

City University of New York (CUNY)

## CUNY Academic Works

---

All Dissertations, Theses, and Capstone  
Projects

Dissertations, Theses, and Capstone Projects

---

6-2020

### **And Ain't I a Man: An Examination of Violence Against African-American Men by Caucasian Men in the United States**

Bryan L. Greene

*The Graduate Center, City University of New York*

[How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!](#)

More information about this work at: [https://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc\\_etds/3755](https://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc_etds/3755)

Discover additional works at: <https://academicworks.cuny.edu>

---

This work is made publicly available by the City University of New York (CUNY).  
Contact: [AcademicWorks@cuny.edu](mailto:AcademicWorks@cuny.edu)

AND AIN'T I A MAN: AN EXAMINATION OF VIOLENCE  
AGAINST AFRICAN-AMERICAN MEN BY CAUCASIAN  
MEN IN THE UNITED STATES

by

BRYAN LADSON GREENE

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

2020

© 2020

BRYAN LADSON  
GREENE

All Rights Reserved

And Ain't I a Man: An Examination of Violence Against African-  
American Men by Caucasian Men in the United States

by

Bryan Ladson Greene

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal  
Studies in satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

---

Date

---

David Halle

Thesis Advisor

---

Date

---

Elizabeth Macaulay-Lewis

Executive Officer

## ABSTRACT

And Ain't I a Man: An Examination of Violence Against African-  
American Men by Caucasian Men in the United States

by

Bryan Ladson Greene

Advisor: David Halle

Various scholars, particularly feminist scholars of color, have examined the experiences of women in the realm of violence perpetrated by men, particularly Caucasian/white men against women of color. Critical Race Theory has proven beneficial to discussing violence perpetrated by Caucasian men in the United States against various communities of color broadly. Using these two premises, this thesis seeks to bring into the conversation the subjugation of men of color by white men. By looking at classical theories concerning the dualities that people of color encounter and struggle with along with womanist theories of feminism, this thesis seeks to spark a conversation about how men of color, particularly African-American/Black men, are victims of violence like women of color. Particularly, this thesis will seek to support the idea that Caucasian American men are prone to exert violence against African-American men historically, contemporaneously and that in the hierarchy of American society, Caucasian Males in America are more like “perpetrators” and African-American Men are their most victims. This thesis nowhere negates the rampant perpetration of violence that men of color display against women of color. Rather, this article seeks to elicit intersectional concepts on the subject matter. The

use of auto-ethnography contributes to this discussion by highlighting potential instances of violence by a white man against a young black man. The concept of a Hierarchy of Violence will be introduced in this thesis to support my claim. This thesis seeks to elicit a conversation about black men in general and how their lived experiences can be defined in race theories and feminist circles. There is a nuance and a void that is not really discussed that this thesis seeks to fill.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many thanks to my thesis advisor Dr. David Halle who literally agreed to assist me with this project in a pinch. Also special thanks to Dr. Jean Halley who was and still is a major cheerleader for my ideas. Finally, thank you so much to my family and friends for their indulgence with this project. Many delays occurred in the construction of this project, but their encouragement finally got me over the finish line.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### Chapter 1

1.1 My Own Mortality

1.2 Synopsis of Thesis

1.3 Definitions

### Chapter 2

2.1 A Hierarchy of Violence

2.2 A Brief History of Violence Against African-American Men in the United States

2.3 Critical Race Theory and its Relevance Here

### Chapter 3

3.1 A Feminist Approach to Violence Against African-American Men

Conclusions

References

Figures

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1-A Hierarchy of Violence

Figure 2-Images of Lynch Mobs in the United States

Figure 3-Postcard Depicting a Lynching

## CHAPTER 1

### 1.1 My Own Mortality

I would posit that in most African-American households in the United States, there are two separate versions of what I will refer to as “the talk.” The first version of “the talk” is the normal version of the “where do babies come from” talk and then there is the other “talk” that has real life or death consequences. The first version of the talk I do not remember much of but the second version of “the talk” I remember vividly. It was a warmer day in November 2000. I had just recently got my driver’s license and I was driving myself back and forth to school at that point. That night I got home from marching band practice and I went upstairs to my room to try and get some last-minute homework done for school the next day. My Dad comes to my room and tells me to come downstairs to the kitchen table. Both my Mom and Dad were sitting at the table and I was taken aback because whenever both of my parents wanted to talk either me or my brothers at the same time something bad was going to be said or some type of punishment would be imminent.

My Dad did most of the talking. “Bryan, you’re driving now and me and your Mom need to let you know what you need to do if you are ever pulled over by the police, especially at night.” I was a little confused as to why this conversation was even happening and why this was such a big deal that both my parents had to be present to give it. My Dad kept talking before I could ask why this conversation was even happening as he was wont to do, even to this day. “Now if you get pulled over, you put BOTH of your hands on the steering wheel at 10 and 2 o’ clock. You wait and stay perfectly still with your hands on the steering wheel. Do NOT roll down your window until you see the policeman approach your car so they can see you do it. Always say Hello Officer. If they immediately ask for license and registration, you say, ‘Ok Officer, I am reaching for my glove compartment, I am turning the knob to open the glove compartment, I am reaching for my

registration.’ Once you get the registration, you then say ‘Ok Officer, I am reaching into my pocket to get my wallet, I am looking for my license. I found my license and I am handing both my license and registration to you.’” I manage to get out the words, “wait, why do I have to do all of this like this though? It sounds crazy.” My Dad said quick as a flash “it’s to keep you from getting shot by the police.” I remember myself asking him “why would he shoot me Dad?” and my Dad and Mom responded in unison “‘cause you black and a man.” Mom went on to say “you know where we live, and I don’t care what people have told you in school. You’re still a black boy and they will say that you are a threat to you and will shoot you in the head because they will think you got a weapon.”

I tried not to think about what they said because I was crazily alarmed by it and scared me in a sense. I put the conversation in the back of mind. Then, a few months later I was driving home from band practice and was pulled over by the police. I immediately flashed back to that conversation I just had with my parents and I started shaking uncontrollably. It was almost instinctively that I remembered to put my hands on the steering wheel like my Dad said. It seemed like an eternity for the police officer to come to my car. I just remember myself jumping when he finally knocked on my window when I held up my hands to show him that I was winding my window down. I remember my voice shakenly saying “Hello Officer.” I remember his pronounced belly against my window, like he really enjoyed his after-work beers. He asked me, with the most pronounced southern drawl, where I was coming from and I remember myself stuttering to say “I’m coming from band practice at school.” He asked me where I went to school and I told him my high school and he then informed me that “you know, your taillight is out in the back right?” I could not even muster a response to what he said and then he asked me for my license and registration. It was almost instinctive again for me to go back into the script that my Dad gave me

to do. At one point, I remember the Officer saying “you know you don’t have to give me a play by play of what you’re doing right?” And I told him, “this is what my parents told me to do when I get stopped by the police.” He said, “don’t worry, I just letting you know that you are gonna have to get that fixed because that can get you a ticket. “He then looked at my license and said “you’re not too far from where you live, I’m gonna let you go without a warning ticket or a ticket but get that fixed soon, ya hear?” I said thank you and he said “you drive careful now.” Once the officer pulled away, I just remember myself crying uncontrollably.

## 1.2 Synopsis of Thesis

Since the Obama administration, conversations concerning people of color, particularly African-American males and the treatment they receive from those in power have been cast in a new light. The horrific events surrounding the murders of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown and others opened a conversation in the broader lexicon of American society revealing some ugly truths. Movements like #BlackLivesMatter have challenged the notion that the United States became a “post-racial” society after the election of the first African-American President of the United States. Most African-Americans and other communities of color would tell you then and now that this idea of a “post-racial” America was farce from its inception. The election of Donald J. Trump as the current President of the United States leads credence to the fact that American society still has not come to terms with its racial animus towards communities of color, particular African-American males.

For this project, I intend to examine this reoccurring problem in what will hopefully be a unique take on the matter concerning violence against African-American men in the United States. I intend to show that violence against African-American males in many ways has been, and still is to an extent, condoned among the broader Caucasian-American society even with the advent of

the #BlackLivesMatter movement. Caucasian-American males, I would argue, are the most likely perpetrators of violence against African-Americans throughout America's history and still to this day. I would argue that Caucasian-American males are more likely than not to condone or in the least "turn a blind eye" to the violence perpetrated on African-American males. If not outright endorsing the violence over time and presently, I would argue further that Caucasian males are more likely than not to make definitive assertions in relation to violence versus trying to find a more nuanced approach to what may have transpired that made the African-American male in question susceptible to the violence enacted upon them.

I intend to examine my assertions in 4 different ways. I will first examine historical factors that support my theory that Caucasian-American males are more likely than not the main perpetrators of violence against African-American males. Founding lore and historical occurrences at the beginning of American's history supports this. One of the first individuals killed by the British was an African-American former slave named Crispus Attucks. As a former slave, he was subject to death due to his escape from his master. There was already a predisposition of violence enacted by a Caucasian/White person to be perpetrated on Attucks due to his former slave status. Crispus Attucks, as espoused in classrooms across America, was the first man to die at the hands of the British which supports my evaluation of Caucasian males' propensity to perpetrate violence against African-Americans.

