modernity, which captured the symbolics of life and death such that they are not simply biological states of existence or nonexistence, but are powerful constructs that connect these physical states with political agency, epistemological legibility, and ontological coherence, or the lack thereof (Hong 26)

This form of racial capitalist modernity is connected to Ferguson and Reddy's analysis of how national culture and in turn the universalization of heteropatriarchy are constituted both through and against subjects of color. In this way, neoliberal projects of racialization, and its coinciding binaries of life and death, can be seen as being connected to a larger project of nationalism.

However, Hong warns against the use of nationalism as a primary way to both understand and remember death. She argues that such forms of misremembering risk situating "racialized death as a problem to be solved" rather than as a way to articulate neoliberal workings of power and the very potential of holding ourselves accountable to its structures. (Hong 37). However, while framing racialized death as a problem to be solved imperils erasing the structural conditions of these biopolitical formations, situating how such power formations are also constituted by projects of nationalism can be beneficial in helping us understand how racialized nationalist discourses foster particular forms of sexualized, gendered, and racialized life and death. For example, in *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*, Jasbir K. Puar, examines how the national project of "American exceptionalism" —which she argues as operating through the neoliberal celebration of queer life (homonationalism)— makes queer life possible only through the ways that such forms of existence are constituted against racialized terrorist subject formations. Puar argues that "...this process [manages] queer life at the expense of sexually and racially perverse death in relation to the contemporary politics of securitization" (Puar, xiii). In this way queerness operates as the technology through which "perverse populations", or what Hong would define as "existentially surplus"

populations, are relegated as being deviant and in turn expendable. But the function of queerness as a technology and its capacity to relegate some bodies as expendable is only made possible by the ways that neoliberal projects deem certain lives as being worthy of protection while others are not. In chapter three, I examine this site of existential surplus through a discussion of the prison industrial complex. However, Puar emphasizes that this form of biopolitics is also tied to a larger project of securitization, in that the positioning of homonationalist discourses— which are tied to what Ferguson highlights as the universalization of heteropatriarchy— function as a way of both shaping and justifying the demonization of foreign bodies that are required to be relegated to death for the project of the “war on terror”.

In *Freedom is a Constant Struggle: Ferguson, Palestine, and the Foundations of a Movement*, Angela Davis broadens our traditional definition of terror by retracing the history of struggles against racism and capitalism, where several black activists, such as herself and Assata Shakur, were deemed as terrorists by the FBI and U.S. state at large (Davis 79). She continues by stating,

The use of the war on terror as a broad designation of the project of twenty-first century Western democracy has served as a justification of anti-Muslim racism; it has further legitimized the Israeli occupation of Palestine; it has redefined the repression of immigrants; and has indirectly led to the militarization of local police departments throughout the country (Davis 79).

However, just as Hong articulates that neoliberalism was only made possible by the ways that post-World War II liberation efforts (such as black liberation movements) were co-opted and re-appropriated by the state, which made it possible for certain bodies to be

recognized as protectable life while others are not, Davis' analysis on the genealogy of terror within the black community helps us resituate our understanding of how these narratives of terror and securitization continue to work within the present day context. For the purpose of my project, I am interested in situating the historical context of Black Lives Matter, and its present-day manifestations, as a way to analyze how this notion of "terror", or as Hong discusses, "fear and loathing" operates affectively, and in turn as a neoliberal project.

### **Affect**

To help foreground my discussion of affect, in chapter three I turn to Grace Hong who helps us situate how neoliberalism operates affectively, and in turn how affect can also function as a site of resistance to these very workings of power. In doing so, I will be analyzing how part of Black Lives Matter's framework of resistance is reliant upon the ways in which the network itself operates as an affective movement of struggle. I will now be turning to Hong's discussion of Audre Lorde, where she highlights Lorde's engagement with "feeling" as a structure of valuation to in turn call attention to how neoliberalism also operates as an affective structure. "For Lorde, feelings are not individual nor free from coercion but rather legislated and enforced as a material structure through which the relation of violence marked by 'difference' is hidden, and devaluation is legitimated" (Hong 75). Hong advocates that Lorde's analysis helps us recognize how the privileging of some lives over others can only happen through affect (75). In the "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power" Lorde writes,

The principle horror of any system which defines the good in terms of profit rather than in terms of human need, or which defines human need to the exclusion of the psychic and emotional components of that need—the principle horror of such a system is that it robs our work of its erotic value, its erotic power and life appeal and fulfillment. (Lorde qtd. in Hong 75)

Hong argues that this passage serves for what Lorde might argue to be a necro-biopolitical theorization of neoliberalism. She asserts, “According to Lorde, this crucial operation of neoliberal power occurs through the mobilization of terror and loathing as affective technologies of abandonment” (Hong 77).

In this way, if contemporary neoliberal structures require the existence of “existentially surplus” people, then the mechanism through which people are rendered as surplus, or intrinsically devalued, is through Lorde’s conception of fear and loathing. Such an analysis allows for us to read affect as something that is not so much beyond structures of power, rather functions as something that Hong sees as being “socially imbricated” to their very nature. Additionally, when we look back to the biopolitical nature of neoliberalism and how it requires the protection of some forms of life over others, like Davis highlights, this relegation of life and deployment of “terror”, has a history. As such, these affective contours are the ways that such forms of disposability are legitimated.

However, such affective conditions can also operate as sites of resistance, and in turn demonstrate the incongruities and ruptures of neoliberalism. For example, Kara

Keeling puts forth the notion of the “politics of impossibility”, which examines “the range of oppositional practices, subjectivities, and alternative visions of collectivity that fall outside of the developmental narratives of colonialism, bourgeois nationalism, mainstream liberal feminism, and mainstream gay and lesbian politics and theory.”

(Keeling qtd. in Hong 15). Hong argues that these theorizations of impossibility can also be extended to the landscape of neoliberalism, which allows for us not only complicate our understanding of life and death within neoliberal frameworks, but to recognize that its affective contours also lend toward a politics of refusal. This form of politics refuses “... to forget the ways in which the contemporary moment [is] structured by longer histories of colonialism and racial violence...” (Hong 98). As such, throughout the course of my project I will examine how this notion of refusal operates in direct opposition to neoliberal disavowal, and in turn can be recognized as a space for subversion.

As an example of this site of resistance, in chapter three I examine the Black Lives Matter movement along the lines of affect. In an interview, Alicia Garza calls Black Lives Matter a “love movement”, and in turn situates this politics of love as a part of the organization’s broader vision. Garza advocates that this vision allows for them to imagine a world beyond the neoliberal paradigm, because as she highlights, “we no longer have to struggle to be heard or fight to make ends meet” (Roberts). This deployment of love directly coincides with Lorde’s analysis of the “erotic” as a site of resistance. Hong argues that for Lorde, “Embracing the erotic, then, is to take on the terrifying prospect of aligning oneself with that which the ‘profit economy’

mobilizes to destroy, and somehow creating connection and community out of the act of rendering oneself open to precarity and devastation” (Hong 79).

In this way, just as Lorde recognizes the “erotic” as a site of resistance to the neoliberal technologies of abandonment, fear and loathing, BLM’s engagement with the concept of love as a political strategy can also be recognized as an affective space of resistance. As a neoliberal formation, Black Lives Matter recognizes the ways in which black lives are rendered as precarious, vulnerable, and expendable. However, by creating a movement and labeling itself as “Black Lives Matter”, the organization seeks to call attention to the ways in which life itself operates within an economy of value. In doing so, the network is “aligning” itself with a structure of neoliberal disavowal, as an effort to highlight how neoliberal projects function and in turn challenge the very existence of its workings.

Throughout the remainder of this section on affect, my project will examine Black Lives Matter’s collaboration with the broader Movement for Black Life, and their specific call for “reparations”. I situate the call for reparations as an affective effort grounded in “love”, and as a “material” space for subversion to neoliberal apparatuses of abandonment. Additionally, I go into a discussion on the BLM campaign, the “Black Futures Project”, which challenges the ways in which the month of February has been dubbed as “Black History Month”. This process of re-naming, and project’s broader media campaign, seek to contest how black life is designated as “socially dead” or relegated to the past. In doing so, I situate these two examples as a part of the movements

broader politics of refusal, which forces us to question the workings of neoliberalism, and find a space of hope to imagine a world beyond its violent formations.

## **Chapter One: Revolutionary Black Nationalism and the Life/Death Binary**

### **Introduction**

In order to examine how the Black Lives Matter movement functions as both an outcome and site of resistance to neoliberalism, it is essential to understand the history behind the formations of the current neoliberal order. Throughout the course of this chapter I will be analyzing the rise of the Black Panther Party in order to exemplify how the party's struggle for black liberation, and in turn how this history has come to be both silenced and appropriated under neoliberal projects, established a historical precedent for the development of the Black Lives Matter movement. As I noted throughout the introduction to my project, examining this form of history will in turn help us situate the development of the Black Lives Matter movement as a part of an "unfolding archive" of neoliberal history.

While there are many sources of scholarship that analyze the origins of neoliberalism (Duggan 2003, Harvey 2005, Melamed 2011) for the intentions of my project I will be utilizing Grace Hong's intervention from her book, *Death Beyond Disavowal*, where she articulates how post- World War II (WWII) liberation movements served as the vantage point of the beginning of a new neoliberal racial order in the U.S. (Hong 10).

Hong defines neoliberalism as a structure of “disavowal”. It functions in this way by relegating racial, gendered, and sexualized forms of violence as occurrences of the past (Hong 7). However, the neoliberal order is only able to operate in this regard, because of the ways in which struggles for liberation in the post-WWII era called into question how that period of racial capital was predicated upon what Hong defines as a “life/death” binary. This binary operates by making “...racialized, gendered, and sexualized difference coterminous with social devaluation and vulnerability to physical death...”(Hong 11). Hong argues that these liberation movements recognized the co-constitutive relationship between life and death, and in turn put forth several tactics to both disrupt and challenge how the material and ideological conditions of life/death structured the very fabrics of the former liberal order of racial capital. However, as Hong argues, the push to make racialized life recognizable and, in turn worthy of protection, was only one of several efforts that were put forth by liberation movements in the post-WWII era (Hong 10). Yet, this “politics of recognition”, which situates itself upon the notion of racialized life as being something that is worthy of protection, has become both appropriated and institutionalized, and functions as the way that these movements are remembered within the dominant imaginary (Hong 11).

More importantly, these recognition politics shaped the foundation of the development and current workings of present-day neoliberalism, in that they directly coincide with the logic of political modernity. This logic functions by “...claiming for oneself (and by extension one’s ‘people’, imagined and discrete, coherent, and unified), the status of protectable life” (Hong 11). Yet, these forms of protection operate along,

racialized, gendered, and sexualized lines of difference, which in turn relegates the protection of certain forms of minoritized life as only being possible because of the ways that it comes at the cost of other forms of life being deemed as invaluable, unprotectable, and even disposable. Hong asserts that not only is this the foundation of the current neoliberal order, but this material and ideological formation was only made possible by the ways that the demands and intentions of post-WWII liberation movements were both co-opted and erased. As such, in order to trace the genealogical origins of Black Lives Matter, and in turn how the movement is constituted both through and against the project of neoliberalism, I will be examining the liberation efforts of the Black Panther Party (BPP) as a case study of neoliberalism's historical co-optation and erasure.

### **Black Panther Party**

The Black Panther Party (BPP) was established in 1966 in the midst of the Civil Rights Movement. Although several major gains were achieved during the Civil Rights era, such as that of the Voting Rights Act, these progressive efforts did not come without the casualties of police brutality and racialized violence. These levels of violence, paired with the Civil Rights Movement's commitment to non-violence, left many members of the black community, such as students and black youth, feeling disillusioned with the movement's capacity to both protect and meet the diverse needs of the black community at large (Abron 33). Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale recognized this need for a more radical intervention in black liberation efforts, and in turn founded the BPP in Oakland, California in 1966.

Although Oakland was the first chapter of the organization, the organization functioned as both a national and international party, with an estimated 5,000 members, 40 local chapters within the U.S., and several affiliated support groups throughout the international community, such as in Europe, Cuba, and Algeria (Carpini 194). The Black Panther's leadership and organizational structure was based upon a three-tiered system: a "central committee" at the top, which served as the party's primary governing body; the "regional" base, that was comprised of state chapters and head by chapter leaders; and the "local", which was run by local branches and typically engaged in the direct recruitment and oversight of new members and community involvement. However, the ultimate authority of the party resided at the national level, where leaders of the central committee—such as some of the party's most commonly known members like: Huey Newton (minister of defense) Bobby Seale (chairman), Eldridge Cleaver (minister of information), David Hilliard (chief of staff), James Forman (minister of foreign affairs), Stokely Carmichael (prime minister), H. Rap Brown (minister of justice), and Kathleen Cleaver (communications secretary)—would issue directives that were expected to be both implemented and followed at both the regional and local levels (Carpini 194).

The organization was originally named the "Black Panther Party for Self-Defense", but the term "self-defense" was later dropped in 1967. The party's name and panther image were inspired by the "Freedom Organization of Lowndes County, which was founded by Stokely Carmichael and had also utilized the image of the panther as a key organizational symbol (Carpini 191). In this way, the party's name and logo reflected the group's desire to both critically build upon a larger legacy of black liberation, and

establish a progressive movement that sought to address the material and ideological realities of violence within the everyday black imaginary.

These intentions were also highlighted in the original BPP initiative, which was based upon a ten-point platform. The ten-point “platform and program”, entitled, “What We Want, What We Believe”, established what the party “wanted” for black individuals within the U.S., and in turn how they felt that these demands should be met by both community and state leaders (Carpini 191). The first nine points called for “...freedom, full employment, and end to capitalist exploitation, decent housing, education that emphasized black history and the current plights of blacks, exemption from military service, an end to police brutality, the freeing of all black prisoners, and juries of peers for blacks on trial” (Carpini 191). These nine objectives sought to emphasize the ways in which the mission of the organization was foregrounded in both addressing and calling attention to the history of the socioeconomic disenfranchisement and discrimination against the black community. Additionally, these initiatives also demanded that institutional reparations be provided at both the community and the state level. For example, in the second point of the “platform and program”, the BPP states:

We believe that the federal government is responsible and obligated to give every man employment or a guaranteed income. We believe that if the white American businessmen will not give full employment, then the means of production should be taken from the businessmen and placed in the community so that the people of the community can organize and employ all of its people and give a high standard of living (Black Panther Party, “What We Want-What We Believe”).