Moving further on in American history, we can look at laws stemming from the Antebellum South of the United States and subsequent "Jim Crow" era. The precursor to the implementation of Jim Crow laws stems back to "black code" laws that were enacted in portions of the Southern United States before the beginning of and during the Civil War and their subsequent resurgence after Reconstruction laws were repealed federally. "By the mid-19th century, race in the popular

mind had taken on a meaning to species-level distinctions, at least for differences between blacks and whites. The ideology of separateness that this proclaimed difference implied was soon transformed into social policy. Although legal slavery ended in the United States in 1865 with the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution, the ideology of race continued as a new and major form of social differentiation in both American and British society. The black codes of the 1860s and the Jim Crow laws of the 1890s were passed in the United States to legitimize the social philosophy of racism” (Wallenfeldt 2010). Further evidence will be presented to confirm that overt racism over time will be coupled with violence against African-American males in the project. This historical analysis will be preceded by an explanation of Critical Race Theory, a theory that you will see permeated throughout this thesis. Its relevance as a concept supports my claim of the historical and contemporary claim I am attempting to make on violence against African-American Males.

Once this is accomplished, I will then examine the way feminist theories surrounding violence address violence against African American men. bell hooks and Erin Forbes are two feminist scholars of color that approach the idea of race and introduce a strain of feminism that could be described as “womanism.” This approach is mostly associated with the study of women of color in feminist research and scholarly activity. Forbes focuses on the ideas of the “ghosts” of slavery and how they have impacted people of color. Forbes discusses the idea of social death pertaining to the life of slaves in examining *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* by Linda Brent (aka Harriet Jacobs). “Social death is not an abstract concept in the history of American slavery. Whether biological or social, Jacobs shows that death was deeply embedded in black lived experience in the antebellum United States” (Forbes 2016). I would argue when discussing the conditions concerning African American men in relation to feminist theory, death and violence are

still issues of concern and permeate the daily psyche of men of color, particularly African American men. Such conditions are unique to the African-American experience and using these theories, I will further explain how feminists would view violence against African-American males at the hands of Caucasian American males.

From looking at these varied viewpoints and theories, I will describe what I call a “Hierarchy of Violence” where I point out who are the main actors of violence in American society and who are the victims. I then plan to show how Caucasian males fit into this “Hierarchy” in comparison to African-Americans. Once this hierarchy is established, I will provide evidence in articles of interest along with Critical Race Theory that will clearly show that Caucasian males are in fact more likely that not the ones to condone, act out and encourage acts of violence against African American males.

### 1.3 Definitions

For this thesis, I will be using several terms interchangeably but for the most part they will have the same meaning. I will be using “Caucasian” and “White” interchangeably but will use white more often than I will Caucasian. This could be considered problematic on its face since there are and were many descriptions for White People in official records for the United States government over time, especially when you look at census data. Painting a race of people with a broad brush is problematic but it has been done over the course of the history of America so my apologies in advance for propagating such a practice. Such methodology has been used before this and will in some cases will continue to be used. I do not condone this a normal practice but for simplicity’s sake, this tactic will be utilized for this project. This practice will be used with a slight caveat when I utilize the terms “Black” and “African-American.” There are many parts of the African and Black diaspora that need to be named and discussed in academia and in common

speech as well.

For simplicity's sake, I will be using these two terms in the same guise as I will be using the terms "Caucasian" and "White." For both racial classifications that I am using, I am focusing on their connotations in the United States which further leads to how problematic this thesis may be. Race and ethnicity as concepts have disparate meanings depending on who is writing about them. I fully recognize this problem and welcome such criticism pertaining to this omission. With this being said, the United States and its unique history on race makes it a perfect test case to examine my theories.

When discussing the term violence, I will be focusing on direct and indirect actions. Most definitions of violence center on actual physical acts but for the purpose of this project, the term will be applied to indirect actions such as verbal and emotional abuse. The threat of violence can be applied towards African-American males from a myriad of sources. The threat of violence can and has more contemporaneous has led to actions of violence against black men.

## CHAPTER 2

### 2.1 A Hierarchy of Violence

Figure 1 in this project presents a concept that I have entitled "A Hierarchy of Violence." The depiction and the placing of the different categories are rooted in a historical and contemporary view of American society. The identified groups of individuals are placed along a range from either the perpetrator of violence to the victim of violence with interconnecting lines between all the groups. The best way to explain this figure is to start from the bottom of it and work our way up.

At the very bottom, I put African-American Women and as you can see, this model has

them placed as the victim of violence. When you examine the figure, you immediately see that the other three named groups of individuals are interconnected with Black Women being victimized by all 3 groups. The modes of violence against black women in this instance are overt acts of violence against them such as sexual abuse and physical assault as well as indirect acts of violence against them. When we think of indirect acts of violence, we can think of verbal and emotional abuse by those placed further up in the figure. Actions by the male groups identified in the figure would be in most cases acts of physical violence. Historically, when it comes to overt violence perpetrated by white men in this model, the main mode of violence would be rape and sexual assault. The placement of white women in the figure serves as a more nuanced interpretation of violence. If you noticed, the placement of white women in the figure is lower than white men but higher than black men. The reason for the placement in the figure relates to the fact that indirect actions of white women have long perpetuated and instigated violence against African-American women historically in American society. The threat of losing employment or a sense of physical security was always a factor in what actions that black women could undertake during their daily lives. From here, we can move up in the figure to discuss African-American men in this hierarchy.

Much more of this thesis will be devoted to violence against African-American men by white men and how they need to be considered in discussions in feminist and historical discourse. My rationale for their placement in my diagram needs to be expounded upon at this moment. Black men were placed in the specific orientation in Figure 1 for a myriad of reasons. As you can see with the connecting lines, black men are susceptible to violence more readily than their white counterparts either male or female. In terms of direct violence, African-American males have been historically subjected to physical assault and death by those in authority or by individuals or groups of individuals that have had, and some cases still have the consent of those in authority. This thesis

will delve further into the history of lynchings and other acts of violence enacted upon black males during the Jim Crow era in the Southern region of the United States. The placement of Caucasian Women above African-American Males in the figure is done so purposefully to show how the group can indirectly cause violence against black males more readily than black women. We will mention more of the historical tropes of subjugation that black males have had to endure at the behest of white women in America but the main aspect I am wanting to state is that actions carried out by white women over America's history have more readily initiated direct violence against black males. However, it behooves me to state the obvious occurrences of direct violence by black men against black women. I would be derelict in my future analysis of feminist theories pertaining to violence against black men without stating that they are also initiators of direct and indirect violence against women too

From here, we can now discuss the placement of Caucasian American Women in the model. The group is placed in the Figure in its orientation to show that even though the group can be victimized directly, in most cases White Women are more involved in the initiation of violence either directly or indirectly. In this case, there is more of an indirect threat of violence against black men as initiated by white men because of their access to power. Historically, as the wives and mothers of white men, they would have more agency than either black men or women to initiate violence against these groups. Historically, you must consider the subjugation of these women as well even though for the advent of them being white, they still possessed more social capital than Black Women or Men could ever obtain at the time. One acute story of a white woman inciting violence against a black male involves the killing of Emmett Till. Without going into all the of the story, one white woman's claim of being "harassed" by a black male led to that black male's death by the hands of white men. Coincidentally, later on the woman in questioned recanted her account

years later but the deed had already been done and her physical fingerprints were nowhere near the body; her mere utterance of an offense led to unspeakable tragedy and sparked a conversation about race relations that still is relevant to this day.

Finally, at the very top of Figure 1 is Caucasian American Males being the main perpetrators of violence. We will see later this trend when we discuss the history of the Jim Crow south and when we discuss violence in relation to feminist theories. As you can see from the figure, White Men are perpetrators of violence either indirectly or directly against all the other groups enumerated in the figure. White men in this depiction are usually the more dominant actors in the course of American history. From manifest destiny to the slave trade to the civil rights movement it can be clear that white men in American history have been the main actors of violence against communities which were either codified in law as inferior or accepted in broader society as inferior over the course of American history. With this depiction stated, I do need to present some caveats with this spatial model I present here.

When you look at Figure 1, you have probably noticed that there are no arrows going in either direction to point out who exactly does what in the figure. This is intentionally done on purpose. The figure is supposed to depict how interconnected all these groups are to one another and how these groups can possibly enact violence upon one another. Moreover, the double arrow running along the side of the figure is meant to show how perpetrator and victim can run along a spectrum. This rationale is further supported by the placement of the groups identified in the figure. From this description of what I call “A Hierarchy of Violence,” we can now look at examples in America’s history and other contemporary events to see how this concept is supported.

## 2.2 A Brief History of Violence Against African-American Men in the United States

The precursor to the implementation of Jim Crow laws stems back to “black code” laws that were enacted in portions of the Southern United States before the beginning of and during the Civil War and their subsequent resurgence after Reconstruction laws were repealed federally. “By the mid-19th century, race in the popular mind had taken on a meaning to species-level distinctions, at least for differences between blacks and whites. The ideology of separateness that this proclaimed difference implied was soon transformed into social policy. Although legal slavery ended in the United States in 1865 with the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution, the ideology of race continued as a new and major form of social differentiation in both American and British society. The black codes of the 1860s and the Jim Crow laws of the 1890s were passed in the United States to legitimize the social philosophy of racism” (Wallenfeldt 2016:96). The laws that were passed more on the local level were further supported by the Plessy v. Ferguson decision from the US Supreme Court. “The Supreme Court decision in Plessy v. Ferguson (1896) permitted ‘separate but equal’ facilities guaranteed that the racial world view, with its elements of separateness and exaggerated difference, would continue to flourish” (2010:96). In this same reference book mentioned, simplified definitions for “black codes” and “Jim Crow” are written and provide a rudimentary understanding of the two sets of laws.

Black Codes as previously mentioned were the precursor to Jim Crow laws enacted after Reconstruction. “Enacted in 1865 and 1866, the laws were designed to replace the social controls of slavery that had been removed by the Emancipation Proclamation and the Thirteenth Amendment...though varying from state to state, the black codes were all intended to secure a steady supply of cheap labour, and all continued to assume the inferiority of freed slaves” (2010: 132-133). Jim Crow laws came to fruition based on the black codes that were enacted across the

southern portion of the United States. “Jim Crow was the name of a minstrel routine (actually Jump Jim Crow) performed beginning in 1828 by its creator Thomas Dartmouth (“Daddy”) Rice (a white man appearing in blackface) and by many imitators, including actor Joseph Jefferson (also white). The term Jim Crow came to be a derogatory epithet for African Americans and a designation for their segregated life” (2010:136).

When we look further into the policies enacted under Jim Crow, you will further see that the actions and policies put in place knowingly disenfranchise African-Americans based solely on a preconceived notion of “race.” The ideas of race and inferiority manifested themselves into the psyche of White Males during this time and to this day linger in some machination, although not as overt as it was during this time in American history. One aspect of violence that spawned from this notion of inferiority was a notion of fear. What if African-Americans realized their full potential once slavery was ended and made further pushes for their rights? This premise coincides appropriate to the history of the south in the United States right after the Civil War. Many of the policies we associated with the Jim Crow era of the 1920’s and beyond have their origins from the backlash of Reconstruction. Many federal policy makers made concessions to white southerners because they were either sympathetic to the white southerner or just reticent to stake a definitive policy stance against the laws they were enacting in the region. You can see parallels to the alienation and economic upheaval that was brought to the region. There was also a great fear of revolt from African Americans due to their newfound status as citizens, so mechanisms and machinery were put into place to keep African American subordinate to white southerners. This will be further discussed in detail, but it behooves me to mention this idea now which will spark further interest in the subject once it is explored in greater detail.

From the legacy of slavery, there was always this premise that African Americans were

not considered as citizen contemporaries of white southerners. Policies like the 3/5 Compromise left an exacerbated legacy of othering and disenfranchisement because in its very nature, such actions were meant to codify legally that African Americans were not considered full citizens and once slavery was abolished, arguments could and were made to view African Americans as others and the “enemy” because they were the embodiment of what lost the Civil War for white southerners.

One of the many aspects that made Jim Crow laws particularly inhumane was the treatment that African-American women were forced to endure. At the time in question, there was this belief among white southerners that white women, although still not considered on the same tier in society as men, were seen as virtuous and that it was the duty of white southern men to protect them from the “brutish” African American male. There was this mentality that permeated the psyche of white southerners that African American women were there for the exploitation. That is one reason why there were so many instances of rape between white men and their black women servants. We will touch on this subject a bit more in detail later but this concept needs mentioning to set the framework of the later claims of supporting Jim Crow and my intent on showing how white men have been and continue to violent towards African-Americans.

Now, we must provide some basic understanding of what Jim Crow laws were and where they were implemented. Stetson Kennedy (2011) constructed a concise guide to describe exactly what Jim Crow laws were and where they were most used. For the purpose of this essay, what we will be considering the “South” will be the old Confederacy. Most of what is considered the Confederacy starts in Virginia and goes west to Texas. The states involved for this essay will be those states who seceded from the United States to create the defunct Confederate States of America. Kennedy first describes how “race” was defined in many states under Jim Crow rule.

“Most of the American laws defining race are not to be compared with those once enforced by Nazi Germany, the latter being relatively more liberal. In the view of the Nazis, persons having less than one-fourth Jewish blood could qualify as Aryan, whereas many of the American laws specify that persons having one-eighth, one-sixteenth or ‘any ascertainable’ Negro blood are Negroes in the eyes of the law and subject to all restrictions governing the conduct of Negroes” (Kennedy 2011:47).

Meredith Roman (2012) explores this premise in her article on Russian writers visiting the United States during the 1920’s and 1930’s. “Reflective of America’s racialized space, Maiakovskii placed racism at the heart of (white) American character. He considered a true American to be the white man who identified Jews as blacks and refused to shake hands with African Americans. An ‘American,’ he clarified, is the white man who rapes African American women without penalty and lynches any black man who even dares to go near a white woman” (Roman 2012:534). Roman writes further “he left no doubt that African Americans constituted the most exploited segment of the US populace, since their poverty, injustice, and violence are more extreme than that faced by Italians, Jews, Native Americans, or other groups in capitalist America” (2012:534). This analysis is ironic for the mere fact that individuals from fascist countries saw America in the more negative light. However, the opinions made in the article do make it a source of commentary that needs to be further fleshed out.

To further support the claim of America being more racist than other regimes around the world, Stetson Kennedy (2011) states “In short, you will find much more equality on paper than in reality in the U.S.A.” (Kennedy 2011:167). Kennedy discusses many of the social and other societal interactions that have historical linkages to fascist theories. One of relatable importance stems from notion that there was this great nation that needed to be protected from this outside

force. “‘ The first essential to the success of any nation, and particularly of a democracy, is a national unity of mind’” (2011:30). This rhetoric mentioned by Kennedy was extracted from writings of the KKK but such writings have roots in fascist ideology or existed in tandem during the 1920’s and 1930’s. Kennedy further writes “Its citizens must be one people....they must have common instincts and racial and national purpose. It follows that any class, race or group which is permanently unassimilable to the spirit and purpose of the nation has no place in democracy” (2011:30). This idea of belonging to a particular group and that your particular group is the more desired group to be a part was an idea not unique to fascism. Rather, the mentality of white southerners had been engrained way before the theories of fascism took hold in places like Italy. The American construct is unique in relation to Jim Crow, but it is not a stretch to see this parallel in relation to social grouping and othering.

Kennedy’s book as previously cited mentions the idea of the virtuous white woman that needs to be protected from brutish African American men. This idea was not originated in fascist ideology as clearly identified by Kennedy. This mentality goes back to slavery and black codes laws. In relation to Jim Crow laws, Kennedy states “as you may well imagine, winking whistling or even looking in the direction of white women is fraught with mortal peril for nonwhite men....Mark Ingram, a 44-year-old Negro share-cropper of North Carolina was sentenced to two years on a chain gang on a charge of ‘assault on a female,’ all because he was said to have ‘leered’ at a white girl, Willie Jean Boswell, while passing her at 75 feet in his automobile. When Ingram dared to appeal his sentence, he was hauled into court and retried on a charge of assault with intent to rape, which could have resulted in the death penalty” (Kennedy 2011:171). Kennedy points to a situation in which the treatment of nonwhite women and the cruelty and indignity they were forced to live under. “In conducting courtroom examinations into a person’s race, one court

required the witness to remove his shoes, it having being asserted that persons of colour have a peculiar configuration of foot. Another court required a woman to bare her breasts to the jury, following testimony that the nipples of coloured women lack a pinkish pigmentation said to be found in white women only” (2011:51). Such degradation of persons was and is still commonplace when we discuss the treatment of African-Americans in the United States. For black men, this maltreatment has carried over into contemporary times. To discuss this topic, we need to start discussing how critical race theory plays into this argument of how white men are considered more violent.

### 2.3 Critical Race Theory and its Relevance Here

Critical Race Theory (CRT) was first introduced into the academic lexicon by Derrick Bell, Kimberlé Crenshaw and others who were seeking to find ways to connect all the reasons why there is still the persistence of white privilege even after the Civil Rights Movement and others made strides to “level” the playing field for African-Americans, particularly black men in the United States. Bell, when describing how critical race scholars approach their analysis, states that their “goal, in part, is to critique race, racism, and power especially as it is used to support and maintain an ideology of racism within the rule of law. They maintain that racial categories are built on the acceptance of two fundamental untruths: people can be distinguished based on phenotype (as well as physical markers) and Whites are the superior racial group and Whiteness is the norm” (Willis 2008:19). With Bell’s premise, we can basically state one definition of critical race theory that has become widely accepted. Critical Race Theory “takes a ‘hard-eyed view of racism as it is and our subordinate role in it...the struggle for freedom is,... a manifestation of our humanity which survives and grows stronger through resistance to oppression, even if that oppression is never overcome”” (2008:17).