For example, one of the primary BPP Survival Programs, was the “People’s Free Employment Program”, which was established under the belief that everyone should have

the right to employment, as a basic necessity for survival (Hilliard 46). In doing so, the Black Panthers recognized the ways that efforts for liberation were hinged upon both calling into question systemic inequities, while simultaneously garnering shifts in institutional forms of support and services, such as the right to employment and sustainable forms of livable income.

However, the BPP also firmly advocated the importance of blacks asserting their own self-determination and securing their interests and rights “by any means necessary” (X). This philosophy of self-determination also included the call for blacks to arm themselves, which served as a key guiding principle throughout the organization’s legacy. The Black Panthers highlighted this belief in both the seventh point of the program, which demanded an end to police brutality, and the tenth point, which called for “land, bread, housing, education, justice and peace” (Carpini 191). The panthers’ belief in the right to self-determination, and in turn “self-defense” pulled from several theoretical bases, such as:

...social contract theory as found in the U.S. Declaration of Independence, individual rights as outlined in the U.S. Constitution, Marxist anti-capitalism, the national liberation theories of Franz Fanon (the black psychiatrist/author who fought in the Algerian Revolution), the self-determination espoused by the black power movement, and the more generalized cultural and political radicalism of the New Left (Carpini 191).

For example, the call for all blacks to arm themselves was as a direct reference to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, and to Malcolm X’s philosophy of “self-defense” (Carpini 191). However, the Panthers’ most famous implementation of X’s self- defense

principle, was through the implementation of “police patrols”, which were established in response to the death of black teenager, Matthew Johnson.

On September 27, 1966, sixteen-year-old Matthew Johnson was shot in the back and killed by police in Hunters Point, a black neighborhood in San Francisco. Johnson and his friends had stolen a vehicle and were driving around the area, when they were pulled over by police. After attempting to flee the scene, Johnson was shot in the back by SFPD and died before the ambulance arrived. In response to death of the teen, the neighborhood broke out in protest, which in turn led police to arrest one hundred and forty-six people and injure forty-two, with ten of them being from gunshot wounds (Bloom and Martin 39). Although Johnson was certainly not the first black teen to be executed by the police, his death highlighted how the despite the achievements that were being made by the Civil Rights movement (see previous discussion), these minimal gains in rights and institutional support, were insufficient in protecting urban black communities from everyday state sanctioned forms of violence. As such, Johnson’s death in turn prompted Newton and Seale to look towards the ideology and tactic of “self-defense” as a way to protect the black community and respond to state issued forms of violence.

After reading about the formation of the Community Alert Patrol (CAP) in the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles, Newton and Seale were inspired to develop a similar model of police surveillance, and in turn self-defense. In the wake of the 1965 Watts rebellion, which formed in response to the beating of Rena Frye, mother of Marquette Frye, who was pulled over by police at traffic stop—and remains of the largest

urban rebellions in U.S. history to date— members of the Watts neighborhood felt that it was essential to establish pre-emptive systems of monitoring and protection to prevent further levels of police abuse against the black community (Bloom and Martin 28-29). As a result, CAP members would drive around Watts documenting police activities. However, even with such forms of monitoring both CAP and community members alike were still rendered vulnerable to harassment and police abuse (Bloom and Martin 39). These vulnerabilities prompted Newton to explore alternative forms of community surveillance that allowed for monitors to also protect themselves.

Although Newton had already been studying law at Merritt College and San Francisco State College, the struggles of CAP prompted him to further investigate the realms of California gun law. After performing a great deal of personal research, Newton learned that California state law permitted individuals to carry weapons as long as they were made visible, which in turn led to the development of police patrols similar to CAP, but this form of patrol differed in that members would also carry loaded weapons (Bloom and Martin 39). Newton believed creating a mass mobilization of armed resistance would help build the necessary political power and leverage to both call attention to and make amends for the historical legacy of violence against blacks within the U.S (Bloom and Martin 69). As such, these police patrols became foundational to the BPP image and initiative of centering armed resistance as primary strategy for countering state violence.

While the BPP's philosophy of armed resistance has a long legacy of often being both characterized and reduced as a project of militancy, this principle tactic was foundational to the Black Panther's central *political* project. The Black Panthers

recognized that the plight for black liberation could not be achieved without having the capacity to physically protect themselves from everyday forms of state violence. Joshua Bloom and Walter E. Martin argue, “Unlike civil rights activists who advocated for full citizenship rights within the United States, [the] Black Panther Party rejected the legitimacy of the U.S. government. The Panthers saw black communities within the United States as a colony, and the police as an occupying army” (Bloom and Martin 2). In this way, by centralizing police violence as both a form of state violence and an issue that demanded immediate attention, the BPP separated itself from other black liberation efforts in that their call for the sanctity and respect of black life was situated within a broader analysis of racial capital. This analysis sought to call attention to the fact that just in the way racial capital requires the erasure of minoritized forms of life (see introduction and following chapter), police brutality functions as a key mechanism of this apparatus of violence and effacement, and in turn allowed the BPP to recognize the ways in which the state relegates black life as something that is unprotectable or even disposable. For example, in a 1967 essay Newton stated,

Because black people desire to determine their own destiny, they are constantly inflicted with brutality from the occupying army, embodied in the police department. There is a great similarity between the occupying army in Southeast Asia, and the occupation of our communities by racist police (Newton qtd. in Bloom and Martin 2)

Thus, by practicing the tactic of self-defense and in turn taking up arms against the state, the Panthers created a way to gain political leverage (through the use of force) and in turn challenge the legitimacy of the state (Bloom and Martin 13) Additionally, these efforts

also highlight the ways in which the Panther's philosophy and intervention were situated within a broader framework of struggle against the tyrannies of capitalism and imperialism.

The BPP's genealogical legacy of anti-imperialism can be traced back to both Malcolm X's revolutionary black nationalism and the efforts of other radical black liberationist groups such as, the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM) (Bloom and Martin 31). For example, in a 1964 speech that was given at the Williams Institutional CME church in Harlem, Malcolm X famously discussed the importance of situating Black Nationalism within an anti-colonial framework:

In my opinion, not only in Mississippi and Alabama, but right here in New York City, you and I can best learn how to get real freedom by studying how Kenyatta brought it to his people in Kenya, and how Odinga helped him, and the excellent job that was done by the Mau Mau freedom fighters. In fact, that's what we need in Mississippi. In Mississippi we need a Mau Mau. In Alabama we need a Mau Mau. In Georgia we need a Mau Mau. Right here in Harlem, in New York City, we need a Mau Mau. . . . We need a Mau Mau. If they don't want to deal with the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, then we'll give them something else to deal with. If they don't want to deal with the Student Nonviolent [Coordinating] Committee, then we have to give them an alternative (Bloom and Martin 26).

Mau Mau was the rebellion that took place in Kenya from 1952-1960, and sought to overthrow British colonial rule, which was influential in shaping Malcolm X's transnational analysis of black struggle, and in turn the theoretical underpinnings of the BPP philosophy and vision (Bloom and Martin 26). As such, like Malcolm X's political ideologies, the BPP's rhetoric and broader politics, were heavily influenced by Maoism and Marxism, and in turn were filled with critiques of the capitalist system and class-based analyses that served to call attention to the incongruencies and failures of state-

based structures and institutional forms of power on a transnational scale (Lubin 119). This global view of anti-imperialist politics varied greatly from the traditional forms of “black nationalism” that were coming out of other sectors of black liberation efforts. The BPP viewed black nationalism as “too dependent upon the logic of nationalism and liberal governance”, which in turn served as a way of reifying the structures and dynamics of the state and capitalism at large. As an alternative, the BPP called for a “revolutionary nationalism”, which functioned as a liberation project that sought to challenge the very structures of racial capitalism and “empire” (Lubin 119). In doing so, the BPP sought to “disavow the U.S. nation”, while also working in solidarity with other “third world” liberation efforts.

In this way, the Black Panther Party’s strategy of “revolutionary nationalism” sought to both call attention to the violences and failures of the U.S. nation state, and how such forms of violence are situated within a broader project of imperialism. We can look to David Harvey’s definition of “accumulation by dispossession” to help us flesh out the workings of imperialism, and in turn the BPP’s anti-imperial underpinnings. He states,

By [accumulation by dispossession] I mean the continuation and proliferation of accumulation practices which Marx had treated of as ‘primitive’ or ‘original’ during the rise of capitalism. These include the commodification and privatization of land and the forceful expulsion of peasant populations...; conversion of various forms of property rights (common, collective, state, etc.) into exclusive private property rights (most spectacularly represented by China); suppression of rights to the commons; commodification of labor power and the suppression of alternative (indigenous) forms of production and consumption; colonial, neocolonial, and imperial processes of appropriation of assets (including natural resources); monetization of exchange and taxation, particularly of land; the slave trade (which continues particularly in the sex industry); and usury, the national debt and, most

devastating of all the use of the credit system as a radical means of accumulation by dispossession (Harvey 159).

Harvey argues that the rise of capitalism is reliant upon the necessity of “dispossession”, and in turn functions as an imperial project. Although this analytic of dispossession focuses heavily on the ways in which these forms of oppression operate within economic realms, the Black Panther Party recognized that these (economic) projects of “dispossession” also operate along racialized and transnational lines. For example, we can look to Alex Lubin’s definition of “intercommunalism”, which he argues to have functioned as a key facet of the BPP’s vision and “political imaginary”. Lubin posits,

Intercommunalism...was a political imaginary that recognized the shared conditions of racial capitalism and possibilities for anti-imperialism among local communities across the world. As a political imaginary, intercommunalism was the practice of geographically linking colonial locations and fostering politics of comparison and solidarity (Lubin 113).

Lubin’s discussion of “intercommunalism” is best highlighted by the ways in which the BPP referred to black communities within the U.S. as “colonies”. “Because they viewed African Americans as constituting a black colony in the United States, the Panthers believed black liberation could emerge only through political actions aimed at decolonization” (Lubin 120). In doing so, the Panthers sought to illustrate their understanding of how the struggle for black liberation was inherently tied to a larger international context of decolonization efforts that were also taking place during that time, as in the case of Palestine, Viet Nam, Puerto Rico, and Cuba (Carpini 191). In this way, by situating their politics within a framework of decolonization, the Black Panthers looked to call attention to the ways in which their vision of revolution,—which aimed to

both challenge the foundational racial logics of the state and its material and ideological violences—and in turn highlight that such a revolution could only occur by dismantling the very structures of empire on a transnational scale (Lupin 120).

This reference to black communities as colonies can also be traced back to Newton and Seale's involvement with RAM. The Revolutionary Action Movement was a Philadelphia based anti-imperialist black Marxist organization (Bloom and Martin 31), which "[drew] on a line of thought reaching back at least to the mid-1940s and the black anti-colonialism of W. E. B. Du Bois, Paul Robeson, and Alpheus Hunton, RAM argued that Black America was essentially a colony and framed the struggle against racism by blacks in the United States as part of the global anti-imperialist struggle against colonialism" (Martin and Bloom 32). In this way, the Black Panther's radical politics and call for the black community to defend itself against the tyrannies of police abuse and state violence must be viewed in connection to a larger international movement that sought to both call attention to how the relegation of black is constituted through the workings of imperialism and dismantle the state based structures of power that allowed for these legacies to continue.

This anti-imperialist strategy and framework also greatly informed the ways in which Newton and Seale viewed both the party's "platform and program" and initiative of armed self-defense as being inherently tied to a larger project of meeting the broader needs of the community. The founders understood that achieving structural change and garnering institutional forms of support were dependent upon having the participation and support of the black community, which entailed garnering their respect and

demonstrating that the revolutionary efforts of the BPP were centered upon meeting their diverse interests and needs. Bloom and Martin argue,

The platform and program emphasized the nationalist character of the Party as a steward of black people's interests. The party was not just about armed action, it was a legitimate voice of black, and as such, it intended to take care of the broad range of the community's needs" (Bloom and Martin 70)

One of the best examples of the party's commitment to serving the community is through the implementation of "survival programs" (Carpini 192). For the Black Panthers, survival programs functioned as a key foundation to their revolutionary and anti-imperialist strategies. We can look to David Hilliard, the BPP's Chief of Staff, to help centralize the role that these programs played in the organization's vision of resistance. Hilliard argued, "[W]e call the program a 'survival' program—survival pending revolution—not something to replace revolution or challenge the power relations demanding radical action, but an activity that strengthens us for the coming fight, a lifeboat or raft leading us to shore" (Hilliard qtd. in Jones and Jeffries 31).

For the purpose of my project, I would like to situate Hilliard's analysis within a framework of racial capitalism. As I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the history of racial capital is predicated upon a "life/death" binary, which renders racialized, gendered, and sexualized hierarchies of difference as being commensurate with vulnerability, devaluation or even physical violence (Hong 11). As Hilliard illustrates, the Black Panthers recognized that the lack of support and state services in black communities was the byproduct of a broader initiative of state-sanctioned racialized violence. In this way, the creation of the survival programs served to both call attention to

the inadequacies of state structures, such as the failures of the “War on Poverty”, and to create sites of resistance to failures of the state and their coinciding social programs.

Survival programs were originally developed by individual chapters but became a part of the Black Panther’s national “Serve the People Program”, which was established in 1969. These programs were implemented in response to the inadequacies of the federal “War on Poverty”. In a discussion on the historical racialization of welfare, Jill Quadagno highlights that similar to how the Black Panther Party was established in response to the limitations of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the federal “War on Poverty” was developed by the state, as a response the black community’s concern that these laws were not doing enough to address economic disparities. In doing so, “The War on Poverty represented an effort to bypass the racially biased New Deal network of welfare agencies and to provide economic security to blacks” (Quadagno 8). In the case of the New Deal era, these forms of structuralized oppression took the shape of “...legitimated racial discrimination in employment and housing” (Quadagno 10). However, despite their claimed intention these federal War on Poverty initiatives failed to adequately address the needs of the black urban poor, which in turn led to the development of the BPP’s survival programs. As Black Panther member Ryan Nissim-Sabat illustrated, these programs represented a broader initiative to both combat and “...compensate for the inadequate institutions of the state and to raise the consciousness of people in their local communities” (Ryan Nissim-Sabat qtd. in Martin and Bloom 196). The programs included but were not limited to the following:

...breakfast programs for school children, liberation schools, medical clinics, clothing programs, buses to prison programs, a sickle cell anemia research foundation, housing cooperative programs, plumbing and maintenance programs, food programs, child development centers, escort services for the elderly, and ambulance programs (Carpini 192).

In this way, these BPP community based initiatives functioned as a broader effort to create tangible forms of support for black communities that weren't being met by the state.

For example, in the case of the Panther's "Free Breakfast Programs", we can look to Martin and Bloom's discussion of how this sector of the survival programs served as an effort to call attention to the state's inadequate efforts to address the issue of childhood poverty and hunger within urban black communities. Martin and Bloom posit,

Politically, the breakfasts shed light on the government's failure to address childhood poverty and hunger—pointing to the limits of the nation's War on Poverty. The U.S. government spent only \$600,000 on breakfast programs in all of 1967. Government-sponsored breakfast programs grew rapidly as the Panthers pioneered their free breakfast program. By 1972, government-sponsored breakfast programs were feeding 1.18 million children out of the approximately 5 million who qualified for such help. (Martin and Bloom 186)

In this way, despite how Lyndon B. Johnson's "War on Poverty", was touted as an effort that would eliminate poverty and provide opportunities for work and education across racial lines, these policy reforms failed to both address the issue of race and in turn empower the black community. As Lisa Duggan points out, and as I will be talking about in more detail in the following chapter, despite the limitations of these policies, this era of welfare reform garnered a great deal of pushback from conservatives and radicals alike. This resistance to the "New Deal" era of welfare reform can largely be attributed to

changes in views on welfarism. For political conservatives, state sanctioned “public interest” initiatives, such as the “War on Poverty”, were seen as both intrusive and a hindrance to growth of private markets and corporate profit rates (Duggan 13). However, many leftist liberation groups, like the Black Panther Party, advocated that these programs did not do enough to support minoritized groups, and to in turn counter the structural legacies of violence within racialized, gendered, and sexualized communities. Duggan highlights that these policy shifts gave way to the creation of a new form of liberalism, which I will be examining in the following chapter as the rise and development of neoliberalism. In this way, we can also situate the creation and vision of the BPP survival programs as a part of the genealogical origin of neoliberalism. As such, like the history of the party itself, I will in turn be situating the legacy of these programs within neoliberalism’s racialized structure of historical erasure and disavowal.

However, I would like to turn first to a discussion of how the Black Panther Party’s survival programs also served as a way to both illustrate and materialize the organization’s belief in the self-determination and agency of black people. These initiatives also spoke to the Black Panthers’ recognition that black liberation is intrinsically bound to building sustainable forms of allegiances with the community and other organizations. For instance, the party developed alliances with several rising New Left organizations, such as the Peace and Freedom Party, the White Panther Party, and the New Freedom Party. These relationships were reflective of the party’s broader coalitional politics, which sought to foreground the interconnections between the black liberation movement and broader liberation efforts that were also taking place during that

time (Carpini 192). For example, the Black Panthers were one of the first non-gay organizations to support the gay rights movement (Carpini 193). However, this history of coalition building, and in turn recognition of the ways in which the “life/death” binary operates along lines of racialized, gendered, and sexualized difference, has largely been erased (Hong 11).

Despite the Panthers’ diverse efforts and coalitional politics, the party is largely remembered as being an organization that sought to demand and protect the sanctity of black life, rather than being an organization that fought to both call attention to and challenge the ways in which the material and ideological conditions of black life within the U.S. are inherently tied to the legacies of capitalism and imperial violence. In this way, the BPP can serve as a key example of Hong’s assessment of how many post-WWII liberation movements have come to be both appropriated and reduced as solely functioning as an effort to make racialized life recognizable or worthy of protection (Hong 11). In the case of the BPP, this took the shape of the party being discursively represented as a militant site of libratory identity politics (Carpini 2000) that looked to both question and re-define the meaning of black personhood within the dominant political imaginary. While this form of recognition politics only functioned as one facet of the BPP’s broader project, I believe that calling attention to this form of historical erasure can also hold a great deal of utility in providing us with the opportunity to destabilize this historical site of disavowal and appropriation, and illustrate the ways that the Black Panthers put forth a particular definition of black life. Additionally, if post WWII liberation efforts, such as the Black Panther Party, serve as the vantage point for

the beginning of the current neoliberal order, and we recognize neoliberalism as a structure of disavowal—that inherently requires the relegation and disposal of some forms of minoritized life at the expense of the protection others, in order to maintain the illusion that gendered, racialized, and sexualized forms of violence are things of the past—then retracing the BPP’s centralizing questions and understanding of life can in turn help us discern how the Black Panthers’ history and efforts to call attention to the state’s reliance upon the sanctioning of racialized violence was simultaneously refigured and erased under the rising neoliberal order.

Through their anti-capitalist and anti-imperial strategies, and efforts to call attention to state violence and police brutality, the BPP can be seen as also making an attempt to both discursively and materially redefine black life. I argue that the Panthers did so by centralizing how this formation was situated upon the necessity of challenging structuralized violence. When the victories of the Civil Rights era, such as the 1964 Civil Rights Act and 1965 Voting Rights Act, proved to not be enough, many black communities began looking for ways to continue the movement’s call for full citizenship, but in a manner that also centered the importance of attaining political and economic forms of power. Bloom and Martin argue,

Civil rights mobilization played a central role in defeating legal segregation, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 enfranchised southern blacks. But for blacks outside the South, neither generated political gains or significant economic concessions. Even in its heyday in the early 1960s, the Civil Rights Movement never significantly challenged de facto, or customary, economic and political exclusion in the black ghettos of the North and West. As de jure, or legal, segregation was defeated in the South, economic and political empowerment

lagged, civil rights strategies lost their punch, and black activists across the country looked for other solutions (Bloom and Martin 25-26).

In this way, the rise of the Black Panther Party can be seen as a direct response to these limitations. As demonstrated by their platform and program, the Panthers understood that rectifying the socioeconomic and political realities of black disenfranchisement required challenging institutionalized violence in ways that went beyond the efforts of the Civil Rights movement. This can also be seen in the development of the national discourse on “Black Power”.

While the notion of *Black Power* came to mean different things for different communities, its genealogical origins can also be traced to this shift in political consciousness within black liberation movements. Similar to Newton and Seale, many young blacks felt the need to demand tangible structural gains, such as educational access and employment opportunities (Bloom and Martin 12). In this way, we can situate the simplicity of the phrase “Black Power” as being a reflection of the ways that the very meaning of black life was being re-imagined. For instance, the fact that the word “power” was explicitly tied to a concept that functioned as both a call to action and reflection of the need to project the strength and dignity of black personhood, attests to the ways that the socioeconomic and political configurations of blackness were transforming. Thus, when attempting to situate the Black Panther Party’s larger definition and call for re-conceptualizing black life, one cannot separate it from the ways that its particularity was centered upon the desire to critically engage with the realities of economic violence. Additionally, this effort to re-envision black life directly coincided with the rise of the

national narrative of *Black Power*, which served as a shift away from the definitions of life that were coming out the Civil Rights era.

Although the Civil Rights Movement was also foregrounded in calling attention to the ways that the era of racial capital rendered black life as vulnerable, its focalizing efforts of ending legal segregation (Bloom and Martin 11) and in turn, expanding the scope of civil rights within black communities, narrowly defined black life within the realms of citizenship. I with many scholars before me (Hall 2003, Higginbotham 1993, Stoler 1989), argue that this was highlighted by the movement's focus on respectability, which I view as being stressed by their central tactic of non-violence. In a 1967 New York Times, Martin Luther King Jr. argued,

The nettlesome task of Negroes today is to discover how to organize our strength into compelling power so that government cannot elude our demands. We must develop, from strength, a situation in which the Government finds it wise and prudent to collaborate with us. It would be the height of naiveté to wait passively until the Administration had somehow been infused with such blessings of goodwill that it implored us for our programs (King 248).

The “compelling power” that King referred to was the use of non-violence as a pathway to achieving racial equality. King's analysis is demonstrative of the ways in which Civil Rights groups centered respectability politics as a necessary primary tactic for garnering governmental support and in turn, challenging perceptions of black personhood.

However, these forms of “compelling power” often fell short of bridging the divide between attempting to end black racial subordination, and addressing the material conditions of structuralized violence that continued to impact the urban poor and communities living in the wake of the Jim Crow South. Bloom and Martin argue,

As the Civil Rights Movement dismantled Jim Crow through the mid-1960s, it ironically undercut its own viability as an insurgent movement. Whereas activists could sit in at lunch counters or sit black and white together on a bus or insist on registering to vote where they had traditionally been excluded, they were often uncertain how to nonviolently disrupt black unemployment, substandard housing, poor medical care, or police brutality (Bloom and Martin 121).

Thus, similar to the ways that the limitations of the Civil Rights Movement's policy created a call to action for black youth, many developing black leftist organizations, such as the BPP, felt that the politics of respectability coming out of the Civil Rights era were insufficient in challenging state violence and creating the material and ideological conditions to transform the notion of black personhood. In this way, we can locate the rise of the black power movement as developing in direct response to these limited politics. For example, in a 1967 New York Times article columnist Sol Stern covered a BPP rally in San Francisco, where Seale spoke on the changing shape of *Black Power*;

No more signing of "We Shall Overcome." "The only way you're going to overcome is to apply righteous power" (Seale qtd. in Stern 11).

Newton and Seale recognized there was a need for something different, and this is illustrated by Seale's articulation and call for "righteous power". This configuration greatly varied from King's discussion of "compelling power", in that it sought to affirm the self-determination of the black community and call attention to the ways that *Black Power* seeks to defy the forms of violence brought on by ongoing imperial legacies of violence. In other words, we can situate Seale's discussion of "righteous power" as an example of the Black Panther Party's intervention in national conversations of *Black Power* and in turn, the changing shape of black life.

This served as a critical shift away from the definitions of life that were coming out of Civil Rights efforts, in that they more directly coincided with the logic of political modernity. As I highlighted in the introduction of the chapter, the logic of political modernity functions by defining life within the realms of what's discursively (and materially) recognizable as being worthy of protection (Hong 11). This is illustrated by King's discussion of "compelling power", in that it advocates for a form of liberation politics that will illuminate black personhood as being legible, or rather respectable, within the eyes of the state. Thus, just as Hong advocates, this notion of "compelling power", and in turn the broader politics of the Civil Rights era can be recognized as a site that aided in the catalyzation of the current neoliberal order. These sites highlight neoliberalism's foundation upon the logics of political modernity, and also demonstrate the ways in which neoliberalism functions as a site that disavows the existence of racialized, sexualized and gendered forms of violence.

However, we can also trace the efforts of the BPP—and their attempts to both redefine black life and call attention to the ways in which black subject formation is both constituted by and through imperial and capitalist legacies of violence—as informing the logics of neoliberalism and its coinciding cultural projects. Edgar J. Hoover, the former director of the FBI (and coinciding COINTELPRO program) under the Nixon Administration, is famously remembered as calling the Black Panther Party "the greatest internal threat" to U.S. National Security (Bloom and Martin 210). However, Bloom and Martin highlight that the most threatening aspect of the BPP to the FBI was surprisingly not their "call to arms" or broader anti-imperial politics rather the implementation of their

“Free Breakfast for Children Program” (Bloom and Martin 211). In a 1969 discussion with a special agent, in charge of San Francisco, Hoover argued,

You state the Bureau under the CIP [COINTELPRO] should not attack programs of community interest such as the [Black Panther Party] “Breakfast for Children”. You state that this is because many prominent “humanitarians”, both white and black, are interested in the program, as well as churches which are actively supporting it. You have obviously missed the point... You must recognize that one of our primary aims in counterintelligence as it concerns black and white community which may support it. This is most emphatically pointed out in their Breakfast for Children Program, where they are actively soliciting and receiving support from uninformed whites and moderate blacks” (**Hoover qtd in Bloom and Martin 211**).

One could argue that the Panther’s free breakfast program was not just a threat to U.S. national security because of the ways that it garnered support for the party, but that it was “threatening” by its very nature of calling attention to economic forms of state violence that operate along hierarchal lines of difference. As I highlighted earlier on in this chapter, As Hong emphasizes, neoliberalism’s history, and in turn foundation, is constituted both by and through the masked, or even disavowed legacies of the post-WWII liberation movements.

breakfast programs were created in direct response to the failures of the “War on Poverty”. In doing so, the BPP positioned themselves, and their vision of “revolutionary black nationalism”, as both an alternative and site of resistance to the state. This space of subversion was foregrounded in calling attention to the limitations of state based services, and in turn the state’s foundation in racial capitalism. Additionally, the implementation of the programs in 1969 also directly coincides with the beginning of the decline of the social welfare state, and as highlighted by Lisa Duggan in the introduction of my project,

shrunk, and in turn increasingly privatized, state based provisions serve as a key facet of the workings of neoliberalism.

### **Conclusion**

Although free breakfast programs did become a key tenet of the U.S. public school systems, its history, like that of the Black Panther Party has been erased under the current neoliberal order. Within the context of the Black Panther Party, one example of this masking and appropriation of history is demonstrated by how the organization's efforts to challenge the state's failing welfare structure, and in turn create alternative community support systems, have been erased under the history of neoliberalism. As I will be addressing in the following chapter, this silencing and disposal of radical history functions as a form of neoliberal violence, in that it masks the ways in which these legacies of violence continue to haunt the social fabrics of our everyday lives.