Including CRT in this portion of the thesis leads to a further discussion of why we can view White Men in the United States as more violent. The power that has been reproduced over the history of America has allowed White Men to in some ways to be immune from actions of violence they perpetrate against not only black men, but other communities of color in the United States. Historically, you can look at the many instances of white men actively participating in violent acts against Black Men in the United States. Figures 2 and 3 contain images of lynch mobs along with the photos of men standing proudly with the corpses of dead black men.

## CHAPTER 3

### 3.1 A Feminist Approach to Violence Against African-American Men

My exposure to theories pertaining to feminism and gender stereotypes approach the topic by discussing the subject in terms of “waves,” moments of time in the development of the theories. The first wave of feminist thought focused on more of the biological differences between men and women. The premise of most of the first wave centers on the idea that men and women are inherently different. The second wave of feminism discusses the inequality and oppression of women by men premised on the advent of violence against women perpetrated by men. The second wave had more of a split between liberal feminism and radical feminism. A noticeable contribution to this split stems from the idea of standpoint theory. Nancy C.M. Hartsock (2008) analyzes the approach of other scholars like Nancy Hirschman, Catherine O’Leary and bell hooks in their interpretation of what standpoint theories are by stating “standpoint theories rely on social construction theories of human subjectivity. Moreover, her strong emphasis on the argument that standpoint theories are methodological tools which can be used to transform understanding of experience makes clearer...the basis for ‘translating’ or rather, perhaps, recognizing that the construction of a political community can (and perhaps must) be at the same time the construction

of an epistemological community” (Hartsock 2008:100). When analyzing these authors Hartstock introduces the idea that knowledge and the truth of the matter is subject to interpretation based on one’s experience. When we start discussing feminist theories, we must examine who the person is that is making the claim. We must also factor in the scholar/author’s personal experiences in coming to their conclusion, considering them to be valid and meaningful to the conversation concerning feminist theories and how they may relate to other theories that are parallel and tangential for discussion among feminist scholars.

There needs to be a conversation about the ways that men of color have relationships between women of color and vice versa. This thesis will not discuss this idea directly, but this paper will attempt to discuss how black men in particular are discussed in feminist theory. There is a bit of a stigma concerning men of color, especially black men, where shows of emotion are not only frowned upon but ridiculed from a very young age. I can remember myself as a child being more sensitive than my older brother. My younger brother, who although is high functioning, is on the autism spectrum with emotional and cognitive delays. However, still growing up we were always told that we had to be “big boys” and “be a man.”

Masculinity and this idea of being a “man” is a discussion point that needs to be further explored especially as it relates to men of color. Aaronette M. White and Tal Peretz (2009) examine this idea of manliness as it pertains to emotions. “Certain feelings and emotional displays are considered ‘masculine’ whereas others are considered ‘feminine.’ The emotional behavior in which people engage can thus be considered appropriate or inappropriate, conforming or deviant” (White et al. 2009:405). I would suggest that men of color have a uniquely complex view of emotions. In a way, I could view my own upbringing as one that definitely centered on gendered roles and norms.

Moreover, it took on a racial context as well because you could not ever be seen as the “brute” or “angry black man” even as teenagers. We were conditioned in such a way that we had to realize that our black male body was different from other male bodies. In the South, there still exists in many ways this mentality that I was exposed to by the black men in my family that not only were we subjugated by our race, but our sex as well. The old trope of not being able to look a white woman in the eye ever, the ability to never show any kind of anger in any setting due to the fact that any defiance could and some instances still would be a death sentence to this day permeates the psyche of all black men from the south especially.

Toxic masculinity is a term that is being thrown around accurately in some instances and abused in other discussions. Hegemonic masculinity, as a term, is more utilized in academic circles but both terms are useful to discuss the unique position men of color find themselves in the conversation. Mike C. Parent, Teresa D. Gobble and Aaron Rochlen (2018) provide cogent definitions for both hegemonic and toxic masculinity. “Hegemonic masculinity is a manifestation of masculinities that is characterized by the enforcement of restrictions of behavior based on gender roles that serves to reinforce power structures that favor the dominance of men” (Parent et. al. 2018:2). According to Parent, Gobble and Rochlen “toxic masculinity is characterized by the enforcement of rigid gender roles, but also involves the ‘need to aggressively compete [with others] and dominate others’...Toxic masculinity is characterized by a drive to dominate and by endorsement of misogynistic and homophobic views” (2018:2).

In relation to men of color, it is something that has not been thoroughly explored in many ways, but it is something that I have firsthand knowledge of. In some ways it has been perpetuated for generations among black men but it is such a conflicting construct to accurately describe. On one hand, we are supposed to be this impenetrable force, devoid of emotion. White and Peretz

(2010) succinctly capture this idea by stating “polarizing gender norms construct male superiority and ‘manliness’ as the ability to suppress feelings of vulnerability by not showing or talking about them” (White et. al. 2010:405). Yet our history as African-American men has been one of subjugation of violence by other men, mainly white men through the history of slavery and/or colonialism. Toxic masculinity could be considered a norm of treatment of white men towards black and other men of color due to the unique level of violence perpetrated by white men. It is a double consciousness that needs to be discussed in academia and other settings. I feel that I have personally taken on aspects of this double consciousness and other aspects I have put towards the wayside. How I view myself as a gendered body versus how I may be perceived are two things that I am still trying to fully grapple with based on my personal history and life experience.

bell hooks (1989) and Erin Forbes (2016) are two feminist scholars of color that approach the idea of race and introduce a strain of feminism that could be described as “womanism.” This approach is mostly associated with the study of women of color in feminist research and scholarly activity. Forbes focuses on the ideas of the “ghosts” of slavery and how they have impacted people of color. Forbes discusses the idea of social death pertaining to the life of slaves in examining Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl by Linda Brent (aka Harriet Jacobs). “Social death is not an abstract concept in the history of American slavery. Whether biological or social, Jacobs shows that death was deeply embedded in black lived experience in the antebellum United States” (Forbes 2016:453). I would argue when discussing the conditions concerning African American men in relation to feminist theory, death and violence are still issues of concern and permeate the daily psyche of men of color, particularly African American men. Such conditions are unique to the African-American experience and such critiques need to be discussed by African-American scholars.

bell hooks (1989) writes in Talking Back about making experiences and discussions tailored towards specific audiences that normally would not be addressed in academic settings. “At a discussion once where a question about audience was raised, I responded by saying that while I would like readers to be diverse, the audience I most wanted to address was black women, that I wanted to place us at the center. I was asked by a white woman, ‘How can you do that in a cultural context where black women are not primary book buyers and white women are the principle buyers of feminist books?’...My placement of black women at the center was not an action to exclude others but rather an invitation, a challenge to those who would hear us speak, to shift paradigms rather than appropriate, to have all readers listen to the voice of a black woman speaking a subject and not as underprivileged other” (hook 1989:15-16). However, I still pose this question in relation to feminist scholarship that hooks seeks to bring to the fore: what about black men?

At this point, we can begin to discuss violence perpetrated on black men and how this violence has led to a warped sense of “manhood” and “masculinity.” David Ikard (2014) in his book Blinded by the Whites begins a discussion on how the black male experience can be discussed in the context of feminist ideology as he analyzes some of the major themes in Toni Morrison’s Beloved. “Morrison actively resists romanticizing the complex process of healing and understanding across and within black gender lines. Her emphasis on black women’s experiences of suffering under slavery is designed not to attack black men, but rather to call attention to the ways that the discourse of black suffering is gendered male. Making black women’s unique experiences of oppression visible in this discourse allows us to see the ways that intersectionality of subjectivity plays out in cultural space and lived experience” (Ikard 2014:50). Ikard presents an interesting take on the constructs of black male existence later in this same book by stating “the

first understanding is that black men's failings as men are attributable to women being too strong and men too weak. The second understanding pits black men against white men in terms of dominance and control. As notions of normative masculinity are bound up with dominating women and weaker men, and as they extend 'to exclusive control over the economic, political, and social order,' white men—who ultimately define the terms upon which this gendered normativity rests—emerge as strong men, while black men, by comparison, emerge as weak and deviant" (2014:57).