If we acknowledge the ways in which neoliberalism functions as a site of disavowal, by declaring racialized, gendered, and sexualized forms of violence as things of the past (Hong 7), then such a declaration also serves to call attention to the erasure of both the history of black liberation efforts, and their coinciding calls for re-defining black life within the dominant political imaginary. In this way, BLM can be seen as both an outcome of and site of resistance to neoliberalism. It functions in this way by underscoring the discursive and material validation of black life, which in turn serves to unsettle how neoliberalism masks its foundational inheritance of the "life/death binary" from the liberal era of racial capital, which situates social devaluation as being

“coterminous” with death (Hong 11). Like the BPP, the BLM movement does so by calling attention to how the material and ideological conditions of black personhood are shaped by everyday realities of state and structuralized forms of violence, and in turn the very validity of black life itself. In this way, my examination of the history of the Black Panther Party functions as a preview for my discussion on the Black Lives Matter Movement, and in turn for how I will be situating the movement in the following chapter as a “neoliberal formation”. As Grace Hong posits, “Because neoliberal power operates through the selective remembering of past social movements, a number of queer and feminist projects, scholarly and otherwise, have recently emerged to challenge and contextualize this remembering...” (Hong 65). In this way, Black Lives Matter can be seen as a response to the hauntings and erasures of neoliberalism, and in turn as space of resistance that seeks to critically re-imagine the radical conditions and possibilities for black life both within and beyond the neoliberal paradigm.

## **Chapter 2: Neoliberalism and the Biopolitics of Disavowal**

Although neoliberalism is largely represented as solely functioning within the realms of economics, it does indeed operate along lines of culture and politics, which are situated upon racialized, gendered, and sexualized forms of violence. As such, throughout the course of this chapter, I will be examining how neoliberalism’s foundation, and in turn reliance, upon hierarchies of difference can in turn highlight how neoliberalism itself is constituted both by and through the workings of biopolitics. In doing so, I will be situating the rise and development of the Black Lives Matter movement as a both and

outcome and response to neoliberalism's biopolitical projects that require the expendability and disposal of black life.

I turn first to Lisa Duggan, who explores the rise of neoliberalism in the 1990's, as way to examine how the material and ideological articulations of capitalism take shape in political and cultural forms, and are in turn centered upon hierarchies of race, gender, class, and sexuality. The project of neoliberalism has been predicated upon developing social relations and a compliant political culture that serves to mask the ways in which policies are engineered to support an upward redistribution of wealth and increasing corporate profit rates. While these political and economic formations operate under the guise of both promoting and achieving neoliberal ideals of equality, Duggan asserts that these articulations only further enable a veiling of how such functions necessitate the structuring of inequities along lines of difference, especially race, and in turn the very nature of neoliberalism's political, economic, and cultural forms.

Duggan defines neoliberalism as "... a late twentieth-century incarnation of Liberalism, [that] organizes political life in terms of race, gender, and sexuality, as well as economic class and nationality, or ethnicity and religion" (Duggan 3). Liberalism was a theory that emerged as a way for capitalist economies to be organized through the production and administration of nation states (Duggan 3). Although there were many forms of liberalism—just as capitalism cannot be rendered down to a single "coherent system"—it was centered upon notions of the public vs. private, and the categories of the state, civil society, economy, and the family (Duggan 4).

In U.S. domestic politics, notions of liberalism and its function expanded and shifted over time but were often perceived as rhetorical ideas—separations of the state from the economy, civil society, and the family—despite the ways in which these institutions all depended upon each other for support and regulation. However, despite its many shifts within the U.S. political landscape, both its “conservative” and “liberal” positions operated under the larger umbrella of “Liberal” capitalism (Duggan 6). In response to the New Deal era welfare state and post-WWII liberation efforts, such as the Black Power and Civil Rights movement, which both sought to expand the quality of access and overall downward distribution of resources in the public sphere, liberalism came under attack by conservatives in the 1960’s-70’s, which in turn created a new liberal center in the 1970’s-80’s. This center came to be defined by neoconservatives who attacked the growth of the welfare state, the Civil Rights movement, and the countercultures of the 60’s. Such levels of pushback created a shift in liberalism, which pushed the perceived center of U.S. politics rightward, and enabled the development of a new liberalism.

This political formation was centered upon what Duggan refers to as a “third way” politics, which presents itself as falling outside of the realms of culture and identity. It does so by as masquerading its efforts as functioning on behalf of the larger project of empowering the individual through the privatization and reduction of social services and programs. These politics were defined “...as somewhere between old liberalism and conservative political parties and policies” (Duggan 9). Third way notions sought to combine pro-market, pro-business, and national and global free-trade policies with the

increasingly limited powers of the social welfare state and shrunken social justice and democratic programs. These policy prescriptions gave rise to what we refer to as neoliberalism, which is a new liberal centrism that is founded upon disguised efforts of upward redistribution through the enactment of a state supported but privatized economy, cuts in social services, and a socially responsible civil society and moralized family (Duggan 10).

However, neoliberalism is typically associated with economic and trade policy, and in turn gets discursively represented as a form of “non-politics”. Duggan asserts that neoliberalism is “usually presented not as a particular set of interests and political interventions, but as a kind of non-politics—a way of being reasonable, and of promoting universally desirable forms of economic expansion and democratic government around the globe (Duggan 10). For instance, within the global arena neoliberal policies are purported as operating within a neutral framework that seeks to maximize “private freedoms” and wealth expansion for all. This is best highlighted by the development and function of global financial institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization. Despite the ways in which these institutions claim to engage in nonpartisan practices that guarantee the conditions and promises of “free trade” and economic stability for both developed and developing nations alike—such as structural adjustment programs or protections like non-tariff barriers to trade regulations and dispute resolution panels—these institutions have enabled global transfers of wealth from the poorest to the wealthiest parts of the world. In this way, Duggan highlights that “...global financial institutions [act] primarily in the

interests of creditors and corporations, transferring wealth from the globe's poorest to richest locations", which she in turn views as a "re-invention of western imperialism" (Duggan 11).

Similar to the ways that neoliberalism's globalized economic and trade policies are saturated with material and ideological contradictions, Duggan argues that the cultural politics of neoliberalism are also contradictory. She highlights that "the broadest cultural politics of neoliberalism—the transforming of global cultures into "market cultures"—has a mixed track record", which in turn creates peace for some and war for others, or is welcomed with cooperation in some locations or by resistance in others (Duggan 12). However, Duggan advocates that neoliberal policy prescriptions have been the most successful where "the domains of western liberalism have been successfully imposed or re-described through neoliberalism's key terms: *privatization and personal responsibility*. In turn, these terms function as the primary connection between neoliberal cultural projects and neoliberalism's economic ideologies and conditions (Duggan 12). We can look to Roderick Ferguson and Grace Hong's contextualization of Jodi Melamed's work in "The Sexual and Racial Contradictions of Neoliberalism", where they highlight her deconstruction of how these key terms—and neoliberalism's foundation—are situated upon a history of liberal anti-racist campaigns. Such campaigns functioned as a way of both masking and perpetuating racialized forms of violence as a part of a broader effort to demonstrate global legitimacy. Ferguson and Hong state,

In the period after World War II, White supremacy began to lose the explanatory and legitimating force it had previously had, and that White liberalism became the dominant state rhetoric. Liberal anti-racism at various points in the post-War

period legitimated U.S. global ascendancy and countered charges of U.S. racism in the context of the Cold War, rationalized de-industrialization and the dismantling of the welfare state through notions of individual achievement and responsibility, and advanced the notion of freedom as free trade and free markets. As such, White liberalism's state-sponsored anti-racism in actuality erased and exacerbated racial violence, dispossession, exploitation, and impoverishment, and in so doing, facilitated racial capital as much as—or, perhaps more accurately, in even more brutal and efficient a manner as—White supremacy did in an earlier era. (Ferguson and Hong 1058).

These liberal anti-racism campaigns function as a part of a broader political project of management, and in turn calls attention to how neoliberal projects have been upheld by “formations of violence and social death”.

Thus, despite the ways in which neoliberalism is typically viewed as a form of “non-politics” and solely functioning within the realms of economic and trade policy, it does indeed have and operate through a larger form of cultural politics, which are situated upon hierarchies of difference. As highlighted by Melamed’s analysis, and as I call attention to in my introduction, these cultural formations are defined by neoliberalism’s primary strategy of privatization, which functions as a means of both transferring wealth and decision making from the public domain to individual and corporate hands. As in the case of welfare reform, and “law and order politics”, privatization works in conjunction with the discourse of personal responsibility by combining neoliberal economic and cultural projects, which in turn obscures neoliberal identity politics. Duggan states,

The goal of raising corporate profits has never been pursued separately from the re-articulation of hierarchies of race, gender, and sexuality in the United States and around the globe. Neoliberals, unlike many leftists and progressives, simply don’t assume that there is any important difference between the material goals and identity politics. They make use of identity politics to obscure their redistributive

aims, and they use “neutral” economic policy terms to hide their investments in identity-based hierarchies, but they don’t make the mistake of fundamentally accepting the ruse of liberalism—the assertion of a clear boundary between politics of identity and class (Duggan 15).

Welfare reform serves as a great example of how seemingly “neutral” terms, like “personal responsibility”, are deployed as a way of masking efforts to both instate and preserve racialized, gendered, and sexualized hierarchies of difference.

Neoliberal welfare reform, which became most prominent during the 1990s, functions by cutting social costs, like entitlement programs, and labor costs, as a way of increasing corporate profit rates—which fell during the 1960s and 1970s due to mobilization efforts that sought to increase the downward distribution of resources from the state. In this way, welfare reform operated as a means of eliminating the social safety net that was provided by public agencies. It did so by transferring the burden to private households. Duggan highlights that this transition required the maintenance and exploitation of low wage labor. She states,

...the gap between the needs of workers and their dependents, and the inadequate pay and benefits provided by their insecure, often no-benefits jobs, is left to be filled by overstretched families and over burdened volunteer charities (Duggan 15).

In other words, this drastic change in welfare reform highlights how social services in turn became “privatized through personal responsibility”. In “Beyond Bratton”, Ruth Wilson Gilmore refers to this process as the rise of the “anti-state state”, in that the state devolves its responsibilities to non-state actors, like individuals (C. Gilmore and R. Gilmore 174).

However, despite the deemed neutrality of these policy narratives, Duggan highlights that these neoliberal cultural configurations operate along lines of race, gender, and class. She states,

From early-twentieth-century widows' pensions to the 1935 Social Security Act and Aid to Dependent Children (ADC), which morphed into Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), welfare policy in the United States has always been shaped to reflect racial exclusions and racist assumptions, to police the "morality" of poor women and contain the low-wage labor market (Duggan 15)

Although demonizing the morality of "poor women" has a long historical legacy, one of the primary examples of this pathologization can be seen in what has notoriously come to be known as the "Moynihan Report". In his 1965 study entitled, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, Daniel Patrick Moynihan highlighted several "pathologies" of black family structures, such as dependence upon welfare and "single-female-headed households", as being attributed to the immorality and inadequacy of black mothers (qtd. Cohen 19). Moynihan's portrayal of black families, and consequently black mothers, on welfare greatly shaped dominant discourses and policy measures around welfare reform. It did so, by positioning poverty as an "individual" pathology, which served to both legitimate these measures and mask their racialized and sexualized nature. For example, legislative efforts that served to diminish the existence of programs like AFDC—which was later reconfigured as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)—were augmented by the deployment of images that depicted hypersexual and lazy "welfare queens", who refused to stop profiting off of the state and take actions to support her household. In this way, these neoliberal cultural projects operate by masking the ways in which these class-based images and stereotypes are racialized by discursively

entrenching its framework and intention within the neoliberal ideals of personal responsibility (Duggan 15). Doing so positions these structuralized economic oppressions as being the fault of the individual, which in turn both obscures efforts of upward redistribution, and the ways that such politics are coded to mask how neoliberal cultural politics are situated upon politics of identity, and in turn racialized, gendered, and class-based hierarchies.

However, rather than seeing the pathologization of the (black) welfare queen as a mere *effect* of neoliberalism, Ferguson and Hong advocate that this form of neoliberal racialization is central to both the formation and developing foundation of neoliberalism and its coinciding cultural projects. Ferguson and Hong state,

....the pathologization of women of color—the black welfare mother in particular was intrinsic to the shift from Keynesianism to Neoliberalism...thus [demonstrating] that the neoliberal mode of inclusion from its start was never uniform or universal, but always produced an abjected and devalued category”(Ferguson and Hong 1061)

They highlight this “particular” mode of inclusion as a way of demonstrating how the ideological shapings of the welfare queen were required as a way of legitimating how women of color needed to be both absorbed into the global economy as low wage labor, and in turn used as a means of justifying efforts of upward redistribution. In this way, like Duggan, both Ferguson and Hong recognize how neoliberalism is situated within a broader scope of racialized, gendered, and sexualized cultural politics, and in doing so also point to neoliberalism’s contradictory formation (Ferguson and Hong 1058).

In *Aberations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique*, Ferguson advocates that neoliberalism's contradictions are a byproduct of the ways in which capital itself exists as a site of contradictions. Ferguson defines capital as a "...formation constituted by discourses of race, gender, and sexuality, discourses that implicate non-heteronormative formations like the prostitute" (Ferguson 11). However, we can also lend this argument to the formation of the "welfare queen". In an effort to problematize constructions of heterosexuality, and in turn how heteronormativity serves to support institutional forms of racism and class-based oppressions, Cathy Cohen advocates that women of color on welfare are positioned within a non-normative status. She states, "...sexuality and sexual deviance from a prescribed norm have been used to demonize and to oppress various segments of the population, even some classified under the label of "heterosexual"(Cohen 457). In this way, we can recognize the formation of the welfare queen, and as I will be arguing later, the rise of the #BlackLivesMatter movement, as a site of politics that are both situated within and constituted by a genealogy of liberal and in turn neoliberal cultural formations.

By looking at the non-heteronormative status of the welfare queen, we can examine the ways in which capital produces surplus populations that exist to both meet and exceed capital's demands. In his analysis on capital and surplus populations, Ferguson looks to Marx to both define surplus labor, and the ways in which these forms of labor exist as a population that operates both within and beyond the realms of capital. Ferguson states,

Marx defines surplus labor as that labor that capitalist accumulation “constantly produces, and produces indeed in direct relation with its own energy and extent.” ... Surplus populations exist as future laborers for capital, “always ready for exploitation by capital in the interests of capital’s own changing valorization requirements.” Both superfluous and indispensable, surplus populations fulfill and exceed the demands of capital (Ferguson 14-15).

Ferguson highlights that racial groups who have a history of being excluded from the rights of citizenship, have historically made up U.S. surplus populations. Additionally, as in the case of the welfare queen, the heterogeneity of surplus populations— as I articulate in my introduction, this is the result of being constituted against the universality of heteronormativity— exist as result of capital’s need to create labor (Ferguson 15). In this way, the non-normative existence of the welfare queen can be seen as a result of neoliberalism’s need to both legitimate and absorb people of color into the economy as low-wage labor. However, this is not to say that the production of surplus populations is isolated to the creation of labor, for within the neoliberal context, the very value and existence of “surplus populations” perform a different type of function.

Although Ferguson highlights the history and context for the production of “surplus labor”, Grace Hong takes this analysis a step further by looking at his notion of “superfluous and indispensable”, as a way of calling attention to how surplus populations within the contemporary moment are produced as “non-laboring subjects”. Hong recognizes these sites of surplus as being an outcome of “speculation” rather than production (Hong 70). What she means by this is that certain populations that are produced as sites of “surplus” become “valued for their very devalued status”—*people as*

*raw materials, by-products, or residues*—, and in turn are what she refers to as being “existentially and inherently” surplus.

The rise of the prison industrial complex can serve as an example of “speculative capitalism’s” increasing need to both expand and in turn create surplus populations. Gilmore highlights that prisons function as a way of managing what she refers to as an “over accumulation of speculative capital”. This over accumulation works in tandem with shifts in state provisions of social welfare, and in turn the need to mask efforts to increase upward redistributions of wealth. Christian Parenti and Angela Davis discuss these shifts as taking place in two parts. The first took place under President Richard Nixon and his coinciding programs to counter political rebellion; the second, occurred under President Ronald Reagan, where he established a response to the economic and racialized forms of “poverty and dislocation” that materialized as a direct result of neoliberal programs to re-structure the state and its coinciding modalities of support (qtd. in Duggan 18) Both of these shifts led to mass increases in incarceration rates.

Since the early 1970s the national rate of mass incarceration has increased by over 500 percent, and black communities have been the most vulnerable to these trends (Cha-Jua 46). As stated by criminologist Richard Quinney states, “Criminal justice is the modern means of controlling this surplus population produced by late capitalist development...A way of controlling this unemployed population is simply and directly by confinement in prisons” (qtd. in Cha-Jua 46). Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua highlights that neoliberalism’s restriction of employment and opportunities for social mobility in turn created a need for a new social structure of control, which he argues as being filled by the

formation and expansion of the prison industrial complex (46). Activists Eve Goldberg and Linda Evans illustrate that similar to military industrial complex, the rise of the prison industrial complex demonstrates the “interweaving of private business and government interests” (qtd. in Cha-Hua 47). In this way, this rapid increase in imprisonment highlights the ways in which neoliberal racial regimes require the relegation and disposability of disavowed (racialized, gendered, and sexualized) populations.

By calling attention to how surplus populations are constituted both by and through the workings of speculative capital, we can in turn begin to unsettle how neoliberal formations not only operate along sites of difference, but how its material and ideological conditions create the very fabrics for value-creation. Hong highlights that neoliberal surplus formations function in this way, because “while labor exploitation is certainly still an important mode of value extraction, under neoliberal regimes certain populations are not destined to ever be incorporated into capitalist production as labor” (Hong 71-73). As in the case of the trope of the “welfare queen”, the construction and in turn demonization of this figure was necessary for re-positioning the burden of shrunken welfare services from the hands of the state to the backs of individuals. As a result, this masked shift in liability created a discourse of morality that in turn served as the foundation for neoliberalism’s primary pillar of “personal responsibility”. In this way, the figure of the welfare queen operates as a necessary neoliberal staple of surplus existence, and what Hong defines as being “existentially surplus”. Her analysis of existentially surplus subjects builds off of Orlando Patterson’s notion of “social death”. The state of

being “socially dead” operates as “...a social form —that is, it is not to say that the “socially dead [have] no social function but rather they [perform] the social function of representing nothingness itself” (Hong 103). As I will be highlighting later on in this chapter, within the context of the Black Lives Matter, the organization’s initial emergence with the death of Trayvon Martin, and later with Michael Brown (see chapter three), functioned as an effort to call attention the ways in which black subjects are constituted through the structural relegation of nothingness. In so doing, Hong’s examination of “existential surplus”, and in turn the very state of “nothingness”, helps us understand how neoliberal racial regimes co-constitute what is valuable against the creation of what “existentially surplus” subjects, who are produced as a neoliberal necessity of being valueless. In this way, like the “socially dead”, being vulnerable, unworthy of protection, and devalued performs a social —and arguably material— function of relegation.

As a result, neoliberalism and its coinciding cultural projects, like the prison industrial complex, are constructed as sites that not only enable the material and ideological conditions for value creation, but also construct an economy of value for life in itself. For Gilmore, this economy of value is illustrated by the ways that African American prison populations function as sites of “raw material” and in turn existential states of surplus existence. Gilmore argues,

...African American prison populations function within the prison-industrial complex not as *labor* but as *raw material*. Put differently, African-American criminalization, which is legitimated through narratives of racialized, gendered,

and sexualized deviance, is not only a means of relegating them as surplus labor but also a means of relegating them to surplus existence (qtd.in Hong 72).

Although the violent material and discursive legacies of black criminalization and constructions of “deviancy” are nothing new,

We can also look to Marc Lamont Hill to help us flush out these particularities, and in turn situate how neoliberal racial regimes relegate minoritized populations, like black subjects, as existentially surplus. For Hill, to be existentially surplus is to be “Nobody”. Hill states,

To be Nobody is to be vulnerable... The role of the government, however, is to offer forms of protection that enhance our lives and shield our bodies from foreseeable and preventable dangers. Unfortunately for many citizens—particularly those marked as poor, Black, Brown, immigrant, queer, or trans—State power has only increased their vulnerability, making their lives more rather than less safe (Hill xvii)

Hill’s analysis is useful in two ways. First, his concept of “Nobody” helps us situate how existential surplus existence is both constructed through and legitimated by racialized, gendered, and sexualized hierarchies of vulnerability. Secondly, Hill’s discussion provides us with a framework to unsettle how this neoliberal relegation of “nothingness” also functions as a form of a state violence, and in turn allows us to formulate how neoliberalism operates as an economy of value for life.

In the case of Michael Brown, whose tragic death sparked the landmark uprisings in Ferguson, Missouri and the start of the Black Lives Matter movement, to be vulnerable meant to be profiled for police brutality, executed, and left dead in the street for four hours. Keisha, a local resident highlighted...”They Just left him there...like he ain’t

belong to nobody” (Hill 10). Brown’s death highlights that to be vulnerable under neoliberal racial regimes, also means that one is at risk of falling victim to forms of state violence, like police brutality. As Duggan highlights, “law and order” programs, like the “war on crime” and the “war on drugs” functioned as a key neoliberal facet for both justifying nationwide crackdowns on crime and the mass incarceration of men, especially young black men (17). These “justice” initiatives served as a response to gross forms of inequity, poverty, and dislocation that were created by neoliberal economic models of restructuring. Duggan highlights, that by “setting aside the use of social democratic government programs as a primary mode of incorporating and defusing the anger and alienation of poor populations, neoliberal policymakers turned instead to policing and imprisonment as central regulatory and disciplinary institutions” (Duggan 18). However, the racist and class-based nature of these policies are masked by notions of “personal responsibility”, which as in the case of Michael Brown, positions police violence as being both an accident and the fault of the individual.

Despite how the dominant narratives about Brown’s murder were centered around the question of his “innocence”, Brown’s death highlights how policing campaigns are racialized, gendered, and sexualized, and exist as a material and ideological manifestation of neoliberalism. Hill states,

... the incident between Brown and Wilson was animated by a set of beliefs and conditions that were all too familiar: the assumptions that all people of color are violent criminals from birth; that petty crimes are the neon arrow pointing to someone already involved in, or destined to commit, more serious crimes; that there is money to be made in over policing minor offenses; and that poverty, race, and gender non-conformity are identifiers of moral failings so rich that there is no

longer any reason to recognize the rights, the citizenship, or the humanity of those so identified (Hill 11).

Although no one can dispute that Brown stole a pack of cigarillos, as Hill highlights, “assumptions” of his “innocence” were already decided by violent legacies and neoliberal policy prescriptions that are augmented by racialized hierarchies of moral personhood. Brown’s life was constructed by notions of criminality before he ever stepped foot in that store (Hill 11).

While the neoliberal value of “personal responsibility” urges us to call into question Brown’s innocence, the notion of “innocence” is beyond the point, for, “...one should not need to be innocent to avoid execution (particularly through extra-judicial means)...”(Hill 10). Even in Darren Wilson’s account to the grand jury, where he recalled shooting Michael Brown, Wilson refers to Brown as “it”, which exemplifies the ways in which Brown was viewed as being sub-human, valueless, and disposable. Wilson stated, “I don’t know how many I shot. I just shot it” (Hill 12). In that same account Wilson went on to describe Brown as being relentless to Wilson’s orders, and continued to paint Brown as posing an unstoppable threat. Wilson stated, “And then when [the bullet] went into him, the demeanor on his face went blank, the aggression was gone...the threat was stopped” (Hill 13). Wilson did not reflect on how Brown was dead, only that the perceived criminal “threat” was gone. In doing so, Darren Wilson’s account illustrates the ways in which black lives, like the life of Michael Brown, are systemically marked as expendable, and in turn helps us situate neoliberalism’s biopolitical nature, and what I will be discussing later as the rise of the #BlackLivesMatter movement.

When we recognize neoliberalism as structure of valuation—or what Hong refers to as a structure of disavowal—that requires the disposal or relegation of “existentially surplus” racialized, gendered, or sexualized subjects, such as Michael Brown, we can begin to see how neoliberalism operates both by and through biopolitics. In her discussion on queerness as a regulatory framework of biopolitics, Jasbir K. Puar looks to Foucault’s examination of biopower. Puar states, “For Foucault, modern biopower, emerging at the end of the eighteenth century, is the management of life—the distribution of risk, possibility, mortality, life chances, health, environment, quality of living—the differential investment in the imperative to live” (Puar 32). In the case of neoliberalism, the production of existentially surplus populations, which are fashioned for the mere purpose of vulnerability—and even disposability—serves as an example of this “distribution of risk”. As I highlight in the previous chapter, neoliberalism is situated upon logics of political modernity, which allows social and racial groups to claim the status of protectable life for themselves, but only at the cost of the relegation and disposability of other populations. This zero-sum game of protection, and in turn claim for validation of life, helps us further understand the intricacies of what Foucault meant by “management”. For instance, as highlighted by Lisa Duggan, Craig Gilmore, Ruth Wilson Gilmore and Sundiata Cha-Jua, as policies of upward redistribution drastically exacerbated gaps in wealth and overall inequality, the prison industrial complex evolved as a site of neoliberal management to both legitimate and control how these reforms were situated upon hierarchies of difference. Increased levels of criminalization, and in turn incarceration, served as a way of rendering the racialized poor as illegible, and in turn

unworthy, for state-services and social programs ( C. Gilmore and R. Gilmore 175).

However, despite the ways that biopower requires the differentiation and vulnerability of certain populations, Foucault does not see death as the primary motivation of biopower<sup>1</sup>, or the state for that matter. Rather, he understands biopower to operate as a means of averting or even preventing death. In other words, “death becomes a form of collateral damage in the pursuit for life” ( Puar 32). Consequently, Foucault’s analysis can help us understand how neoliberalism also functions as structure for the “management of life”, or what Lisa Stevenson refers to as a “regime of life”.

In *Life Beside Itself: Imagining Care in the Canadian Arctic*, Stevenson traces the history of the Canadian government’s response to the tuberculosis crisis among the Inuit community, and in turn provides a useful example for examining state-based forms of management as sites of biopolitics. After WWII the Canadian government made it their intention to incorporate the Inuit community into the structures of the state, which rendered the survival of population as a key governmental concern. However as Stevenson highlights, the Canadian government’s involvement was not based upon care for the Inuit population, but was tied to a broader project of both achieving and maintaining global legitimacy. Thus, with the rise of tuberculosis, the Canadian Northern Administration became focused on questions of how to control the Inuit death rate, for “...having a dead Eskimo would be tantamount to bureaucratic failure”(33). Life in this

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<sup>1</sup> As these broader discussions on the particularities and differentiations between biopower and necropower are still unfolding, I would like to highlight that these relations of power, and in turn the split between life and death, are not as simple as they are presented in this section.

regard is situated as an indifferent value, for "...it doesn't matter who you are, just that you stay alive".

While the notion of "regime of life" is closely related to Foucault's discussion of biopolitics, in that death is not the aim but a byproduct of the imperative to life, Stevenson's focus on "regime" serves to highlight how "life" is something that is being structurally imposed (Stevenson 196), or as Foucault states, death is "something that slips into life" (qtd. in Puar 33). In so doing, the concept seeks to call attention to how state based apparatuses of power aren't just defining how to live based upon "conceptions of the good", rather are imposing forms of existence that are shaped by racialized, gendered, and sexualized formations of violence. Thus, Foucault's use of the term "slip" to describe the ways that death operates as an outcome of life, can be understood as operating within the neoliberal context, and in turn allows us to situate neoliberal configurations as a "regime of life". As I argued earlier, under neoliberal formations, protectable life cannot be achieved without vulnerability and the sanctioning of (social) death. In this way, neoliberal death operates as slippage, in that its very nature is denied, despite the ways in which death itself operates as a necessity.