Ikard's interpretation of black men being seen as weak and deviant leads me back to an instance that I briefly mentioned earlier in this work concerning the social norms surrounding interactions between black men and white women. I remember my grandfather telling me this story when I was in high school about how he would have to hold his head down in certain places as a child and young adult when passing a white woman on the street. My grandfather, who was lighter in skin color than myself, told me of a time when he was with his brother, who was lighter in complexion than him mistakenly bumped into a white woman on the street who said that my granduncle was trying to attack her. A mob of sorts tried to surround my granduncle and he had to literally run away in order to not be attacked or killed by lynching. Being in a public space of any kind as a black man in the era of Jim Crow was problematic in the least and flat out life threatening if placed in a situation like my grandfather was. The idea of being considered "deviant" was pervasive in relation to the conduct of black men during that timeframe. In some cases, this advent of violence being readily perpetrated on black men by white people, particularly white men, was commonplace.

Anthony Lemelle (2010) discusses the lingering occurrence of black men still during this timeframe being seen as not a full being in many of the ways that black women have been made to feel across time and in womanist theories espoused by bell hooks and Erin Forbes. "The

powerful status classes portrayed black males as subordinate in their talk, and those talking points reflected their subordination in the educational system and labor market. It meant that like women, black male bodies became to-be-possessed objects” (Lemelle 2010:51). However, the idea of the “possession” of black men can be considered under a gendered construct that still has lingering strains of problematic tropes.

Mentioned previously, there has been this idea of the black male being seen as the “brute” or this hyper masculine and dangerous being, almost beastlike and animalistic. I still remember conversations that my parents had with me and my brothers in which we were told how to move and not move in social settings. Rough housing and aggressive play in streets as kids had to be in a certain way as to not rouse suspicion from neighbors who may construe our play as “gang activity” since we were all black males. There has been this overarching trope in African-American society about assembling as a group or being in a group setting. There is an old adage use by many African Americans which my parents still use to this that states “If you see too many of us in one room, get out because something bad is going on.” The idea that a collective of black bodies being in one setting or space as a bad occurrence is still prevalent today. You can just look at coverage of such marches and protest by the Black Lives Matter movement as an example of such a maligning of the black populace in the United States. Protests are “riots” and when you see actual riots on TV by white Americans they are seen as “celebrations” and “wild parties.”

These anecdotal mentions of violence and the threats of violence mentioned so far have been presented to show that feminist scholarship that focuses in on violence cannot be just limited to just women, particularly women of color. Feminist scholarship still to this day has an overarching tenet of violence permeating through it regardless of the person who is contributing to the discussion. Black feminists, in particular, focus on violence perpetrated by men (both white

and black) towards women of color. However, although this discussion is fruitful, the discussion of violence needs to be discussed in relation to black men as well. There has been mention previously of the ways patriarchy has contributed to the victimization and subjugation of black male bodies. Gary Lemons (1997) poses, and I do as well, that just blaming the issue on patriarchy overly simplifies the issue. In other words, it is complicated. Lemons believes:

*“it has been the fear of emasculation originating in the history of black male lynching where the power of white (male) supremacy performed itself in the ritual act of castration (the violent sexual dismembering of our bodies) as a tool ‘to put/keep us in our place’ expressly because we were black and male-to ‘feminine’ us. Thus, it is the fear of feminization in the minds of many black men that has led us to over-determine our sexuality, believing the idea that our identity as men resides only in the power of our penises. Against the inhumanity of our past-we must create a place/space to make ourselves over again in our own image. It must not be one reconstructed in the very mythology which sexually demonized our bodies as the scourge of white womanhood, but rather one which frees us to be black in the most radically revolutionary manner, to be male in the most non-oppressive, anti-sexist way, to be feminist in the supportive, non-patriarchal way to be about an end to the domination, subordination and mistreatment of women exactly because they are women (Lemons 1997:1-2).*

Lemons states very clearly that acts of violence against the black body were not just limited to the women; rather, black men have a uniquely violent experience like women of color. However, we also must come to terms with the fact that black men are also perpetrators of violence against black women which complicates this theory and comparisons to feminist theories. Lemons clearly describes an idea of a double-consciousness that will now be further examined and how such a construct can be applicable to feminist theory and how black men can fit into scholarly discussion

of feminism.

Double consciousness as a theory was first developed by W.E.B. Dubois in the early 1900's in his seminal work *The Souls of Black Folk*. Jose Itzigsohn and Karida Brown (2015) succinctly define the three main "elements" of what Dubois defines as double consciousness: the veil, twoness and second sight. "The first element is the veil that separates the races-in other words, the color line. The is a constitutive structural element of racialized modernity and it also structures the way in which subjects situated in different sides of the veil see and experience their social world" (Itzigsohn et. el 2015:4). This premise of the "veil" made by Dubois and summarized by Itzigsohn and Brown directly correlates to the ideas of standpoint theory. The idea of how a person and/or polity is viewed is crucial in the understanding of how African-Americans have been viewed and are still viewed in a society. Dubois' viewpoint leads credence to the idea that who makes the argument will determine whether or not it could be seen as either more valid or not valid.

Itzigsohn and Brown summarize 'twoness' stating "twoness means that within the process of self-formation the racialized takes the position of two different worlds-the Black world, which they intersubjectively construct behind the veil, and the White world, which dehumanizes them through lack of recognition" (2015:4). There is parallel that could be made with how bell hooks (1989) examines her experiences of being ignored and/or punished by speaking her mind as child and as an academic. "Growing up in a black, working-class, father-dominated household, I experienced coercive adult male authority as more immediately threatening, as more likely to cause immediate pain than racist oppression. It was equally clear that experiencing exploitation and oppression in the home made one feel all the more powerless when encountering dominating forces outside the home" (hooks 1989:21). This duality of fear by internal and external forces can be made in relation to feminist theories and their correlations to other theories concerning

communities of color. Moreover, this provides an instance in which feminist theories can be applied to struggles that black experience.

Itzigsohn and Brown's (2015) summary of second sight states "in a world where the racialized can 'only see himself through the revelation of the other world,' this 'gift' forces the Black subject on the one hand to contend with their constant dehumanization, but, on the other hand, allows him or her to glance into the White world, creating the possibility of neutralizing the mirroring effects of the veil" (Itzigsohn et al. 2015:4-5). I find this summary and the background theory very intriguing and relatable to discussions surrounding black feminism and feminism in general. Feminism and particularly black feminists seek to have a lens into both the conditions presented by the overarching patriarchal society while in the same breath examine the conditions brought upon them by members of their own community. However, the conversation that I feel Dubois introduced years before current tenets of feminism still provides a unique viewpoint that does consider the black male body as entity subject to dehumanization on similar if not identical parameters set upon black female bodies.

Stemming from the idea of double consciousness, I propose that we would need to look at feminist theories in relation to the black male body in a multifaceted way. The previous discussion of double consciousness leads to current scholarship on the idea of intersectionality, providing the insertion of not just typical, empirical and static research in academic circles. Intersectionality provides room more interpretations of feminist theory and would provide room to discuss the violence against black men in feminist terms as well.

Samuel Ado-Poku (2001) provides a poignant account of how difficult it can be for men, particularly men of color have in discussing feminist theories and whether their criticisms would be acknowledged in overall academic discourse. "As the only male and black student, I was

confronted with many challenges. In our first class session, I was taunted by a student that I would need to alter my gender before I would be welcomed into the course. I felt that the unspoken part of her taunt was that I needed to alter my race as well in order to gain credibility as a feminist scholar. I was thus reminded of my problematic position and the ‘threat’ I posed as a black male in and an ‘outsider’ to feminism. I began to reflect on the impact my presence would make in an all- white, all-female, and women-centered course” (Ado-Poku 2001:2). This account from Ado-Poku serves as a vital depiction as to how the black male body can be felt as well in feminist scholarship. Previous mentions of violence against black male bodies in this paper deserve discussion in feminist scholarship among white and black feminist thinkers. Ado-Poku’s account leads us to discuss ideas of masculinity and whether masculinity can even be discussed in feminist theories.

Much of this paper has focused on the advent of violence against African American men and brief mentions of the term masculinity. When discussing the situation surrounding my granduncle, one portion that was not really expounded upon was the issue of this pervasive trope of a black man to be potentially a threat to a white woman, and why that was and in some ways still problematic. There have been mentions of castration and lynching which was a common practice inflicted upon black men because black males were and, in some cases, still construed as savage, almost rabid lustful creatures that are somehow impure. At this juncture, I feel as though a brief discussion on masculinity is warranted.

Anthony J. Lemelle (2010) asserts that “masculinity is not a place. Rather, it is a power relationship; Gender is a form of power” (Lemelle 2010:15). In describing power, Lemelle “agree[s] with Michel Foucault’s definition of power. He established power as not located in a territory but pervasive in human interaction” (2010:15). I would like to believe that Lemelle would

agree that power in relationship to the black male body is fraught with struggles against white male patriarchy and their historical relationship. I would pose that certain institutions facilitate and nurture this power relationship against black male bodies as they do against black female bodies.