We can also look to Puar, who calls this very slippage into question by demonstrating how it operates as tension of both biopolitics and necropolitics. Puar argues that "...[the] distancing of death is a fallacy of modernity..." (32). However, despite the ways that necropolitics makes death its primary objective (Mbumbe qtd. in Puar 33), and (neoliberal) biopolitics repudiates how its structures warrant its very existence, putting these two sites of politics in tension with one another "...allows for us

to attend to the multiple spaces of deflection of death” (35), and in turn the disavowal of racialized, gendered and sexualized forms of life. For example, although many have come to know Eric Garner through his devastating murder, which took place at the hands of Staten Island police in 2014, many don’t know that Garner was routinely “stopped, searched, and humiliated” by police. Jordan T. Camp and Christina Heatherton highlight that “Before he was slain on a Staten Island sidewalk, he pleaded with approaching officers, ‘Every time you see me, you arrest me. I’m tired of it. It stops today’”(Camp and Heatherton 1). In this way both Garner’s life and death can be seen as a byproduct of neoliberalism’s bio-necropolitical tensions. These biopolitical tensions can also be situated as operating through racism. For example, in *Society Must Be Defended* Foucault states, “What in fact is racism? It is primarily a way of introducing a break into the domain of life that is under power’s control: the break between what must live and what must die” (Foucault 254). In so doing, although Garner’s death exemplifies how neoliberalism sanctions the disposal of racialized life, the fact that his life was routinely structured around police brutality (and state forms of disavowal) illustrates the ways in which biopolitical relegation serves to erase the systemic racialized nature of these forms of violence.

However, “this stops today”, became a powerful slogan of the Black Lives Matter movement. “Protestors not only questioned how Eric Garner died, they also challenged the conditions under which he was forced to live (Camp and Heatherton 1). In doing so, Black Lives Matter can be seen as site that seeks to challenge how premature black

deaths are “deflected” as accidents, and in turn challenges the very systems that enabled these forms of vulnerability and death to occur in the first place.

By highlighting the systemic nature of racialized expendability, and in turn how neoliberal regimes operate as sites of valuation, Black Lives Matter can be seen as functioning as a site that seeks to call this regime of life into question. In so doing, BLM operates as what I define as a neoliberal formation. #BlackLivesMatter formed as a movement to “...[work] for a world where Black lives are no longer systematically and intentionally targeted for demise” (Black Lives Matter, “About the Black Lives Matter Network”). The very name of the movement “Black Lives Matter” calls attention to these neoliberal landscapes of value by highlighting that under neoliberal formations, black life is rendered as not ‘mattering’. Doing so serves as a way of contesting the very legitimacy of its structures, and the ways in which neoliberalism’s racialized cultural politics—such as the prison regime— necessitates the positioning of certain populations as invaluable.

Black Lives Matter, as a neoliberal formation, serves as an example of this space for subversion. Ferguson argues, “as formations that transgress capitalist political economies, surplus populations become the possible locations for critiques of state and capital” (Ferguson 15). By being rendered as sites of existential surplus, subjects of color, and in turn black lives, are disavowed as unprotectable and disposable. But within the neoliberal project these subject formations cannot be relegated to sites of complete erasure, rather they need to operate within visible and discursive sites of subordination. Thus, by being positioned within these spaces, subjects of color always transgress capitalist political economies, because of the ways in which they are both constituted by

and exist beyond the realms of capital. In this regard, black subjects always have a queer temporal relationship to capital and neoliberalism, which in turn serves as a space for resistance.

We can examine this queer relationship to capitalism through Rey Chow's analysis of the interconnections of sexuality and biopolitics. In her assessment of Chow's work Puar states,

Rey Chow notes the general failure of scholars to read sexuality through biopower as symptomatic of modernist inclinations toward a narrow homosexual/heterosexual identitarian binary frame that favors 'sexual intercourse, sex acts, and erotics' over 'the entire problematic of the reproduction of human life that is, in modern times, always racially and ethnically inflicted'" (Puar 34).

Puar and Chow highlight that non-normative sexualities are rarely centered within discussions of biopolitics, despite the ways in which queer (non-normative) sexual forms of existence are positioned as being deviant and perverse. Such forms of non-normativity are central "...components of the very establishment of norms that drive biopolitical interests" (Puar 34-35). Just as Cohen likens the non-normative sexuality of "welfare queens" to a racialized queer subjectivity, which in turn allowed for us to call attention to the contradictory formations and queer temporalities of neoliberalism, we can also extend these discussions to situate black subjects as racialized queer subjects. In other words, if we can see people of color as non-normative sexual subjects, then I posit that we can also recognize black subjects as queer. This formation of queerness is an outcome of the both paradoxes of racial capital, and, for the sake of my project, how racial capital serves as a key tenet to the workings of neoliberal projects—the very foundations of biopower. For instance, by requiring the relegation of racialized, sexualized, and gendered subjects,

biopolitical formations, like neoliberalism, necessitate the creation of queer racialized populations. In this way, black queer subjugation is an outcome of neoliberalism and its coinciding biopolitical projects, which in turn allows for us to situate black subjects as queer.

By exploring how the queer subjugation of black subjects, which also allows for us to examine the ways in which black personhood is relegated as deviant and vulnerable, as a direct result of neoliberal biopolitics, we can in turn begin to re-orient our understanding of neoliberalism and its biopolitical nature. Just as Cohen sought to reconceptualize the term queer as a way to broaden the scope of queer politics and its capacity to more deeply challenge intersecting systems of domination and oppression, I situate black subjects as racialized queer subjects to call attention to the necessity to re-examine the ways in which neoliberal disavowal requires the relegation of the most marginal and vulnerable. In doing so, we can re-orient our understanding of neoliberalism, by framing the material and ideolgoical conditions within queer politics, which in turn allows for us to organize along intersectional lines. Cohen highlights, “this is not an easy path to pursue because most often this will mean building a political analysis and political strategies around the most marginal in our society, some of whom look like us, many of whom don’t” (Cohen 481).

In doing so I would like to situate this discussion of racialized queerness as a way to foreground the vision of Black Lives Matter, which, as I will be discussing in chapter three, seeks to center the lives of the most marginalized within black communities, such as black women, trans, and queer folks. As such, we can in turn connect BLM’s vision

and ethic of mobilizing around the most vulnerable within the black communities, with Cohen's discussion of transforming queer politics, as a way to call attention to neoliberalism's contradictory formation and sites of possibility. For as Cohen argues, "...the radical potential of queer politics, or any libratory movement, rests on its ability to advance strategically oriented political identities arising from a more nuanced understanding of power" (Cohen 458). I recognize this "more nuanced understanding of power" as being deployed through the ways in which Black Lives Matter calls attention to neoliberalism's structures, which highlights the very conditions and possibilities for the existence of (queer) racialized life. In doing so, BLM in turn forces us to reconceptualize the workings of neoliberalism, and re-envision our prospects for hope within neoliberalism's landscape of disavowal.

### **Chapter 3: #BlackLivesMatter and the Affective Reimagining of Respectability and Refusal**

For the purpose of this chapter I will be examining the formation of Black Lives Matter, and how the movement, as an outcome of neoliberal paradoxes and possibilities, seeks to contest the systematic devaluation of black life. In doing so, I will be examining how the movement operates along affective lines as way to foreground how BLM functions as site of refusal to the workings of neoliberalism, and in turn a space of hope for re-imagining the possibilities of life in an era of black disavowal.

Before I move on to the specifics of the movement, I will first turn to its sites of inheritance in order to illustrate how BLM's efforts to challenge the devaluation of black

life also serves as a way of highlighting the erasures and absences of neoliberalism. In the first chapter of my project, I looked at the legacy of the Black Panther Party in order to centralize how the foundation of neoliberalism is situated upon the co-optation and erasure of post-WWII liberation movements. "...The social movements of the mid-twentieth century succeeded in rendering untenable the uncritical glorification of Western Civilization that was the ideological and cultural basis for the earlier, colonial form of global capital. These social movements did so by critiquing western civilization's foundation in white supremacy" (Hong 132). For example, the Black Panther Party sought to challenge white liberalism's reliance upon racial capital, and in turn the management of racialized subjects. The organization did so by questioning how black life is systematically relegated as vulnerable by creating anti-imperialist campaigns, community-based initiatives, and programs to counter police brutality and abuse. However, with the rise of neoliberalism "...the logics of racial management shifted toward neoliberal multi-culturalism" (Melamed qtd. in Hong 87), which functioned to mask the ways in which the systemic subjugation and uneven distribution of violence towards racialized, gendered, and sexualized populations is both disguised and required.

In a keynote speech to the Personal Democracy Forum, Alicia Garza, one of the Black Lives Matter founders, highlights these contradictions of the neoliberal era:

We have been living in an era where everything and nothing is about race... We emerge from an era where talking about race and racial inequity has been deemed racist in and of itself. Even Rodney King, whose brutal beating by Los Angeles Police officers in 1992 was one of the first caught on videotape and broadcasted around the world, responded to the rage that many poor Black people felt by saying, "Can we all get along?" as if it was just as simple as people being nicer to

each other. A cauldron has been bubbling under the surface for a very long time...(Garza, "To Imagine What a Real Democracy Can and Should Look Like")

Garza's discussion is useful here, in that it allows us to contextualize the development of the Black Lives Matter Movement, as a byproduct of a "cauldron" of race relations that, as she states, "has been bubbling over the surface for a very long time". In this way, I liken her deployment of the term "cauldron" as a symbol for neoliberalism, and the ways in which neoliberal structures both mask and are reliant upon the disavowal of racialized, gendered, and sexualized forms of violence (see previous chapter). Doing so allows for us to highlight how a key tenet of "multiculturalism", and neoliberal projects at large, is the necessity of erasure. This site of erasure manifests itself as a form silencing—a silence that denies that racialized violence continues to exist, and that the very structures of neoliberalism are founded upon histories of liberation and resistance, like the Black Panther Party.

We can look to Avery Gordon, who illustrates that in spite how neoliberalism disavows that racialized, gendered, and sexualized forms of violence continue to exist, the very fabrics of our everyday social, political, and economic imaginaries are deeply entrenched with their material and ideological manifestations. Gordon argues, "...a post-modern social formation is still haunted by the traces of its productions and exclusions" (Gordon 17). Within the context of neoliberal disavowal, these sites of haunting can be likened to the ways in which the systematic killing of black subjects are discursively represented as accidental, or the result of a few "bad apples". For example, during his senate confirmation hearing, (now) Attorney General Jeff Sessions was stated,

I think there's concern that good police officers and good departments can be sued by the Department of Justice when you just have individuals within a department who have done wrong. These lawsuits undermine the respect for police officers and create an impression that the entire department is not doing their work consistent with fidelity to law and fairness" (qtd. in McDonough et al.)

Statements like these serve as a way of erasing the structuralized nature of police violence, and are unfortunately all too common. As in the case of Michael Brown, a "bad apple" narrative would render Brown's murder as being the result of one individual having done wrong (Darren Wilson), rather than as a part of a much broader history of corruption and racial discrimination within the Ferguson police department and the state of Missouri alike (Hill 2016). These structures are "haunted" by the silencing and erasures of its legacies of violence, which in turn urges us to recognize how sites of haunting, like the state sanctioned killing of black subjects, operate as a part of a broader framework of historical violence.

Black Lives Matter as a neoliberal formation, also serves as a response to these institutionalized sites of erasure, and in turn BLM can be recognized as a movement that also seeks to call attention to its sites of inheritance. For instance, Black Lives Matter builds upon the legacy of the Black Panther Party by functioning as a movement that calls attention to the legitimacy of the state and its supporting structures. BLM does so by focusing primarily on police violence as a form of state violence. For example, in an interview with Metro Weekly Alicia Garza states,

We're talking about a system of policing that has developed a culture that is largely unaccountable, not transparent, and corrupt. And it's not a question of good cops or bad cops...it's about whether or not the structure that we've created for safety, and for justice, is actually playing the functions that we wanted it to.

And I think what the movement is saying, and what our network is saying, is that it's not (Garza 2016 February)

Although Garza is initially referencing how a corrupt carceral system lends to both the creation and masking of an overarching police culture of unaccountability, her analysis also highlights how this culture is a part of a broader form of systemic violence that rests upon the devaluation of minoritized populations. As such, where the Black Panther Party developed a political ideology and forms of resistance that highlighted how white liberalism both requires and is predicated upon black death (Hong 97), such as in the case of their Ten Point Platform and Program and the development of police patrols, Black Lives Matter continues this legacy by challenging the ways in which these forms of racialized forms of violence, like police brutality, are masked and reproduced under neoliberal projects. In doing so, Black Lives Matter attempts to call into question the specificities of the “life/death binary” (see first and second chapter), which serves as the foundation of racial capitalism and neoliberal (necro)biopolitics. The movement does so by centering how racialized forms of violence not only continue to exist, but how the devaluation and disposal of black subjects, as in the case of police brutality, is both systematic in nature and functions as a key feature of state violence. This broader vision allows us to situate BLM’s intention to both build upon and re-imagine black liberation efforts as a part of a broader project of memory. This project functions as form of resistance that is predicated upon the “...[refusal] to forget the ways in which the contemporary moment [is] structured by longer histories of colonialism and racial violence...” (Hong 98). This form of refusal operates in direct opposition to neoliberal

disavowal and its coinciding requirements of erasure, and will serve as the framework for this chapter.

We can also utilize Hong's analytic of refusal to foreground the question of life that lies at the center of Black Lives Matter organizing. As I discussed in the previous chapter, the very name of the "Black Lives Matter" network and broader movement, aims to call attention to the ways in which black life is reduced as unprotectable, vulnerable, and unvalued. More importantly, BLM seeks to challenge the structures that enable the routine extrajudicial killings and state sanctioned violence against black subjects by refusing to accept the very conditions that seek to relegate black life as materially and ideologically disposable. This level of resistance is most aptly represented by the "genesis" of the movement—the protests in Ferguson, Missouri. As I briefly mentioned in chapter two, these protests broke out in response to the outrage over Michael Brown's death, and in turn served as a catalyst for the current Black Lives Matter movement. I will now turn to a more in depth examination of the events in Ferguson to center this chapter's framework of refusal, and in turn begin our discussion of BLM and its scope as a neoliberal formation.

After Michael Brown was shot and killed on August 9 2014, the notorious image of his body lying in the street circulated throughout social and news media, and in turn sparked a national uproar. We can look to Marc Lamont Hill's interview on *Code Switch*, to help contextualize the role that Michael's death played in catalyzing the movement in Ferguson, and in turn the rise of Black Lives Matter. Hill argues, Ferguson became the "...cauldron in which everything exploded...it was an overflow of the energy and

emotion and frustration, from the death of Trayvon Martin that went unavenged, went without any sort of justice attached to it". These profound frustrations that people had, sort of bubbled over into Mike Brown" (Hill 4:36). As Hill highlights, this was certainly not the first state-sanctioned murder of a black teenager. However, Brown's situation was unique in that his body was left lying on the hot pavement for four hours, visible for all to see. Hill posits, "...when Mike Brown is laying on the ground....and he lays out there for four and a half hours, much like a twentieth century lynching. His body was laid out as a spectacle for an entire town to see" (Hill 3:15). In this way, the very materiality of his death was made into a public spectacle, that in turn prompted many within the Ferguson and national community alike to mobilize and protest not only Brown's death, but the ways in which black life is systematically constituted as expendable and disposable.

The analytic of materiality helps us situate how the image of Brown's body allowed for viewers to experience the "material" conditions of state violence. Unlike the case of Trayvon Martin, which also sparked national outrage, Brown's death created a point of visible consumption. Hill argues,

Every generation has a moment, where that generation says we've had enough, and where their frustrations that the social burdens and pressures that they are wrestling with bubble over and mobilize them into a movement" (Hill 2:03). You know August 28, 1955, was the day that Emmett Till was killed. It wasn't the first lynching, It wasn't the first day that a black boy had been beaten or dragged. It wasn't the first social crisis that we had seen in the city of Chicago or in Mississippi...But what happened is that boy was killed, and Emmett Till had the open casket funeral, and the whole world could see the kind of material effect of state violence. The material effect of state sponsored violence. The material effect of white supremacy and the consequences of it. (Hill 2:39).

In this way, similar the national broadcasting of Emmett Till's open casket, which created the conditions for national support of the civil rights movement, Brown's death also functioned as "public spectacle", which in turn launched a national movement. However, "unlike the lynchings of the twentieth century, the whole world could see this public spectacle..." (Hill 2:45). This form of global visibility, enabled Brown's death and the protests in Ferguson to be picked up by all across social media, which in turn allowed for communities to mobilize for other deaths, like in the case of Rekia Boyd and Eric Garner. Hill advocates that this mobilization was enabled by a momentum that was created on August 9, 2014, when Michael Brown was murdered (Hill 4:00). As Hill comments, "he died, so a new generation of freedom fighters could live" (Hill 4:07).

Additionally, Hill also notes that unlike the case of Martin, where he was hailed as a "good kid" and in turn deemed as a respectable subject, Brown's innocence was never a question, for he was the "imperfect victim". Hill states, "I also want to spotlight that while Mike Brown isn't the normal victim, that is also the marker of progress. Because too often in history, our protests have been anchored to a kind of respectability politics that says that the victim has to be perfect (Hill 5:35). However, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, this issue of "innocence" operates as a part of a much broader neoliberal project. The very notion of innocence itself is situated within the neoliberal moralizing framework of "personal responsibility", and in turn served as a way of pitting the "responsibility" of Brown's death, on the back of no one but Brown himself. However, the positioning of this blame is structural, in that neoliberal cultural projects require the relegation and demonization of certain (minoritized) subjects in order to both

justify their workings and distract from their violences. In the case of Michael Brown, this level of masking served as a way of erasing how his murder was the byproduct of state violence. But more importantly, Brown's murder demonstrated how one's right to life is determined on the basis of "respectability". As such, protesters in Ferguson recognized these violent contradictions, and in turn catalyzed upon Brown's murder in order to call attention to the fact that committing petty theft should in no way be grounds for capital punishment, and more importantly, everyone should be worthy of respect, protection, and the right to live (Hill 6:29).

In this way, we can situate the outrage in Ferguson as the genealogical origin of the Black Lives Matter movement, in that the protests that developed in response to Brown's execution sought to highlight the fact that one should not need to be viewed as respectable or the "perfect victim" to live (Hill 5:50), and furthermore, that Brown's death is emblematic of the ways in which black lives are systematically structured as unworthy and disposable. Although #BlackLivesMatter was already being deployed as an ideological strategy and organizing tool, the deployment of the network truly took place in the aftermath of Ferguson. Like many within the national community, many BLM organizers were outraged by the events in Ferguson, and wanted to find a way to both support Brown's family and the organizers on the ground, beyond social media messaging. As a result, Black Lives Matter members Patrisse Cullors and Darnell Moore responded by creating "Black Life Matters" rides to Ferguson. These rides were developed in the image of the 1960's "Freedom Rides", and functioned as an effort to mobilize the black community and their allies to fight for the justice and validity of all

black life (Cullors and Moore “5 Ways to Never Forget Ferguson-And Deliver Real Justice to Michael Brown”). In an interview Garza commented, “Really, the genesis of the organization was the people who organized in their cities for the ride to Ferguson... [and] pushed us to create a chapter structure.” (Garza qtd. in Cobb et al.). In separate account, Patrisse Cullors also highlighted the centrality of these forms of collaboration,

When it was time for us to leave, inspired by our friends in Ferguson, organizers from 18 different cities went back home and developed Black Lives Matter (BLM) chapters in their communities and towns—broadening the political will and movement building reach catalyzed by the #BlackLivesMatter project and the work on the ground in Ferguson. It became clear that there was a need to continue organizing and building Black power across the country. (Cullors, “We Didn’t Start a Movement. We Started a Network”).

In this way, what was originally an effort to help “amplify the voices” of the Ferguson and St. Louis community and mobilize around anti-black racism, developed into an initiative to create a network to support the continuation of this work.

As I mentioned in previous chapters, this network-based movement is foregrounded in an effort to center those at the margins. In this way, it is not insignificant that Michael Brown’s murder functioned as the catalysis for the development of BLM. If we look back to Hill’s discussion where he situated Michael Brown as the “imperfect victim”, his analysis allows us to also recognize the response that took place in Ferguson, and in turn the development of Black Lives Matter network, as an outcome of the ways in which these respectability politics were called into question. Within the context of BLM, the movement sought to challenge these neoliberal status quo configurations—which renders certain lives as unworthy of protection— by creating an organization that looks to

center the most marginalized populations within black communities. The organization's website states,

Black Lives Matter affirms the lives of Black queer and trans folks, disabled folks, black-undocumented folks, folks with records, women and all Black lives along the gender spectrum. It centers those that have been marginalized within Black liberation movements. It is a tactic to (re)build the Black liberation movement.”(Black Lives Matter, “About the Black Lives Matter Network”)

These efforts are emblematic of the ways in which BLM has been referred to as “not your grandfather’s civil-rights movement”. In an interview with *Truth Out*, Alicia Garza highlights that while BLM both recognizes the validity and importance of previous black liberation efforts, and in turn has embraced many aspects of those visions, she emphasizes that this particular era of neoliberal state-violence calls for something different. Garza states,

These are much different times than those of the last period of civil rights. That doesn't mean that we abandon the ideas, the tactics or the strategies of that period. We reject strategies and tactics that left some people behind -- women, queer people, trans people and even poor people in some regards. (Garza 2016 October)

In this way, re-tracing how the movement emerged in part to challenge narratives of respectability, and in turn call attention to the fact that all (black) lives are valuable, helps us to situate BLM’s vision and existence as a neoliberal formation that’s foregrounded in a politics that refuses both state violence, and the liberal exclusions of past movements.

This effort to re-orient the tactics of previous liberation efforts is also highlighted by the ways in which BLM ‘s vision is centered around the work of Ella Baker. In an

interview with Jelani Cobb, Barbara Ransby spoke on the nature of Baker's work when she was the director of several N.A.A.C.P branches,

she would go into small towns and say, 'Whom are you reaching out to?' And she'd tell them that if you're not reaching out to the town drunk you're not really working for the rights of black people. The folk who were getting rounded up and thrown in jail had to be included. (Ransby qtd. in Cobb, et al.)

Similar to Baker, the Black Lives Matter founder's also recognized that truly working "for the rights of black people" requires the creation of forms of resistance that challenge the logics of political modernity. As I previously highlighted, these logics function as the key ideological tenets of state violence and anti-black racism, and require that claiming the status of "protectable life" for oneself can only come at the cost of denying these forms of protection to other minoritized forms of life. As such, a movement that seeks to call attention to how black subjects are positioned within this "life/death" binary, must also center the ways in which some black lives are more vulnerable than others.

For BLM, this ethic is illustrated in the movement's leadership and organizational structure. As three black queer women, Garza, Tometti, and Cullors recognize that "to love and desire freedom and justice for [themselves] is a necessary prerequisite for wanting the same for others" (Black Lives Matter). This notion of inclusivity informs the founder's vision for the BLM network and their intention to "(re)build" black liberation efforts. As queer black women, Garza, Tometti, and Cullors, understand that without such notions of inclusivity, they themselves would have likely been marginalized in both the society that they are attempting to re-imagine and in many of the racial justice organizations that are also fighting to change those very structures (Cobb, "The Matter of

Black Lives”). Even, within the Black Lives Matter movement, Garza, Tometti, and Cullors have experienced a great deal of backlash for rightfully naming themselves as the founders of BLM and the creators of #BlackLivesMatter. However, more than anything these forms of violence have taken the shape of silence and erasure. On one level, we can situate these sites of erasure within a broader historical project where the work of black women, or members of the queer and trans community are discredited and co-opted. However, this project of erasure is also constituted both by and through the neoliberal framework of disavowal. Just as neoliberal cultural projects require the relegation of black life in order for others to be granted the status of protectable life, these logics also operate within minoritized communities.

In her acclaimed piece for *The Feminist Wire*, Garza spoke out against the erasure of the roles that black queer women played in the development of the movement. In doing so, Garza highlighted that the very ways in which herself, Tometti, and Cullors are disavowed are a part of the same logics that sanction the disposability and devaluation of black life. Garza argues,

When you drop “Black” from the equation of whose lives matter, and then fail to acknowledge it came from somewhere, you further a legacy of erasing Black lives and Black contributions from our movement legacy... The legacy and prevalence of anti-Black racism and hetero-patriarchy is a lynchpin holding together this unsustainable economy. And that’s not an accidental analogy. In 2014 hetero-patriarchy and anti-Black racism within our movement is real and felt. It’s killing us and it’s killing our potential to build power for transformative social change. When you adopt the work of queer women of color, don’t name or recognize it, and promote it as if it has no history of its own such actions are problematic (Garza, “A Herstory of the #BlackLivesMatter Movement”).

Garza's analysis helps highlight the historical legacy of anti-black racism and heteropatriarchy, and the role that these legacies of violence continue to play in shaping the everyday imaginaries of black subjects, especially, black women, trans, and queer folks. We can in turn situate the founder's efforts to ensure, that as queer black women, they are properly credited for their work, as a part of the organization's broader initiative to be inclusive. I recognize that the term "inclusion" is reminiscent of neoliberal multiculturalism, in that the phrase gestures towards the idea of recognition in itself being enough. However, I highlight the particularity of its usage as a way to foreground how Black Lives Matter is attempting to build a network that moves beyond this neoliberal paradigm of acknowledgement or recognition. They do so by demanding that not only all black lives be centered in U.S. culture and politics, but that the movement operates in such a way that the black lives that would be relegated as marginal—like Garza, Tometti, and Cullors—are affirmed and put at the forefront of an effort that seeks to dismantle those very structures of de-valuation. As Garza highlights in an interview, "We want to make sure that people are not saying, 'Well, whatever you are, I don't care,' " she said. "No, I want you to care. I want you to see all of me." (Garza qtd. In Jelani Cobb).

One example of how this mode of inclusion operates within the organization is through its de-centralized leadership structure. "Garza, Cullors, and Tometti advocate a horizontal ethic of organizing, which favors democratic inclusion at the grassroots level...", and in turn functions as a "modern extension of Ella Baker's thinking—a preference for ten thousand candles rather than a single spotlight" (Cobb, "The Matter of Black Lives"). This model for "ten thousand candles" is rooted in the desire to center and

affirm the lives of all black folks, and the recognition that such forms of inclusivity cannot be achieved under traditional models of leadership. We can look to Jelani Cobb's discussion on the BLM leadership structure, where he highlights the founders' views,

Cullors says, "The consequence of focusing on a leader is that you develop a necessity for that leader to be the one who's the spokesperson and the organizer, who tells the masses where to go, rather than the masses understanding that we can catalyze a movement in our own community." Or, as Garza put it, "The model of the black preacher leading people to the promised land isn't working right now." (Cullors and Garza qtd. in Cobb et al.)

This desire to build a network that's grounded in a grassroots community based model is illustrated by the organization's chapter-based structure. With over 30 chapters, Black Lives Matter is able to function as a network that's situated in the desire to all for black individuals to come together and build sustainable spaces of support and resistance within their own communities. For example, in coordination with the broader Movement for Black Lives, as a Mother's Day campaign entitled, "Mama's Bail Out Day", Black Lives Matter Oakland, created a list of policy demands and urged community members to donate money to help provide bail for incarcerated mothers. With over "700,000 people who are condemned to cages and separated from their families simply because they cannot afford to pay bail", the initiative functioned as both a community action to both challenge and to call attention to "inhumane and destructive bail practices" (National Bail Out, "Mama's Bail Out Day"). Additionally, by focusing on incarcerated mothers, this initiative functioned as an effort to call attention to the ways in which black women, especially black trans women, are particularly vulnerable to incarceration and state

violence at large (National Bail Out, “Mama’s Bail Out Day”). This effort exemplifies the ways in which BLM’s chapter-based structure and de-centralized leadership model, serve as a way to help individuals build systems of support and challenge racialized violence within their own communities.