This example I presented was one of the many instances that I felt my black male body come under potential threat just because I just happened to be in the situation I was in which for so many other races of people would be nothing to be concerned about. This experience, even though I was still teenager, still sticks with me even to this day and provides an excellent example of what it means to be a black male body that could be misconstrued as a threat. Mortality is a real threat for African American men and leads to a discussion in feminist thought where women of color especially feel victimized by power structures either institutionally or socially. Anthony Lemelle provides some insight into how the black male body is valued or not valued in the United States. “U.S. society produced Black males as a specific racialized group. This production was not merely nor most prominently physical but cultural. Society could not construct Black women in the same way. The society organized their roles in context of severe sexism. For normal males, the role expectation is to provide for a spouse and children...” (2010:81). Historically, Black males were not able to satisfy this paradigm because nuclear families could not be formed fully without the threat of being sold to different plantations. For years, I would argue, black men could not satisfy this notion of what it meant to be a “man” and when the opportunity presented itself later in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the idea became warped. This does not excuse the notion that black men are not part of the problem, but it does give some insight into the circumstances that would allow their sense of who they are as men to become cloudy. Such experiences that I describe in this paper lead me to believe that the mere threat of violence by those in power give credence to the inclusion of the black male experience into discussions involving feminist theories.

## Conclusions

The first section of this thesis is written in order to garner an acute and visceral reaction from the reader. I purposely included my lived experience in order to humanize the concepts that I would further attempt to explain in a more academic light. I provide this account in order to instill upon reader that anecdotal accounts are crucial and necessary to explore the more academic reasonings and rationales that I would expound upon after my account. At this moment, I will now summarize the major concepts of this thesis.

Before I go too in depth with my summary and conclusion, you probably noticed that I purposely did not analyze any other conditions in other countries outside of the United States. The United States, with its unique history on race relations and slavery serves as a model for unique analysis based on its sordid history. Comparative analysis on other countries in the world with similar history would be beneficial but for the sake of this exercise, the United States is uniquely rife for this form of analysis.

As I previously stated, I utilized broad terms and definitions interchangeably throughout my project. “Caucasian” and “white” along with “black” and “African-American” are overly simplified identifiers and are easy ways to categorize groups of individuals in American society. I fully stated that in the Definitions sections of my project. To reiterate, my intent was not to discount the experiences and potential stigma and marginalized life experiences that could be attached to any of these monikers of classification. I used these terms in order to facilitate an easy read and accessible grasp of the major claims and theories I attempted to proprot. Along those same lines, my definition

of the term “violence” attempted to encapsulate indirect and direct actions by individuals against other individuals. Physical violence along with verbal and emotional violence are excellent parameters that I utilized to describe how violence affects African-American males.

Using these definitions, I introduce my concept of a “Hierarchy of Violence.” When designing Figure 1, I took great pains to display my concept in such a way that would make sense by just viewing the figure. I am not sure of its efficacy, but the diagram serves a multitude of purposes. The intent of Figure 1 is to spatially examine the concept of hierarchy. Every orb on the diagram is oriented intentionally in a place on the figure. The figure attempts to illustrate where these particular groups would fall in my hierarchy. Moreover, the arrows along the side of the figure serve as a model for further evaluation because these identifiers show how violence is enacted upon African-Americans. I stated before that this thesis would not primarily focus on black women mainly because there is too much to say in relation to where I place the group on my diagram. My rationale for their placement in my diagram is a topic of discussion for another time but one that I am not ignoring by any means. My primary focus for including black women in the model was to show the relation that black men have in relation to violence and whether they could be seen as perpetrators of violence as well. Feminist scholarship on the subject shows that they in fact are culpable in violent acts but I wanted to visually display how black men can fall victim to violence as well. From Figure 1, I then went into a historical analysis of violence against black men in the United States.

I decided to not fully explore slavery and the multitude of ways that the practice

supported my “Hierarchy of Violence” theory because in many ways, the power dynamics and model were plainly explicable. There was no in-depth analysis needed to prove that black men were susceptible to violence by white men in the United States. Rather, I decided to briefly touch upon the history of pre-Reconstruction laws that were enacted. These laws which would become known as “Black Code” laws codified a system of domestic terrorism against black American with deadly consequences to black men at the time. Reconstruction was an attempt to rectify and abolish these laws but due to changes in presidential administrations and lax enforcement of reconstruction laws, “Jim Crow” regimes across the southern United States were allowed to flourish. Jim Crow laws allowed for the abhorrent treatment of black Americans, with unique cruelty towards black men during the time.

Figures 2 and 3 vividly illustrate how violence became the norm during that time. Figure 3 is the most poignant and horrifying. This is a post card from the lynching and burning of an African-American man named Jesse Washington. The person who sent the card is only identified as “Joe” who apparently sent the card to at least one if not both of his parents. The back of the postcard reads “This the barbeque we had last night. My picture is to the left with a cross over it” (MacRae 2014:1). Such grotesque imagery was normalized in many parts of the United States and from viewing the figure, you see that there is a sense of ease, if not joy across “Joe’s” face. The inclusion of these figures further supports the normalization of violence of white men towards black men in the United States. “Joe” was not fazed by what he saw; he reveled in it and made light of the inhumanity. There are images upon images in archives that support my claim that

historically, white men in the United States have been preconditioned and have been prone to racial violence.

Moreover, many other countries during the height of Jim Crow would point out the hypocrisy of the United States when it would try to say how other countries would infringe upon the rights of its own citizens. I briefly touched upon such occurrences in Chapter 2.2 of the thesis. The United States has always prided itself, even to this day, on being the moral standard bearer for the world while fostering a mentality of exceptionalism. Being called to task for it at the height of Jim Crow made their claims somewhat awkward at the moment and still that awkwardness can be seen when people talk about issues of police brutality and racial disparities. This thesis did not address this in the greatest of detail, but it does serve as another point of discourse to be discussed.

I took great pains to discuss indirect violence against African-American males by the hands of Caucasian women because broad discourse on the subject of racial violence diminishes the affects that mere hearsay along with uncorroborated accusations can put black men in America in violent situations. Many people recount the story of Emmett Till to illustrate this threat of violence initiated by the complaint of a white woman. However, I purposely chose not to speak on this particular tragedy but Till's case was not the only such occurrence of indirect violence against African-American men. Stetson Kennedy's work chronicled multiple instances of indirect violence against black men at the hands of white women in America and why such placement in my "Hierarchy of Violence" figure is worth further discussion. From here though, I took another historical and yet contemporary way to analyze the concept of violence by utilizing Critical Race Theory.

I used the concepts of Critical Race Theory (CRT) mainly as a segue of sorts to my discussion on feminist theory and how they can relate to the study of violence against African-American men. The crux CRT concepts relies heavily on power relationships and notions of inferiority and superiority. Violence to its core is an idea that relies heavily on power dynamics: who has the power, what exactly is that said power and how people use said power to achieve their particular aims. CRT roots as a prevailing theory stem from the post Civil Rights Movement in American where conditions were changed on paper to equalize the playing field but not in actuality. CRT was very useful to show that there was and still is a long history of subjugation of black men particularly by white men in the United States and that in many ways, such indignities have been institutionalized across the board. From here, I moved to an analysis of violence between two groups of men with a feminist perspective.

Previously, most of my exposure to feminist theories involved the actions of men and their relationship to women. Primarily, much of the literature that I read on the subject centered around violence and how violence was enacted upon women by the hands of men. I briefly covered some of the history of feminist theory and the various waves in the discourse. One idea that I feel related to my “Hierarchy of Violence” theory was the standpoint theory which I described when I initially approached feminism and its relation to violence against African-American males. This concept was a springboard of sorts to the feminist concepts of womanism and its relation to the experiences of African-American men. Before I went into deeper discussions of womanism, I devoted some energy to the discussion of masculinity and how its related to the experiences of black men in the United

States. I presented the idea that if feminist theorists were wanting to have conversations about gendered violence, the conversation should include the lived experiences of black men in the United States. As I stated before and shown in Figure 1, black men on the Hierarchy of Violence are the perpetrator and the victim of violence under a sliding scale. Since many feminist theories revolve around violence, how could you not add black men into the discourse? With this question in mind, I proceeded to discuss masculinity briefly and how it can be attributed to violence against black men in the United States.

What I attempted to show in this portion on masculinity in Chapter 3.1 was how masculinity as a concept can be linked to theories of power and power relations within my “Hierarchy” model. There is a major conflict between tropes of what it means to be a “man” and what it means to be a “black man” in the United States. Tropes of being considered the aggressor, the brute persist in broader historical analysis of African-American men and men in general. This label of toxic masculinity I briefly utilize in support of my claim pertaining to violence against black men at the hands of white men. From this discussion on masculinity, I move on into the crux of my argument in the “Hierarchy of Violence” when I discuss womanism.

bell hooks and Erin Forbes, two black feminist scholars, describe in detail this new theory of feminism which correlates perfectly with my “Hierarchy of Violence” theory. Womanism essentially puts black women at the bottom of the pile in relation to power dynamics and shows that black women in particular are the most susceptible to violence at the hands of white men historically and in some cases contemporarily. Forbes and hooks broader works clearly show that if we cannot have a conversation the violent experiences

of women of color in the United States in feminist thought, we could not have a clear and comprehensive discussion on modern feminism. From these two women scholars, I go further to explain how male scholars of color have approached the idea of violence and its relation to black men in the United States.

I anecdotally mention the Black Lives Matter movement among other to illustrate how violence is currently being enacted upon African-American men in the United States in order to discuss how scholars such as Gary Lemons discussed violence against African-American men. I used many of Lemons example to show how violent acts against black men in the United States can be comparable when discussing womanist theories on violence. In Chapter 2.2, I painstakingly discussed actions like lynching which was the ultimate form of violence enacted upon black men for centuries in the United States. Moreover, Lemons take on the subject leads to a discussion of emasculation of black men, particularly when you would look at the various forms of torture and degradation to the bodies of black men that were lynched.

From Lemon's perspective, I attempted to draw parallels to W.E.B. Dubois and his idea of double-consciousness to analyze a new take on standpoint theory. Such analysis proved beneficial to look at how feminist theories could be applicable to the lived experiences of black men in the United States. Power relations are a constant conversation in feminist discourse and when you examine ideas about womanism, Dubois' analysis of the "veil" and double consciousness is pertinent to examining violence. I discuss the concept of fear and where that plays in power relations between African-American men and broader American society. My discussion on "twoness" is quite relevant because when

you speak on such issues, you begin to ponder how black men in the United States are able to reconcile their lot in life in my hierarchy as being the victim and the perpetrator potentially. From here, I try to address the notion that black men in the United States are victims of broader patriarchy as well, particularly at the hands of Caucasian men in the United States. I also briefly touch upon how black male scholars reconcile their position in this patriarchal system as being both victim and potential perpetrator. I posit that there is and will continue to be this conflict of sorts because it begs the question as to how you can analyze both of your positions in my model and in the discourse of violence against men.

Towards the end of Chapter 3.1, I begin to discuss how my own experience relates to this broader discussion on masculinity and its relation to my “Hierarchy of Violence” theory. I address my own personal feelings of worth based on family accounts and my own experience that I mentioned in Chapter 1.1. My lived experience in that moment of terror personalizes many of the broad theories that I attempted discuss in my “Hierarchy of Violence” model. These discussions are fruitful to now try and address what the overall purpose of this project was.

In the abstract for this thesis, I clearly stated that this piece would serve as a template for a conversation: it is not a complete theory but rather a skeletal model for further discussion. However, I feel that it is necessary to discuss why this model and conceptualization is warranted in this time now more than ever. Noel Cazenave (2018) is a racism scholar at the University of Connecticut that does not full on address the issues that I raised and my “Hierarchy of Violence” model. Dr. Cazenave recently published his

work *Killing African-Americans* where he speaks on the concept of violence in such a way that could be visualized by my model. Cazenave states “racial oppression is, indeed, a strange animal. It is a shape-shifter that not only survives but thrives through its ability to take different forms as the need arrives. It can be highly visible as it lets out a frightening lion-like roar, as it did during American slavery. It can trample its victims beneath its hooves like a rumbling herd of wildebeest, as it did during this nation’s deadly white race riots. Or it can be as quiet and stealthy as a mouse, as systematic racism usually works in the United States today. But no matter how it manifests itself, there is one enduring mechanism that remains at its core: violence” (Cazenave 2018:79-80). Cazenave’s argument supports all the theories that I attempted to show how Caucasian Men in the United States have been shown to be more violent over the course of American history. Between the feminist analysis, the historical analysis and my “Hierarchy” theory, the recurring theme of all of these approaches is violence.

The violence that I speak about in my model attempts to provide a visual aid of the violence that permeates American society. Cazenave does take a different but relatable point in relation to masculinity and how it relates to my theory on violence but how it relates to violence. He discusses racialized hyper masculinity which touches on the “individual’s notion of what it means to be ‘a man’ are not reinvented by each European American boy as he works his way into adolescence and manhood. Instead, he is socialized into such heavily scripted roles by attitudes, emotions, and norms that existed with the larger society long before he was born” (2010: 221). Cazenave’s argument is another, yet more precise version of the myriad of concepts that I attempted to discuss in my thesis on

the propensity of white males in the United States being more violent. In a way, the actions are innate and unfortunately, many of these principles and interactions will persist unless there is a realization of what actions have occurred. My intent for this thesis was to put to paper a concept that needs to be further explained after this. My thesis will hopefully spark a conversation on this matter further.

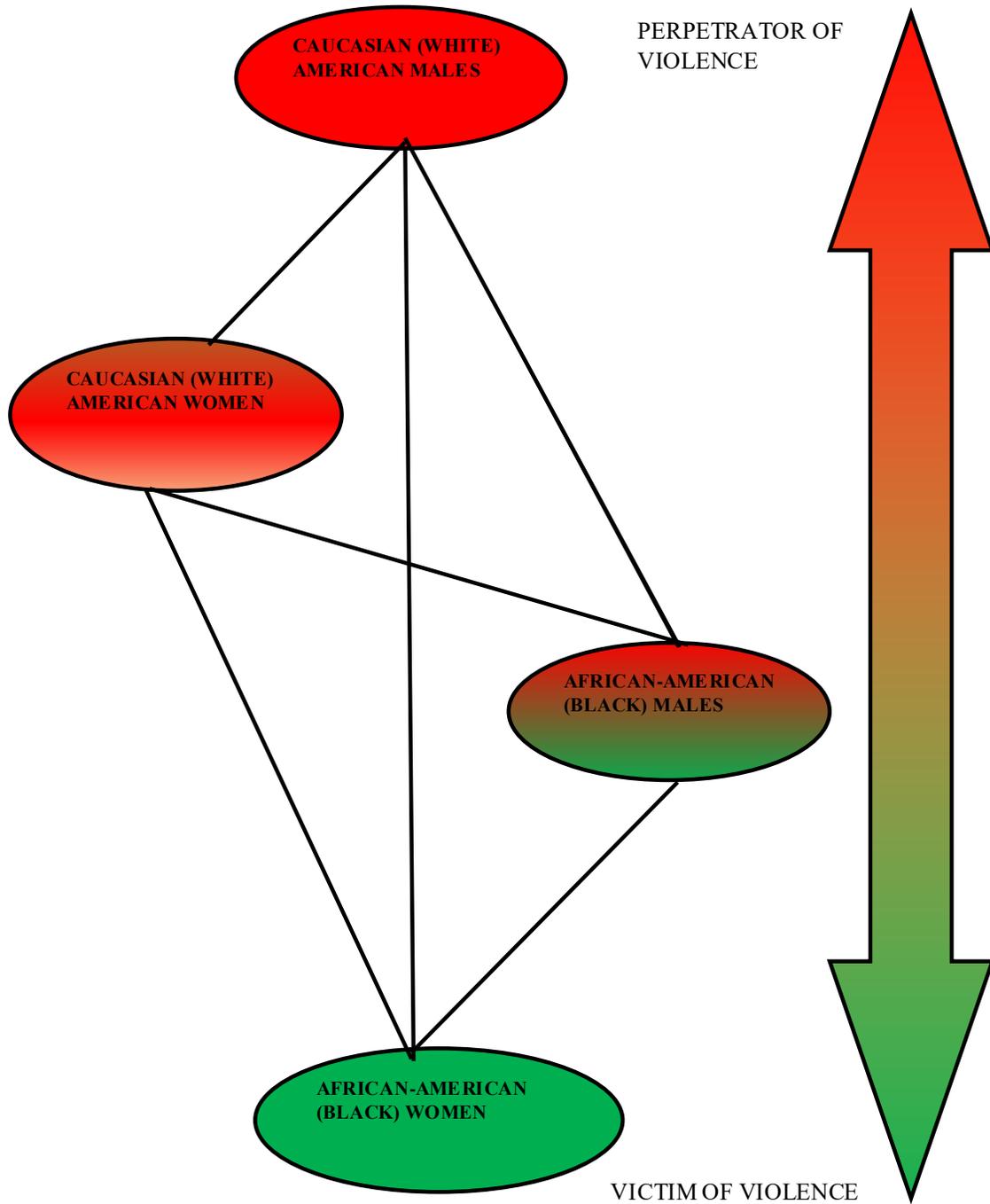


Figure 1-A Hierarchy of Violence

By Author

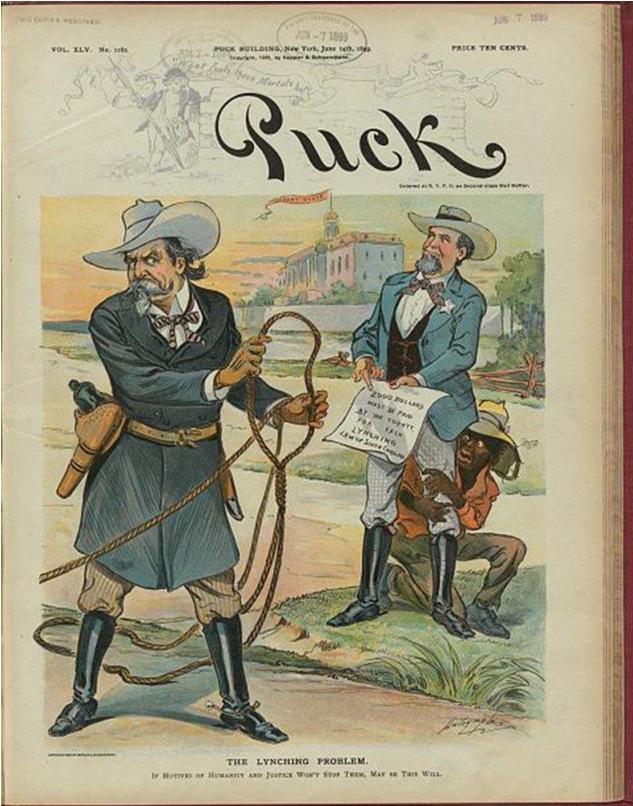


Figure 2-Images of Lynch Mobs in the United States  
Anon. n.d. "Lynching in America." PBS. Retrieved January 10, 2020  
(<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/emmett-lynching-america/>).