Additionally, this de-centralized leadership model also operates as a way to counter the cis-gendered, heteronormative logics of previous liberation efforts. This is what Garza is against when she calls attention to the “black preacher model”. Not only did these models fail in their very structural dynamics, and in many cases led to the demise of those very movements (as in the case of the BPP), but these former structures are built upon the logics of hierarchy which BLM seeks to counter. As such, BLM seeks to build a “queer affirming network”. This is highlighted in the organization’s principles statement,

We are committed to fostering a queer  
do so with the intention of freeing ourselves from the tight grip of  
heteronormative thinking or, rather, the belief that all in the world are  
heterosexual unless s/he or they disclose otherwise (Black Lives Matter, “Guiding  
Principles”).

-affirming ne

For Black Lives Matter, these efforts go beyond highlighting how queer and trans folks are a part of our communities, but rather function as a way of putting trans issues at the center of their work. In an interview, Patrisse Cullors highlighted that despite some of Black Lives Matter’s work with the Trans Women of Color Collective (TWOCC), not doing enough for trans lives was one of the network’s biggest failures. With seven black trans-women killed within the first two months of 2017 (Michaels, “Members of

Congress Urge Sessions to Investigate Violence Against Trans People”), BLM NYC, the Black Youth Project 100, and TWOCC organized a rally in Brooklyn entitled “Not One More” (Cullors, “Black Lives Matter/Black Life Matters et al.). In doing so, Black Lives Matter recognizes that in order to challenge these structural sites of violence, we also need to call into question the compulsory heteronormative logics that they rely upon. This type of framework also allows for the building of different types of alliances, which looks not just at racialization but how different bodies are positioned in relation to the state (Cohen). In an interview Cathy Cohen argued that BLM’s effort to affirm the importance of queer bodies and “[center] cis and trans women and lesbians and gay men as members and leaders of our communities” is something that is “new and significant” (Cohen). These efforts both function as a way of queering marginalized bodies and the traditional scope of black liberation efforts.

We can also look to José Esteban Muñoz’s discussion of disidentification to help us situate how the organization’s project of centering the needs and leadership of black women, queer, and trans folks, and in turn queering our understanding of marginalized bodies, serves as a site of resistance to the very neoliberal structures that enabled the network’s creation. Muñoz defines disidentification as a “survival strategy that works both within and outside the dominant public sphere simultaneously” (5), where minoritarian subjects are able to engage in a form of politics that allows them to identify with dominant logics while simultaneously “not opting to assimilate within such structures”(8). As a neoliberal formation, the Black Lives Matter network both operates within, and in turn identifies with, the logics of neoliberalism by calling attention to and

aligning with the historical disavowal of black subject hood. This form of adherence takes the shape of a vision of “unapologetic blackness” (Black Lives Matter, “Guiding Principles” which recognizes the ways in which black subjects have historically been constructed through sites of systematic oppression, and uses that space of vulnerability to call attention to the value of black life. As such, I find Munoz’s analytic of disidentification useful, in that just as the workings of capital cannot relegate black subjects to a sites of complete erasure, which in turn allows them to have a queer temporal relationship to capital (see previous chapter), the Black Lives Matter Network “capitalizes” upon these sites of marginalization to in turn change the scope of black liberation efforts, and neoliberal life within itself, by queering the notion of what bodies are both affirmed and centered in our everyday imaginaries. It is this re-imagination of life, and in turn black subjectivity, that I recognize as a “disidentificatory” practice. Munoz advocates, “a disidentificatory subject seeks to hold on to this object and invest it with new life” (14). Thus, by calling attention to the workings of neoliberalism, and seeking to counter its reliance upon the disposal of minoritized subjects, BLM seeks to puts these subjects at the center, and in turn re-define our understandings of life.

However, I would like to turn now to an examination of this question of “life” within a different context. In the previous chapter I looked notions of “life” (and death) within the realms of (necro) biopolitics. Although BLM’s call to re-imagine black life is very much rooted in an analysis of the material consequences of systematic and ideological disposability, this level of relegation is foregrounded in a broader question of citizenship. We can look to Egbert Martina and his discussion on black subjectivity and

citizenship, to help us understand how black (social) death is constituted through state-sanctioned structures of belonging. Martina states, “The ontological status of the Black as anti-human inaugurated the Black subject not as *citizen* but as ‘anti-citizen’, that is ‘someone both profoundly excluded and, at the same time, made to hold still as an icon of the risk posed by dangerous ‘others’” (Martina, “On Violence, Power, and Citizenship”). In this way, legacies of black dehumanization cannot be separated from projects of citizenship.

However, I would like to call attention to Martina’s illustration of the notion of risk, in that black subjects were not simply rendered as “anti-human”, rather these legacies of de-valuation operate along affective lines. In other words, in order to be constructed as “anti-citizen”, black subjecthood had to be constituted as threatening, something that posed a “risk” to others, or was “dangerous” in its very essence. As Judith Butler highlighted in her discussion of the Rodney King case, “The visual field is not neutral to the question of race, it is itself a racial formation, an episteme, hegemonic, and forceful.” (Butler, qtd. in Puar 183). Or as Jasbir Puar illustrates in her examination of Butler’s notion of “inverted projections of white paranoia”, “...the black male body [is] always already the site of violence and a source of danger to whites and model minorities...” (183). As such, Puar’s analysis of Butler helps us parse out how these logics operate affectively, for despite how these events are happening within “visual fields”, the perception of a “threat”, and in turn the coinciding emotions of fear, function within the realms of affect. Sara Ahmed defines these affective orientations, which take place on the body, as sites of “stickiness”(Ahmed qtd. in Puar 188). In the case of

‘violent black male body’, “stickiness” positions the body as a “body that is already known discursively as a body to fear” (Puar 188).

However, if we look back to Martina’s discussion, this projection of fear works in tandem with the ways in which subjects are valued and permitted access to protections of citizenship. For example, in an interview on the direction of Black Lives Matter, Garza engages with this question of citizenship to illuminate how these notions are saturated with something more than the signification of systematic material, and ideological based privileges. Garza states,

We really need to be talking about this question of citizenship which I think is huge. I feel like what Black folks are fighting for in this moment, right, is what we’ve been fighting for the whole time which isn’t citizenship, like papers, but it’s citizenship like dignity (Garza qtd. in Schmidt et al.)

As Garza articulates, the call for the affirmation and protection of black life is structurally imbricated within the social fabrics of national belonging, for black subjects have historically been denied the full rights and benefits of citizenship. However, her focus on the notion of “dignity” calls attention to the ways in which citizenship functions as structure of valuation. In this way, we can in turn situate neoliberalism’s structure, which requires the simultaneous valuation and disavowal of certain (minoritized) subjects, as engaging in both a project of citizenship, and operating along affective lines.

In her reading of Audre Lorde’s discussions of affect, Grace Hong argues that Lorde advocates that this (neoliberal) privileging of certain subjects over others can only happen through affect. “For Lorde, feelings are not individual nor free from coercion but

rather legislated and enforced as a material structure through which the relation of violence marked by 'difference' is hidden, and devaluation is legitimated" (Hong 75). Additionally, Hong highlights that for Lorde, "fear and loathing" function as "the only legitimated affective response to the relation between valued and devalued subjects" (75). As such fear and loathing function as "technologies of abandonment". In this way, the "stickiness" of the black (male) body, which renders black subjectivity as something that is violent and to be feared, is operating within a "material structure". I like Hong, recognize this material structure of disavowal, and the ways in which it both allocates and denies the material and ideological conditions of citizenship—rather, life for that matter—, as neoliberalism. In doing so, we can in turn situate neoliberalism and its coinciding cultural projects as operating along political, economic, and affective lines.

As opposed to denying these affective responses, Lorde advocates an engagement with these affective conditions. Hong highlights that in Lorde's famous essay, "*Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power*", Lorde puts forth the notion of the "erotic" as a form of power to challenge these material and ideological structures (Hong 78). However, for Lorde the erotic is not confined to the realms of sexuality, but rather serves as a mode of engagement with feeling to challenge neoliberal "technologies of abandonment". Hong asserts, "Embracing the erotic, then, is to take on the terrifying prospect of aligning oneself with that which the 'profit economy' mobilizes to destroy, and somehow creating connection and community out of the act of rendering oneself open to precarity and devastation" (Hong 79). In this way, by existing as a site of resistance to neoliberalism, Black Lives Matter not only functions to counter neoliberal structures of abandonment,

but does so with an engagement of Lorde's conception of the "erotic". In an interview on the meaning of the Black Lives Matter movement, Alicia Garza highlights how BLM both re-imagines and utilizes Lorde's conception of the "erotic". Garza advocates,

Our movement is grounded in love... We believe in a world where we keep each other safe, because our needs are met. Because we no longer have to struggle to be heard or fight to make ends meet. This movement has never trained anyone to kill anyone else. But our U.S. military does do that. (Roberts)

Garza's discussion illustrates that like Lorde, Black Lives Matter also recognizes the necessity to engage with the power of the erotic, and for BLM that power is "love". The deployment of love operates in direct opposition to state-sanctioned apparatuses of "fear and loathing", which operates as a (necro)biopolitical regime of life that enables the murder and de-valuation of minoritized life, in both the national and global context. In doing so, BLM's deployment of "love" serves as a challenge to the very neoliberal structures that require their expendability and erasure.

However, as Hong highlights, like the power of the "erotic", which "aligns itself" with structures of disavowal, love is constituted both by and through the workings of neoliberalism. If we look back to my discussion of how BLM, as a byproduct and site of resistance to neoliberalism, functions as a disidentificatory practice, I would like to also situate the deployment of the power of "love" as a part of that practice of disidentification. As Hong highlights, "If contemporary neoliberal capitalism... requires a set of existentially surplus people, the mechanism through which populations are rendered surplus... is through the mobilization of terror and loathing in order to legitimate

their disposability” (Hong 76). In this way, challenging neoliberal structures in its very nature requires for those sites of resistance to also operate along affective lines. Thus, if fear and loathing serve as the foundations of neoliberal technologies of abandonment, which both mask and enable the disavowal of black life, love, and Black Lives Matter as a “love movement”, operates as a site of disidentification and resistance to those very structures of power.

For Black Lives Matter, this deployment of love takes the shape of a call to affirm black life through “unapologetic blackness”, and by building a network that seeks to dismantle those structures of disavowal. For example, in collaboration with the broader Movement for Black Lives, BLM and several other black racial justice organizations created and released a list of demands—as well as forty recommendations on how to address them—entitled, “A Vision for Black Lives: Policy Demands for Black Power, Freedom and Justice”. This policy agenda was organized around six policy platforms: End the War on Black People, Reparations, Invest-Divest, Economic Justice, Common Control, and Political Power (The Movement for Black Lives, “A Vision for Black Lives: Policy Demands for Black Power, Freedom and Justice”). This agenda also seeks to locate historical sites of neoliberal haunting by building upon the legacies of black liberation efforts. The statement reads,

...this agenda continues the legacy of our ancestors who pushed for reparations, Black self-determination and community control; and also propels new iterations of movements such as efforts for reproductive justice, holistic healing and reconciliation, and ending violence against Black cis, queer, and trans people (The Movement for Black Lives, “A Vision for Black Lives: Policy Demands for Black Power, Freedom and Justice”).

As such, I would like to return to Avery Gordon's discussion of "haunting", which helped us contextualize the ways in which systematic structures like neoliberalism are haunted by their sites of exclusion and erasure. Doing so allows us to situate the Movement for Black Lives' vision statement, and in turn the organization's desire to build upon the legacies of Black Power, as an effort to call these sites of haunting into question and demand accountability. In her discussion, Gordon asks "how can we be accountable to people who have seemingly not counted in the historical and public record?" (Gordon 186). For Black Lives Matter, and the broader Movement for Black Life, one aspect of this demand for accountability is the provision of reparations.

Although the vision statement addresses several policy areas, I will be focusing on the request for reparations as a way to highlight how this measure embodies the affective power of love, and its coinciding effort to challenge neoliberal abandonment. The list for reparations included reparations for the extraction and exploitation of black communities, systematic denial of access to education, cultural and economic appropriation, and for the lasting impacts of slavery (The Movement for Black Lives, "Reparations"). In this way, just as Lorde highlighted that affect is grounded in "material structures", the call for reparations in itself functions as a material manifestation of the movement's deployment of love. As such, if we recognize "love" as the affective embodiment of the affirmation of black life, then reparations serve as the materialization of that power by challenging the ways in which neoliberal technologies of abandonment are institutionalized in our everyday cultural, economic, and political structures. In this

way, we can liken the call for reparations as an effort to unmask the ways in which neoliberal economic and cultural projects—like social welfare policies and law and order programs— both operate along hierarchical lines of difference, and allows for the renunciation of black life in all of its forms—past, present, and future.

However, as an affirmation of black life, the modality of love also functions as a politics of refusal, and in turn calls for the re-imagination of what a black future can look like. As Tanya Lucia Bernard, the Arts and Culture Director for Black Lives Matter, highlights, “We are committed to remembering, celebrating, and learning from our history, but also imagining our future. Black people are more than what happened to us.” (Black Lives Matter, “Black Futures Month”). An example of this effort to re-imagine is Black Lives Matter’s “Black Futures Month” campaign Black Lives Matter, “Black Futures Month”). As a counter to February being dubbed as “Black History Month”, for the past two years Black Lives Matter has challenged this hallmarked month, which in turn serves as a way to contest the notion of black subjectivity as being something that is situated in the past or socially dead, by re-naming February as “Black Futures Month”. During the month of February, the campaign features different artists every day, and in turn provides the space for the black community to counter the realms of state violence and dream of what a future beyond the realms of state-sanctioned disavowal can look like. Opal Tometi states, “It is directly connected to the fight to end state-sanctioned violence against Black people and is a visual manifestation of what Black liberation looks like.” Black Lives Matter, “Black Futures Month”). Thus, when we return to Gordon’s question of “how can we be accountable to people who have seemingly not counted in

the historical and public record?”, for Black Lives Matter, this mode of accountability, and its coinciding deployment of love as an affective mechanism of resistance, is centered in a politics of refusal. As such, in an effort to counter black disavowal and call attention to neoliberalism and its structural manifestations of violence, Black Lives Matter functions as a movement that refuses to accept the devaluation of black life, and in turn that the capacity to both imagine and create a black future beyond the neoliberal paradigm is anything but possible.

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