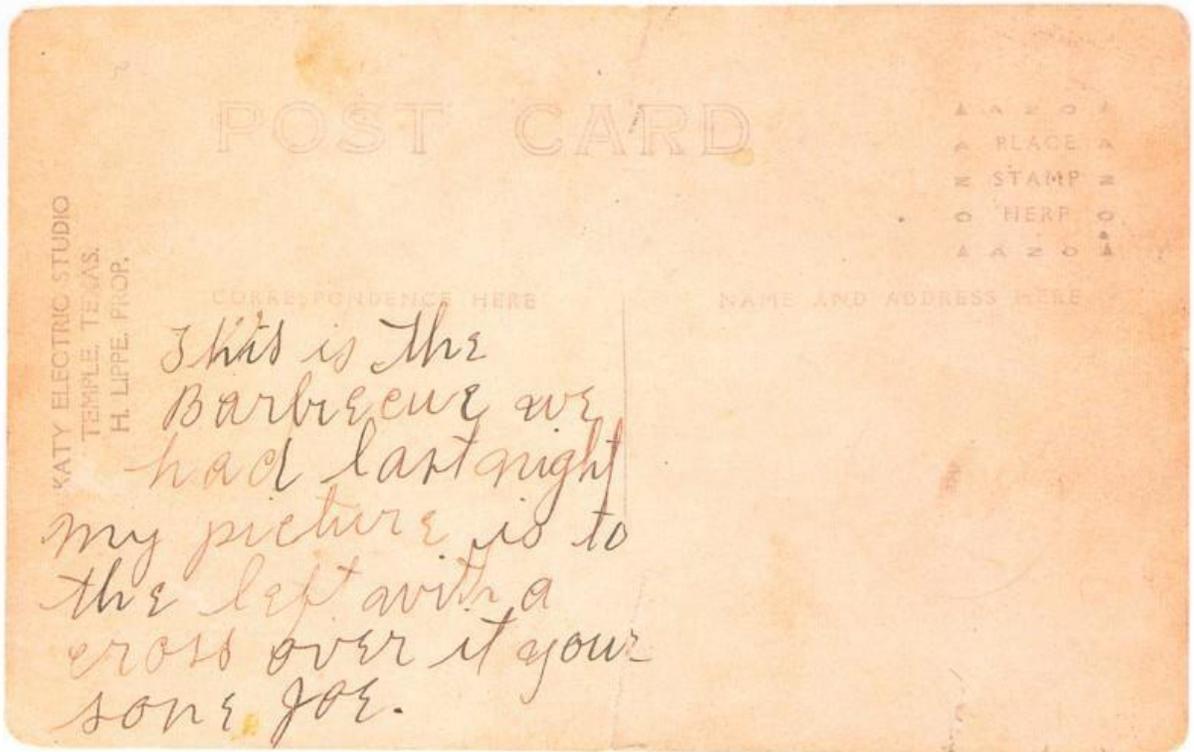


Figure 3-Postcard of a Lynching

MacRae, Meghan. 2014. "NSFW: American Terrorism... Lynching Postcards." *CVLT Nation*.

Retrieved April 27, 2020 (<https://cvltnation.com/nsfw-american-terrorism-lynching-postcards/>)

## REFERENCES

Ado-Poku, Samuel. (2001). Envisioning (Black) Male Feminism: A cross-cultural perspective.

*Journal of Gender Studies* 10(2), 157-167. Retrieved August 29, 2019

(<http://web.b.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.gc.cuny/ehost/details/detail>)

Anon. n.d. "America's Black Holocaust Museum." *Americas Black Holocaust Museum One*

*Hundred Years of Jim Crow Category*. Retrieved January 10, 2020

(<https://abhmuseum.org/category/galleries/one-hundred-years-of-jim-crow/>).

Anon. n.d. "Lynching in America." *PBS*. Retrieved January 10, 2020

(<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/emmett-lynching-america/>).

Bowler, Mary, Randy E. Ilg, Stephen Miller, Ed Robinson, and Anne Polivka. (2003).

"*Revisions to the Current Population Survey Effective in January 2003.*" Retrieved

December 12, 2019 (<https://www.bls.gov/cps/rvcps03.pdf>).

Cazenave, Noel A. (2018). *Killing African Americans: Police and Vigilante Violence as a Racial*

*Control Mechanism*. New York, NY: Routledge, an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group.

Foley, Barbara. (2010). A Dramatic Picture of Woman from Feudalism to Fascism: Richard

Wright's "Black Hope." *Obsidian: Literature in the African Diaspora*. 11(2), 43-54

Forbes, Erin E. (2016). Do Black Ghosts Matter?: Harriet Jacobs' Spiritualism. (2016). *ESQ:*

*A Journal of Nineteenth-Century American Literature and Culture*, 62(3), 443-479.

Hartsock, Nancy C.M. (2008). Standpoint Theories for the Next Century. *Women & Politics* 18(3), 93-101

hooks, bell. (1989). *Talking Back: Thinking Feminism, Thinking Black*. Boston: South End Press.

Ikard, David H. (2013) *Blinded by the Whites: Why Race Still Matters in 21<sup>st</sup> Century America*.  
Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Itzigsohn, Jose and Karida Brown. (2015). Sociology and the Theory of Double Consciousness:  
W.E.B. Dubois's Phenomenology of Racialized Subjectivity. *Dubois Review*. 12(2) 231-  
248. (<https://search-proquest-om.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/docview/1733239740?OpenUrl>)

Kennedy, Brittany Powell. (2015). *Between Distant Modernities: Performing Exceptionality in  
Francoist Spain and the Jim Crow South*. University Press of Mississippi

Kennedy, Stetson., and Project Muse. (2011). *Jim Crow Guide to the U.S.A. the Laws, Customs  
and Etiquette Governing the Conduct of Nonwhites and Other Minorities as Second-class  
Citizens*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press.

Lemelle, Jr., Anthony J. (2010) *Black Masculinity and Sexual Politics*. New York: Taylor and  
Francis.

Lemons, Gary L. (1997). To be black, male and "Feminist"—making womanist space for black

men. *The International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*. 17(1/2), 35-61  
(<https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/docview/203703044?OpenUrlRefid>)

MacRae, Meghan. 2014. "NSFW: American Terrorism... Lynching Postcards." *CVLT Nation*.  
Retrieved April 27, 2020 (<https://cvltnation.com/nsfw-american-terrorism-lynching-postcards/>).

Mehring, Frank. (2009). "Bigger in Nazi Germany:" Transcultural Confrontations of Richard Wright and Hans Jürgen Massaquoi. *The Black Scholar* 39(1-2), 63-71.

Parent, M. C., Gobble, T. D., & Rochlen, A. (2018, April 23). Social Media Behavior, Toxic Masculinity, and Depression. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity*. Advance online publication. (<http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/men0000156>) 20(3), 277-287.

Roman, Meredith L. Forging Soviet Racial Enlightenment: Soviet Writers Condemn American Racial Mores, 1926, 1936 1946. *The Historian*, Phi Alpha Theta, 2012.

Rothman-Zecher, Moriel. 2014. "How Do You Say 'Jim Crow' in Hebrew?" *The Leftern Wall*.  
Retrieved December 19, 2019 (<https://thelefternwall.com/2012/08/17/how-do-you-say-jim-crow-in-hebrew/>)

Wallenfeldt, Jeff. (2010). *Africa to America: From the Middle Passage Through the 1930s*.  
Chicago: Britannica Educational.

White, Aaronette and Tal Peretz. (2009). Emotions and Redefining Black Masculinity: Movement Narratives of Two Profeminist Organizers. *Men and Masculinities*. 12(4), 403-424.

Willis A.I. (2008) Critical Race Theory. In: Hornberger N.H. (eds) *Encyclopedia of Language and Education*. Springer, Boston, MA